

QUESTION: Mr. Menzies, after your recent visit to The Hague you re-affirmed Australia's support for Dutch sovereignty in West New Guinea. The Indonesians seemed to take this as a change of front on the part of the Australian Government. Is that so?

MR. MENZIES: No, it is not. You may remember that after the visit, the very happy visit, I thought, by Dr. Subandrio to Australia, I made a speech in Parliament in which I indicated what our policy was in the light of our discussions with him. Now it was quite clear, it was and is quite clear, that we support the Dutch claim to sovereignty. I put it to Dr. Subandrio myself that I would like to know what the legal basis was of the Indonesian claim to sovereignty. And he explained at once that it was not on legal grounds but on political grounds, and that was why the matter had never been taken by Indonesia to the International Court.

Now that represents no change of front at all on our part. We have frequently repeated that we recognise Dutch sovereignty. If that sovereignty is to be changed then it must be changed only by an agreement truly negotiated between themselves and the Indonesians or by the decision of the Court. That was our position. That remains our position.

QUESTION: Speaking of Dr. Subandrio, when he was here in February, I think it was, there was a joint communique in the course of which there was a hope that was expressed that there might be some day a treaty of friendship between the two nations. Has that matter been carried any further?

MR. MENZIES: Well, I do not know what has happened during my absence, but as you may have heard I have an arrangement to go to Indonesia myself before the end of the year. I do not know what date, but I have accepted an invitation to go there before the end of the year. And in that event, of course, we would pursue it and very properly, because one thing which was quite clear during Dr. Subandrio's visit was that we had no points of difference, speaking in essential terms, other than our difference of view as to the sovereignty of West New Guinea. And, therefore, there is ample scope for friendship and honourable association.

QUESTION: Before leaving the subject, Mr. Menzies, what do you foresee for the ultimate future of Dutch New Guinea.

MR. MENZIES: Well, it is very difficult to look into the future but if you look far enough then I would hope to see self-government in New Guinea and I think there would be great merit myself in seeing that as self-government of the entire island. You see, treating it as a whole, because ethnologically there are very few distinctions to be made between the people of the West and the people of the East and the people of Papua.

Now our policy as you know has been and is to promote the welfare of the native people, many of whom of course are still living in their remote and rather savage conditions, but to promote their welfare so that some day, which is certainly not going to be next year or the year after or something like that; some day they will be brought to a state of life in which they can accept self-government. And so far as the Dutch are concerned they have told us that they have the same ultimate ambition for their people, and therefore in the long run, it won't perhaps be in my time as Prime Minister, but in due course, with all the efforts we can make in the meantime to promote their welfare, we may find an independent nation of native New Guinea citizens conducting their own affairs and I hope living in terms of close friendship with Australia.