A U S T R A L I A N S T A T E M E N T

A T

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

TEXT OF SPEECH

by

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE R.G. MENZIES, C.H.,Q.C.,M.P.,
PRIME MINISTER

Wednesday, 5th October, 1960

AUSTRALIAN STATEMENT

at

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Text of Speech by the Right Honourable R.G. Menzies, C.H., Q.C., M.P., Prime Minister
Wednesday, 5th October, 1960

I join in the congratulations which have been extended to the new President and the new member nations. Each of them, in a sense, needs our sympathy, our understanding, and our disinterested help. I have heard only some of the speeches, for I arrived from Australia only on Friday last, but I have read most of the earlier speeches, and have endeavoured to sense the feeling of the debate. Each delegate must try to make his individual contribution to our discussion from the point of view of his own country. I should therefore present myself to you - I am afraid for the second time to-day - as the Prime Minister of a nation which grew out of six colonies; a nation of relatively small numbers - something over ten millions - but of considerable productive and trading development, and a lively interest in the world Australia is, indeed in terms of international trade, one of the first seven trading nations. This being so, it will at once be seen that the continuance and expansion of peaceful trade is, from an economic point of view, vital to us.

The proportion of our trade which sails the seas is immeasurably greater than that of countries of high population and resources, who could, if they wished, live to themselves much more successfully than we could. We therefore not only have, as human beings, a passionate desire for peace; we have, as a nation, a great vested interest in its preservation. It would seem to most of us a happy circumstance that sentiment and interest should coincide. "Here", we would say, "is the perfect marriage". Future generations, if human follies do not destroy them in advance, may well, with the clear "hindsight" of history, wonder how it came about that the 20th century was so marred by war, and how it was that, in 1960, representatives of 100 nations could not make peace. "Surely", they will say, "if each nation had peace as its heart's desire, and also wanted peace as the condition of prosperity, nothing could have stood in the way".

Can we all honestly look into our own hearts and minds and answer those implicit questions? As a newcomer to this Assembly, I have been shocked at the evidence that there are some who have no peace in their hearts, and who appear to believe that by threats of aggression, by violent propaganda,

by actual conquest if necessary, they will extend the substance of their material wealth and the boundaries of their economic influence.

I thought that President Eisenhower made a statesmanlike, constructive, generous speech. In a conference in which there appears to be a disposition in the minds of some to play for the ideological support of the new member nations, and to bring them within what I believe are called "Spheres of influence" for purposes of aggrandisement, the American President took a high line.

He said in effect, and I most respectfully agree, that we are not to look at our new colleagues as if they were voters to be collected, or as pawns in a vast international game, but as independent, co-equal, and free.

The new nations have not won their freedom only in order to barter it away. It is offensive to them to regard them as potential satellites. Let me, for my own country, address some words directly to the representatives of these nations.

They have not failed to observe that there are those here who seek to inflame their minds with a spirit of resentment, and to make them believe that their best friends are those who produce with monotonous but fierce regularity slogans about "colonialism" and "imperialism".

It is I believe, a simple but sometimes forgotten truth that the greatest enemy to present joy and high hope is the cultivation of retrospective bitterness. I beg of all these distinguished representatives to put bitterness out of their minds.

So far as they are concerned, the past has gone. The dead past should bury its dead. It is the present and future that matter. Most of them know that political independence can be won more swiftly than economic independence and yet both are essential to true nationhood.

Under these circumstances, nations which are older in self-government should not be looking at the new nations as people whose support should be canvassed, but as people who need objective assistance with no strings if the material prosperity of their people is to be improved. It is one of the significant things in contemporary history that the advanced industrial nations are, because of their scientific and technological advantages, improving their standards at a phenomenal rate; while less advanced countries, lacking the same techniques on the same scale, are advancing at a slower rate.

This is not one of the facts of life which one may observe and, having observed, forget. Its significance is that gap between the advanced and the relatively unadvanced tends, unless we do something about it, to grow wider every year. It is not a state of affairs which civilised and humane

thinking can indefinitely tolerate.

If in this Assembly and in the nations here represented, we will constantly remember that our trust is for humanity and that, indeed, the United Nations itself has no other reason for existence, we will more and more concentrate our efforts on providing economic and technical help for new nations to the very limit of our capacity; not because we want, to put it crudely, to buy them into our own ideas of things, not only because we really and passionately believe in independence and freedom, but also because we believe that our fellow human beings everywhere are entitled to decent conditions of life, and have enough sense to know that independence and freedom are mere words unless the ordinary people of free countries have a chance of a better life to-morrow.

This point of view seemed to me to underlie the temperate speech of Mr. Macmillan and other speeches made by democratic leaders.

But there are others who have so far misunderstood the spirit of the United Nations as to resort to open or veiled threats, blatant and in some instances lying propaganda, a clearly expressed desire to divide and conquer. They should learn that "threatened men live long", and that free nations, however small, are not susceptible to bullying.

I will permit myself the luxury of developing this theme, though quite briefly, in the particular and in the general. In his opening speech, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Khrushchev made his usual great play about "colonialism". As Mr. Macmillan reminded us, the answer to much of his story is to be found in the presence in this Assembly of many new nations, once colonies and now independent.

Mr. Khrushchev said among other things - "nations who oppress other nations cannot themselves be free. Every free nation should help the peoples still oppressed to win freedom and independence". This was, in one sense, a most encouraging observation.

It made me wonder whether we were perhaps about to see a beginning of an era in which the nations of Europe, which were once independent and are now under Soviet Communist control, were going to receive the blessings of independence.

What a glorious vista of freedom would be opened up by such a policy. How much it would do to relieve the causes of tension, and promote peace. I venture to say that it is an act of complete hypocrisy for a Communist leader to denounce colonialism as if it were an evil characteristic of the Western Powers, when the facts are that the greatest colonial power now existing is the Soviet Union itself.

Further, in the course of this Assembly, Mr. Khrushchev was good enough to make some references to my own country and its position in relation to the Territories of Papua and New Guinea. He calls upon Australia to give

immediate full independence and self-government to New Guinea and Papua. As a piece of rhetoric this no doubt has its points. But it exhibits a disturbing want of knowledge of these territories and of the present stage of their development. Nobody who knows anything about these territories and their indigenous people could doubt for a moment that for us in Australia to abandon our responsibilities forthwith would be an almost criminal act.

Here is a country which not so long ago was to a real extent in a state of savagery. It passed through the most gruesome experiences during the last war. It came out of it without organised administration and, in a sense, without hope. It is not a nation in the accepted term. Its people have no real structure of association except through our administration. its groups are isolated among mountains, forests, rivers and swamps. It is estimated that there are no less than 200 different languages.

The work to be done to create and foster a sense and organism of community is therefore enormous. But with a high sense of responsibility, Australia has attacked its human task in this almost unique area. Since the war some form of civilised order has been established over many thousands of square miles which were previously unexplored.

We have built up an extensive administration service from nothing to a total of thousands of public servants, local members of the public service and administration indigenous employees.

We have created five main ports with modern equipment. We have built over 5,000 miles of road; constructed over 100 air fields; established and improved postal and tele-communications services. We have built four large and modern base hospitals, 101 subsidiary hospitals and 12,000 aid posts and medical centres. There are in operation 778 infant and welfare clinics. We have built from nothing, medical services which include 119 doctors, 347 trained nurses, 236 medical assistants, and thousands of native medical assistants, medical orderlies and nurses.

In a little more than a few years, we have established 4,100 schools which are attended by 200,000 pupils; large stock stations have been established; and a great forestry industry founded. I could go on like this indefinitely. All this has been done in a few years since the war. The achievement has not been without cost. We are a very strange colonial power, if I understand the sense in which that term is used. We have put many more millions into Papua and New Guinea than have ever come out or will ever come out. Like the Netherlands, whose representative spoke last night about its side of New Guinea we regard ourselves as having a duty to produce as soon as it is practicable an opportunity for complete self-determination for the people of Papua and New Guinea. We have established many local government Councils in order to provide training in administration, and we have set up a Legislative Council on which only the other day we substantially increased the number of indigenous representatives.

Mr. Khrushchev includes us in his diatribe against "foreign administrators who despise and loot the local population". I have shown how exactly opposite to the truth this is in our case. His further extravaganza about the "overseer's lash" and the "executioner's axe" must relate to areas with which he is more familiar than he is with New Guinea and Papua.

I must say with complete clarity that we do not need to be lectured on such matters by a man who has no record whatever of having brought colonial people into freedom and self-Government. We indeed are proud to be in the British tradition of the 20th Century - a tradition which has by sensible degrees and enlightened administration brought the blessings of self-Government and a seat in the Councils of the world to many former colonies.

Why has this General Assembly become so significant a forum on this occasion? Why has it attracted the attendance of what I must imagine to be the greatest number of Heads of State and Heads of Government in its history?

These are interesting questions and I should like to try to answer them. The dominating fact is that world's peace is under threat and, as Mr. Nehru pointed out on Monday, peace is the paramount problem. We are not living in a time of peace.

The "cold war" is intensifying. The heartsand minds of men and women are distressed. Most delegates have come here hoping that tensions might be reduced, that some ray of light may come through some opening door; that the new nations here represented for the first time - here because they have achieved an independent freedom and are, as I hope and believe, determined to maintain it - would make a fresh contribution not to recriminations but to achievement.

Running through all these ideas is the widespread world feeling that the United Nations represents the great hope; that it is better to debate freely about grievances and occasions of difference than to make war about them. But what has happened so far? A highly organised group, threateningly led, has developed an attack in at least four directions.

It has engaged in a colossal war of propaganda, singularly uninhibited by facts and marked by gross falsity of argument. The old slogans have been used ad nauseam. Mr. Khrushchev talked on Monday last in a somewhat macabre fashion about corpses. But I point out that the whole of his heated propaganda about "imperialism", of which his own country is no doubt itself the chief current practitioner, has been designed to put pressure on the newly free nations to move into the unfree Communist orbit, to foment bitterness in their minds about the past, to disinter the corpses of old grievances and sorrows; to persuade our new colleagues, if he can, to forego the joy and hopes of their new and independent nationhood.

Mr. Khrushchev has engaged in an attack upon the Secretary-General, the distinguished choice of the United Nations, a man with whose opinion anybody has a right to disagree, but whose ability and integrity are beyond challenge. He has the complete confidence of Australia. Mr. Khrushchev has without a shred of evidence, called him the biassed representative of Western capitalism, and has asked for his replacement by a triumvirate of Secretaries-General.

In this triumvirate there will be what I will describe in the modern jargon as an "in-built" veto; a triumvirate whose work would be clearly doomed to frustration and fatuity, leading to the consequential collapse of the United Nations executive machinery. Since the result of his proposal could be no other than this, it must be presumed that he intends it.

There is an old maxim of the English law that a man is presumed to intend the reasonable consequences of his actions. It is a trite saying, but it is worth thinking about.

Mr. Khrushchev has sought to convert the United Nations into the dis-United Nations by dividing the nations (as ancient Gaul was, according to Caesar) into three parts, which he conveniently though perhaps not very accurately described as the Communist world, the free democratic world (or as he might prefer to call it so as not to step outside the slogan line - the capitalist world), and the neutral world. Neutralism is of course, one of those rather rotund words which does not readily admit of definition.

If, when we say that a nation is neutral, that it will not under any circumstances take arms in any conflict which does not concern the protection of its own immediate boundaries, it seems to be a notion hard to reconcile with the Charter of the United Nations which contemplates under certain circumstances the use of combined force in terms of the Charter itself.

Mr. Nehru, the distinguished leader of India, has not, I think, used the word "neutral" in this sense - I hope I accurately represent him. He and his Government maintain large defences in their own country, and are active supporters of the Charter.

What he has consistently made clear is that he stands for non-alignment in the sense that he will not engage in any special military or quasi-military alliance.

My own country does not subscribe to this view although it respects it, since we are party, for example, to the South-East Asian Treaty with the military associations which are either expressed or implied in it. But we do not quarrel with each other about these matters

I would think it impossible to believe that some of the greatest leaders of so-called neutral countries would regard themselves as being neutral in the great conflict of ideas. The real point that I want to emphasize is that you cannot make the United Nations effective by converting all of us into pledge advocates of groups of conflicting interests in this Assembly, in the Security Council, in the whole operation of the United Nations and its specialised agencies.

Unity must be the aim. Common action for peace must be the procedure.

In short, Mr. Khrushchev has on this occasion, so far from working towards an easing of the cold war, for the very existence of which his country carries a grievous and major responsibility, set out to exacerbate the cold war by fomenting tension, by encouraging bitterness and by seeking to paralyse or confuse the minds of the free peoples. I speak for a small nation with a love of peace, without nuclear weapons, with a burning desire to develop itself, a task which consumes every ounce of energy it possesses; to raise its standards of living; with no aggression in its heart; utterly independent, though with strong historic and present ties with its sister nations of the Commonwealth.

In Australia we are as I will not need to say, resolutely opposed to communism. It will never prevail in an unconquered Australia. It runs counter to all our traditions, our instincts, and our hopes. But there is a distinction to be made. Free democracies are not aggressive. No free nation or combination of free nations desires either to send political missionaries into the Soviet Union (a courtesy which we would be glad to have reciprocated) or to resort to the futile arbitrament of war. In this true sense, we stand for peaceful co-existence. We believe that Communist countries have as much right to their own system as we have to ours. It means that for other countries, emerging from colonial rule, we believe in self-determination, uninfluenced by threat or guile or purchase.

It is an appropriate occasion on which to remind delegates that Australia is situated in a part of the world in which the immediate threat of aggression comes from Communist China, a nation of vast resources of man-power, and with leaders deeply devoted to Marxist principles. It is small wonder that such nations as Pakistan and the Philippines, Thailand, Great Britain, the United States, France, New Zealand and Australia have banded themselves together for mutual assistance and to do their best to avoid a further exposure of the area to Communist control. This treaty is palpably one of non-aggression. It deserves the careful thought of delegates because it will recall to their minds the fact that Communism is not expansionist in the West and South-West only.

I used the well-known phrase "peaceful co-existence". Perhaps I should make it quite clear that we would welcome "peaceful co-existence" if

the Communists would only practise it. Nobody denies or regrets the great modern development of the resources of the Communist powers. The technological achievements of the Soviet Union for example have excited our admiration. All that we ask is that we just be left alone to enjoy our own forms of government and our own type of civilization.

I was profoundly interested in what Mr. Nehru said about disarmament, and about the need for establishing contemporaneously, arrangements for disarmament and inspection. There are, however, two aspects of this matter, about which he and I have exchanged ideas before to-day, which are worth mentioning. The first is that the problem of disarmament itself cannot be divided into parts.

As has already been said, disarmament and inspection are inseparable. Again it is to me unthinkable that we should imagine that the risks of war would be diminished if the nations disarmed in the nuclear field but not in the field of what are politely called "conventional arms". For the fact is that it is only the possession of nuclear weapons, terrible though they are in their possibilities of destruction, horrible as it is to contemplate their continued development, which deprives the Communist powers of instant and overwhelming military superiority in the relevant areas. Nuclear, thermo-nuclear and conventional arms must, therefore, all be dealt with together.

The second point I make is that I cannot honestly accept the view that armaments are the major cause of world tension. That view seems to me a serious over-simplification. True, if any power or combination of powers has shown that it is aggressively-minded and seeks to extend its boundaries of control wider and wider by force if necessary, then the possession by that power or group of powers of vast armaments will be the cause of tension. But if the non-aggressive powers are in result driven into maintaining and developing great defensive armaments, it is proper to say that their armaments are the result of tension and not its cause.

In effect, what we need in the world, just as much as the vastly important disarmament talks, is a serious attempt by negotiation to encourage freedom and understanding, to remove the causes of friction and to persuade nations that aggressive policies and proselytising political religions are the ememies of peace. There are many other matters which I could speak about. But time marches on, and I wish to avoid repetition.

I therefore conclude by saying, for Australia, that we subscribe to the sound principle of foreign policy - that no nation should seek to interfere with the domestic affairs of another. This, indeed, is the "good neighbour" principle. If it could be accepted seriously and generally, the world would become a happy place.