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WEST NEW GUINEA : STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER  
FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

The Minister for External Affairs, Sir Garfield Barwick, referred today to reports claiming that the Australian Government was due to change its attitude on the West New Guinea issue. "These reports, acknowledged to be unofficial, are speculative", Sir Garfield said. "The Government's position in respect of the dispute was set out in a statement made in Canberra by the Prime Minister on January 12 after Cabinet had discussed the matter. That statement makes it clear that the government desires settlement of the dispute by peaceful means and not under duress or threat of war. The Prime Minister's statement also makes it clear that Australia pre-eminently desires that the Papuans of West New Guinea should, in due course, be given the right to choose their own future. The Government has made no other decision.

In conformity with this unchanged policy, on the one hand steps have been taken to persuade the parties to go to the conference table, and on the other the Government has expressed its disapproval of resort to war or threats of war. However, the ultimate resolution of the matter is one for the parties themselves with the assistance, the Australian Government hopes, of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Australia, not being a party principal to the dispute, is not itself involved in these negotiations. It has made it abundantly clear that it will respect the voluntary agreement of the parties in conformity with the principles of the Charter."