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PRIME MINISTER'S LETTER TO SOVIET PREMIER

The following letter has been sent to the Soviet Premier, Mr. N.S. Khrushchev, by the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, in reply to a New Year letter from Mr. Khrushchev :-

"Dear Mr. Chairman,

I have given careful and close attention to your message of 31st December, 1963, the receipt of which I acknowledged in my last brief message to you. I should like to say at the outset that, while I am unable to agree with some of what you say in the course of expounding your argument and although you introduce qualifications which I could not concede, I welcome your clear statement of belief in the need to renounce the use of force in relation to disputes between states over territorial claims and questions of boundaries. Such disputes are, of course, only one category, and, in the way you limit them, a relatively small category, of the differences which arise in international relations: the principle of avoidance of the use of force, subject to the right of individual and collective self-defence, is fundamental to the Australian Government's attitude towards all international disputes.

Indeed, the general obligation to seek the pacific settlement of disputes is placed upon all those states which have subscribed to the Charter of the United Nations. As members of the United Nations, Australia and the U.S.S.R. have both accepted this obligation, together with the obligation stated in Article 2.4 of the Charter that 'all members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state.'

I believe, Mr. Chairman, that it is necessary for us both to strive to live up to these obligations ourselves, and also to do what we can to secure their universal acceptance and application by all governments and regimes, whether or not they are members of the United Nations. For the Charter provides a code of international conduct which, if consistently accepted and honoured by all, would enable problems arising between states, including territorial disputes, to be settled justly and by peaceful means.

I agree with your observation that methods of settling disputes peacefully have been improved, and - with particular reference to territorial disputes - that experience shows that peaceful means of settlement are feasible. The United Nations, despite its imperfections, has shown itself capable of useful work in this respect; and I believe that our best course lies in seeking to make it more effective, both in performing its functions of mediation and conciliation, and also in its peacekeeping activities.

"The first necessity is that member States should fully accept and live up to the principles and obligations of the Charter. Then, it is essential, if the United Nations is to carry out its functions, that it should be on a sound financial footing, which means that all members should contribute their proper share of its expenses. Also it is clearly most desirable that means of peaceful settlement in accordance with the Charter should be respected and observed: that when, for example, procedures of ascertainment of the wishes of the people of particular territories have taken place through the United Nations in accordance with the principle of self-determination, all members of the United Nations should accept and support the outcome of those procedures.

The problem of territorial disputes is but one aspect of the wider problem of creating an international community that will learn to live in peace and without mutual interference, whether ideological or physical, and to settle its disputes by agreed peaceful procedures according to principles that must, if they are to have any real meaning, be universally applicable to all. In this respect as I have said I cannot agree with the various exceptions to the principle of peaceful settlement that you appear to be stating in parts of your letter in suggesting that in certain cases the use of force is justified while in others it is not. Nor, incidentally can I accept your description of certain countries (the Republics of Viet Nam, Korea and China) as being 'under foreign occupation'; nor, in the face of such problems as that of Germany and Berlin, your reference to the 'postwar settlements' as apparently being excluded from the realm of unresolved questions in international affairs.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I wish to reaffirm that the Australian Government accepts and will continue to abide by the principle of peaceful settlement of all disputes, including those arising out of territorial or border claims. I welcome the Soviet Government's apparent acceptance of the same view, and I hope that the Soviet Government will use its influence in all cases where border troubles are now causing tension, or may do so in future, towards a peaceful settlement, in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter and with accepted international procedures.

Yours sincerely,

(Sgd.) R.G. MENZIES

Prime Minister

His Excellency Nikita S. Khrushchev,
Chairman of the Council of Ministers of
the U.S.S.R.,
MOSCOW.

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CANBERRA,

1st March, 1964.