

PRESS, RADIO AND TELEVISION CONFERENCE HELD AT  
MASCOT AIRPORT, SYDNEY, ON THE RETURN OF THE  
PRIME MINISTER, MR. HAROLD HOLT, FROM THE  
MANILA CONFERENCE

26TH OCTOBER, 1966

MR. HOLT : I have discovered that Parliament will be in session tomorrow, and that's the proper place for a statement of this kind to be made, and preferably first to my own colleagues in the Cabinet. I don't want to make a statement here today which means that the statement I make in Parliament tomorrow has already been said. So I feel that what I should do here today is give you my own impressions and conclusions of the conference, but not try to go through it in too much detail. I have brought along the parchment document of the "Goals of Freedom" and the "Declaration on Peace and Progress". I have also got with me the official communique. I thought the TV boys would like to take a shot of the page which deals with the "Goals of Freedom" and the seven signatures with it.

I haven't had time to go through the Australian press, but I gather that one or two of them are referring to wrangles that went on between us that delayed the conference and held up the drafting and so forth. Well, we have the distinguished Prime Minister of New Zealand here with me, so anything I say can be used against me and challenged by him. . . . . but if he has ever attended a better-natured conference or a more co-operative conference, or one in which it was found easier to reach agreement on the points of substance, then he has the advantage of me. I have not attended a conference where there has been readier disposition to find agreement together on the matters that counted, and when you come to think of it, at the drafting stage, three different documents were produced. The short ones are not always easier to write than the long ones. The "Goals of Freedom" expresses the essence of what we were trying to say in our 'Declaration of Principles of Peace and Progress in Asia and the Pacific'. I think the correct official title - I have the document with me - is "Declaration on Peace and Progress in Asia and the Pacific". The "Goals of Freedom" were drawn as expressing the essence of that larger document.

I have never attended a more successful conference myself and I never expect to, nor a more important conference, because this reaches right out into the future.

Well, that is something that I am prepared to say here today. There are highlights which I would otherwise have referred to but which could perhaps more appropriately be dealt with in the Parliament.

(At this stage, the television cameras were switched on)

As you will see, we have just returned from what I believe is the most important conference I have ever attended or ever expect to attend. I am quite sure that as the years go on this will be seen as an historic landmark in man's long struggle for freedom and it will reveal how closely identified are the policies of the Asian powers who have joined with the great Western country of the United States of America and with Australia and New Zealand from the South Pacific in order to resolve the principles which will guide us not only in our policies in respect of the freedom for Viet Nam from aggression - the Republic of Viet Nam - but will also guide us in the positive and constructive tasks we see ahead of us in that

(MR. HOLT Contd.) country and in the peaceful progress that we feel can be made in the Asian area as a whole. It was most heartening to find the sincerity and the complete dedication to the task ahead of us manifested by all the Heads of Government present. I am sure we all took encouragement from the way in which we were able to agree so readily on all matters of substance. I haven't had an opportunity of checking the Australian press accounts in any detail, but I have seen one or two references which frankly astonished me -- references to wrangling at the conference, delays because we couldn't agree on wording and matters of that sort. Well, Mr. Holyoake was present; Mr. Hasluck was present at much of the discussion and at the separate proceedings in which the Foreign Ministers were doing their own drafting, and I would say in their presence, and would confidently expect them to agree with me, that it would be difficult to name a conference in which there was agreement more fully reached in a more co-operative fashion than was the case at this conference.

As to the drafting, when you consider that the conference produced three significant documents - "The Goals of Freedom", the communique itself which ran into many pages because there were important matters relating particularly to Viet Nam which we thought should be spelt out in some detail for public knowledge. . . . and then the "Declaration on Peace and Progress in Asia and the Pacific". Now these things can't be drafted in double-quick time. No-one would imagine that we came to them as novel propositions. Indeed, in the "Goals of Freedom", there is no novelty in the fact that these principles have been stated. Each of us in our turn has stated them at some time or another, probably many times. But what is significant is that seven countries so diversely composed - the greatest power in the Western world, these four Asian powers and New Zealand and ourselves, were able to come to such a consensus and express ourselves so forcibly regarding it.

You will have noted through the detail published of the communique that certain important items have been put more clearly, I think, than ever before: The intentions of the Government of the Republic of Viet Nam. They have made it clear that they are not looking to North Viet Nam to do anything more than abandon its aggression, and that is the least that could be asked of any country, and that is all that we have asked in our support of the Republic of Viet Nam in the south. They have given firm assurances of their intention to proceed speedily to the creation of democratic institutions. They think the constituent assembly will have reached its decisions within the scheduled time - indeed in advance of it in March, 1967, and that within six months of that constituent assembly producing a constitution for the country, they will be able to hold elections for a democratically-elected Parliament.

Now this, I think, is a great advance in a country which is subjected to daily attack of one kind or another and is afflicted by the ravages of war.

There was the agreement to help in the civic programmes of that country. One thing that should be noted in Australia is that there are limits as to how effectively we can work on these civic action programmes - the tasks of reconstruction and rehabilitation - while the Viet Cong are able to come back and destroy the work which is being carried out. So whereas emphasis in the past has been on what has been known as "search and destroy" operations, in the future the emphasis will be on "clear and hold" operations. In other words, you don't merely deal with the Viet Cong militarily, but there is the political Viet Cong remaining behind which have been able to destroy a good deal of the work done through the

(MR. HOLT Cont.) programmes of civic action, and on a "clear and hold" basis, you don't merely deal effectively in a military sense with the enemy, but you remain on in that centre to ensure that whatever you are able to do in a positive and constructive way is not subsequently sabotaged. Now these are some of the things which have come out.

I would like to put to you the detail of the "Goals of Freedom". Perhaps those of you with television cameras might like to get a shot of this particular passage in our documentation. It reads as follows :-

"We the seven nations gathered in Manila, declare our unity, our resolve and our purpose in seeking together the 'goals of freedom' in Viet Nam and in the Asian and Pacific area. They are :-

1. To be free from aggression.
2. To conquer hunger, illiteracy and disease.
3. To build a region of security, order and progress.
4. To seek reconciliation and peace throughout Asia and the Pacific."

In support of these objectives, you will see that each of the Heads of the seven Governments represented there have attached their signature as in earnest of their determination to follow these principles through.

Now that, if it is carried out, will represent the most remarkable advance in the story of Asia ever to be recorded. I believe that there are these revolutionary processes going on in Asia, revolutionary in the sense that they represent a movement away from an unhappy past, but hope is stirring in Asia, and that this conference will have lifted the hearts of the people of the area of Asia and the South Pacific generally, will have revealed to them a resolute determination because each of those seven Governments has said quite firmly, "We are going to see this job through" and if there are any doubts in the minds of the Government of North Viet Nam as to our resolution, then I hope this clear and emphatic declaration will have resolved those doubts for them.

So, with the concentration on the task of securing a peace, if peace cannot be negotiated - and surely we have made it abundantly clear that the terms of a peace require nothing more than an abandonment of aggression - not a surrender of national integrity or a destruction of an economy, or the life of the North Vietnamese people; they are free to choose the form of government they want, the way of life they want, but they must abandon the aggression.....well, if they won't negotiate on those terms, we must see the thing through, and check the aggression as best we can by our own combined military means. While this is going on, and after a cessation of hostilities has been produced, then the tasks of reconstruction and rehabilitation must proceed.

I would conclude by saying just this about the initiatives of the Asian countries which brought us together that it was, I feel a happy augury for the conference that it should have arisen in this way. We had a firm statement from the President of the United States of the major part that the United States was willing to continue to play, and the vast expenditure

(MR. HOLT Contd.) it was willing to incur in pursuit of our agreed objectives, and no-one could have attended that conference and felt and seen the evidence of the earnestness, the sincerity and the dedication and the courage of the representatives of the Government of the Republic of Viet Nam. - the Chairman of the National Committee of Liberation, Mr. Thieu, and the Prime Minister, Kao Ky, without feeling that here were men of purpose and dedication, men who could justly require of us support in the task they have of restoring the freedom which their country should enjoy and in enabling it to go steadily forward in peaceful progress.

MR. EGGLETON: Now, are there any questions?

Q. Sir, you are quoted in Manila as saying you wouldn't be reviewing our commitment in Viet Nam until after the elections and that you wanted to give the Australian public a chance to vote on the issue. Does this mean if you win the elections you will regard yourself as having a mandate to increase our commitment in Viet Nam?

MR. HOLT: This is the situation, if I can state it quite simply. I don't make a decision in the absence of my Cabinet. We have a system of Cabinet Government in this country and I wouldn't accept firm commitments on behalf of Australia in relation to matters of this sort without my Cabinet colleagues being fully informed and having an opportunity to engage in any discussion. Within perhaps twentyfour hours or so, the Parliament will have been dissolved. I have already had letters prepared for my colleagues of the Cabinet that from the dissolution of the Parliament, no major decision is to be taken which would alter existing arrangements, because this is the traditional practice as a government nears an election. (To Mr. Holyoake) I suppose you have the same practice, Mr. Prime Minister.

Mr. HOLYOAKE: That's the constitutional way.

MR. HOLT: That's the constitutional way, as you say, of dealing with these matters. So, it is not a case of asking the Australian public to decide whether or not we should have more troops or less, or more aid or less. They know our policies and the purposes we have in mind. If they re-elect us, they must expect of us that we will pursue those policies in the most effective way we can. Whether or not this requires an increase in the military commitment will be a matter which the Cabinet will then have to decide in the light of the circumstances which exist. Conceivably before the new Parliament is elected, there could be moves from Hanoi which would respond to our peace initiatives from this conference. I am not so optimistic as to expect this as a probability, but it is certainly within the realms of possibility. It may be, on the other hand, that the fighting intensifies, that our allies increase their commitments, and if they were to do so and the situation worsened, then we would have to review our contribution in the light of those facts. I don't think that the Australian people would ever expect that we take up a static position, neither moving up or down, regardless of circumstances, but the evidence should be clear enough that I have no desire to involve more Australian lives in issues which are of tremendous consequence to the long-term future of this country than circumstances make necessary, not only in the judgment of myself but of men like Mr. Hasluck and my other Cabinet colleagues who would be joining in a discussion on those matters with me.

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, will there be an opportunity before Parliament dissolves for a statement by the Opposition or any kind of debate?

MR. HOLT ; Yes, what is now currently planned - and I understand this is in accordance with Mr. Calwell's expressed wish - is that I make a statement to the Parliament tomorrow, probably in the night session, and that the Opposition would debate that statement on the Friday. This would then be among the concluding business of the Parliament. What I would like to do is table the documents after Question Time tomorrow so that there will be opportunity through the day for them to be carefully studied, and no doubt the texts are already around, but the full and authoritative text would be available for their study and then I would make my statement and the debate could proceed on it.

Thank you.

\*\*\*\*\*