

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

SPEECH

BY

The Rt. Hon. HAROLD HOLT, M.P.,

ON

MANILA SUMMIT CONFERENCE

Ministerial Statement

[From the "Parliamentary Debates," 27th October 1966]

Mr. HAROLD HOLT (Higgins—Prime Minister).—by leave—Mr. Speaker, I report to the House upon the Manila Summit Conference from which I have just returned. Following the Conference I have made some comment in Manila and also to representatives of Press, radio and television who were awaiting me on my return last night at Mascot Airport. All this has been widely publicised. Earlier today, I tabled in the House of Representatives the official documents which emerged from the Conference. They are the "Joint Communiqué", the "Declaration of Peace and Progress in Asia and the Pacific" and "The Goals of Freedom". I have mentioned these facts because I believe it is not necessary for me to go over all of the same ground. It is proper, however, that there should be on the record of the Parliament an authoritative account of the Conference and its results. I attended with my colleagues, the Minister for External Affairs (Mr. Hasluck) and the Minister for Defence (Mr. Fairhall) and other members of the Australian official delegation. This was in response to the invitation which Australia received from the

President of the Republic of the Philippines after his consultations with the President of the Republic of Korea and the Prime Ministers of Thailand and the Republic of Vietnam.

This week history was made at Manila. Sometimes we are too close to great events to measure their significance. But time, I suggest, will convince us all that the Manila Conference was an event that helped to shape contemporary history in our region of the world. The leaders of seven nations in the Asian and Pacific region met on October 24th and 25th to review their wider purposes in Asia and the Pacific. They gathered together to chart a programme for the peaceful and free development of a great and changing area of the world. This, remember, is also our part of the world and we were there in Manila with our Philippine friends, our Vietnam friends, our Korean and Thai friends and our American and New Zealand friends—all of us looking to the future. The future is expressed vividly and in a few words in the Conference document "The Goals of Freedom".

Mr. Bryant.—How is the word spelt?

Mr. HAROLD HOLT.—The document recites that the goals are—

... to be free from aggression, to conquer hunger, illiteracy and disease, to build a region of security, order and progress, to seek reconciliation and peace throughout Asia and the Pacific.

Does the honorable member for Wills, who sneers at what I have been saying, challenge any one of those objectives as being a right and proper objectives for us? To him they are just clichés. To some people they are the very finest principles for which men and women have fought and died through history. These are not an empty set of words.

Although we were at Manila to assess the military situation in Vietnam, our greater task was this vision of the future. The participants were President Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines, President Park Chung Hee of the Republic of Korea, Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn of Thailand, Chairman Thieu and Prime Minister Kao Ky of the Republic of Vietnam, Prime Minister Keith Holyoake of New Zealand, President Lyndon Johnson of the United States of America, and myself, representing Australia. We had agreed to make a thorough review of the Vietnam situation. This was to include an assessment of the military position and of continuing resistance to Communist inspired and directed aggression and subversion. We wished to look at the progress being made through programmes of social development and pacification, the tasks of economic stabilisation and rehabilitation and the evolution of democratic institutions.

It was part of our purpose to look at practical means for peaceful settlement of the conflict in Vietnam. Problems of regional security, co-operation and development relating not only to Vietnam but to Asia and the Pacific generally were also to be examined. The products of our discussions are to be found expressed in some detail in the three documents which I have earlier today presented to the Parliament. They are the "Joint Communique", the "Declaration of Peace and Progress in Asia and the Pacific" and "The Goals of Freedom".

I have described the Summit Conference as historic. There have been various meetings in the past of Asian and Pacific

Governments, a recent notable instance being the Asian and Pacific Council meeting, or A.S.P.A.C. as it has come to be known, at Seoul in Korea where nine Governments came together for discussions on matters of common interest. But until the Conference at Manila it was unprecedented for Heads of State and Heads of Government of seven countries in the Asian and Pacific region to meet for a collective purpose. The meeting was historic in that sense, but it was historic in even more important ways. Only great issues can bring such a meeting about in times when Heads of Government are so busily engaged. The issues in this case affect the security and prospects for a better life of 15 million people of South Vietnam. They closely affect the future of the neighbouring countries of South East Asia. They affect the basic security of the whole Asian and Pacific region. Indeed, the world as a whole is involved in the consequences of the outcome. These issues produced the meeting. The documents express our particular conclusions. I should like to say a word about the Australian and New Zealand participation in the meeting. I say with gratification that each of the Asian Heads of State or Heads of Government warmly welcomed me and the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Mr. Holyoake, into their counsels. This is a very important factor in the approach of the Asian countries to the Conference and, even more, to the Vietnam issue. I mention this and stress it because I have heard honorable members opposite say so often that our participation in Vietnam is alienating Asian opinion against us. Here is evidence to the contrary. Honorable members and all Australians will be interested to note the words of welcome that President Marcos accorded our participation and that of New Zealand in this Conference. He said—

The participation in this meeting of the Prime Ministers of Australia and New Zealand is also a hopeful augury. These two freedom loving nations are our neighbours by the accident of geography but our friends and partners by deliberate choice. They are as fully committed as ourselves to the freedom of Asia and to the attainment of the secure and just peace indispensable to the economic development of these combined nations. They have much to contribute to the attainment of our common goals.

The opening speech was made by President Marcos at a public ceremony. It set the

stage for the confidential discussions which were to follow. In an eloquent and memorable address he expressed with deep personal conviction a longing of the Asian people for social and economic stability and for freedom from insecurity and military threat. This theme, with particular emphasis on the problems of Vietnam, became the focus of the Summit Conference activity. It is this theme that finds expression in the communique, the declaration, and notably in the statement of the "Goals of Freedom".

The language of official documents, however warmly and graphically stated, for understandable reasons can rarely reproduce the atmosphere of a conference or its full significance, or the contacts between the personalities who participate. As one who not only was present throughout the Conference proceedings but also shared in the intimate discussions of those Conference meetings confined to the participating Heads of State and Heads of Government, I regard this as being as important a conference as I have ever attended or believe myself ever likely to attend. I can recall no conference in which agreement was more readily forthcoming on all matters of substance. I have read various reports since the Conference which alleged that there were delays because of wrangling and that there has been surprise that documents of such weight could emerge from so limited a period of discussion. There was no wrangling in our talks together. There was strength of purpose, firmness of resolution and dedication to the principles that we expressed in our declaration and the statement of our "Goals of Freedom". As to surprise, it must not be overlooked that our discussions together neither began nor ended at Manila. The Governments represented are in almost daily contact by one means or another, including diplomatic representation, cabled advices and the like. We are familiar with each others' views. The Foreign Ministers had met informally and had done some useful ground clearing immediately prior to the Conference. Later they did their share of the work of drafting while the Heads of Government went ahead with their own ideas of what the contents of the documents should be. It is not to be wondered at that a good deal of time was required for these purposes and the exchanges of thinking until

at a final meeting together the Heads of Government and Foreign Ministers produced the documents in the forms they ultimately took.

The communique deals principally with the situation in Vietnam and the problems of the present and the future there in the military, social and economic fields. The declaration of peace and progress in Asia and the Pacific sets out the principles on which we base our hopes for future peace and progress in the Asian and Pacific region, for, as the declaration states—

In the modern world men and nations have no choice but to learn to live together as brothers.

The "Goals of Freedom" express briefly, and in language that all should be capable of understanding, the essence of our declaration. We said there—

We, the seven nations gathered in Manila, declare our unity, our resolve and our purpose in seeking together the goals of freedom in Vietnam and in the Asian and Pacific area.

It struck me as quite remarkable that the representatives of the Republic of Vietnam should be able to accept so explicitly and however regretfully a continuing line of demarcation between North and South Vietnam until a decision had been taken democratically by the people of both areas for reunification. They stated that the work of the constituent Assembly elected to draw up a constitution for the Republic of Vietnam was proceeding ahead of schedule. They gave an undertaking that general elections to select a representative government would be held within six months of the adoption of a constitution. Believing that the democratic process must be strengthened at the local level as well as the national level, the Vietnamese leaders announced that, to this end, village and hamlet elections would be held at the beginning of 1967. They further announced that they are preparing a programme of national reconciliation. They would open all doors to Vietnamese who had been misled or coerced into casting their lot with the Vietcong. They would be given amnesty and assisted to resume a normal existence as to their employment and community participation.

Further, the Vietnamese representatives made it clear that they were not making any demands on North Vietnam other than that the aggression should cease. When it is considered that the Republic of Vietnam

is still subjected daily to military and terrorist attack; with continuing infiltration and eternal subversion, the attitude of the Vietnamese representatives at the conference must be regarded as most helpful and forthcoming. The Vietnamese leaders stated their intent to train and assign a substantial portion of their forces to what are termed "clear and hold" actions in order to provide a shield behind which a new society can be built. The tactics of "search and destroy" so frequently employed by the allied forces in the past have been found by experience to be inadequate for satisfactory follow up action of reconstruction, civic action and pacification. This is because the civilian Vietcong remain in the area to commit acts of terrorism and sabotage after the military forces have moved on. Illustrations were given to us of the construction of schools in the wake of the departure of Communist military forces, only to be followed by the physical destruction of school buildings by individual Vietcong or small marauding bands drawn from the civilian element of the Vietcong. It is now proposed that the clearing operation should be more thorough and that a military component capable of securing the area should be assigned to enable civic action and rehabilitation operations to be carried through with enduring benefit.

The Government of the Republic of Vietnam wishes to forge what is described in the communique as a "social revolution of hope and progress. Even as the conflict continues, the effort goes forward to overcome the tyranny of poverty, disease, illiteracy and social injustice."

Dr. J. F. Cairns.—After 20 years.

Mr. HAROLD HOLT.—The present Prime Minister of Vietnam has been fighting for more than half his lifetime to preserve his country and he deserves something better than the sneers of the honorable member for Yarra. Top priority is to be given to land reform and tenure provisions. Agricultural credit is to be expanded; crops will be improved and diversified. The leaders recognise that to build confidence and co-operation amongst the people they must be convinced that honesty, efficiency and social justice form "solid cornerstones" of the Vietnamese Government's

programme. The participating governments applauded these declarations, recognising that they open brighter prospects for the people of Vietnam. Each undertook to give its continuing assistance according to its means, whether in funds, skilled technicians or equipment. The Vietnamese appreciated the help being given in non-military fields by other countries and expressed the hope that this help will be substantially increased. The participants further agreed to appeal to other nations and to international organisations working for the full and free development of all nations to give further assistance to the Republic of Vietnam.

We devoted a good share of our discussions to peace objectives, reviewing the many efforts for peace already undertaken. What is sought is a just and reasonable solution; but Hanoi has still shown no sign of taking any step towards peace, either by action or by entering into discussions or negotiations. I know that recently reference has been made to rumours or to some feeble peace signs that seem to be emerging. I know of none that can be attributed directly to Hanoi. We all agreed that the search for peace must continue. The Vietnamese representatives pointed to the suffering they had experienced from the ravages of war for more than 20 years. They declared themselves to be second to none in their desire for peace and would welcome any initiative that would lead to an end to hostilities while preserving the independence of South Vietnam and protecting the right of its people to choose their own way of life.

The detailed views of the Government of the Republic of Vietnam are set out in the communique. The other participating governments endorsed these as essential elements of peace and agreed that they would act on this basis in close consultation together. We pointed out that Allied forces are in Vietnam because that country is the object of aggression and in response to the support requested by its Government. We agreed that our troops would be withdrawn, after close consultation, as the other side withdraws its forces to the north and ceases infiltration and the level of violence subsides. Our forces will be withdrawn as soon as possible, not later than six months after the conditions mentioned are fulfilled.

My own contribution was designed to indicate our sense of partnership with our allies, our awareness of the great common issues at stake and our determination with our allies to see the issue through. I spoke, of course, against the background of the views which had been offered by early speakers—President Marcos and Chairman Thieu at the public session, and Air Vice-Marshal Ky in private session. Separate statements on particular aspects of the Vietnam situation were made by members of that country's delegation. There were military reviews by General Cao Van Vien, Chief of the General Staff in Vietnam, and General Westmoreland, Commander, United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam. Others spoke on the civic action, revolutionary development and rehabilitation programmes.

I said at the time I had no need to go over ground already covered, beyond confirming the Australian Government's clear recognition of the military realities and the vital issues at stake. I expressed our belief that Vietnam is, unhappily for its people, a battleground for not only its own national security, freedom and integrity, but of even wider issues—issues of freedom, security and progress affecting generally the future and stability of all free peoples in the Asian and Pacific regions. I spoke of aggression as an age old enemy of mankind—a challenge to be taken up and defeated just as poverty, disease and hunger, other age old enemies, are to be taken up and defeated. I expressed the view that it would be useful to seek to build up world opinion more widely against the aggression which now manifests itself through tyranny and oppression in Vietnam.

There are many countries throughout the world which seem more indifferent than is desirable or wise. This is not necessarily a question of seeking military assistance by other groups or individual countries. It is important to secure a wider acceptance of our narrow but essential objectives in Vietnam, and also a widening of the economic effort for the development of Vietnam, both immediately, so far as this is practicable, and after the fighting has terminated. I assured the Conference of my Government's determination that the Australian Government would conduct itself as a dependable ally, continuing its contribution on both the military and non-military sides.

I mentioned specifically the aid which we have been giving on the medical, engineering and education fronts.

Plainly, while the fighting continues, it is not practicable for us and others to give, or for Vietnam to receive, more than the level of assistance of a material kind that can be absorbed. But if peace could be brought about, we and others would be in a position to divert more resources to civil rehabilitation and Vietnam would become capable of gaining more benefit from the contributions that could be made.

Mr. Speaker, I have already said that the question of peace was given a great deal of attention in the Conference itself and, as honorable members will see, it takes up quite lengthy passages in the Conference final documents. It was the view of all of us that we not only stand ready but are anxious to consider any possible approaches to a settlement, and in general to enter into unconditional discussions at any time provided that concessions prejudicial to our basic objectives must not be made. The peaceful settlement of the Vietnam conflict must be just and enduring. A settlement achieved at the cost of freedom and security for the South Vietnamese people would be unacceptable.

In the words of President Marcos, the peace we want is not the peace of death or the peace of betrayal. We want a purposeful peace that will guarantee the option for liberty and progress of the people of South Vietnam and of all other peoples similarly situated. This is why we have said in the communique that we are united in our determination that the South Vietnamese people shall not be conquered by aggressive force and shall enjoy the inherent right to choose their own way of life and their own form of government and that we shall continue our military and all other efforts as firmly and as long as may be necessary, in close consultation among ourselves, until the aggression is ended.

It was the view of all of us that only when the other side realised that our countries mean precisely what they say—that there will be no weakening or flagging, that all the necessary measures will be taken—it is only then that the other side will conclude that the aggression will not succeed. That conclusion on their part is the essential requirement for the bringing about of

peace. Whether peace is to be reached through discussion and negotiations or whether through a dwindling away of the conflict, serious efforts will be maintained through all avenues to bring the other side to peace. Part of the peace effort is convincing them, through our steadiness of purpose and our capacity and readiness to meet force with force, that aggression will not succeed.

The benefits I derived were not confined to the results of the Conference itself, highly successful though, in my judgment, they were. The venue of the Conference provided me with my first visit to the Philippines. I had not previously met President Marcos nor had I previously met President Park Chung Hee of the Republic of Korea. It will be helpful in my future contacts and discussions to have built these new friendships and to have further consolidated those already made with the other Chiefs of State and Heads of Government.

Let it be understood that we are not engaged in Vietnam because we want to roll back the frontiers of Communism, but because we do not want the frontiers of Communism to roll back down over South East Asia. But always we must see the conflict in Vietnam in its greater context as a battleground for human values of freedom and dignity. All Asia looks today at the future of free choice in South Vietnam. If it is preserved—and it will be—the basic future and stability of all free peoples in the Asian and Pacific regions will, I believe, be guaranteed. And this is a prospect equally important to us in Australia, and indeed to the whole world.

I present the following paper—

Manila Summit Conference—
Ministerial Statement, 27th October 1966—

and move—

That the House take note of the paper.