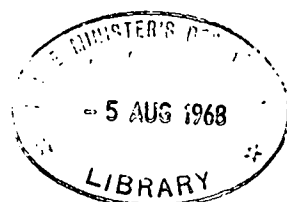


THIRD MEETING OF THE ASIAN
AND PACIFIC COUNCIL

Opening Speech by the Prime Minister,
Rt. Hon. J. G. Gorton, MP

Canberra, ACT



30 JULY 1968

It is my privilege to address you this morning on what is an historic occasion for the Australian Government and people.

On behalf of the Australian Government, it is my pleasure to welcome to Australia the distinguished representatives of the Republic of China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Thailand, and the Republic of Viet Nam as well as the observer from the kingdom of Laos.

The Asian and Pacific Council is a young organisation, having been established in Seoul just two years ago. It has had a promising beginning and it is the Australian Government's conviction that it will have an increasingly important role to play in the future of the region.

ASPAC includes a representative group of significant countries in the area and we in Australia are proud to be members of it.

As a regional organisation, ASPAC has some unique characteristics. It includes countries from North Asia, South-East Asia and the South Pacific, but it does not include countries from outside the region.

A number of other regional organisations do include as full members the great powers from outside the region and it is right and proper that this should be so. The region in which we all live will for a long time to come need the help and support of the advanced nations outside it. But the existence of ASPAC testifies to the fact that there is a growing recognition in our region that in the long run our destinies will be determined by our own efforts.

Since the end of World War II there has been a steady growth of regional consciousness in many parts of the world. Increasingly governments and peoples have realised that their individual efforts can be made more fruitful if they work closely with their neighbours.

We now understand perhaps more clearly than in the past that goodwill between neighbours, and a readiness to look forward to friendliness and co-operation rather than backwards to old hostilities, is an indispensable requirement for that progress towards the decent standards of living to which all our peoples aspire. We must have cordial co-operation among ourselves and it is to be promotion of this co-operation to which the Asian and Pacific Council is dedicated.

The need for regional co-operation was recognised in the Asian and Pacific region as early as anywhere in the world, yet in some ways the translation of this into practical action has not proceeded as rapidly as it has elsewhere.

The reason for this perhaps is that the peoples of our region have rich and diverse cultures, and in recent times they have followed very different historical paths. In some cases their links have been with European countries rather than with their neighbours. But now the basic facts of geography and economics are reasserting themselves and none of us can doubt that ultimately the future of this region lies in the hands of the peoples and countries within it, so many of whom are represented here today.

It is true that before ASPAC was founded, bodies like the Colombo Plan and the regional commissions and institutions set up under the United Nations played an important part in stimulating the sense of a regional community.

Indeed, if you cast your minds back, two remarkable achievements in regional economic co-operation that come immediately to mind are the Asian Development Bank and the Mekong Development Project; and a complex network of other regional activities has already been developed. The principal purpose of all these existing activities has been to apply to the development of the area the resources and knowledge available from countries outside the area.

This is where ASPAC differs somewhat from previously established regional organisations. Its main concern is to promote co-operation among the countries inside the region itself and to develop the potential strength within it through our own efforts.

The prospects for practical co-operation of this kind are steadily increasing. For example, the rapid economic growth in several ASPAC countries will help to ensure that trade between them continues to grow. It is important that the rate of growth of a number of developing countries in ASPAC is higher than that of all but a few countries outside this region. The annual growth rates among the majority of ASPAC countries ranges from 5 per cent to more than 8 per cent. This compares with an approximate average of about 4 per cent for the total Asian and Far East region.

Our own Australian trade with ASPAC countries is growing rapidly. In 1966/67 about one quarter of our total trade was with our fellow members of ASPAC.

We are particularly pleased that ASPAC countries are beginning to benefit from the Australian scheme for tariff preference on certain goods manufactured by developing countries, and we hope that they will take increasing advantage of the scheme and the opportunities which it presents.

Economic and social progress can of course only be maintained in our region in circumstances of peace and stability. Unfortunately, the region is one which at the present time in history is most exposed to threats of direct and indirect aggression. While these threats exist, we must welcome the support of our major allies in contributing to the security of the region but must at the same time do our best to provide for our defence through our own efforts, and we should do our best to ensure that no internal differences of opinion upset the peace and stability which the region requires.

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It may be appropriate for me to say that Australia has long recognised her responsibilities for contributing to the security of the region. Indeed, since the end of the Second World War, the youth of Australia has participated in the fight against aggression in Korea, in Malaysia and in Viet Nam, and its armed forces have made a small but valuable contribution to the security of other countries in the region.

ASPAC is in no sense a security organisation and in the view of the Australian Government it should not attempt to become one; even though we recognise that if our efforts under ASPAC to promote the welfare of the region are to succeed means it is necessary for the region to be secure from aggression.

The answer to aggression is not, of course, to be found only in the military arena. Military strength itself flows from a prosperous and progressive community, but so does political stability and freedom from subversion, and in order to achieve that prosperous and progressive community and that political stability, neighbourly co-operation in paths of peace is, we believe, essential.

So in ASPAC, we are seeking to establish a close comradeship and a practical working co-operation in the political, economic, cultural and social fields. We also will maintain an open door through which other countries in the region can join us whenever they wish to do so. This, of course, is a matter for their free choice.

But we hope, however, that as the real objectives of the organisation are increasingly appreciated and understood, there will be a growing inclination in all the countries in the region to realise the value of the kind of co-operation that ASPAC stands for.

What we are seeking to establish is a genuine and deep understanding in all aspects of our relations of one another's points of view and of one another's problems. None of us is seeking to force the adoption of a common view upon others, but rather to develop a common approach to those problems which all of us share. In short, to identify the problems which are common and to seek to discover whether there is a common solution which we can together apply.

One of the great advantages indeed of ASPAC is that it is not an organisation which meets to make proposals which are to be voted upon, to have decisions which are to be done by majority rule, but rather to meet in order to discuss, to identify and to see whether there are common approaches which can solve the problems of the region.

We have already become in ASPAC a valuable forum for the exchange of those views between government leaders and the officials of our countries. They meet together not only in this Council, but regularly between Council meetings in the Standing Committees of ASPAC, and at numerous international conferences, they take the opportunity of holding informal consultations among the delegations from this region, representing each one of the countries here present.

I believe the organisation must be congratulated on the practical way in which it has set about its tasks. During the past year, my colleague, the Minister for External Affairs has chaired the regular meetings of the Standing Committee and those meetings have been most valuable in promoting that kind of understanding of which I have spoken and which is the basic objective of this organisation.

During the year, the ASPAC Registry of Expert Services has been established in Canberra and is now in operation, and at this Council meeting, Ministers will be asked to give their final endorsement to the agreement establishing the ASPAC Cultural and Social Centre in Seoul. I have no doubt that further projects of this kind will be developed, and each will have some contribution to make to those objectives of which I have spoken to you this morning.

I would like to conclude by reiterating my welcome to the distinguished representatives here today, and by expressing the hope and confidence that your deliberations during this Third Asian and Pacific Council Meeting will further strengthen the ties that unite us, I hope by seeking, peering down the paths of the future, to put into your minds a vision of this region with its people, politically free and economically prosperous, working together for the good of all human beings in the region, perhaps partly as a result of conferences such as these and of the work put into those conferences by the representatives of the countries who are here today and by the backing they will get from the ordinary men and women who in this region, and perhaps ultimately in the world, have a common goal which ASPAC seeks.

I declare the meeting open.
