



PRIME MINISTER

OPENING OF SEVENTEENTH SEATO COUNCIL MEETING

Speech by the Prime Minister, the Rt Hon. William McMahon
C.H., M.P.

27 June, 1972.

Gentlemen:

I welcome you as distinguished delegates to the 17th meeting of the Council of the South East Asia Treaty Organisation. Although we are in the depths of winter here in Canberra, I assure you that our welcome to delegates and their wives, and staff, is a warm and sincere one. I particularly want to welcome General Vargas, the retiring Secretary-General. We have known him as a dynamic and energetic personality. I know, as a former delegate - and so does anyone else who has been connected with SEATO that in the rugged tenacity and strength of purpose of General Vargas, SEATO has no greater champion.

The South East Asian Treaty Organisation has occupied an important position in the affairs of the South East Asian region since its formation in 1954. Notwithstanding the many changes since that time, it still has a meaningful role to play - so long as external threats remain to the peace and security of member and protocol states, the continuing importance of the Manila Treaty remains self-evident.

That Treaty has contributed to the stability of the region for almost eighteen years and the Organisation has provided the machinery for co-operation between member countries. Neither should we forget that because of its obvious security value to regional members and protocol states SEATO also contributes to regional confidence. While the Treaty and the organisation retain their value and relevance - and they do, despite the critics - my Government will continue to support and sustain the Organisation.

The presence here of the distinguished regional representatives of Thailand, The Philippines and the Republic of Vietnam and of the distinguished representative of Britain, New Zealand, and the United States, is also clear evidence of the importance these Governments continue to attach to SEATO.

One has only to recall, that as recently as February of this year, President Nixon reported to the United States Congress that the Manila Treaty had made "a valued contribution to peace", and that the Treaty had been and "will be honoured".

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During my visit, I was very much heartened by the trend towards closer co-operation among these countries. I was very heartened by the goodwill and friendliness I found there towards my own country, and I can assure you they know we are anxious to assist them with their very real problems. It is interesting to recall that the Manila Treaty represented one of the earliest examples of regional co-operation.

It is a sign of the times that the links which bind the countries of South East Asia are being progressively strengthened, by increased contacts and exchanges, and through co-operation in an increasing variety of regional organisations and arrangements.

It is my wish that your deliberations at this Council meeting should be successful, and that they will contribute further to regional co-operation, progress and security.
