



**DEPARTMENT OF
FOREIGN
AFFAIRS**

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STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER FOR
FOREIGN AFFAIRS, MR E.G. WHITLAM, ON THE SIGNING
OF THE VIET-NAM CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT

The Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Whitlam, said today that the Australian Government welcomed the coming into force of the ceasefire agreement this morning, Australian time.

He said that the Government sincerely hoped that the agreement would provide the basis for a lasting peace in that country and that peace would quickly come to the other countries of Indo-China, Laos and Cambodia.

Mr Whitlam repeated that Australia stood ready to play its part in an international effort for relief and reconstruction in both North and South Viet-Nam and, if possible, in Indo-China as a whole.

He said that the signing of this agreement was a beginning but that its success in bringing about progress toward a lasting settlement would depend on the readiness of the parties to make further concessions in the interest of achieving a lasting political solution, and the extent to which the agreement proved an adequate framework for the settlement of disputes over its implementation and for the negotiations that were to follow.

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Both sides had made concessions in order to arrive at the present ceasefire agreement, Mr Whitlam said. The conclusion of the agreement was a major achievement in itself. Acts of violence and intimidation were likely to continue, at least in the early stages, and there could even be outbreaks of fighting in particular regions. But the dimensions of the suffering and destruction should be substantially reduced.

Beyond that, there was the possibility that the two sides would eventually be able to hammer out, in direct negotiations and by a further process of mutual concession, political arrangements under which all the people in South Viet-Nam would be able to make a genuine choice as to the Government they wanted, and under which the NLF and its supporters would have an opportunity of legitimate representation in the future Government. There would be a need on both sides for restraint, patience, and compassion. But the opportunity was there.

Mr Whitlam said his Government shared the concern that had been expressed in various international quarters that the ceasefire agreement appeared to contain no detailed provisions for ending the fighting in Laos and Cambodia.

"But the expected withdrawal of foreign troops from both these countries should make it easier for their peoples to settle their differences free from outside interference," he said.

"We hope and expect that the contending forces in those countries, both victims of the Indo-China war, will take the opportunities which the agreement seems to hold out," he added.

"Australia is not a signatory to the ceasefire agreement nor to any related Protocol.

"Nevertheless," Mr Whitlam said, "the Australian Government takes note of the agreement and undertakes to respect its provisions.

"The Australian military advisers and instructors have been withdrawn from Viet-Nam. Arrangements for this withdrawal were concluded on a bilateral basis with the Government in Saigon and the final withdrawal took place on 23 December.

"Under the terms of the ceasefire agreement, an international conference is to be called within thirty days. Australia will not be represented at that conference. Australia will, however, attend a separate international conference, if one is convened, to consider ways and means of providing aid to Indo-China.

"It is in this field that the Australian Government sees itself as making a particular contribution in the future.

"The Australian Government welcomes and supports the settlement which has been reached. We hope that, in the first instance, it will lead to the scaling down of the fighting.

"We also hope that, in the longer term, it will lead to the reconciliation of the contending political forces within Viet-Nam and give the inhabitants of that war-torn country an opportunity to determine their own future by truly democratic means in conditions of peace."

(NOTE: The ceasefire is to come into force at 24.00 hours G.M.T. on 27 January 1973.)