



PRIME MINISTER

PRESS STATEMENT NO.55

25 February 1973

PAPUA NEW GUINEA-INDONESIA

My visit to Papua New Guinea and Indonesia has achieved two purposes. It has enabled me to renew my close personal contacts with the leaders of Australia's nearest neighbours. It has enabled me, for the first time since the election of the new Government, to explain personally the new policies and directions my Government will follow in its international relations, and to hear the views of Indonesia and Papua New Guinea on issues of mutual concern.

My visit was in keeping with the four basic commitments of an Australian foreign policy which I enunciated in my policy speech. These commitments are, firstly, to Australia's own security; secondly, to a secure, stable and united Papua New Guinea; thirdly, to develop closer relations with our nearest neighbour, Indonesia; and fourthly, to promote the peace and prosperity of our neighbourhood.

In Papua New Guinea I emphasised Australia's determination to see Papua New Guinea achieve independence within the life of the present Australian Parliament. This determination is well understood and widely accepted. Papua New Guinea's problems will not be removed by delaying or fearing independence. They will only be removed by embracing it.

The striking difference between Papua New Guinea now and two or three years ago is that all parties now accept the inevitability of independence and are working actively towards it. Arguments about timing or method there may be, but arguments about aims and principles have disappeared. In Papua New Guinea the tide has turned, and it has turned in favour of change. There can be no stopping this process now.

Australia has a continuing and enduring role to play in assisting the progress and prosperity of Papua New Guinea. One of the aims of my talks was to stress that Australia's commitment to Papua New Guinea would last well beyond the achievement of independence. We are needed in Papua New Guinea and will be needed for a long time to come. We shall not fail the trust that the people have placed in us.

My other aim in Papua New Guinea was to stress the need for national unity. I made it clear that a secure and prosperous independent nation would be established only through the unity of many different tribal, cultural, regional and linguistic elements. Our aid will be channelled through a national government in Port Moresby. Our dealings with Papua New Guinea will be between the national Government in Canberra and the national Government of a united, independent Papua New Guinea. There is no future, there is no hope, in fragmentation and parochialism.

In Indonesia, I believe I established a closer personal contact with President Soeharto. It is of great importance that the leaders of Australia and Indonesia should be on the friendliest terms. I was touched by the President's warmth and hospitality. I wanted to explain to President Soeharto the new more self-reliant and independent Australian approach to its foreign relations and assure him personally that these changes would not affect the continuing process of strengthening Australia-Indonesian relations.

I was impressed by the great differences between Australia and Indonesia. But our history and our geography have combined to give our two countries the unique opportunity to bridge these differences. We have an exciting opportunity to set an example; to see that two such different societies can form a constructive and mutually advantageous relationship of cordiality and real and lasting value.

I did not go to Indonesia with any blueprint or firm plans for a future regional organisation. Australia has no wish to impose her views on her friends and neighbours. I had frank and useful discussions on the future of the Asian region with President Soeharto and his ministers. I found that fundamentally the Indonesian and Australian Governments have very similar views about the future of the Asian and Pacific region. I was gratified that President Soeharto welcomed our interest in the evolution of a more broadly based and representative regional forum. If such a forum is achieved it will be through close and detailed negotiations with Indonesia and all other interested nations in the South-East Asia region.

CANBERRA, A.C.T.