DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

NO   **DATE**

M/58   24 March 1973

EMBARGO: Not to be used
in any form before midnight
on Saturday 24 March 1973.

DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH THE VATICAN

The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Whitlam,
announced today that Australia and the Holy See had agreed
to enter into diplomatic relations and agreed to the following
joint communique:

"Australia and the Holy See, wishing to promote
mutual friendly relations, have decided to exchange diplomatic
representation, with the rank of Embassy on the part of
Australia, and of Apostolic Nunciature on the part of the
Holy See."

Mr Whitlam said the names of the respective Heads of
Mission would be announced shortly, adding that the Australian
Ambassador to the Holy See would be accredited on a non-
resident basis.

Mr Whitlam noted that Australia had become one of
over 70 countries, of which 12 were members of the Commonwealth,
which maintained diplomatic relations with the Holy See. In so

doing, it joined ten of the most influential and populous of its Asian neighbours, including Indonesia, India, Japan, Pakistan and Thailand. The Holy See maintains resident diplomatic representation in over 60 countries at the level of Nuncio or Pro-Nuncio (equivalent to Ambassador), as well as having Observer status to some 12 international organisations, including the United Nations, the European Communities, and a number of the Specialised Agencies of the United Nations.

Mr Whitlam said he expected that the Apostolic Delegation in Sydney would, in due course, become an Apostolic Nunciature in Canberra.

The Minister said he had taken careful note of views put to him by individuals and organisations before a decision on this question had been made. He emphasised that the step was one of several actions which the Government had taken to normalise its relations with other States and should be seen in this secular light. The nature of any exchanges between the two States would be that of normal diplomacy and would in no way provide privileged access by the Catholic Church to the Australian Government.