



**DEPARTMENT OF
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OVERSEAS VISIT BY SPECIAL MINISTER OF STATE

The Special Minister of State, Senator Willesee, will leave Australia early next month to visit a number of African countries.

Announcing this today, the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Whitlam, said that Senator Willesee would be travelling as his personal emissary and would be making the first contact by a Minister of the new Australian Government with political leaders in those countries.

Senator Willesee will arrive in Ghana on 13 June and then visit Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia and Mauritius. He will travel to Africa via Brussels, where he will preside at a meeting of Australian Ambassadors to member countries of the EEC. He will also pay brief private visits to Rome, London and Dublin.

Mr Whitlam said he hoped that Senator Willesee's visit would help consolidate the improvement in Australia's standing with African countries resulting from the Government's new policies against racism and colonialism.

This is the first time in ten years that an Australian Minister has undertaken a tour of East and West Africa.

Mr Whitlam said: "The Australian Government believes that Australian Ministers have in the past paid insufficient attention to the more than 200 million black Africans on the continent of Africa.

"The 35 black African countries comprise more than one quarter of the membership of the United Nations and twelve of them are members of the Commonwealth. They will continue to constitute an important and at times vocal influence in world affairs."

The Prime Minister said that the Government believed it was time to show a more positive interest in African affairs. By its voting on various resolutions in the UN, the Government had already shown its sympathy with and understanding for the aspirations of all black Africans for racial equality, majority rule and independence.

By its program of self-government and independence for Papua New Guinea, its determination to improve the welfare of its own Aborigines, and its signature and forthcoming ratification of various UN conventions on human rights and the elimination of racial discrimination, Australia was showing her adherence to these principles.

Equally Australia gave her ready support to countries sharing these views.

Mr Whitlam said that during his visit Senator Willesee would also seek views on questions likely to arise at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Ottawa in August.

Senator Willesee will be accompanied by Mrs Willesee, as well as by Dr J.W.C. Cumes, of the Department of Foreign Affairs, and his Private Secretary, Mr G. Briot.