

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. E. G. WHITLAM, Q.C., M.P.,
AT A LUNCHEON GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE ROYAL
GOVERNMENT OF LAOS, VIENTIANE, 4 FEBRUARY, 1974

I AM INDEBTED TO YOUR HIGHNESS FOR GIVING ME THE OPPORTUNITY DURING MY PRESENT JOURNEY TO VISIT VIENTIANE AND TO RENEW AN ACQUAINTANCE BEGUN WHEN YOU YOURSELF WERE IN AUSTRALIA SOME YEARS AGO. I WELCOME TOO THE OCCASION TO INFORM MYSELF OF THE ACHIEVEMENTS AND PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH THE LONG AWAITED RETURN OF PEACE AND ORDER THROUGHOUT YOUR COUNTRY. AS YOU WILL KNOW, THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT FIRMLY SUPPORTS THE PRINCIPLES OF NATIONAL INTEGRITY, INDEPENDENCE AND NEUTRALITY OF LAOS DECLARED IN THE GENEVA AGREEMENTS AND LOOKS TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO ENDORSE AND SUPPORT THEM.

AUSTRALIA WELCOMED BOTH THE FEBRUARY AGREEMENT AND THE SUBSEQUENT PROTOCOL IN SEPTEMBER OF LAST YEAR. WE SAW THESE AS HIGHLY IMPORTANT IN THEMSELVES, BUT ALSO AS ENCOURAGING AND HEARTENING EVIDENCE OF A SPIRIT OF GOODWILL, MAGNANIMITY AND CO-OPERATION AMONG ALL PARTIES IN LAOS - OF WILLINGNESS TO PURSUE A MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE COMPROMISE IN THE PRESIDING INTEREST OF A GENUINE NATIONAL RECONCILIATION. I KNOW HOW MUCH IMPORTANCE YOU PERSONALLY HAVE ATTACHED TO THIS GREAT OBJECTIVE OF NATIONAL RECONCILIATION AND HOW MUCH IS OWED TO YOUR WISE JUDGMENT AND IMAGINATIVE LEADERSHIP IN THE PROGRESS YOU HAVE MADE TOWARDS IT.

I SPEAK FOR ALL MY FELLOW AUSTRALIANS WHEN I SAY THAT AUSTRALIA UNDERSTANDS HOW MUCH NOW HAS TO BE DONE TO BIND UP THE WOUNDS OF WAR, TO REPAIR THE LOSS AND DAMAGE OF SO PROTRACTED A CONFLICT. ALL OF US IN THIS ROOM ARE CONSCIOUS OF WHAT THE TRAGIC EVENTS OF THE RECENT PAST HAVE MEANT IN TERMS OF FAMILY BEREAVEMENT AND HUMAN SUFFERING, THE PAINFUL REALITY WHICH UNDERLIES THE MACABRE STATISTICS OF WAR. WE CAN NEVERTHELESS LOOK FORWARD WITH OPTIMISM TO A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR ALL THE PEOPLE OF LAOS. WE CONFIDENTLY EXPECT THAT THE DAY IS NOT FAR OFF WHEN A COALITION GOVERNMENT WILL MAKE A START IN HARNESSING NATIONAL ENERGIES FOR THE URGENT TASKS OF REHABILITATION AND RECONSTRUCTION.

IN THIS WORK ALL FRIENDS OF LAOS WILL WISH TO MAKE SOME CONTRIBUTION TO PROMOTE THE POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TALENTS AND RESOURCES OF ALL ITS PEOPLES. MY OWN GOVERNMENT STANDS READY TO TAKE PART IN THIS COMMON ENDEAVOUR. I BELIEVE THAT THERE ARE AREAS IN WHICH AUSTRALIAN EXPERIENCE HAS ALREADY PROVED TO HAVE PARTICULAR RELEVANCE TO THE SPECIAL NEEDS OF THIS COUNTRY, AS FOR INSTANCE, IN AFFORESTATION AND IN PASTURE ESTABLISHMENT UNDER TROPICAL CONDITIONS. IN SUCH FIELDS WE MAY BE ABLE TO EXPAND OUR PRESENT CONTRIBUTION, IF YOU WISH US TO DO SO, HELPING TO PROVIDE EMPLOYMENT IN THE PROCESS TO REFUGEES AND DEMOBILISED SOLDIERS, AND TO LAY FOUNDATIONS FOR THE CONTROLLED DEVELOPMENT OF IMPORTANT NATIONAL RESOURCES. WE ARE HAPPY, TOO, TO CONTINUE OUR CONTRIBUTION TO FOREIGN EXCHANGE SUPPORT FOR LAOS. IN OTHER DIRECTIONS WE LOOK FORWARD TO PURPOSEFUL AND PRACTICAL DISCUSSIONS WITH YOU OF WAYS IN WHICH YOU THINK WE MIGHT HELP, AND WHERE WE WOULD COUNT IT A PRIVILEGE TO SERVE.

WE ARE ALSO INTERESTED IN EXPLORING WITH YOU THE
POSSIBILITY OF AN AGREEMENT TO ENCOURAGE TRADE BETWEEN
OUR TWO COUNTRIESx

AUSTRALIA AND LAOS WILL BOTH PROSPER BEST THROUGH
A COMBINATION OF OUR OWN EFFORTS AND THE PROMOTION OF
A HELPFUL CLIMATE OF INTERNATIONAL OPINION AND BEHAVIOURx
WE HAVE TO BE BOTH NATIONALIST AND INTERNATIONALISTx WE
SEE LAOS, AS IT SEES ITSELF, AS PART OF A REGION LINKED BY
GEOGRAPHY, CIRCUMSTANCES AND HISTORY TO THE OTHER COUNTRIES
OF INDO-CHINA AND AS A NEIGHBOUR ALSO TO BURMA, THAILAND
AND CHINAx LAOS DRAWS A RICH AND FASCINATING INHERITANCE
FROM ALL THESE ASSOCIATIONS, WOVEN INTO THE FABRIC OF
POPULAR LIFE AND FURNISHING THE BACKGROUND OF THE NATIONAL
GENIUSx AUSTRALIA IS A MORE RECENT NEIGHBOUR WITH A SHORTER,
MUCH SHORTER, AWARENESS AND EXPERIENCE OF THIS AREA, BUT WE
ACCEPT FULLY AND COMPLETELY THE EXTENT TO WHICH OUR DESTINIES
ARE BOUND UP WITH YOURSx THEY BOTH LARGELY DEPEND UPON THE
DEGREE OF SUCCESS THAT ATTENDS THE LABOURS OF US ALL TO
CONTRIBUTE TO A PEACEFUL WORLD ORDER AND THE PROSPECT OF
PEACEFUL ACCESS TO A FAIR SHARE OF ITS RESOURCES FOR ALL ITS
PEOPLESx

THERE COULD BE NO BETTER EXAMPLE TO PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS OF LEADERS IN LAOS, IN INDO-CHINA AND, INDEED, THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE REGION OF SOUTH-EAST ASIA THAN THE UNREMITTING LABOUR YOUR HIGHNESS HAS DEVOTED TO PEACE. IT IS IN THE HOPE OF SEEING EXTENDED THE AREA OF PEACE, OF FRATERNAL DIALOGUE AND DISCUSSION THAT I WILL LEAVE VIENTIANE, ENCOURAGED BY THE CONVICTION THAT THE PATH OF NEGOTIATION ON WHICH YOU ARE NOW EMBARKED IS THE RIGHT ONE FOR LAOS AND FOR THE REGION OF WHICH IT IS PART. WE SHALL FOLLOW WITH THE KEENEST INTEREST AND SYMPATHY THE OUTCOME OF YOUR ENDEAVOURS. YOU MAY COUNT UPON US FOR SUPPORT IN YOUR ACHIEVEMENT.

FINALLY, ON BEHALF OF ALL IN MY PARTY, MAY I EXPRESS MY DEEP APPRECIATION OF YOUR GENEROUS HOSPITALITY TO US ALL. I REGRET THAT CIRCUMSTANCES HAVE NOT PERMITTED A LONGER STAY AND WIDER ACQUAINTANCE WITH LAOS. WE LEAVE WITH YOU OUR MOST EARNEST HOPES AND GOOD WISHES FOR THE FUTURE PEACE AND PROGRESS, SO EARNESTLY DESIRED BY EVERY LAO, WHICH WILL REPRESENT THE CULMINATION OF YOUR EFFORTS AS A STATESMAN AND PEACEMAKER.
