



## NEWS RELEASE

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### PRIME MINISTER IN LAOS

Following is the text of an address by the Prime Minister, Mr Whitlam, at a luncheon given in his honour by the Prime Minister of the Royal Government of Laos in Vientiane on Monday, 4 February:

"I am obliged to Your Highness for giving me the opportunity during my present journey to pay this visit to 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 declared in the Geneva Agreements, as to the national integrity, independence and neutrality of Laos and looks to the international community to endorse and to respect them.

Australia welcomed both the February Agreement and the subsequent Protocol in September of last year, seeing 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 on 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 towards it so far achieved.

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. But we can nevertheless look forward with optimism to a brighter future for all the people of Laos. We can confidently expect that the day is not far off when a Coalition Government can make a start on harnessing national energies for 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 countries.

Australia and Laos will both prosper best through a combination of our own efforts and the promotion generally of a helpful climate of international opinion and behaviour. We have to be both nationalist and internationalist. 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 but as a neighbour also to Burma, Thailand and China. 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 genius. Australia is a more recent neighbour with a shorter, much shorter, awareness and experience of this

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area, but we accept fully and completely the extent to which our destinies are bound up with yours. 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 peoples.

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, heartened and 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 and you may count upon us for support in your achievement.

Finally on behalf of all in my party here today, 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 go away sorry that our stay was not longer, but leaving 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."