



DEPARTMENT OF
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STATEMENT BY PRIME MINISTER AFTER FRENCH NUCLEAR WEAPONS TEST

The Prime Minister, Mr Whitlam, said today that the Australian Government had reason to believe that the French Government had exploded a nuclear weapon device in the atmosphere over Mururoa atoll today 17 June.

The Prime Minister said that it was a matter of deep concern to the Australian Government that the French Government had proceeded to yet another program of nuclear testing in the Pacific, which was likely to lead to the deposit of radio active fallout within Australian territory. The feelings of the Australian Government and people against these tests had been made known in the past in the clearest way. Nothing had changed in the Australian attitude since last year.

The Prime Minister said: "The fact that this further test has been held is all the more regrettable because a new French Government is now in office, and because I have sent a message to the new French President expressing the sincere desire to develop relations between our two Governments and peoples. These relations have been regrettably affected during recent years by the dispute over nuclear testing in the Pacific, which we had not sought but which had become inevitable when our repeated protests were consistently ignored."

The Australian Government had noted the French Government's statements expressing an intention to cease

atmospheric testing after the present series was completed. As Senator Willesee had pointed out, these statements were a step in the right direction, but the French Government had not given the Australian Government any satisfactory commitment that further atmospheric tests would not be held. The new French Government could not claim to be in ignorance of the strong feelings of the Australian people that there should be no atmospheric test in the Pacific, or indeed anywhere.

The Prime Minister recalled that on 22 June 1973 the International Court of Justice had made an order granting to Australia interim measures of protection which required France to refrain from conducting any further tests which might lead to the deposit of radio active fallout on Australian soil.

This order of the Court had been ignored by France in 1973 and was now being ignored again. Mr Whitlam said that he had hoped that the French Government would abide by this order and be prepared to co-operate in having this continuing dispute resolved in a responsible manner by the International Court in accordance with international law. This had not proved to be the case, but the Prime Minister reaffirmed that, for its part, Australia would continue to seek resolution of the dispute by the Court, and work vigorously elsewhere for a complete cessation of nuclear weapons testing.