

PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH, SOUTH PACIFIC CONFERENCE, RAROTONGA,
26 SEPTEMBER 1974

PRIME MINISTER: Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen: thank you very much indeed for allowing me to say a few words to you at your conference. This is my first visit to the Cook Islands and I am making this visit because of the hospitality, the very good personal relations which Sir Albert Henry has been able to establish with so many people over the years at various conferences. I have attended, as a member, the South Pacific Forum. I did so shortly after becoming Prime Minister in April last year. The conference was held in western Samoa, and the conference was held a few months earlier than had originally been arranged because there had been brand new governments in New Zealand as well as in Australia in December 1972. On that occasion, as a full member of a South Pacific body, I was able to learn more closely than ever before many of the things which concerned us jointly as well as individually. The South Pacific Commission is the first of these bodies to be created - it was created under the Canberra Agreement named after Australia's capital in 1947. It seems now very much an archaic and fraternal body. It was composed entirely of metropolitan powers. It became clear for many years past that that was not enough to satisfy the aspirations of the people of the South Pacific and thereupon the South Pacific Conference emerged. It was composed of all the territories in the South Seas. Those who were independent, those that were associated with metropolitan powers, but they were all represented there. And eventually the South Pacific Conference came to discuss matters of great substance, matters which concerned all the people whatever their language, whatever their political arrangements and now the position of the Commission and the Conference has been very largely transposed. Now, I am happy that last year my country was very anxious that the conference should become even more significant and the Commission should become a Commission of the Commonwealth. As I understand it my country is not entitled to be a member of the conference except in so far as it has responsibilities for Norfolk Island and still for Papua New Guinea. By the time of the next South Pacific Conference I would expect that Papua New Guinea, in international terms, will be an independent country as, from Australia's point of view, we are already happy to regard. But as head of government in my country I am able to attend meetings of the South Pacific Forum and I find it a very interesting and significant body.

At the conference, over the next few days, my Government will be represented by Mr. Bill Morrison who was a member of the Australian diplomatic service for about 20 years before he became a minister in my government. As a member of the diplomatic service he has served in Singapore and Malaysia and had responsibilities on behalf of Australia in many programs that Australia was engaged in in some parts of Malaysia. He therefore comes to this conference with twenty years or more experience of international arrangements and particularly in developing countries; countries developing not only economically but politically. When I formed my government I made him the last minister in charge of External Territories, in effect Papua New Guinea. When last December Papua New Guinea

became self-governing, we in Australia no longer regarded it as appropriate to have a minister responsible for it, so he retained the position of Minister for Science but we have wanted him to continue as Minister Assisting the Foreign Minister in respect of the affairs of the South Pacific. So, my Foreign Minister who is at the General Assembly of the United Nations (and I am bound there in the next couple of days) has been very anxious that he should participate on behalf of Australia in so far as Australia's participation is appropriate in the affairs of this continent. Mr. Morrison can participate on all the matters of substance which are on your agenda. In addition, to indicate the interest which we place in Australia in this representative body we have brought with us two representatives of the Australian Parliament, Senator Primmer and Senator Bonner. In Australia we believe that representative institutions are extraordinarily important. We are the last to deny that there are very great deficiencies and shortcomings in Australia's representative institutions. I could scarcely urge any country in the South Pacific to copy Australia's political institutions - a federal system or a bicameral system. I don't urge this plan but naturally we still have the idea that representative government is quite basic if one is to involve the people in the affairs of government - if government is to be soundly based. We are in population and also in area a very large country in South Pacific terms. We therefore are aware that many people might believe us to be unconcerned or remote or indifferent. We don't want you to believe that we are indifferent or unconcerned. We have had experience of very many problems which must concern you. Some are matters which have arisen only in the last few years. In the South Pacific the ratio of sea to land is greater than any other part of the world. Accordingly, there are very many international matters of navigation and resources which concern all of us. It is just as important to Australia as it is to any other country in the South Pacific that there should be proper international standards set as for the rights of access by surface or by air or underwater, whether it is for strategic, political or economic purposes. You are very much aware that in the South Pacific the law of the sea is quite basic if all are concerned. There is no difference of interests between Australia and archipelagos in the south seas. There are also again many matters in the economic field where our concerns in Australia may be different in degree but not in time from those of all the other countries in the South Pacific. All of us, Australia and all the other countries in the South Pacific, have been concerned with the price that their products get elsewhere in the world, the degree to which their products are processed in our own countries, the degree to which the products, the resources of our countries are discovered or developed or marketed by ourselves or by organisations in which we have a fair share of the responsibility. And, in these days when inflation affects so many countries and certainly all the countries with which the South Pacific countries are trading or with which they have relations relating to transport and the like, it is very important that we should all understand the economic opportunities properly. We want to ensure that even if we depend on a very few products we can get a fair return from them as we get a fair share in development.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, the deliberations of the South Pacific Conference are of concern to Australia not just because we are all geographically so close but also because as far as the rest of the world is concerned there are very many things which concern us just as much in Australia as they concern people in the South Pacific. My minister, Mr. Morrison, will be participating in the conference I am happy to say and will be reporting to me and our other colleagues on the matters you raise here.

Looking over the last 25 or more years, we can take quite a deal of satisfaction in the way that this very large tract of the world's surface has come together, by the way it has developed its appropriate institutions, the institutions have changed as the needs have changed and it would seem to us that this conference is the one which you can not only make wider representation but it is the only comprehensive one and despite all the political diversions, the differences, you must confess, have been largely introduced in political terms in the last 150 years. Despite all this we are coming to see in the South Pacific how much we have in common and how much the things which we each individually want to achieve can be more fully and promptly achieved if we can consult together. Allow me to conclude by saying how much more our deliberations will be promoted, how much more harmonious as well as fruitful they will be because we are meeting in this beautiful hall, on this beautiful island, in this benine and benevolent regime. Well, I have only the opportunity with my senior officials, my Treasurer and our wives to thank you for your hospitality on our way to North America. On the way back we will be calling into Fiji for the Centenary of its association with Britain and at Norfolk Island to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Captain Cook's landing at that then uninhabited island, so our way between Australia and North America, the United Nations, new President Ford, re-elected Prime Minister Trudeau, will be made all the more interesting, we will be fortified on our way, refreshed on our way back by going to the islands of the South Pacific, our neighbours. And for those who are fortunate enough to be spending weeks instead of days on this island in this archipelago, on behalf of the Australian Government I wish you ^{not} only a happy but a very fruitful conference believing that it will mark another big step in our associations with the people of the South Pacific.