

Ministerial Statement

in the House of Representatives by the Prime Minister on
11 February 1975

I wish to report to the House and to the Australian people on my recent mission abroad. It was, I believe, the most arduous and comprehensive overseas visit ever undertaken by an Australian Prime Minister. It was also among the most necessary and productive. From Australia's point of view it was long overdue; in each of the countries I visited it was welcomed without reservation. It enabled me to put Australia's views, to hear the views of our friends and trading partners and to strengthen our goodwill in regions of undoubted importance to us. I count it an unqualified success.

Between 14 December and 21 January I visited Sri Lanka, Belgium, the headquarters of the European Communities in Brussels, Britain, Ireland, Greece, the Netherlands, France, Italy, Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union, the Federal Republic of Germany, Pakistan and Bangladesh. I had intended also to visit Malta, but because of my return to Australia after the disaster in Darwin, the Special Minister of State, Mr Lionel Bowen, who accompanied me throughout my mission, visited Malta in my stead. Mr Bowen and I were accompanied by a team of senior officials, including the Secretary of the Department of Minerals and Energy, the Secretary of the Department of Overseas Trade, the Deputy Secretary of my own Department, a Deputy Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and for part of our visit, a First Assistant Secretary of the Treasury and the Secretary of the Attorney-General's Department.

It will be seen from the duration of my trip, from the number and range of the countries visited and from the number and seniority of the officials who accompanied me, how highly I rated the importance of this mission and the

tasks I undertook on Australia's behalf. No Australian Prime Minister had visited the Soviet Union in the 33 years since diplomatic relations were established between the Soviet Union and Australia. Many of the other countries I visited had not previously been visited by an Australian Prime Minister. Yet the nations of the European Economic Community constitute Australia's second largest trading partner after Japan. The Soviet Union is one of the world's two super-powers—one of the nations whose policies determine the fate of all mankind. More than one and a half million citizens have come to Australia from the nations of continental Europe. We share with many of the countries I visited economic and social problems which it was clearly in our interests to discuss together.

I saw my mission as an essential part of my duty as a head of government. It had already been postponed for six months because of the action of the Opposition in refusing Supply and forcing an election last May. I did not believe it should be postponed again. Quite apart from the inconvenience and disruption this would have caused to the Governments I visited, the issues we discussed were so important, so pressing, so central to Australia's immediate and long-term interests, that a further postponement could not be contemplated.

I stress that point because, for some weeks, the Australian people witnessed a persistent and often unscrupulous campaign by sections of the media to deter me from my visit, and when I was not deterred, to disparage what I did. The specious view was put forward that a Prime Minister's duty is to stay at home at a time of economic difficulty. Now however serious our own problems and however acute my concern

about them—and I trust my concern is not in question—I believe a Prime Minister, in the nature of his office, has a special and at times an overriding duty to promote Australia's place in the world. This is not to say that our economic problems are unimportant. I agree that domestic matters, inflation and unemployment, have a greater priority in our thinking and are more important to the nation's welfare than any of the matters with which I had to deal overseas. The point is really this: while it was possible for my colleagues to deal with our domestic problems in my absence, it was not possible for anyone other than the Prime Minister to deal with the matters that arose during my mission.

That is the crux of the matter. In all the denigration of my visit I have not seen this point acknowledged, let alone refuted. Only a visit by a head of government enables Australia to put her point of view at the highest level and in the most forceful terms. Only a visit by a head of government obliges the countries visited to clarify and co-ordinate their policies towards us. Only a visit that includes all European countries—or at least the majority of those of importance to us—can generate a cumulative impact and promote Australia's advantage on the widest scale.

Our economic problems, far from being irrelevant to the matters discussed on my trip, in fact bore closely upon them. One of the themes of my mission was the essential and growing interdependence of nations in dealing with their economic problems. It would have been curious indeed if I had given the impression to our friends and trading partners, by cancelling or again postponing my mission, that Australia is the only country whose problems can be isolated from the rest of the world. The whole point of my mission, the point persistently ignored by the critics, was that Australia cannot isolate herself. Our inflation and unemployment are to a large extent linked with the present economic recession in the United States and much of Western Europe. I left Europe with the feeling that despite our temporary difficulties, Australia's economy is healthier and basically sounder than those of most of the countries I visited. I left Europe with the sure knowledge that the management of the western monetary system and the western economy is, along with the maintenance of peace, the greatest and

most immediate problem of 1975. In meeting that problem, Australia, like every other advanced industrialised nation, has a part to play.

For the information of honourable members I shall give a brief outline of my itinerary and official discussions before dealing with particular issues.

I left Sydney on 14 December and made an initial stop in Sri Lanka, where I had talks with President Gopallawa and Prime Minister Bandaranaike. The following day I flew to Brussels for a stay of four days, during which I was received by their Majesties the King and Queen of the Belgians and had discussions with Prime Minister Tindemans. I had talks in Brussels with the President of the Commission of the European Communities, M. Ortoli, and with the Vice-President, Sir Christopher Soames. I addressed the International Press Centre there on 18 December.

On 19 December I flew to London for a five-day visit, which included an audience with Her Majesty the Queen of Australia and discussions with Prime Minister Wilson and the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Heath. I sought to define Australia's relations with Britain in my speech at the Mansion House at a luncheon given by the Lord Mayor of London.

On 23 December I paid a short visit to the Irish Republic for talks with the Taoiseach, Mr Cosgrave, and other Senior Ministers. I was also received by President O'Dalaigh.

On my return to Europe I visited Greece, where I had talks on 3 January with the recently elected Prime Minister, Mr Karamanlis. The same evening I flew to The Hague for a two-day visit. There I was received by Her Majesty the Queen of the Netherlands and had talks with Prime Minister Den Uyl and other senior Ministers.

On 6 January I went to Paris for two days of talks with President Giscard D'Estaing, Prime Minister Chirac and other French Ministers. In Paris I attended a ground-breaking ceremony at the site of the new Australian Embassy building and a civic reception in the Hotel de Ville. I had talks with the Secretary-General of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, whose headquarters are in Paris.

From Paris I travelled to Rome, where I had discussions with President Leone and Prime Minis-

ter Moro, the Foreign Minister, Mr Rumor, and several other senior Ministers. During my visit to Rome I signed a Cultural Agreement between Australia and Italy.

I flew next to Yugoslavia, the first Australian Prime Minister to visit that country. I had talks on 9 and 10 January with Prime Minister Bijedic and met President Tito.

On 12 January I flew to Leningrad and two days later to Moscow where I had wide-ranging discussions with President Podgorny and Prime Minister Kosygin of the Soviet Union and signed cultural and scientific agreements between the Soviet Union and Australia.

I visited the Federal Republic of Germany from 16 to 18 January. In Bonn I met President Scheel and had talks with Chancellor Schmidt and other senior Ministers. I addressed a meeting of bankers and industrialists at the Federation of German Industry in Cologne on 16 January.

On my way back to Australia I paid a brief visit to Pakistan on 19 January for talks with Prime Minister Bhutto, and Bangladesh, where I met Prime Minister—now President—Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Joint communiques were issued after my visits to Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union.

The EEC—Uranium

It became apparent as my visit to the seven EEC countries progressed that Western Europe's demand for uranium in the late 70's and the 80's will be very substantial. Our role as a potential major supplier of uranium means that Australia's importance to these countries will increase.

In Brussels, London, The Hague, Paris, Rome and Bonn, as well as in Moscow, I consistently asserted Australia's wish to develop her own enrichment capability so that as much uranium as possible should be exported in an enriched form. There are important policy issues to be resolved, such as the choice of enrichment technology, the capital investment required, and the extent to which we may be prepared to sell unenriched uranium both before and after we have our own enrichment capability. I am convinced that my visit, and the fact that the Head of the Department of Minerals and Energy, Sir Lenox Hewitt, accompanied me, has

greatly facilitated the Government's consideration of the total uranium supply and demand situation over the next decade.

The obvious interest shown throughout Europe in Australia as a supplier of uranium suggests that we shall exercise considerable influence in this important area.

The EEC—Beef

In each European Community capital I took up forcefully the Community's current import restrictions on beef. I left heads of Government in no doubt about our attitude to the Community's action in imposing restrictions without warning or consultation. I pointed out the disruptive and harmful nature of this action to the Australian meat industry and urged on European leaders the need for stable long-term marketing arrangements. The response of individual Governments was, in the main, apologetic and sympathetic. I believe that my visit has made it more likely that the Community market will be re-opened to Australian beef, if not later this year, then by mid-1976. I was informed that the total market could return to about 400 000 to 500 000 tons by mid-1976. This total market, of which we would have a share, would mean that we would be still selling less beef than we did before the market was closed, but it would be an improvement. I also believe that the strong stand which I took on this matter and the interest of the European countries in Australian uranium will make it much less likely that such restrictive actions will be taken against Australian commodities again.

Energy

In a number of countries I discussed in some depth the energy crisis and the Middle-East. I assured European leaders that while we agreed that an increase in the price of oil was justified, we did not wish to see a confrontation develop between cartels of producers and consumers. I asserted strongly our attitude that while producers have every right to negotiate with consumers for fair prices for their resources, we will also work to harmonise the interests of producers and consumers with proper concern for the international situation as a whole.

The Middle East

In my discussions on the Middle-East I asserted the right of all countries in the Middle-East,

including Israel, to secure and recognised boundaries. I believe that Israel's integrity as a State must be upheld. At the same time, a lasting solution in the Middle-East will require withdrawal from occupied territories and measures to meet the legitimate needs of the Palestinian people. While I cannot go into the details of private discussions, I was not discouraged by my discussions in the Kremlin and in Belgrade on this matter.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

I took the opportunity in a number of capitals to urge greater support for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. In particular I did so in Paris, Bonn and Rome. Australia wants to see the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty strengthened and all countries accept the multilateral obligations which the Treaty embodies. I sensed that there is a real possibility of movement by the governments in Rome and Bonn, which is most encouraging. In France I explained frankly the problems of selling uranium to countries which had not ratified the NPT or adhered to the International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards. Although France has not signed the NPT, I believe that she too is concerned about the proliferation of nuclear weapons and I hope that she too will sign. Meanwhile, France has said that she will behave as if she were a party to the NPT and that she already applies the safeguards adopted by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The Non-aligned Movement

I discussed with Mrs Bandaranaike in Sri Lanka and with President Tito and Prime Minister Bijedic in Yugoslavia Australia's interest in the Third World and the non-aligned movement. Although Australia is an aligned country—and there can be no doubt about this—we have interests which overlap those of the Third World.

Many of the non-aligned countries—like Sri Lanka—are within or on the borders of the Indian Ocean. I explained to Mrs Bandaranaike, President Tito and Prime Minister Bijedic our interest in attending future meetings of the non-aligned group either as a guest or as an observer. I found all three appreciative of the interest of Australia in the problems of the Third World and the objectives of the non-aligned

movement and sympathetic to our association as a guest or as an observer with future meetings.

We shall in the future be examining further the possibilities of our attendance in this capacity at future meetings of the non-aligned countries with other important members of the movement in Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

The Indian Ocean

I had discussions on the Indian Ocean while I was abroad. Honourable members will recall that I raised this matter in the United States and that the Government had raised it previously through diplomatic channels in both Washington and Moscow. I took the opportunity of my visit to Moscow to refer to this matter at the highest levels in the Kremlin. The Soviet Government understands our attitude. In the joint communique issued after my visit to Moscow the Soviet Government endorsed 'its readiness to participate' in 'seeking a favourable solution to the problem of making the Indian Ocean an area of peace'.

I believe that in urging mutual restraint on the great powers we are on the correct course. To support any further development of bases in the Indian Ocean—or any long-term naval deployments in the area—is to support escalation and a heightening of tension in the region. We reject that course.

Investment

While in Western Europe, and especially in Bonn, I had full discussions on the question of investment in Australia. I made it plain that the Australian Government continues to welcome foreign investment but that we wish as far as possible to control our own industries and resources. I agreed that a West German mission should visit Australia in the near future to discuss in detail all aspects of investment in Australia. I agreed also to take up with the Australian taxation authorities the strongly expressed interest of the Belgian, Netherlands and Italian Governments in negotiating a double taxation agreement with Australia.

The International Court

Honourable members should know that I took advantage of my visit to The Hague—the city in which the International Court of Justice is based—to refer to our warm support for the

principles and objectives of the International Court and to urge that the international community give greater attention to the Court as an instrument for world peace and harmony. I urged that the Court's jurisdiction should be made compulsory and universal. Honourable members will know that it has been the practice of most countries, including Australia, to accept the Court's jurisdiction only with reservations or with the exclusion of certain categories of dispute. I take this opportunity to inform the House that, as an earnest of our respect for the Court, Australia proposes to forgo her existing reservations, and in any dispute which we litigate before the Court, to accept its judgment unreservedly.

Relations with Britain

In London I had useful and cordial talks with Prime Minister Wilson on important issues including energy problems, unemployment, inflation, the dangers of a world recession, British attitudes to the re-negotiation of the Treaty of Rome, and Constitutional issues including the right of appeal to the Privy Council. I have today introduced Bills to give effect to the Government's policy on Privy Council appeals. That policy can be stated simply: we do not believe that Australians should litigate their disputes before the Courts of another country. I believe that attitude is understood and accepted in Britain to a greater extent, regrettably, than it is in some quarters in Australia.

In case there are any lingering misconceptions about the Government's approach to its relations with the United Kingdom, at the Mansion House I made it clear in a speech, which was widely publicised and applauded by the British media, that changes in the world situation had naturally led to changes in Australia's traditional relationship with Britain. I made it clear that those who saw the Government's recent actions concerning Britain as a manifestation of strident new nationalism or anti-British sentiment had completely misread the Government's intentions. What we are seeking to do is establish an independent Australian identity in the world and especially in our region. We have grown up. Our actions are in no way anti-British; they are simply pro-Australian. Contrary to a popular impression, I did not raise in Britain the question of State Agents-General. I made it clear that the traditional understanding

and affection between Australia and Britain, based on strong historical and family connections, would deepen rather than diminish as Australia assumed her rightful place as an independent nation with a distinctive Australian role and a distinctive Australian voice in the South East Asian region, in the Commonwealth and in the world at large. We see particular value in our continuing associations with the Commonwealth. With the majority of member nations of the Commonwealth now lying in and around the Indian and South Pacific Oceans, Australia is geographically closer to the centre of the modern Commonwealth than is Britain herself.

The Soviet Union

It is thirty-three years since a former Labor Government established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. When I spent more than six hours in discussions with Chairman Kosygin and President Podgorny in the Kremlin it was the first time that Australia's views on a wide range of important issues had been put at this level. We discussed such matters as the situation in the North Asian region, Japan, China, Korea, detente and disarmament.

I was also able to raise a number of human rights issues. While the Soviet Union maintains that these are matters within its domestic jurisdiction it is not insensitive to representations on these matters. I raised the matter of Jewish emigration. I raised the matter of 'Operation Reunion', that is, the scheme under which persons resident in the Soviet Union seek to join relatives or friends in Australia. Prime Minister Kosygin listened with courtesy to my presentation and replied in some detail on the question of Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union and on the question of 'Operation Reunion'. The Soviet Government takes the view that these are matters of purely domestic concern. Australia for her part, believes that on any matters involving broad humanitarian rights nations have a duty to put their viewpoints strongly. No purpose is served if we avoid issues where agreement is unlikely. The Soviet Union has a better understanding of our views and, I believe, a greater respect for our candour.

France

In France I had substantial and lengthy discussions with President Giscard D'Estaing and Prime Minister Chirac. I believe it is true to say

that my visit and my reception by my hosts in Paris put the seal at the highest level on the resumption of normal relations with France following the strains which had developed over France's atmospheric testing in the Pacific. This testing has now ceased.

Arising from my visit to Paris, it was agreed that a French trade mission should visit Australia in the coming months to explore the possibility of increasing commercial exchanges between our two countries. Businessmen in Australia should understand that there is no political constraint upon their initiating contacts with France. It was agreed also to negotiate a cultural agreement between Australia and France and an agreement on co-operation in science and technology. It was further agreed to hold regular consultations between officials of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and the Quai d'Orsay. The first round of these consultations is likely to be held towards the middle of this year.

Bangladesh

My visit to Dacca brought into focus the issues involved in responding to Bangladesh's enormous needs, especially for food. I explained the great sympathy which the Australian Government and people felt for the people of Bangladesh in their struggle to feed their population. However, I felt obliged to point out to Sheikh Mujib that while Australia is willing to do as much as we can for his country, it is not right that the whole burden for supplying as aid, or selling on credit, wheat for Bangladesh should fall on the relatively few countries which produce surplus grain. I suggested international arrangements under which some of the developed Governments with capital, such as the Federal Republic of Germany or Japan, or the oil-rich Middle Eastern countries, might use some of their petrodollars to finance the purchase of wheat on credit from the grain producers.

Detente

I turn now to the broader issue of world peace. I see the peace of the world as resting on the progressive reinforcement of the network of accommodations and understandings between the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. This network of understandings is itself part of a wider balance of interests involv-

ing the other principal powers, China, Japan and the enlarged European Community.

If peace is to be preserved—and in the ultimate analysis nothing is more important than that—the interests of the United States, the Soviet Union, Japan and China and those of the enlarged European Community must be kept in balance in Europe and in Asia. Each must live with respect for the legitimate interests and aspirations of the others. Only in this way will detente become durable and global. Only in this way will peace be secured.

It is the duty of the middle powers and the smaller powers to make their views heard in seeking to strengthen the structure of peace. This must be a common collective concern, not something left to the major powers alone. The future belongs to us all and, as I said in my address to the General Assembly last September, the Government rejects a concept of a world in which a handful of powerful men in charge of the most powerful nations chart the course for the rest of us to follow.

Some may ask what influence a country like Australia has in the White House, in the Kremlin, in the Councils of Europe, in the Great Hall of the People, or in Tokyo? I believe we can and do have influence. I believe at the very least we should not fail to try to exert some influence for the causes in which we believe. We should not permit our views on major international problems like the proliferation of nuclear weapons and access to markets to go by default.

I had a number of objectives in undertaking this journey and I believe I fulfilled them all.

I wanted to emphasise Australia's continuing and substantial interest in Europe and to strengthen Europe's awareness of Australia. I have done so.

I wanted to complete, as far as possible, the pattern of visits which my Foreign Minister and I have been undertaking abroad to outline Australia's policies in a number of areas following the first change of government in twenty-three years. I have now largely completed that pattern of visits.

I wanted to establish or strengthen personal contacts with the heads of government of important countries and exchange views with

them on matters of international concern and on common economic problems including inflation and unemployment. I have done so.

I wanted to discuss at first hand Australia's interest in long-term arrangements for the access of our commodities in markets in Europe and I have done so. It is less likely, I believe, that Australia will ever again be subjected to summary and restrictive closures of markets which we have carefully nurtured.

I wanted to discuss at the highest level the international energy situation and to form my own assessments on the major policy issues involved in the sale of Australia's bountiful mineral resources, especially uranium and coal, to the countries of Europe. I have done so, and I believe the outlook for Australia in the area of energy supply is immensely encouraging.

I wanted to discuss with those countries whose people have contributed to Australia's cultural heritage and economic development the present attitude of the Government towards immigration. This I did in Britain, Ireland, Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia and the Netherlands.

I wished also to explain Australia's policies on foreign investment and to remove any uncertainties about these policies. I have done so.

Finally, I wanted to examine ways in which Australia might make its contribution to strengthening the fabric of co-operation between Australia and Europe and to explore, at the highest level, the attitudes of countries like the Soviet Union, France and Yugoslavia to detente and to the Middle-East, which are essential to forming any sound assessment of the prospects for world peace. I have done so.

I regret that many of these things, these immense and tangible benefits for Australia, have been obscured from the Australian people. I do not resent fair criticism from the media. Everyone in public life accepts such criticism and frequently benefits from it. Even my worst enemies would concede that I have rarely complained about the media's treatment of me, that I have been more accessible to the media, more frank in my dealings with them, than any of my predecessors in this office. A free press has an essential and constructive role in democratic society. I regret however that on this occasion the Australian public was not served

by the media as objectively or as intelligently as it deserved. Too often matters of substance were subordinated to reports of trivia. It was repeatedly suggested that much of my time was taken up with sightseeing in visits to archaeological sites and museums. Very little time was taken up with these things and most of it was during public holidays and weekends. Such diversions, of course, are a normal part of the hospitality extended to visiting heads of government, and I make no apology for my interest in the culture and histories of the countries I visited, of the countries from which so many of my fellow citizens have come.

We are not a nation of Philistines; we should not be content with an image abroad based mainly on Barry McKenzie. I take some pride in the extensive and sympathetic presentation of my mission in the media in all the countries I visited. I found immense goodwill, not just for me, but for Australia. This goodwill was expressed and symbolised in many different ways. In Bangladesh, for example, there was a warm appreciation of Australia's food aid programs. In the visits of the Special Minister and myself to war cemeteries in France, in Belgium, in Crete, in Athens, I found deep and genuine gratitude for the contribution of Australian soldiers to the allied cause in two world wars. In many countries there was a ready understanding of the links forged by our immigration program. Everywhere in the media of the countries I visited I found a full appreciation of the importance and urgency of the matters I sought to raise. I regret that I found much less understanding in the media of my own country.

Over a year ago, on my return from China and Japan, I had occasion to say that Australia had at last got her relations right with the four powers of most immediate concern to us—with Indonesia, our nearest neighbour; with Japan, our largest trading partner; with China, the most populous nation on earth; and with the United States, the world's most powerful nation and our firmest ally. My visit to China ended a generation of lost contact with a quarter of the world's people. My visits to the United States, Japan, Indonesia and India consolidated, improved and matured existing relationships of great importance to us. My visit to the Soviet Union has marked a new stage in the development of practical and realistic relations with the

other powerful nation on earth. My visit to Europe has reasserted our strong and continuing interest in the European Community, and I believe, rekindled Europe's interest in a strong, progressive and independent Australia. Taken together, we have begun to fashion a more contemporary relationship with Europe—East and West—more appropriate to the changed conditions of our time. We can now say confidently that Australia has got her relations right, not just with the countries nearest to us but also with most nations of importance, and regions of importance, in the world.