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PRIME MINISTER

Press Statement No. 495
15 April 1975

COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING

The Prime Minister, Mr Whitlam, announced today that he would leave Australia on 23 April to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Kingston, Jamaica, and to pay official visits to Peru and the United States.

He would return to Australia on 11 May.

Mr Whitlam said he would visit Peru from 24-27 April. He would be in Kingston from 27 April - 7 May and would then fly to Washington for a 27 hour visit. He would spend two days in Tahiti on his way home.

The Prime Minister said that he would be accompanied by the Special Minister of State, Mr Bowen.

The Delegation would include the Secretaries of the Departments of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and of Foreign Affairs, Mr Menadue and Mr Renouf, the High Commissioners in London and Kingston, Sir John Bunting and Mr Hoyle, and the Deputy Secretary of the Department of Overseas Trade, Mr Scully.

Mr Whitlam reaffirmed Australia's unswerving support for the Commonwealth as a unique multi-racial grouping. He recalled in this context that the Commonwealth was a voluntary association of 34 independent states, each responsible for its own policies, but consulting and co-operating in the common interests of their peoples to promote international understanding and world peace. He noted also the important non-governmental links which existed between professional and other associations in Commonwealth countries.

The Australian Government, he said, attached particular importance to the development of co-operative international arrangements of this kind which would operate free from special allegiances to power blocs. The periodic Heads of Government meetings - the last was at Ottawa in 1973 - were an important aspect of Commonwealth co-operation. He would be going to Kingston to participate in wide-ranging discussions with other Commonwealth leaders on international matters and issues of common concern to Heads of Government. He and his colleagues would aim to play a full and active part in promoting further co-operation between member states in a number of areas where practical programs beneficial to the peoples of the Commonwealth were already in operation, such as education, the law, and science and technology.

He was also looking forward to a detailed exchange of views, under the heading of world and Commonwealth trends, of changing power relationships and of world trade and financial matters, which he believed would be important subjects for consideration at this meeting.

Mr Whitlam said that during his visit to Washington he expected to meet President Ford and Dr Kissinger, as well as members of the House International Relations Committee and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

This would be his second meeting with President Ford in just over six months and would provide a good opportunity for discussion of developments in power relationships, particularly in Indo-China, in the intervening period.

His visit to Peru would be the first by an Australian Prime Minister to South America and he was glad of the opportunity to meet and hold talks with the President, General Juan Velasco Alvarado, the Prime Minister, General Morales Bermudez, and Government Ministers.

He noted in this regard that Peru was an important Pacific state, which had played a major role in matters concerning the law of the sea and in the non-aligned movement. It was also a member of the Organisation of American States and the Andean Group of States. Australia has observe status with both organisations.

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