



PRIME MINISTER

PRESS STATEMENT NO. 497

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TRIBUTE TO RAAF

The Prime Minister today paid tribute to the humanitarian contribution made by the C-130 aircraft of the Royal Australian Air Force which have been operating in South-East Asia since 30 March. He did this on the occasion of the return to Australia of three aircraft which require servicing.

The Prime Minister recalled that the aircraft had originally been sent to South-East Asia to fulfil an urgent task in the uplifting of refugees at Da Nang. Australia had been the first country to respond to this request for humanitarian assistance by providing an airlift capacity : subsequently the Royal New Zealand Air Force had also provided aircraft.

Since their arrival the C-130 aircraft have been engaged in relief tasks, most of them connected with the movement of United Nations supplies. They have also played a role in the uplift of South Vietnamese orphans for adoption in Australia.

The Prime Minister said that he regretted that there had been some misleading reports that the aircraft had been under-employed. In fact, their crews and all those associated with the carrying of relief supplies had been working under very great pressure, in arduous conditions. For example, about half a million pounds of medical and relief supplies had been transported from Bangkok to Saigon and much of these had had to be loaded by hand by RAAF crews.

The Prime Minister recalled that he had already referred in Parliament to tributes paid to the RAAF performances. He said that he had asked the Chief of the Air Staff to convey his personal appreciation to all those who had been involved.

The Prime Minister said that there had been discussions this week with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Waldheim, and the coordinator of relief assistance for Indo China, Sir Robert Jackson, about the future role which RAAF planes might play in assisting United Nations agencies in their humanitarian tasks in Indo China. As a result RAAF Hercules were to be assigned to the United Nations to play a bridging role in the transport of relief supplies until United Nations agencies were able to make satisfactory arrangements for the chartering of aircraft to meet their needs.

The Prime Minister said he was particularly pleased that Australian Government aircraft would be able to play this essential humanitarian role in the service of the United Nations in transporting relief supplies contributed by the Australian and many other Governments.

Canberra, A.C.T.