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PRIME MINISTER

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA AT THE OFFICIAL
DINNER IN HIS HONOUR HOSTED BY PRESIDENT FORD - 27 JULY 1976

Mr President, thank you for your invitation to join you on this occasion, for your generous hospitality and for the opportunity it has given us to see America celebrating her Bicentennial.

We were delighted to have your Vice-President and his wife in Australia a short while ago. During his visit we reaffirmed the friendship that has long existed between our peoples. I would like to say, Mr President, that your Vice-President was a warm and gifted Ambassador for your country, and the discussions we had were constructive and useful.

Earlier this year we were also delighted to welcome Mrs Kissinger. I would also like to express our appreciation to Secretary Kissinger for making himself so frequently available for discussions between my Foreign Minister and himself.

Australians probably have more cause to celebrate the Bicentennial with you than any other country. If it had not been for your successful War of Independence against the British, it is most unlikely that the British would have settled Australia when they did.

I know I speak for the many Australians here when I say how pleased we have been to make some contribution to your Bicentennial celebrations. Amongst the many different contributions that were made I would like to mention the Australian Ballet. I hope that those of you who saw their performance enjoyed it.

Mr President, we did have cause to be grateful to the United States even in the early days. There are many who think that our nation's beef trade is a recent development. But in 1792 the struggling Colony of Port Jackson received an important shipment from the American ship 'Philadelphia'. The voyage took nine months so by the time it arrived the cargo of barrels of American beef was well cured. Our local crops had not been very successful and your beef was greeted enthusiastically. It is a shipment we are prepared to return a thousand-fold.

Mr President, Australia and America have many things in common - our frontier experience, and the fact that we are both migrant nations. We both value our independence and our democratic institutions, our ideals of freedom and opportunity.

Our histories have taught us both that we have our freedom not as of right, but only so long as we remain vigilant and resourceful. I know that in support of our ideals we will work together in the future as we have in the past.

In our countries the State is regarded as the servant of the people. In other countries these values are set aside - the State is paramount. Such differences have often led to conflict. The great challenge of the next twenty five years will be whether or not countries with differing social systems can learn to live together, and resolve their international differences by negotiation.

In the uncertain world which faces us the need for co-operation is strong. This is especially so because over recent years there has been criticism where there should have been understanding.

We are aware that there has been vigorous debate within the United States on your world role. We believe that out of such debate emerges a stronger and a freer nation - one more able to provide the leadership the world requires.

We appreciate the manner in which the United States has persisted. In future years the resolution of the American people is going to be more important for securing the peace of the world than it has ever been.

That is by no means to suggest that countries such as mine do not have responsibilities. Whatever others may feel, no Australian assumes that we are entitled to a free ride, that your efforts are a reason why we should be complacent or negligent about our responsibilities. It is merely recognition that as the world's greatest free power, there are many things that only the United States can do. If the United States does not do them they will remain undone. Others may contribute, but your strength is indispensable in supporting the diplomacy and negotiation essential for the building of peace. The fact that your nation attracts criticism in its international role is much less important than the fact that the task is done.

Mr President, over the last two hundred years there have been many revolutions. But whatever some other ideologies may claim for their revolution, yours is distinguished by its unequalled democratic character, by its purpose and by its morality.

The ideas contained in the Declaration of Independence still stir the hearts of men and women around the world. We can find in that Declaration the philosophy of the best social reforms that have taken place in the years since.

Mr President, we know the great responsibility that rests on democratic leadership. That is one of the reasons why meeting the demands of the Office you hold must be the most difficult but at the same time the most rewarding task in the world.

Your country, Mr President, has made an immeasurable contribution to world peace, and to the ideal of liberty. There has never been a time when support of these ideals has required more dedication, more firmness, more persistence than now.

My wife and I are honoured to be here and I ask you now to rise and drink the toast:

The President of the United States'.