



PRIME MINISTER

FOR PRESS

9 JANUARY 1977

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY: 9.00 p.m.

ADDRESS TO THE NATIONAL CHRISTIAN YOUTH CONVENTION, CANBERRA

I am pleased to be with you tonight at your ninth National Christian Youth Convention.

It is a particular pleasure to welcome to Australia delegates and distinguished visitors from overseas. The fact that the Convention has been able to attract so many people from so many nations is a tribute to the continuing vitality of the Convention. The response to the Convention has, I am advised, been unparalleled. This is not surprising given the relevance and the diversity of the issues which the Convention will discuss.

The Convention offers an outstanding opportunity for young people of different backgrounds and nationalities to come together and grapple with some of the basic problems and significant issues which concern modern societies. Issues such as the nature of personal relationships, contemporary moral problems, the nature of personal freedom and education, the problems of the disadvantaged, religious ethics are of fundamental importance to contemporary society - as they have been to all societies across history. It is particularly important that young people have opportunities to come together and discuss such issues thoroughly.

What differentiates young people from older people is that theirs is a learning period, a time of growth and development. Conventions such as this have an enormously important contribution to make to this process of development by giving young people the opportunity to participate in a community, to live and to work together.

In this community, for an intense - although short - period, young people can test their ideas against others, refine and elaborate them, and sometimes change their ideas. It would be facile to suggest that what would emerge is a unified consensus on all the issues discussed. Young people are as diverse in their political, social and philosophical perspectives as are people over thirty. But by bringing fresh perspectives to bear on

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social issues, young people can assist in clarifying the nature of these issues, and improve on existing solutions.

This Government is seeking to develop youth policies which will support the process of continuing individual growth, and contribute to establishing a society in which every individual has the opportunity to develop his full potential. This goal cannot be achieved by Government alone. All sections of the community should be involved, and most importantly, young people themselves should be involved - as masters of their own destiny.

To achieve a society in which all people have the opportunity to realise their potential, the diversity of contemporary society and contemporary youth must be recognised. There must also be a balanced relationship between Government initiatives and the many voluntary agencies and organisations which are associated with youth. A practical example of the way in which the Government is seeking to contribute to this type of relationship is the Community Youth Support Scheme. This scheme is designed to encourage community involvement in the provision of supportive programmes and services to the young unemployed. Support under this scheme will be provided for job search orientation groups and for voluntary community activities which perform a useful function for the individuals involved and the community. These include, among other things, the organisation of youth recreation activities, social service activities, minor maintenance to community facilities, and social surveys.

Support is also being provided to enable the sharing of knowledge and skills with other unemployed who could assist in imparting basic job skills.

Another approach which has also been taken to the problem of the young unemployed is the establishment of the special youth employment training scheme. This subsidises employers providing training for the young unemployed. In the first instance, priority was given to school leavers from 1975 who had been unable to establish themselves in stable employment. The scheme took off from the moment it began. The acceptance the programme achieved in the community and particularly with employers, enabled the Government to extend the conditions for entry. By mid-December, 3,600 young people had been placed in employment under the scheme.

Both these schemes are practical demonstrations of the Government's resolve to develop a creative relationship between the Government and voluntary sector in meeting the issues faced by young adults. Unemployment among the young is a particularly significant problem because of the loss of self-esteem and dignity brought by the prolonged inability to participate in productive employment. There are also a number of other concerns and issues facing young people.

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Cabinet has considered representations from individuals and organisations on the establishment of a Youth Bureau and an inquiry has been established to report on youth matters generally. It has been asked to examine the advantages of establishing a Youth Bureau or Youth Advisory Panel to advise the Government on all youth matters. Through the inquiry, the Government seeks to identify the issues affecting youth and their needs to examine the services provided by voluntary organisations and the three spheres of Government and how these may be improved.

The inquiry will also look at how overseas experience can be used to assist in the development of models of youth consultative and co-ordinating machinery. The inquiry will provide an important way through which Government can obtain the views of youth across the broad spectrum of issues.

If we are to make progress in coming to grips with the problems facing Australian society and Australia's young people, we must be willing to get the benefit of a variety of perspectives and at least be forced to argue our position through.

This Convention will make a valuable contribution to the process of discussion, of reasoning together, and I wish it every success.

I have great pleasure in declaring this Convention open.
