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PRIME MINISTER

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ADDRESS BY PRIME MINISTER AT DINNER IN BRUSSELS : 16 JUNE 1977

I thank you for your kind words and warm welcome. It is a great pleasure for me to visit your country, a nation with which Australia has many interests in common, and with which we have sound and friendly relations.

Geographically, our countries are almost as far apart as two countries can be, and our experiences have been very different. You have always been at the centre of international affairs. Once you were on the frontier between two hostile European powers - the cockpit of Europe. Now you are the heart and headquarters of the European Community.

A generation ago, by contrast, Australia was situated outside the main currents of international politics, although our fighting men have more than once earned us a place in the peace council of the world. We have been influenced greatly by remoteness and isolation, by what one Australian historian has called the tyranny of distance.

These differences have been lessened by changing patterns of international politics - by technology, and by increasing interdependence. They have always been less important than the values and interests we share.

Belgium and Australia are among the comparatively small number of genuinely democratic countries which exist in the world today. Your recorded history is much longer than ours. The establishment of modern Belgium however almost coincides with the history of European settlement in Australia; and our democratic institutions have developed in parallel.

These institutions differ in detail, but in both cases they are structured to make political leaders responsible to the people; to preserve and strengthen individual liberty - and provide the conditions for enterprise and achievement. And not only have our democratic institutions shown a broadly similar development, but our societies and economies are much the same. Twice this century, our two countries, along with the other democracies, have fought to preserve their liberty. We were successful because, under challenge we have found the will and the unity necessary to survive.

Today, the democracies face different challenges - both domestic and international - the military power of authoritarian regimes is growing; the democracies are facing a period of economic difficulty and rapid social change; greater and sometimes unrealistic demands are made of democratic governments.

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If the democracies are to meet the challenges they face, they will have to do so collectively, not in isolation. They will have to appreciate their interdependence, state clearly and confidently their common interests and values - and formulate effective policies in terms of them.

This world outlook should not, and cannot, be left to the great democratic powers alone. I believe that countries like Australia and Belgium have an important part to play. Our stake in the outcome is as great and our responsibility is as clear. In shaping an adequate democratic response to these challenges Belgium's role is a vital one. Your country has been amongst the most imaginative and energetic proponents of a united Western Europe. Given the background of centuries of conflict, the movement towards Western European unity has been impressive.

Australia, for her part, has given and will continue to give firm support to the achievement of greater unity amongst Western European democracies. The substantial progress made in the last decades perhaps makes it understandable that Europeans have mainly concentrated on their own affairs. But the situation that now faces us calls for an outward looking Europe - one which sees its role in global terms.

Most of the world's democracies are located in Western Europe and without their full and active commitment the democratic view in international affairs will be seriously attenuated.

I hope that the Community's potential for contributing to the resolution of major international problems, to the development of the international economic system, and to an expansion of world trade, will be fully realised. Belgium has not only been one of the great architects of Western European unity, but it has also been one of the strong supporters and most active participants in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

While Australia's immediate security interests lie especially in Asia and the Pacific, we always have been closely interested in European security arrangements. For despite our location, we are very aware of Europe's strategic importance and the contribution the European Community makes to the North Atlantic community and to the present global balance. All democracies - I believe - are becoming increasingly aware that national security cannot be safeguarded in one area alone but must be looked at on a global basis; that our strength does not lie in any one region - North America, Europe or Japan - but in our collective strength and will.

We need to foster this awareness and avoid narrow, exclusively regional preoccupations - to be aware of the impact of our decisions not only on our own country, but on the rest of the world. If we do not do this then we run the risk of damaging the interests we all have in common.

I am in the happy position of visiting a country with which we have very good relations. We hope to see these relationships continue to grow to the mutual benefit of both our countries. We will take every opportunity to strengthen our relations in all respects.
