



EMBARGO: 1.00 p.m.

PRIME MINISTER

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ADDRESS AT PARLIAMENTARY LUNCH FOR WESTERN SAMOAN
HEAD OF STATE

Your Highness, on behalf of the Australian people I offer our warmest welcome. We are delighted you are in Australia on the first visit by a Western Samoan Head of State. I also welcome your Minister for Finance, The Hon. Vaovasamanaia Filipo and officials.

In recent years there has been a notable strengthening of relations between Western Samoa and Australia. An Australian High Commission has been opened in your capital and an Australian Foreign Affairs officer has been seconded to the Foreign Affairs unit in the Prime Minister's Department of Western Samoa. My own contacts with your Prime Minister, Tupuola Efi, have been frequent and close.

Your Highness, the South Pacific region is of high importance to Australia. We are determined to live up to our responsibilities towards the countries of the region. At the same time, South Pacific nations are taking the initiative in establishing links with countries outside the region. Western Samoa has been leading the way in the movement among the independent island countries of the region towards developing new diplomatic and other links with other countries and with multilateral organisations. I know for example, that Western Samoa recently opened in New York a permanent mission to the United Nations, the United States and Canada. This is an initiative that Australia strongly welcomes. It highlights the need for regional cooperation to safeguard and to protect the perceptions and viewpoints of the region.

Your Highness, you can be assured that the Australian Government will continue its efforts to sustain and extend its relations with the countries of the South Pacific, both bilaterally and through existing regional organisations. This function is an appropriate occasion to acknowledge the valuable and most constructive contribution that Tupuola Efi made at the recent Commonwealth Heads of Government Regional Meeting in Sydney. Tupuola Efi as keynote speaker on the item "Special Problems of Small States" pointed out the constraints on economic development commonly shared by the island states of the Pacific. These include a small area and population; heavy reliance on external trade; as well as transport and communication difficulties.

Australia is aware of these problems. We agree that a regional approach is indispensable in tackling them. At the same time, it is essential for the problems of small states to attract the attention of larger regional countries. As Tupuola Efi pointed out, countries in the Asian-Pacific region share many common experiences. The problems facing villages in India or Malaysia are similar in many ways to the problems facing villages in Western Samoa.

The Commonwealth Regional Meeting focussed attention on the problems of small states and a series of productive discussions took place. Various important initiatives were announced with particular relevance to small states. These included the secondment of a Commonwealth Secretariat officer to the South Pacific Economic Commission, a CHOGRM Regional Consultative Group on Trade, and an Australian offer of a loan of \$180,000 to the Pacific Forum Shipping Line, to meet its outstanding requirements for working capital.

Australia's development assistance programme to Western Samoa is substantial. It was considerably raised in 1976 when my Government increased its aid to the South Pacific fourfold. Western Samoa is approaching its development tasks in a confident spirit of self-reliance, diversifying its economic base through further development of export industries, and expansion of trade in order to increase foreign exchange earning and employment opportunities.

Australia too is mindful of our obligations for development in the South Pacific. A review has been commissioned by our Department of Trade and Resources to examine the possibilities for increasing the two-way trade between Australia and the Pacific island countries.

Another area of particular importance to Western Samoa is fisheries. Australia will continue to cooperate closely with Western Samoa and the other Pacific Forum countries in establishing a South Pacific Regional Fisheries Agency.

Your Highness, we warmly welcome the recent steps towards a genuine strengthening of relations between our countries. Our relationship is based on a mutual friendship and a desire to encourage understanding between our nations. I hope that there will be an early opportunity for a visit to Western Samoa by the Australian Foreign Minister.

May I again welcome you and your party to Australia and wish you a happy stay here.
