



PRIME MINISTER

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LUNCHEON FOR PRESIDENT BONGO

On behalf of the Australian Government and people, I extend to you, your Excellency, a very warm welcome to Australia. In the past, visiting leaders from African nations have by and large come from Commonwealth countries and we are delighted that you have chosen to come to Australia on a private visit.

We welcome this opportunity to meet with a leader of one of the French speaking countries of Africa, but our pleasure in receiving you in Australia as our guest runs deeper than that.

As Chairman of the Organisation of African Unity in 1977, you personally brought a wealth of experience and tact to that position at a time when African issues were at the forefront of world attention. Under your leadership, Gabon has become one of the most prosperous countries in Africa and your experience suggests that your Government has much to contribute to the international debate on economic development.

Both our countries are developing and exploiting a wide range of natural resources. We are both, for example, uranium producers and we both stand to benefit from a more stable approach to world commodity trade.

The Australian Government has been active in encouraging the development of a more stable and equitable trading system through means of a Common Fund. International negotiations on the establishment of a Common Fund have reached a critical point. At one stage it seemed that the recent UNCTAD negotiating conference might end without any consensus being achieved. It was heartening that in the end both the developed and developing countries moved towards consensus on a number of the important issues.

Many aspects still require further negotiation, particularly the size of the Fund and the financial details. What is needed is a hard-headed analysis by all groups of the possible options which are available so that the next negotiating conference can move towards practical agreement on a viable Common Fund.

This will demand from all participants a significant degree of political will, flexibility and pragmatism. It will also require intensive consultation and cooperation between countries -- particularly between developed and developing countries -- so that all the major problems and issues in the North/South Dialogue can be fully understood and extreme and intransigent views on either side modified. It is for just this reason that the Foreign Minister and myself will be attending an informal meeting of a number of Heads of Government in Jamaica later this month called by Prime Minister Michael Manley.

Your Excellency's visit to Australia has provided another opportunity for these issues to be examined in a friendly and informal manner, far removed from the atmosphere of confrontation and rigid group negotiating stances which has been seen all too often in the past.

Your Excellency, Australia is following with close attention political developments in the African continent. The stability and relative prosperity which Gabon has enjoyed in recent times provides an optimistic pointer for the future. But of course not all is well in the African continent.

In our view there can be no durable peace in Africa until lasting solutions can be found to the problems in Southern Africa.

Our two countries are both firmly opposed to the South African Government's policy of Apartheid. Any policy based on the supposed superiority of one race over another constitutes a total denial of fundamental human decencies and a continuing affront to humanity. It is doomed to ultimate failure, and we totally reject it.

Your Excellency, I have found our discussion today interesting and valuable. We are delighted that you found it possible to visit us.