



Mr. Yeend

## PRIME MINISTER

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### NAMIBIA PEACEKEEPING FORCE

The problem of Namibia is one of long-standing. It dates from South Africa's refusal, at the end of World War II, to enter into a trusteeship agreement over the old mandated territory of South West Africa and its claim to sovereignty over that territory. South Africa has continued to administer Namibia despite the United Nations' decision in 1966, that South Africa's mandate should be withdrawn.

Concerted U.N. efforts towards achieving self-determination and independence for Namibia began in 1972. These efforts were unsuccessful and, in 1974, the U.N. adopted measures seeking immediate and unconditional South African withdrawal.

In 1975, South Africa officially recognised the international status of the territory and decided to initiate its own discussions in Namibia towards a constitutional settlement. The Five Western members of the Security Council (U.K., U.S.A., France, West Germany, Canada) in 1977 advised South Africa that its constitutional proposals arising out of these consultations would not gain international approval. Following this advice discussions were initiated between the "Five" and South Africa on how to achieve early and peaceful independence for Namibia through an internationally acceptable settlement. Discussions were also held with SWAPO - the South West African People's Organisation. These talks led, early in 1978, to the formulation of the present plan now agreed to by both the South African Government and SWAPO. The plan envisaged, in essence, free elections for Namibia, under U.N. supervision and control for the purpose of electing a constituent assembly to draw up and adopt a constitution for an independent Namibia. The plan, and proposals by the U.N. Secretary-General for its implementation, were later accepted by the U.N. Security Council as a basis for an internationally acceptable settlement that would give Namibia independence.

The establishment of UNTAG - the United Nations Transitional Assistance Group - is part of the plan. Elections are scheduled to be held some seven months after UNTAG's deployment, and independence following about five months later.

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Since 1977, Australia has received a number of informal soundings about a contribution to a peacekeeping force in Namibia. Representations were made to us, at different times, by the U.N., the Commonwealth Secretariat, and by representatives of the British and American Governments.

In July last year, the U.N. Secretariat made an approach enquiring whether Australia could provide elements for the UNTAG logistics force. In the light of recent indications that the U.N. would be seeking to establish UNTAG very shortly, the Government has been actively considering a contribution that would be consistent with Australia's international obligations, its support for an early settlement of the Namibia problem and support for the Western and U.N. proposals for achieving it.

Southern Africa is a region of considerable strategic importance to Australia, indeed to the entire free world. In the Government's view we ought to do what we reasonably can to promote conditions there which will bring about stability and so contribute to security in the widest sense. The Western initiative on Namibia offers the opportunity for this and it is thus vital that it should be successful.

There has been in the past great turmoil in Africa. Many African problems have been seen to be intractable. Now we have an opportunity to settle one of those problems peacefully and in a manner which will deal justly with all conflicting interests. We must not let this opportunity slip by.

It has been no easy task for the United Nations to put together a peacekeeping force for Namibia acceptable to all concerned. Not all of its components have yet been settled. But it has been made entirely clear to us that an Australian contribution would be widely welcomed and, in particular, would be acceptable both to the South African Government and to SWAPO. It has also been put to us that an Australian component would contribute significantly to the effectiveness of the force.

The Government has considered this question on a number of occasions in the past. It has weighed carefully all the issues which are relevant to it. In coming to the judgement that Australia should offer to make a contribution to United Nations peacekeeping in Namibia we have regarded as paramount the importance of having this Western initiative succeed, the political significance of the area in which the force will operate and the firm belief that a successful outcome in Namibia will bring new hope for stability and progress in what has been a sorely troubled continent. A successful conclusion to the problem of Namibia should give renewed hope that other African problems can be resolved by reasonable means.

The Government has carefully weighed the international circumstances in which Australia finds itself at this time. It has especially taken into account present conflicts in South East Asia. It has concluded above all that now is a time for Australia fully to assume its international responsibilities. It is not a time for us to stand back and refuse to be involved because the problem to be settled lies in a distant continent and may appear to be of no immediate concern to us. We are fully aware that the conflict in Indo-China involves grave risks to the region and to the world as a whole. We have made this clear by our recent actions. Some would argue that at a time of danger and difficulty in Asia we should not participate in this international initiative. The Government argues to the contrary - we are part of the wider world.

We have a real capacity to contribute to the success of this United Nations initiative. We believe that this is above all a time when our sense of responsibility in international affairs and our commitment to the settlement of disputes by peaceful means needs to be firmly underlined. This is a time not for withdrawal but for participation, for the acceptance of a commitment which is within our capacity.

If we are not prepared to participate in an initiative sponsored, amongst others, by the United States and Great Britain, adopted by the United Nations and accepted by the conflicting parties, how can we expect others to fulfil their obligations to act responsibly and cooperatively in efforts to settle disputes and restore stability in areas of conflict?

The composition of the U.N. force in Namibia has not yet as I said before, been finally determined. The United Kingdom has already announced its proposed participation in UNTAG and it is expected that contributors will include a number of other western countries; there will also be African, Asian, Latin American and possibly east European contributions.

The element which we will offer to the United Nations for inclusion in the force is an engineer contingent of 250 officers and men, together with a national headquarters and support element of 50. If accepted, this unit will have the responsibility of providing a variety of engineering services in support of the operational battalions. This role will be vital to the success of the force.

It is planned that the U.N. operation in Namibia will be for a period of twelve months. It is intended that the deployment of the Australian contingent will be for that length of time.

Our defence forces have been given instructions to pay the fullest regard to the safety of Australian personnel who may be deployed to Namibia. We cannot say they will not face any dangers. There are risks involved in any peacekeeping operation. But all aspects of the situation in which the force will operate have been given the most careful consideration and the risks our men will face are assessed by the National Assessments Board as low.

Australia has played a part in a number of U.N. peacekeeping operations in the past. It is at present contributing to them in the Middle East in Cyprus, and in Kashmir.

We cannot be expected, nor will we be asked, to contribute to all future U.N. operations. But, we believe our decision to offer a contribution to the Namibia force is fully consistent with the policy adopted in the past by this and earlier governments. It is a contribution well within our capacity. It is the right decision. It has been taken in a conscious awareness of our international responsibilities at a time when such awareness, by ourselves and by others, is needed more than ever.

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