

PRIME MINISTER: DONATIONS TO KAMPUCHEA TO BE TAX DEDUCTIBLE
DOORSTOP, CANBERRA

Question

Prime Minister, what prompted the decision to make donations for Kampuchea tax deductible?

Prime Minister

The matter was raised by the Treasurer and the Foreign Minister. You know the long-standing policy of all Australian governments that aid from Government sources should be official aid controlled by the Government, directed where the Government's own bureau believes is most desirable.

We have not in any sense inhibited people from giving privately, but it has not been tax deductible so they have borne the total cost of what they have provided in terms of foreign aid.

We decided that that, in a sense, traditional approach, ought to be altered in this case because of the severity of the problems in Kampuchea, because of the degree of harm and hurt to tens upon tens of thousands, probably to millions, of people in that particular country. Also of course having in mind the history of Kampuchea over the last several years. It is not only the Vietnamese invasion that is causing very tragic hardship, the activities of the Pol Pot regime before that involved anything up to two million people losing their lives.

It is one of the greatest human tragedies. We felt this would encourage some additional aid to go to Kampuchea and also felt that the Australian people would welcome this opportunity to participate in a very real tragedy in a very direct way, so that people themselves could feel involved and do what they could to help.

Question

Do you have a proposal for supervision to ensure the aid gets through.

Prime Minister

There is the Kampuchean aid fund, and we are quite sure that the people involved in that will want to do what they can to make sure that aid gets through to those who really need it. So far as Kampuchea is concerned - for everyone, for Governments, for the United Nations - it is a very real question and it is a difficult question because it is not going to suit our purpose and it will not suit the purpose of the Australian people who provide funds if the aid ends up by providing additional support to the Vietnamese invading armies. We will need the closest possible supervision. That means the closest that we can provide in the circumstances of Kampuchea. When the next aircraft goes to Kampuchea, Andrew Peacock has already made a decision that officers of his own Department and the aid

Prime Minister (continued)

bureau should travel to Kampuchea so that we can have a direct input from Australian sources of the way in which the aid is being handled. It is all a very very difficult question. That only means we have to work harder at it. to try and make sure that aid goes where it is most needed.

Question

Prime Minister, on that tax relief question, you described it as a breakthrough in the Parliament. Do you see it as the forerunner of breaking through to allow people who make donations to all overseas aid --

Prime Minister

We made the decision in a limited way. It is for this financial year. It is for the Kampuchea relief fund. It is obviously going to throw into debate the whole question of Australia's foreign aid, but we felt that we ought to make an exception in relation to Kampuchea for the reasons that I have outlined.

Question

But nothing on Freedom From Hunger or anything at this stage?

Prime Minister

No. At this stage the decision is strictly for Kampuchea - for Kampuchean relief - and it is restricted at this time for aid provided through this financial year. If people think that that is too limited, that it should have been wider, that at least is a very considerable break with the practice of some decades. I believe it will have very widespread and wholehearted Australian support.