



PRIME MINISTER

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RHODESIAN CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE

The Prime Minister, the Rt. Honourable Malcolm Fraser, C.H., M.P., said today that the Australian Government warmly welcomed the announcement from London that agreement has been reached at the Rhodesian Constitutional Conference on arrangements for the transitional period leading to the holding of elections in Rhodesia and the subsequent granting of legal independence from Britain.

This represents a major step towards a just settlement of the problems that have for many years brought tragedy and suffering to countless thousands of people in Rhodesia and neighbouring countries.

Britain's decision to convene the Constitutional Conference followed consideration of the problem at the recent Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Lusaka. At that meeting Australia played an active part in helping to establish agreement on the principles on which the London Conference is based. Since then, the Australian Government has followed the proceedings of the Conference with deep interest, and Australian views have been conveyed to the parties principal and to other Commonwealth leaders as the Conference has proceeded.

The Conference has now moved through its first two phases, concerning the Constitution and transitional arrangements. It is now entering its third and final phase, discussion of ceasefire arrangements. Agreement on this will complete the work of the Conference and enable elections to take place. As the Deputy Prime Minister announced on 9 November, the Australian Government has indicated its willingness to participate in a Commonwealth group to monitor the ceasefire in Rhodesia, provided that all parties to the Conference reach final agreement on a settlement, and provided satisfactory arrangements for the Australian contribution are worked out with the British Government.

That the Conference has come so far already, the Prime Minister said, reflects the skill of Lord Carrington's chairmanship and the willingness of all parties at the Conference to compromise in the interests of achieving a long-sought settlement which would have far-reaching benefits for the peace and security of all Southern Africa. All too often in the last thirty years,

people have resorted to arms to resolve their political difficulties. This has been the case in Rhodesia, where difficult problems of decolonisation have been complicated by the problem of race. Over the years this has led to the division of the people of Rhodesia into various contending groups, and to fighting and tensions between them which has flowed over into neighbouring countries and affected the peace and stability of the entire region.

It is the strongly held hope of the Australian Government and people, and it is a hope that I share to the full, that the agreement reached in London reflects a lasting understanding among all the parties to the conflict that their happiness and security is inextricably linked to peace and the resolution of differences through peaceful means, tolerance and negotiated settlement. While fighting continues, the suffering and hardship will grow and racial tensions will increase even further, with the possibility of substantial interference by super powers. The dignity of the people of Southern Africa, the integrity of Southern Africa and the progress of Southern Africa demand a settlement. And that settlement may now be in sight.

The success of the London Conference to date represents a most notable advance. It provides us with some real hope that with patience and good faith the spirit of Lusaka can prevail over the hatreds and suspicions of the past decades. If this can be achieved, then the people of Rhodesia can look forward to an optimistic future of a kind that has escaped them for far too long, and the achievements of the past few months will become an example for the rest of the world.

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