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Question

Prime Minister can I ask you first for your reaction to the election result in Zimbabwe?

Prime Minister

Well I am very glad that the processes have gone forth. All the reports that I have seen from election observers have indicated that they believe that the elections have been free and fair. Obviously there were problems. There has been intimidation. But you have to have in mind the history of the issue - the hatred and fighting that has gone on for year after year. It is a remarkable achievement to have come to an agreement and to have been able to consummate it in this way. As each day passes I think there can be more confidence that the future would be reasonably looked after.

Question

Given that conflict that you mentioned, do you think that Mr. Mugabe can form a government that will be acceptable to everybody there and that he can hold it together?

Prime Minister

The statements that he has been making seem to me to have been well and properly directed. He is talking about the need for national unity, the need to govern for all people in Zimbabwe, the need to support the constitution, to support the rights of all people irrespective of race, colour or creed. The reports that are coming to us do indicate that he is seeking to involve as many different groups in his government as possible. That has yet to be seen. But if these objectives can be fulfilled and if the principles that he has enunciated in a recent speech are pursued then I would have thought that there is a real possibility for the new Zimbabwe to go forward with a real degree of certainty and security and with the peace which the country just has not known for fifteen years.

Question

But the initial reaction from some of the whites at least seems to be one of horror. Now do you expect there to be an exodus of whites from Zimbabwe to South Africa and possibly even to Australia?

Prime Minister

Well no I don't. There has been that reaction. Some of the press reports over here have referred to it. But the intelligence coming to me indicates that there are a large number of people trying to get people to assess the matter as it is. Mr. Mugabe, himself that he wants people to stay in Zimbabwe and that he does want to govern for all the people of Zimbabwe - black and white. Therefore I think there are encouraging signs. I think it would be most unfortunate if we were to assume that because a certain party has won the vote that there is therefore going to be a situation which would encourage and persuade a lot of people to leave Zimbabwe. From what he has said, that is certainly not Mr. Mugabe's objective. Again I think we need to look at what has happened over the last six months since the Lusaka Agreement,

Prime Minister (continued)

the Lancaster House document, the development of the new constitution the development of the transition arrangements, the actual practice and experience that has occurred during the election period. Now all of this is slowly, step by step, building up a situation where the country can return to what we might regard as a degree of normalcy - going about their business in an ordinary and peaceful way. So each day that passes gives everyone a greater degree of confidence that the next day will also be a reasonable one and a sensible one. I would hope therefore that the alarmist tunes will not be played and that Mr. Mugabe is able to live by the standards and principles that he announced a day or two ago in a major speech.

Question

Are you suggesting though if white Rhodesians find they can't live under a black government and want out that Australia might not be too eager to accept them?

Prime Minister

I do not like dealing with hypothetical situations. I do not like saying things which could even encourage a situation to arise which otherwise might not because the white people in Zimbabwe have built their homes. I have spoken to a large number of white people when I was in Zambia and Lusaka and that was where their homes were - they wanted to stay there. They said they lived in a multi racial society. It was a society without tension and they were at peace and happy in their homes. Now quite plainly the objective is to see that the same kind of thing develops in Zimbabwe. It is early days yet and there will be people who will be looking to the future very closely to see what unfolds - to see the sorts of policies that are pursued. I do not think it helps for people to jump to the alarmist conclusions when up to this point. The things that have happened have been reassuring.

Question

At what point would the Australian Government be prepared to extend recognition to Mr. Mugabe's government?

Prime Minister

Well the Government has not considered that at this point. But I would be expecting that once formal power is handed over and the government is established that that would be the point - a formal process. There would be no question of recognition being withheld. It would be unthinkable after the processes. So it is a question of having the right time. I have sent Mr. Mugabe messages today and you will have heard what was said in the Parliament. He does need to be congratulated on his resounding electoral win. And one of the things that we need to have in mind is that processes for the election were established - about 93 per cent of the people voted. They have been judged free and fair and Mr. Mugabe has won the election. Now whether people support Mr. Mugabe's personal, political philosophy or not - he has been judged by the people of Zimbabwe as the person that they want to run the government. Against that background, if we had the kind of confidence that we ought in the democratic process, the judgment has certainly got to be respected and therefore Mr. Mugabe congratulated on what is plainly a very significant electoral win.

Question

Prime Minister what's the situation now regarding sanctions and economic aid to Zimbabwe Rhodesia?

Prime Minister

Sanctions have been off for some time. Claims and suggestions for economic aid, civil aid will be examined by the Department. You know most of our aid does go to Southeast Asia and to the Pacific. Some aid has gone to Africa. I have got no doubt there will be some things in which we will have some involvement in relation to Zimbabwe if that is their wish.

Question

Prime Minister, thank you.

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