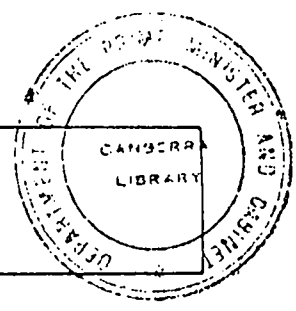




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PRIME MINISTER

ZIMBABWE INDEPENDENCE

During my meeting today with Mr. Mugabe, Prime Minister of Zimbabwe, I said that Australia warmly welcomed Zimbabwe's independence and looked forward to the development of a constructive and many-sided relationship with Zimbabwe. My presence here, in company with my colleagues from the Australian Parliament, testifies to that.

The road to independence has been a particularly difficult one for Zimbabwe, involving years of bloodshed and mistrust and affecting thousands of families, both in Zimbabwe and elsewhere in Africa. The recent months, however, have seen a determined - and successful - effort by Zimbabwe's political leaders to achieve a peaceful settlement and an end to the war, with national reconciliation - a very considerable achievement. Australia is pleased to have been able to play some part in Zimbabwe's progress to independence, through consultations with African and other leaders, including the Prime Minister of Britain; through the Commonwealth's consideration of this matter in Lusaka; and by membership of the Commonwealth Observer Group and the Ceasefire Monitoring Force and the work of the National Observer Group.

There have been times when peace in Zimbabwe has seemed an unattainable goal. However, it is now a reality which will permit the energies of the people of this country to be directed towards a better life for everyone, with opportunities for all.

Australia wishes Mr. Mugabe every success in the difficult task ahead of him.

My talks with Mr. Mugabe provide a valuable opportunity for the establishment of personal contact and exchanges at the highest political level. During the discussions, I told Mr. Mugabe of Australia's offer of \$5 million in aid over a period of two years, of which \$1.5 million has been earmarked for the immediate rehabilitation and expansion of such facilities as schools and hospitals, and for veterinary work and agricultural rehabilitation in rural areas. Officials of the two countries will consult about the most useful and efficient way of expending the total amount, and to this end, an officer of the Australian Development Assistance Bureau will be stationed in Salisbury for a period. This Australian aid will, as always, be on grant terms.

This is not the first such step that Australia has taken in relation to Zimbabwe. We have already donated \$1 million to the UNHCR appeal for Zimbabwean refugees. In addition, some 100 Zimbabweans have participated in Australian training programs over the years. These programs are continuing, and we are particularly pleased that among the Zimbabwean trainees this year will be two participants in the Australian Foreign Service training course.

I was very pleased that Mr. Mugabe accepted our proposal to appoint Mr. Jeremy Hearder, a senior Foreign Affairs official, as our first High Commissioner to Zimbabwe.

I also informed Mr. Mugabe of an Australian Government gift of two despatch boxes for the Senate Chamber of the Zimbabwe Parliament. This gift will symbolise the bond between the two countries as constitutional democracies with a common system of institutions which I believe will facilitate co-operation over a wide range of activities.

Mr. Mugabe and I have agreed that Zimbabwe and Australia will benefit from the development of economic, trade and commercial links. I conveyed to Mr. Mugabe Australia's decision to apply to Zimbabwe the Australian system of Tariff Preferences for Developing Countries. This decision, which takes immediate effect, should help Zimbabwe to take advantage of the growing Australian market.

I also told Mr. Mugabe that I looked forward to welcoming him with other Commonwealth leaders to the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, to be held in Melbourne in 1981. The Commonwealth has played an important part in the process of independence for Zimbabwe, and we are particularly pleased that Zimbabwe has joined the Commonwealth and will be present in Melbourne for the next CHOGM.

Zimbabwe promises to be a country of large significance. Its human and material resources, and its industrial skills, give it the opportunity to be a political and economic leader in the Southern African region in particular. Its new Government has embarked on a path of peace, reconciliation and unity, both at home and abroad, which we hope will be welcomed by all Zimbabwe's neighbours and reciprocated by them. Zimbabwe will also be a country of importance in international organisations, including the United Nations and the Commonwealth.

We in Australia have already demonstrated our active interest in the welfare and economic development of Zimbabwe under democratic leadership, and this interest will be maintained and strengthened as relations between the two countries develop.