



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

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DEATH OF PRESIDENT TITO

The Government has learned with sadness of the death of President Tito of Yugoslavia. On behalf of the Government of Australia and Australians generally, I extend our deep sympathy to the people of Yugoslavia at this time. We appreciate the very special nature of the loss that President Tito's death will mean to them.

President Tito led his country tirelessly for 35 years and can be described without exaggeration as the architect of modern Yugoslavia.

At home he secured the unity and support of the country after the turbulent years of World War II. President Tito's courage and success in preserving Yugoslavia's independence provided an example to many, not least to the forces of national independence which existed elsewhere in Eastern Europe.

In 1943 when the Soviet Union assumed that Yugoslavia could be absorbed into the then monolithic Soviet bloc, it was President Tito's successful defiance which preserved his country's independence. Subsequently he was a staunch critic of the Soviet invasion of Hungary and Czechoslovakia and more recently of the Soviet-backed Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea.

By these actions and by his championing of the original principles of the non-aligned movement, Yugoslavia stands today as a firmly united and resourceful country fiercely committed to the defence of its independence and integrity.

Yugoslavia's independence has assumed even greater significance since the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan - an act which has shown that the threat of external subjugation is still very prevalent today as it was when President Tito confronted it in 1948.

It is thus all the more important that countries make clear their attachment to Yugoslavia's independence and their firm hope that Yugoslavia will continue unimpeded on that same independent path. Australia for its part unequivocally joins in that support.