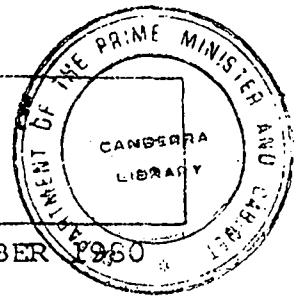




PRIME MINISTER



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PRIME MINISTER'S RESPONSE TO WELCOMING
ADDRESSES BY PRESIDENT REDDY AND
PRIME MINISTER GANDHI AT CHOGRM

Your Excellency, President Reddy, Heads of State, Heads of Government, Secretary General, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It gives me the greatest pleasure to respond to the gracious words of welcome addressed to us by His Excellency President Reddy and Prime Minister Gandhi.

This second regional meeting of Commonwealth Heads of Government is, very appropriately, being hosted by the country whose independence, 32 years ago, set in train that international decolonisation movement which eventually led to the creation of the free and equal Commonwealth of Nations whose members we are. This meeting is being held in one of the great democratic capitals of the world. It is a fitting place for our deliberations.

I join most readily and happily in welcoming the Heads of Government of those countries whose independence has been achieved since the first meeting - Kiribati, Tuvalu, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. I trust that they will find this a congenial and rewarding forum.

The first Commonwealth Heads of Government regional meeting, the latest in many innovations in the evolving pattern of Commonwealth consultation, was held two and a half years ago in Sydney. The thinking behind this initiative was that we, unlike most of our other Commonwealth colleagues, lacked an alternative regional arrangement outside the Commonwealth which brought us all together on a regular basis; second, that some of the smaller and more remote members would find such a meeting particularly beneficial. For Australia - and I believe for others in the eastern part of the region - the arrangement had the particular attraction of strengthening our links with the sub-continent.

The spirit of the initiative was practical and pragmatic; its orientation was towards the tackling of specific functional problems and projects; its aim was to enhance regional cooperation and the regional meeting was seen as one which would contribute to the vitality and stature of the wider Commonwealth.

Mr President, I think it is true that in any enterprise of this kind the second meeting is always a crucial one. The first is likely to be sustained by the novelty of the occasion and initial enthusiasm. But this second meeting in Delhi will be crucial in providing the opportunity to develop momentum from now on and in shaping the lineaments of CMOGRM's future. I trust that in four days' time there will have emerged the outlines of a pattern of practical cooperation under the CMOGRM umbrella. That pattern should seek to be of benefit to the region as a whole.

Mr President, I have put the stress firmly on the practical and I believe that this is where it should be. But as we meet here we cannot ignore the fact that in the two years since our last meeting in Sydney there have been momentous changes on the wider international scene. It is difficult to see many of these as anything but changes for the worst. The world is now breathing a harsher air and the decade we have just entered promises to be a troubled and dangerous one. We in this chamber cannot contemplate these changes with detachment and indifference, since some of them impinge very directly on our region and have implications for its future.

I do not think we should be embarrassed or inhibited because there exist among us some differences of interpretation as to the causes and nature of some of these events. We have different perspectives - historical as well as geographical - and different interests which make such divergences inevitable. It is healthier to recognise this rather than to pretend that it is not so.

But there is no need either to dwell on these differences or to make them the focus of our discussions. For I am sure that, however we interpret events, none of us can be complacent about their actual and potential consequences for the region. The intrusion of great power rivalries; deteriorating relations between some of the states within the region; attempts to divide existing states; the human misery, and the strain on resources, represented by hundreds of thousands of refugees - these are facts which, regardless of what interpretation of causes is accepted, represent impediments to the goal of stable and continuous development in the region.

Insofar as we discuss recent disturbances and conflicts at this meeting, therefore, I believe that we should do so looking forward, in terms of how we can live with and respond to consequences, rather than looking backwards in terms of origins and the attributing of blame.

In approaching these questions we might well bear in mind and take heart from the major contributions made by the Commonwealth to the resolution of the seemingly intractable problems of Zimbabwe last year. That contribution demonstrated that the smaller and middle-sized countries of the world need not be without influence. When I visited India for the Independence Day celebrations in January 1979, I maintained that there was an urgent need for the voices of moderation in the world to speak out with conviction that the causes of toleration, reason and world order demanded the same passionate support as is all too often reserved for extremism. Events since then have increased that urgency.

There is a role for all of us to play in this respect; we should not allow ourselves to be over-awed by events or to denigrate the potential influence of reasonable views resolutely put.

Mr President, in concluding these brief remarks I would like to say again how pleased I am to be back in your great country. I look forward to an exchange of views with old and new friends and to a constructive conference.