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PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

WEDNESDAY, 24 JUNE, 1981

ADDRESS AT MEXICO BANQUET, MEXICO CITY

I thank you for your gracious welcome and I am delighted to be visiting Mexico as Prime Minister of Australia.

More and more Australians are becoming aware of Mexico's vibrant culture and dynamic growth. We know Mexico as a significant country, characterised by independence of mind and a determination to exercise its own judgment.

You are a non-aligned country, but you do not belong to the non-aligned movement. You are one of the world's major oil producers, but you do not belong to O.P.E.C. In a world of bloc politics, Mexico treasures its individuality and in doing so gives an example to the world.

Over the years, Australia and Mexico have each had their own preoccupations. We have each bent our energies to the building of our own nations and to our traditional relationships, to the regions of predominant and immediate concern to us. On opposite sides of the world's largest ocean, we have seemed a long way apart. But now there is a change. With the many new and emerging Pacific states, and with growing opportunities and markets, a sense of identity and community is arising. All this, and more, points towards greater co-operation, and stronger links among countries in and around the Pacific.

The Pacific connection alone would be reason enough for our two countries to take steps now to make up for lost time. But there are also other factors drawing us together at this time. Australia and Mexico have been working towards an agreement on science and technology, and I hope this will be a concrete step in developing our relationship. Both our countries are rich in energy; you in oil, we in coal, uranium and natural gas. So we both enjoy the privileges and share the responsibilities which come with a relative abundance of energy resources. You are rightly determined that Mexico shall not be, or seem to be, merely an oil exporter. The importance of energy as a world issue cannot be over-emphasised, and your initiative for a world energy plan is a step towards concrete progress in this area.

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Australia and Mexico are also both middle-ranking countries, and we both take moderate and independent views. I believe there is a role for us to play on issues of peace and stability and more especially on issues of development and progress. It would be wrong for us to keep silent, to say nothing, when a contribution we may be able to make may help clarify issues or strengthen resolve and when every incremental gain is valuable.

We have a responsibility to our own peoples for their security and well-being, and an obligation to our children for the future. It is not enough to leave that responsibility and obligation to the great powers alone. We must exercise our own minds and judgments. We are indeed able to give support to views and approaches we believe to be right, and such action can accord with an enlightened view of our interests. Countries such as Mexico and Australia can speak to great powers without being overwhelmed and to smaller states with genuine understanding of their position. Initiatives that may be taken by countries such as ours are less likely to introduce competition, less likely to arouse suspicion and misunderstanding, than are those of great powers. So while we must not exaggerate our contribution we must be willing to do what it is within our power to do.

Our two countries have accepted responsibilities in relation to issues of world poverty and development, and the problems here are among the most pressing which face mankind. Later this year you will be hosting a Summit Meeting of developing and developed countries at Cancun. This will be an important meeting and I congratulate you for your initiative and determination in making sure that it will happen. Shortly before that meeting, Australia will be hosting a meeting of the Heads of Commonwealth countries in Melbourne. That meeting, like yours, will discuss issues affecting relations between developed and developing countries.

I suppose, Mr. President, that you are sometimes asked, as I am, what is the point, what is the purpose of Heads of Government Meetings? I am sure you would agree that the very fact that Heads of Government meet is of value. For it is through such meetings that they can establish a relationship, an understanding of how others will react, of what may be done together, of how consensus may be established on priorities, and how conflict may best be avoided.

If the meetings in Mexico and Australia later this year can achieve these results, their worth will already be established. May I suggest that these meetings, which will together be attended by some 55 Heads of Government representing two thirds of the world's population, may achieve somewhat more than that.

If these meetings can achieve agreement that there is a real problem of massive proportion that we need to do something about; if these meetings can instil a life, a vigour, a purpose into what is called the North-South dialogue; if they can produce agreement that the issue is urgent and real, not only from every humanitarian and moral standpoint, but also from enlightened self-interest; and if a commitment towards doing something can result, then both meetings will have more than repaid the efforts put into them.

I sometimes wonder whether nations address North-South issues with sufficient energy, whether there is not a feeling that the problem of poverty is not new and that whatever we do will be insignificant. But if we can all recognise that there is a massive problem which compels our attention, a problem which affects how hundreds of millions of people live or die, then surely we will ask ourselves, "what can we do, individually and collectively?"

Some things can be done by national Governments, but there is also need for efforts from the whole international community. Countries who ask what they can do will find much that they can do to help other nations. For example, both our countries are pastoral and agricultural, and both have tropical and desert areas. Much of the knowledge and experience we have could benefit others, if we can find ways to transfer it. We have a capacity to develop that knowledge through research, to point to practical things that can be done, to improve people's standards of living. I hope that the agreement between our countries on science and technology, which I have already referred to, may play some part in that.

My visit is a very short one. But even a fleeting visit is bound to leave a strong impression of Mexico's vitality and maturity. I hope that more Australians will come here and stay longer. That will be a good thing because there is no substitute for direct contact between people. I hope that all the travel will not be one way. In particular, I hope that you will find it possible to pay a visit in the not too distant future. I cordially invite you to do so. When you come, I hope that your impressions will be as favourable and warm as those with which I shall leave your country.

Your Excellency, ladies and gentlemen, I ask you to join me in a toast to the President and people of Mexico.