



EMBARGO: 5:00 pm

PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

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ELECTORATE TALK

We live in a troubled and uncertain world, in which it sometimes seems that stability and a clear sense of direction are almost the exception rather than the rule.

The assassination of President Sadat is not only a tragedy for his country and for stability in the Middle East, but it also serves to remind us of the damage that is caused when unreasonableness and division are allowed to take first place in human affairs.

In 1977, after 30 years of continual warfare in the Middle East, President Sadat made his historic and courageous visit to Jerusalem to address the Knesset, and thus opened the path to negotiation in the quest for peace. And then in 1979, the Egyptian/Israeli peace treaty was signed. I said at the time that the world hoped that work on a comprehensive Middle East settlement would proceed in the aftermath of that treaty. But now, while it is obviously too early to assess the full consequences that will flow from President Sadat's assassination, the world clearly has to cope with the aftermath of a tragedy.

Not everyone, as we know, agreed with what President Sadat was doing, although everyone must surely respect him for his courage and his objectives of peace and stability and certainly no benefits will follow from what has taken place.

The assassination of President Sadat is not an isolated incident. There have been at least five other assassinations and attempted assassinations of world leaders during this year. It is never easy to learn lessons or draw conclusions from this kind of madness and terror. Some say that the world has lost its way and certainly there are many people in the world who are disturbingly uncertain about where the course of progress really lies. But by the same token, there are other people who are so fanatical in their own convictions and aspirations that they lack a sense of balance.

In a troubled world, we surely need a sense of our own direction and objectives as a nation, and we need above all to be realistic. We need to be willing to face up to problems, and confront issues head on. There is a need for firmness, together with an open and frank approach.

The civilised discussion of major human issues requires more support than ever before. That is why the value of meetings such as the Commonwealth Heads of Government in Melbourne cannot be over-estimated. The Commonwealth is, as President Kaunda of Zambia said in Melbourne, a civilised association of nations. Around the conference table and in private discussions, more than a quarter of the world's leaders proposed and considered ways of making the world a better place to live in.

The Commonwealth has, over the years, and particularly in relation to Zimbabwe and Namibia, displayed vision and courage in seeking practical means for the settlement of international conflicts. At the Melbourne meeting, difficult and contentious issues were tackled and firm specific statements resulted.

There was a real commitment to build on the good will that exists within the Commonwealth, in order to bring practical proposals to the dialogue about issues of poverty and development and to other problems as well.

I am proud that such a successful conference was held in Australia, and our visitors so enjoyed the friendliness which they encountered here that they have become ambassadors for Australia.

The Commonwealth leaders, with their determined practicality, their refusal to be distracted from the central themes, and their willingness to discuss issues openly with each other, have set an example for others to follow in the vision and sincerity of their leadership.