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PRIME MINISTER

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PRESIDENT REAGAN'S PEACE PLAN

Last night, President Reagan issued an invitation to all nations to join in the quest for peace, security and freedom across the globe. I welcome this invitation.

Successive Australian Governments have worked hard to secure balanced and verifiable arms control measures and for an improved nuclear non-proliferation regime which would prevent both the spread of nuclear weapons and their qualitative improvement.

In what is probably the most important statement on peace to have been made in recent years, President Reagan has proposed a comprehensive four-point plan which, if implemented, would secure global peace and prosperity. These four points are: first, the United States to cancel its deployment of Pershing II and cruise missiles if the Soviet Union dismantles its vast stock of SS-20, SS-4 and SS-5 missiles; second, the superpowers to engage in Strategic Arms Reduction Talks, which the President has termed START; third, lower levels of conventional forces in Europe; fourth, measures to reduce the risks of surprise attack and the chance of war arising out of uncertainty or miscalculation.

The programme is as bold as it is comprehensive. For President Reagan has not started from any misconception about relative armament levels between East and West. The picture he paints of the growth of Soviet military power over recent years is indeed sombre. Such growth cannot but reflect on the intentions of the Soviet Union. Taking advantage of Western restraint, the Soviets have built up massive nuclear as well as conventional forces, which they can project not only in Europe but in other regions as well.

Despite the provocation inherent in this situation of Soviet armed strength, President Reagan is proposing mutual Soviet and Western measures which would reverse present trends in arms deployment. This is statesmanship of the highest order.

Thus the four point programme proposes not simply the limitation (the "L" of the SALT process) of nuclear systems but rather the reduction of each sides' holdings of these weapons.

I join with President Reagan - as all responsible world leaders will - in calling on the Soviet Union to match this boldness of vision. The Soviet Union must play its part in reducing the risks of war, in improving the prospects for peace and in creating the climate for the advancement of individual rights and economic prosperity.

It is clear that President Reagan's four point plan cannot be implemented unless both the United States and the Soviet Union negotiate together. President Reagan has again drawn attention to the fact that a secure and pacific world demands that arms levels not be reduced unilaterally. Success can only come if the Soviet Union will share the United States' commitment.

The concept of peace enshrined in President Reagan's statement transcends the mere absence of war. Rather it envisages a flowering of economic growth and prosperity and the development of individual liberty in a world at peace.

Last month, in Melbourne, leaders of forty-one nations meeting under the Commonwealth banner confirmed a common belief in just such principles of international relations for the realisation of which President Reagan's statement gives even more hope. President Reagan's invitation is a challenge to the Soviet Union which, if accepted, will provide the basis for a consensus which hitherto seemed beyond grasp.