



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT - FORUM PRESS CONFERENCE - 12 NOON, 27 AUGUST 1984
FUNAFUTI

PRIME MINISTER: Well ladies and gentlemen, the Forum having quickly disposed of certain procedural matters went first to the decolonisation issue which, of course, specifically involves developments in New Caledonia. Without identifying contributions individually I would attempt to spell out and sum up for you the nature of the discussion. And I would preface that by saying that we concluded the discussion just prior to lunch when I introduced the nuclear free zone concept. I'll come to that in a moment. No resolution was passed on this matter of New Caledonia, but that will come to be reflected in the final communique. I think these things can be said as reflecting general views in the Forum discussions. Firstly there was, as of course will be no surprise to you, a unanimous view as to the desirability of independence for New Caledonia. But I think what should be stressed is that while in some quarters there has been a tendency to stress the question of independence for the Kanaks it was the very general view that what we're talking about is independence for New Caledonians. There was reference to the multi-ethnicity of the population and that all people there - including, of course, the Kanaks - have the right to independence. Within that view there was again I think a fairly general attitude that there should be an acceleration of the move by the French. We were talking about, as you know, a referendum date of 1989 and without there being a resolution on this a number of speakers felt that there should be an attempt to be thinking of perhaps as early as 1986 for a referendum in these terms. There was a general recognition I believe of the progress that has been made under the Mitterand Government since its accession to power in 1981. Indeed, I think there is an acceptance generally of the integrity of the French Government in its attempts to come to a peaceable resolution of this issue. There was reference to some of those particular developments and I refer not merely to the passage of the statute recently in the French Parliament, but earlier to the plan for legislation which was instituted by decree from France in 1982. And that was subsequent to the visit to France by a Forum delegation headed by Prime Minister Ratu Mara of Fiji. On the specific question of the suggestion that there should be a move to support reinscription of the issue of New Caledonia on the agenda of the Committee of 24 of the United Nations I think it is fair to say that there was a general, not unanimous, but a general view that reinscription on the agenda of the Committee of 24 would not be helpful to the aspirations of New Caledonia for independence which, as I say, the Forum unanimously supported - that as such reinscription itself would not add anything but properly considered may in fact create more difficulties within France, where after all the decisions of substance have to be made. And there has to be a consciousness of the fact that there are elections in France in 1986 and that is relevant for the present Government and indeed looking at the political continuum in France there is the judgement generally made, I think, by Forum members that the decisions taken now by us in respect of how we would attempt to press or not to press for reinscription on the

P.M. cont...: Committee of 24 would be relevant to that internal French context. A final point I'd make in regard to the discussions is this, and I think its a very important one, that there are suggestions from the independence front or at least elements of it that this is a critical point for the Forum as to their attitude and that if in fact we were not to take a particular position, for instance in regard to inscription, that this could be regarded as providing a situation, or creating a situation, where they would no longer be able to look to the Forum and would have to look outside the region. Now very specifically some of us referred to that issue and we made it clear that one of the great advantages of our region, the forum region, is that the processes of force, armed revolution and terrorism have been distinctly absent from the way in which affairs have evolved in this country. And I think there was a fairly general agreement with the attitude expressed by some of us that the evidence that exists of some embryonic move by elements of the Independence Front to seek support from quarters which advocate the processes of terrorism should be condemned. So ladies and gentlemen I think that that essentially covers the essence of the discussion and I believe that those views will come to be reflected in the final communique.

I introduced in the last stage of this session the next item on the agenda which is the nuclear free zone and in a brief introduction I made the points that Australia welcomed the developments that had taken place since the Canberra meeting in 1983 - that there had been discussions bilaterally between countries in the Forum, the basis of a draft set of proposals. I indicated that different countries gave perhaps different emphasis to different aspects of this issue. For some the question of the testing of nuclear devices in our region was the most important. For others the question of the possible dumping of nuclear waste products assumed perhaps more importance than other aspects. For some the more general question of trying to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weaponry was another matter. But I indicated that there did seem to be an emerging consensus that we in this region should try and move to a position of some sort of nuclear free zone concept. I pointed out that there are particular matters, technical matters, that need to be addressed in some detail. Without being exhaustive, that includes the question for instance of the geographical limits of the zone, it includes the question of at what stage would we as a Forum wish to take the matter into other international forums in general of the nuclear weapons states in particular. And so I stressed that in Australia's judgement what we needed to do was to have this general discussion now and address these matters in a productive working group. I also made the point which I think is of particular relevance at this time to say that from the moment when I introduced the concept last year it had been an intrinsic part of Australia's proposal that the question of the visit or non-visit to the ports of members of nuclear-armed or nuclear-powered ships had always been seen from the outset and was built into our proposals that that was a matter for decision by individual countries of the Forum. I've made that clear in Canberra. I reiterated it today and that that right of individual countries was, of course, not only consistent with but important to the concept of a nuclear free zone. I made the observation that from

P.M. cont...: Australia's point of view, because of our alliance relationship with the United States, Australia had made the judgement that such visits would be permitted to Australia. But in saying that again re-emphasised that this was a matter for decision by particular states.

So ladies and gentlemen that is the end of the report that I would make to you.

JOURNALIST: Just a point of clarification on decolonisation - you didn't mention French Polynesia, did that come into it at all.

P.M.: No it didn't come into the discussion at all this morning. That doesn't mean that it may not be picked up later. But it wasn't alluded to this morning. Except let me say this that one speaker did make the general point, but really in addressing himself to New Caledonia, that there was no further reason for a French presence in the area.

JOURNALIST: You say there's no resolution ... to bring forward the referendum date to 19856. What were the arguments that. Were there arguments that that was too soon.

P.M.: No there were not specific arguments against it and I think that in the communique you will see reference to, you'll certainly I believe, see reference to the desire of the Forum countries for a bringing forward of the date. There may be reference to 1986 but I think you'll see there'll be a view put that we are all saying to the French that it is evident that very considerable tensions are building up. You've got the decision of the Independence Front to boycott the up-coming elections, to withdraw co-operation. There is evidence that the situation is deteriorating and it's in that context that we are saying that the French should try move more quickly towards the concept of a referendum embracing the independence of New Caledonia.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister was there specific mention of elements of the Independence Front approaching Libya.

P.M.: Yes there was ...

JOURNALIST: Was it that that you condemned.

P.M.: Oh it was certainly condemned by those of us who referred to it and, of course, its not exclusive - that's the evidence of that approach at present, but the concept of buying outside the region and making an appeal to the force of arms and the terrorist technique to be introduced was something which I think was very generally deplored.

JOURNALIST: What you are saying, Mr Hawke, is that you want ... by the French Government before the next ... election.

P.M.: Well the next Parliamentary election, of course, is 1986. It's a five year term. The Presidential election is a seven year term, so it's 1988. But really the concept of mentioning a date was not specifically related to the date of the elections in France. There was a view expressed that under the Mitterand Government there had been progress, some perhaps thought it could have been faster, but there has been identifiable progress. And there was a view that nothing should be done which would complicate the capacity of the French Government to move towards independence. But let me say there was also the view expressed that even should there be a change of Government that there was a more general attitude beyond this Government in France to recognise the aspirations of the people of New Caledonia. But I repeat the concept of bringing forward a date was not specifically related to the timing of elections in France.

JOURNALIST: Were you among those who believed that the date should be brought forward.

P.M.: Yes, I believe that if it's possible it should be brought forward because we recognise the building up of tension. But speaking of myself I am one who has consistently said, following my discussions with President Mitterand in Paris last year, that I do recognise the integrity of the Government of France on this issue. They have, as I've put it, no political or economic imperatives to remain there any longer than is necessary. But they do have a recognition of the very large and potentially explosive difficulties that exist there because of the composition of the population and the quite disparate training of the elements of the population - the Kanaks are lacking in physical and armed(?) resources, that's one thing. But in terms of professional and technical training because of a generation of inadequate approach by previous French administrations there is at this stage a relative lack of trained people amongst the Kanaks and the French Government is conscious of all these elements.

JOURNALIST: Were there any discussion of any possible initiative that the Forum could take to persuade France to move faster on the timetable for the referendum.

P.M.: These elements were alluded to by various speakers. One, while I think as I've said, there was a general view against the concept of reinscription and the Committee of 24, I think acceptance that in their speeches to the United Nations General Assembly that Forum members could make the point about the need for acceleration. Secondly, that individual members of the Forum in their relations with and their bilateral relations with France should press the view. And thirdly, I would expect the communique will probably be again an attempt by the Forum as a Forum to press the view upon France.

JOURNALIST: Will there be any mention last year's decision to ask France to invite a Ministerial group to visit New Caledonia.

P.M.: Well we didn't specifically address ourselves to that, but it's possible that we may make that attempt again.

JOURNALIST: Did the New Zealand Prime Minister make any attempt to explain New Zealand's position on the visits of nuclear ships.

P.M.: No because, as I pointed out, it arose just in the last few minutes. I merely made the introduction and after my introduction we closed the session.

JOURNALIST: Who put the proposal for reinscription.

P.M.: Oh well that's in the paper that's been circulated by Vanuatu and it was advanced by the spokesman for Vanuatu. He was not entirely unsupported.

JOURNALIST: Who was supportive.

P.M.: Well I've made the point that I don't want to go to individual points although it was appropriate to respond that way to Mr Steketee because in fact that was a matter of knowledge that they had distributed that paper.

JOURNALIST: What was the flavour of the debates. Was there sharp differences or differences of emphasis or how would you characterise it?

P.M.: No - differences of emphasis. It was a very Pacific discussion.

JOURNALIST: Does the lack of a resolution, Mr Hawke, reflect ...

P.M.: It reflects the fact that there won't be any communique until the end and I would believe that on all the issues that we discussed, it's unlikely that there be specific resolutions emerging until the end. That may not be the case but that's the way I put it.

JOURNALIST: Is the debate then, Sir, finished on the nuclear issue and also on New Caledonia.

P.M.: No, for the third time I repeat that in the last few minutes before the conclusion of the session I introduced the nuclear issue. That means by definition that the debate hasn't started.

JOURNALIST: Do you expect the debate on the nuclear issue to be a long one. What's your reaction to how the island delegates will gauge the Australian proposal.

P.M.: Well by definition there hasn't been any opportunity in the formal meetings to get the response. But my impression from what has happened up to this stage is that there is a growing support for the concept.

JOURNALIST: Were there any other countries who were mentioned as possible sources of outside assistance to New Caledonia.

P.M.: Libya was the only one that got a guernsey.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister you said at your press conference yesterday that the zone proposal, Australia's zone proposal, would be consistent with your treaty obligations. And in 1975 Mr Whitlam seemed to think that it wouldn't be consistent, or at least New Zealand's proposal then, wouldn't be consistent with our treaty obligations. I'm just wondering what's changed.

P.M.: I don't want to make too much of the point. But there's a great deal of difference in 1984 between the Governments that are operating and in times past. We deal with the issues now in terms of our assessment of the present.

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