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PRIME MINISTER

PRIME MINISTER'S REMARKS AT RECEPTION IN HONOUR OF THE
1985 UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL, 6 NOVEMBER 1984

YOUR EXCELLENCIES, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

In January 1985, Australia will begin a two-year period as a member of the United Nations Security Council.

I thought it appropriate to invite here today representatives of those countries with whom we will be working on this important body, of other countries which will be shortly completing their periods of service on the Security Council, and representatives of Australian institutions, public and private, which have a major interest in the United Nations and in problems confronting the international community, in order to outline how Australia approaches its task on the Security Council.

Notwithstanding the legitimate criticisms to which the United Nations is subject, our Government regards it as a uniquely valuable institution in world affairs in providing a forum for the expression of the aspirations of the peoples of the world for peace, justice, equality and political, social and economic advancement.

As the authors of the UN Charter put it, the peoples of the United Nations are determined:

to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our life-time has brought untold sorrow to mankind;

to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women of nations large and small;

to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained; and

to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.

One hundred and forty-six members of the United Nations voted in favour of Australia's election to the Security Council. We are extremely proud of and honoured by this strong support and I believe that it is an expression of the credibility and respect which Australia's international activity has earned in the hands of this Government, and particularly of Bill Hayden and his officers.

The Security Council is charged specifically with the maintenance of international peace and security. This is an enormous responsibility. Regrettably, the Council's record in fulfilling its role falls far short of the hopes of those who drafted the United Nations Charter in San Francisco in 1945.

Australia does not conclude from this that making the Council more effective is a task beyond achievement. To the contrary, we believe that, in our increasingly interdependent world, there is no sensible alternative to multilateral efforts to solve problems, least of all on issues of international peace and security.

Australia will approach its term on the Security Council in this spirit and with the highest sense of responsibility. We see membership of the Council as an opportunity to pursue our obligations under the United Nations Charter and as a challenge to join in the effort to make the Council what its originators envisaged and what it so clearly needs to be - an effective instrument for the containment of existing conflicts and for the prevention of new conflicts.

We believe that the Security Council continues to have an important role in seeking to moderate international tension and conflict wherever they may arise. Whether the United Nations is involved in Southern Africa, where the injustice of apartheid continues to foster violence and to affront the world community, or the Middle East, or Indochina, I would like to assure our fellow-members of the 1985 Security Council that they will find Australia a co-operative, responsible and honest partner in efforts to bring about peace and reconciliation.

I should like to address some particular remarks to the five Permanent Members of the Security Council, who happen also, by a symmetry not envisaged by the UN's founding fathers, to be the world's five nuclear weapons powers.

The effectiveness of the Security Council is heavily dependent on the degree of commitment on the part of the five Permanent Members to make it work. And this in turn depends heavily on the state of relations between them, particularly, of course, between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Despite some recent encouraging developments - notably the talks in Washington in October between President Reagan, Secretary of State George Shultz and Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko - US-Soviet relations remain very strained. This is most starkly reflected in the complete absence of bilateral negotiations to control and reduce the nuclear arsenals and to deal with the militarisation of outer space, a development that we see as fraught with great risk and uncertainty.

This situation has understandably, and rightly, given rise to feelings of great concern and anxiety all over the world. The Australian Government has sought to address these issues realistically. Given the existence of massive nuclear arsenals, the first concern must be to prevent nuclear war through preserving a state of stable mutual deterrence. Australia, as an aligned nation, is in a position to contribute directly to this objective and we have consciously shouldered this responsibility.

There is, however, a second imperative. We know from investigations into the probable effects of nuclear war - and from the professional consensus that the prospects of keeping such a war limited are very poor - that crossing the nuclear threshold may be the last thing we ever do. In stark contrast to past wars between the major powers, the world may not again be given a second chance.

The dangers inherent in this situation are only too obvious. We cannot afford to accept deterrence based on massive nuclear arsenals as a permanent solution.

Notwithstanding the fact that nuclear weapons have not been used since 1945 it would be foolish in the extreme to stake our future on the perpetual infallibility of nuclear deterrence.

It follows that the negotiation of agreements to progressively reduce the nuclear arsenals is of supreme importance. The agreements must, of course, be balanced and effectively verifiable - if these fundamental requirements are neglected, stability would be jeopardised and the negotiating process difficult to sustain. But these are not insurmountable obstacles. Given the horrendous consequences of nuclear war and the global yearning for nuclear disarmament, the mutual concessions necessary to produce balanced and effectively verifiable agreements can and must be made.

The control and reduction of the nuclear arsenals is the pivotal security issue of our time. In the absence of progress on this issue - and in the international political atmosphere that accompanies that lack of progress - the resolution of other issues that threaten international peace and security is rendered exceedingly difficult if not impossible.

The nuclear weapon states alone do not have the right to determine the destiny of mankind. Every nation has the right - and the responsibility - to be heard on the fundamental issues of nuclear war and nuclear disarmament and Australia is determined to exercise this right to the full.

The competition in nuclear weapons is a threat to the security of every nation on earth. The stability of the nuclear relationship is constantly challenged by technological developments. In addition there is the ever-present risk of the further horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons, a risk that is heightened by unceasing vertical proliferation by the existing nuclear weapons states. The degree of stability in the nuclear relationship that these states have managed to preserve could be very severely stressed if the number of independent players increased further.

Australia has been a vigorous advocate of renewed negotiations to control and reduce the nuclear arsenals and of greater efforts to strengthen the international non-proliferation regime. However, Australia, and other countries like ours, can only do so much. Special responsibility necessarily resides with the nuclear weapons states.

On behalf of the Australian Government, I must say frankly that the response to date of the nuclear powers has not matched the genuine and legitimate concerns of millions of ordinary people around the world.

Forty years after the Second World War, the people of the world, and certainly the people of Australia, yearn for a real peace - a peace that is more than a mere absence of war. This is particularly the heart-felt plea of our young people. They would like to see their leaders unite against a common enemy - the threat of thermonuclear extinction. The matter is urgent but we must approach it in a spirit of confident determination and of persistence. We cannot afford to become despondent or desperate. Rather, through practical and realistic measures of international co-operation we must look for ways to lessen this danger which faces us all.

In conclusion, let me repeat that the Australian Government's readiness to undertake the obligations of membership of the Security Council reflects our commitment to the United Nations and our determination that Australia should make a worthwhile contribution to its role in the maintenance of international peace and security.
