

EMBARGOED AGAINST DELIVERY  
AT 1.00PM



## PRIME MINISTER

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER  
THE INAUGURATION OF ST. CHARBEL'S MONASTRY AND COLLEGE  
PUNCHBOWL - SUNDAY - 10 MARCH 1985

Premier Neville Wran, Abbot Paul Naaman, ministerial colleagues, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It gives me great pleasure to be with you on this important day for the inauguration of St. Charbel's Monastery and College.

When I look around here I am impressed by what has been accomplished in such a short time by the Maronite Order of monks since their small beginning in Punchbowl in 1973.

Abbot Naaman, who laid the foundation of St. Charbel's College on his last visit here in March 1982, will be delighted today to see stage one of the college built and operational and also the adjoining monastery building which will serve your community well.

It is a credit to the monks and your community that these buildings have been built in such a short time to join, I understand, another nine missions around the world.

It is yet another landmark in the long story of major contributions by the Lebanese community to Australian society.

Many of you here today have chosen to build your lives in Australia because of the tragedies which have overtaken your homeland, Lebanon.

My Government shares your sorrow at what has happened in Lebanon. Lebanon has been enveloped by tragedy, and has become the focus for some of the most intense and intractable problems in the Middle East. We have all been witness to that tragedy, but our policy towards Lebanon is not that of a detached and disinterested observer.

All of us here hope that warfare, tragedy, loss of life and suffering in Lebanon may soon come to an end. We

are deeply concerned that a peaceful resolution of the conflict be found.

In this context we welcome Israel's plan for a phased withdrawal, the first phase of which has already been implemented. All other foreign armed forces must also be removed, and only those remain which are there at the express wish of the Government of Lebanon.

As I have said many times before, it will only be when this happens that the people of Lebanon will be able to resume a normal and peaceful life. Australia, for its part, supports fully the efforts of the Lebanese Government to restore its authority over the entire territory of Lebanon and looks forward to the day when, with the return of true independence, national reconciliation without further bloodshed will be achieved.

One of Australia's greatest strengths has been its acceptance of people from quite diverse nationalities around the world.

Our plurality and diversity is a national asset to be cherished and safeguarded.

We live in a society which, while supporting a common group of institutions, legal rights and obligations, leaves individuals free to maintain their religion, language and customs. In this way, all the communities such as your own, contribute to the richness and traditions of our nation. The resulting broad racial and social consensus is a great achievement.

For its part, the Government aims to promote a just and equitable society that

- accepts people irrespective of their ethnic or cultural background and
- provides members of the different cultural groups and ethnic communities in Australia with the effective opportunity to participate in Australian society and to achieve their own potential.

Maintenance of our non-discriminatory immigration program is crucial. Through it we aim to meet Australia's social and humanitarian obligations while accommodating prevailing domestic economic conditions.

Side by side with our immigration program, the Australian Government also attaches great importance to developing programs in the community which will assist migrants to feel part of our country - to feel Australian.

Since assuming office in 1983 the Labor Government has moved to strengthen many of the programs developed to address the needs of migrants. For instance we have

- . increased from 140 to more than 200 the number of grants-in-aid to employ multilingual welfare workers
- . launched a migrant workers rights scheme
- . extended and strengthened the migrant resource centre network
- . increased funding of the adult migrant education program and
- . boosted funding for translator and interpreter services.

Through our community relations policies we will continue to encourage communities such as yours to maintain and share their cultural heritage with other Australians.

In this regard it is pleasing that the Lebanese Community Council of New South Wales was launched two weeks ago. It should provide a framework for co-ordinating settlement support to the dispersed Lebanese community in New South Wales.

While recognizing the political and religious differences among members of the Council it is imperative that everyone involved work together for the common benefit. The Council's work is of the utmost importance and I wish it well for the future.

People come to this land for a home and security for their families. High among aspirations of Australians is access to a good education for their children.

We have a great tradition in Australia of co-operation between government and the community to meet the special needs of our people. This tradition is most important in its impact on our young people in the development of Australia's national education system.

One feature which has impacted on our education system has been the sacrifice that individuals have been prepared to make to develop non-government schools in this country.

There has been a great deal of debate about the future of non-government schools, in particular the continuation of Commonwealth assistance.

We as a government have grappled with these problems and have developed a policy that ensures that our education system copes with the diversity of our society in terms of abilities, aspirations and needs.

Schools such as your own are an integral part of that system.

Our new scheme of assistance recognises that parents may choose a non-government schooling for their children, for any of a number of reasons be they educational, religious or cultural. Our policy acknowledges the continuing partnership between the Commonwealth, the States and the school community to ensure a satisfactory standard of education for all.

It is intended to ensure that assistance should be firmly based on the principle of need.

Although the first stage of St. Charbel's College was built from the Lebanese Community's own resources, the Commonwealth Government provided grants totalling more than \$160,000 in 1984 to assist in the establishment of facilities at the new school, for English language instruction and to meet general operating costs.

For 1985, your school has been placed in one of the highest levels for any school seeking Government support. This will ensure that the College has the assistance it needs in future years.

The young are our hope and our pride and offer the best chance for a secure future together. You are providing the opportunity your children also need to preserve their ties of family and tradition.

For our part as a Government we will assist you in your endeavours to build a great future for all Australians.

The paths along which we are all proceeding are, I believe, converging to lead to an even richer and more vibrant society in the future.

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