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REMARKS BY PRIME MINISTER AT SICHUAN ZOO,
CHENGDU : 21 MAY 1986

CHINA HAS ACCORDED AUSTRALIA A GREAT HONOUR IN ANNOUNCING THAT IT WILL PARTICIPATE IN THE CELEBRATION OF AUSTRALIA'S BICENTENARY BY PERMITTING US TO DISPLAY IN AUSTRALIA A PAIR OF RARE AND APPEALING GIANT PANDAS.

THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE ARE AWARE OF HOW PRECIOUS THE GIANT PANDA IS NOT ONLY TO THE CHINESE PEOPLE BUT TO PEOPLE ALL OVER THE WORLD. WE ARE VERY AWARE OF THE MASSIVE RESCUE MEASURES TAKEN BY THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT TO SAVE PANDAS FROM STARVATION WITH THE WIDESPREAD DEATH OF BAMBOO IN THE MOUNTAINS. FOR YOU TO CONTRIBUTE SO GENEROUSLY TO OUR BICENTENARY CELEBRATIONS MARKS THE STRENGTH AND WARMTH OF THE RELATIONS THAT HAVE DEVELOPED BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES.

IN AUSTRALIA WE SHARE YOUR CONCERN AND THAT OF ORGANISATIONS SUCH AS THE WORLD WILD LIFE FUND FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE GIANT PANDA AND I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT WE WILL TAKE ALL NECESSARY STEPS TO ENSURE THE SAFETY, COMFORT AND WELL BEING OF THE PANDAS DURING THEIR JOURNEY TO AND FROM OUR COUNTRY AND WHILE THEY ARE IN AUSTRALIA. THERE IS PRESENTLY AN AUSTRALIAN DELEGATION FROM OUR WILDLIFE AUTHORITY IN CHINA DISCUSSING ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE CARE AND NURTURE OF THE PANDAS WITH THE RELEVANT CHINESE AUTHORITIES.

MANY ACTIVITIES WILL CLAIM THE ATTENTION OF THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE DURING 1988. OUR YEAR OF CELEBRATION WILL BEGIN WITH A SPECTACULAR OPENING CEREMONY. THROUGHOUT THE YEAR THERE WILL BE WORLD CLASS EXHIBITIONS AND PERFORMANCES, A GATHERING FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF TALL SHIPS, THE OPENING OF AUSTRALIA'S NEW PARLIAMENT HOUSE, A WORLD EXPOSITION, AT WHICH CHINA WILL BE A PARTICIPANT, AND MANY INTERNATIONAL SPORTING EVENTS. YET I CAN PREDICT THAT FOR TENS OF THOUSANDS OF AUSTRALIANS THE EXHIBITION OF GIANT PANDAS WILL BE A HIGHLIGHT.

JUST AS WE HAVE TRAVELLED ACROSS CHINA TODAY TO SICHUAN PROVINCE TO VIEW THE PANDAS AT THIS ZOO, THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE WILL TRAVEL FROM THE DISTANT CORNERS OF OUR CONTINENT TO SEE THIS MOST TREASURED SPECIES OF ALL ANIMALS WHICH HAS BECOME THE INTERNATIONAL SYMBOL FOR THE CONSERVATION OF NATURE.

IT IS WITH THE HIGHEST SENSE OF THE GREAT HONOUR THAT YOU ACCORD AUSTRALIA THAT I MOST GRATEFULLY ACCEPT THIS OFFER OF A PAIR OF GIANT PANDAS FOR EXHIBITION IN AUSTRALIA DURING OUR BICENTENARY YEAR CELEBRATIONS IN 1988.
