



PRIME MINISTER

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CANDLE-LIGHTING CEREMONY
KINGS HALL - 28 MAY 1986

25 YEARS AGO, THE VISION AND HUMANITY OF PETER BENENSON, A CATHOLIC LAWYER OF JEWISH DESCENT, BORN OF ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN PARENTS, GAVE BIRTH TO AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, THE GREAT ORGANISATION WHOSE ANNIVERSARY WE CELEBRATE TODAY.

IN MAY 1961, THE FIRST AMNESTY APPEAL WAS MADE, ON BEHALF OF POLITICAL PRISONERS FROM EIGHT COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD, BOTH COMMUNIST AND NON-COMMUNIST.

IN DECEMBER OF THAT YEAR, THE FIRST SYMBOLIC LIGHTING OF THE AMNESTY CANDLE TOOK PLACE ON THE STEPS OF THE CHURCH OF ST MARTINS-IN-THE-FIELD, LONDON.

FROM THOSE SMALL BEGINNINGS, AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL HAS DEVELOPED INTO AN ORGANISATION WITH OVER HALF A MILLION MEMBERS, SUPPORTERS AND SUBSCRIBERS WORLD-WIDE.

IT HAS MADE ORDINARY PEOPLE ALL OVER THE WORLD AWARE OF THE PLIGHT OF THOSE DEFENDING THE HUMAN RIGHTS WE IN AUSTRALIA TAKE FOR GRANTED. IT HAS SUCCEEDED IN BRINGING PRACTICAL HELP TO THOUSANDS OF VICTIMS OF ABUSE.

AMNESTY CAN RIGHTLY CELEBRATE TODAY TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF SUCCESSFUL ENDEAVOUR TO IDENTIFY AND FREE PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE, TO SECURE FAIR AND PROMPT TRIALS FOR POLITICAL PRISONERS, AND TO END TORTURE AND EXECUTIONS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

IN AUSTRALIA AMNESTY HAS SOME 10,000 COMMITTED MEMBERS IN BRANCHES IN ALL STATES. ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY GROUPS ARE WORKING HARD TOWARDS RELEASE OF PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE. THE GOVERNMENT PARTICULARLY COMMENDS THE CURRENT CAMPAIGN WHEREBY THE ENTIRE MEMBERSHIP IS WRITING TO 10,000 DECISION MAKERS IN SOUTH AFRICA TOWARDS THIS END.

TODAY'S CEREMONY, FITTINGLY HELD HERE, IN THE PLACE WHICH IS CENTRAL TO AUSTRALIA'S FUNDAMENTAL IDEALS OF FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY, IS SPONSORED BY TWO OF THE AUSTRALIAN AMNESTY GROUPS, THE A.C.T. GROUP AND THE PARLIAMENTARY GROUP.

THE PARLIAMENTARY GROUP WAS FORMED IN 1973 AND CURRENTLY HAS OVER 70 MEMBERS. THE FOUR PARTY LEADERS, JOHN HOWARD, IAN SINCLAIR, DON CHIPP AND I ARE HONOURED AND PROUD TO BE ITS PATRONS.

THE WORK OF AMNESTY IN IDENTIFYING AND SUPPORTING PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE HAS THE SUPPORT OF ALL AUSTRALIANS TO WHOM THE IDEALS OF POLITICAL AND PERSONAL FREEDOM AND THE VALUE OF FREE SPEECH AND OPEN PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT ARE IMPORTANT.

TO NOBODY WERE THESE IDEALS AND VALUES MORE IMPORTANT THAN TO THE LATE SENATOR ALAN MISSEN. ALAN WAS TWICE THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PARLIAMENTARY GROUP OF AMNESTY, AND WAS ITS CURRENT CHAIRMAN AT THE TIME OF HIS UNTIMELY DEATH IN MARCH.

IT IS THEREFORE WITH GREAT PLEASURE THAT I AM ABLE TO ANNOUNCE TODAY THAT THE PARLIAMENTARY AMNESTY GROUP HAS DECIDED TO ESTABLISH A PERMANENT MEMORIAL TO ALAN WHICH WILL REFLECT HIS LIFETIME'S COMMITMENT TO HUMAN RIGHTS CAUSES. NEXT YEAR, BEFORE HUMAN RIGHTS WEEK, THE PARLIAMENTARY GROUP WILL ORGANISE A HUMAN RIGHTS LECTURE TO BE GIVEN IN ALAN MISSEN'S NAME. WITH ANY PROCEEDS RAISED FROM THE LECTURE, WHICH WILL BE GIVEN BY A PROMINENT PERSON WITH DIRECT PERSONAL EXPERIENCE IN THE AREAS OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS, AMNESTY WILL THEN MAKE SOME DONATION TO A SPECIFIC AMNESTY PROJECT, THEREBY COMBINING BOTH SOME PUBLIC RECOGNITION OF THE WORK OF AMNESTY WITH A PRACTICAL DEMONSTRATION OF CONCERN. I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT ALAN WOULD HAVE APPROVED WHOLE-HEARTEDLY OF THIS UNDERTAKING.

AMNESTY TOOK AS ITS SYMBOL THE CANDLE SURROUNDED BY BARBED-WIRE IN RECOGNITION OF THE TRUTH OF THE ANCIENT CHINESE PROVERB, "BETTER TO LIGHT A CANDLE THAN CURSE THE DARKNESS".

HERE TODAY, IN LIGHTING THIS CANDLE, A CEREMONY WHICH I PERFORM ON BEHALF OF ALL AUSTRALIANS, WE REMEMBER THE FATE OF THOSE WHO ARE NOT FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO LIVE IN A COUNTRY WHERE THEIR RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS ARE RESPECTED. WE SUPPORT THE WORK WHICH AMNESTY HAS DONE FOR A QUARTER OF A CENTURY ON THEIR BEHALF, AND I INVITE THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION TO JOIN WITH ME IN OUR EXPRESSION OF SUPPORT FOR AMNESTY'S CONTINUING EFFORTS.
