



PRIME MINISTER

E AND O E - PROOF ONLY

COMMENTS BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT RAAF BASE - FRIDAY, 23 JANUARY 1987

JOURNALIST: ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARDED TO THE TRIP?

PM: YES. THERE'S A VERY IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENT OCCURRED THIS MORNING THAT I THINK WE ALL SHOULD BE AWARE OF. I HAD A CALL FROM PRESIDENT REAGAN ON A VERY IMPORTANT MATTER. A CONTEST THAT IS GOING TO BE TAKING PLACE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF AUSTRALIA, WHICH BEGINS WHILE I'M AWAY. HE SAID HE WASN'T NORMALLY A PUNTING MAN. IT'S NOT SOMETHING I CAN SAY MYSELF IN RECIPROCATION. HE THOUGHT THAT THERE SHOULD BE SOME WAGER BETWEEN US. HE NOMINATED THE STAKES OF ONE OF HIS WHITE COWBOY HATS AGAINST AN AUSTRALIAN AKUBRA. SO THE STAKES ARE SET.

JOURNALIST: SO HE'S SACKING THE AMERICANS?

PM: YES HE IS.

JOURNALIST: HAS HE GOT ANY CHANCE?

PM: WELL THEY'RE IN THE RACE, BUT WE'LL WIN.

JOURNALIST: PRIME MINISTER, ON YOUR TRIP DO YOU THINK YOU'RE WALKING A DIPLOMATIC TIGHTROPE?

PM: NO I DON'T THINK IT'S A DIPLOMATIC TIGHTROPE. IT HAS HISTORICALLY BEEN A VERY COMPLEX AREA, TENSE AREA. BUT I HAVE VERY GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE LEADERSHIP IN THE COUNTRIES THAT I'M VISITING OF JORDAN AND ISRAEL AND EGYPT. AND AUSTRALIA ITSELF HAS GOOD STANDING. WE'RE RECOGNISED AS A COUNTRY WHICH HAS A RESPONSIBLE APPROACH TO THE PROBLEMS OF THAT AREA, BASED UPON ON THE ONE HAND THE RECOGNITION OF THE RIGHT OF ISRAEL TO EXIST, BEING BEHIND SECURE AND RECOGNISED BORDERS. AND ON THE OTHER HAND, THE RECOGNITION OF THE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE. THAT'S RESPECTED AND I GO THERE NOT TO ASSUME ANY GRAND ROLE AS MEDIATOR OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT. I'VE MADE IT QUITE CLEAR THAT I GO THERE TO LISTEN AND MERELY TO SAY THAT IF IN ANY WAY AUSTRALIA CAN BE OF ANY ASSISTANCE AT ANY TIME THEN THAT WOULD BE FORTHCOMING.

JOURNALIST: BUT YOU DO HAVE A PASSIONATE INTEREST, ALMOST A LOVE FOR ISRAEL, DON'T YOU? CAN YOU BE EVEN-HANDED?

PM: I WISH PEOPLE WOULD RECOGNISE WHAT I'VE BEEN CONSISTENTLY SAYING ABOUT THIS. OF COURSE I HAVE STRONG, CONTINUING COMMITMENT OF THE RIGHT OF ISRAEL TO EXIST. I RECOGNISE ITS IMPORTANCE FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE JEWISH FAITH. I HAVE ALWAYS, AT THE SAME TIME, ACKNOWLEDGED THE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE. I HAVE NO DIFFICULTY AT ALL IN RECONCILING THE NATURE OF MY COMMITMENT IN THE STATE OF ISRAEL WITH A RESPONSIBLE ASSESSMENT OF WHAT IS NECESSARY TO ATTEMPT TO BRING SOME RESOLUTION OF THIS PERMANENT CONFLICT IN THE REGION, WHICH IS NOT ONLY TRAGIC FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE REGION ITSELF, BUT REMAINS ONE OF THE POTENTIAL FLASH POINTS OF DANGER FOR THE REST OF THE WORLD.

JOURNALIST: WHAT ABOUT MR VANUNU PRIME MINISTER, ARE YOU GOING TO RAISE THAT MATTER?

PM: ANYTHING I HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THAT IS NOT HELPED BY PUBLIC COMMENT.

JOURNALIST: ONE OTHER THING. WE LEARN FROM THE PAPERS THIS MORNING THAT WE'VE REJECTED THE UN REQUEST FOR A SEMINAR. CAN YOU TELL US WHY?

PM: I'VE GOT NO COMMENT TO MAKE ON THAT AT THIS STAGE.

JOURNALIST: MR HAWKE, AS YOU'RE LEAVING ARE YOU CONCERNED ABOUT THE MEDIA OWNERSHIP MESS THAT YOU'RE LEAVING BEHIND?

PM: WHAT MESS?

JOURNALIST: WELL THE CURRENT STATE OF FLUX.

PM: CERTAINLY A CURRENT STATE OF FLUX, BUT I NOTICED ALL MY PAPERS WERE THERE THIS MORNING. TELEVISION STATIONS ARE STILL OPERATING AND THE RADIO IS WORKING. YOU'RE ALL GIVING US A FAIR GO.

JOURNALIST: DID YOU EVER THINK THE CROSS OWNERSHIP RULES WOULD HAVE LED TO THE TYPE OF SITUATION WE'VE SEEN?

PM: I'VE HAD A VIEW ABOUT WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN IN THE AREA OF LEGISLATION AS SOME PEOPLE HAVE EXPRESSED DOUBT ABOUT THE WISDOM OF WHAT WE'VE DOING. IT SEEMS TO BE HAVING ITS EFFECTS NOW BEFORE IT IS EVEN ON THE STATUTE BOOKS. I'M QUITE RELAXED ABOUT IT ALL.

ENDS.