



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

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The Government has previously voiced concern about the nature and direction of Libyan activities in the South Pacific region. Some of these activities have been conducted openly, others - many others - with varying degrees of clandestinity. They have become more intense in the course of this year.

There is no plausible explanation in terms of geography or legitimate national interest for Libyan activity in this region, as the Foreign Minister and I have both noted in Parliament and elsewhere.

We have repeatedly been assured that Libya seeks normal relations with the countries of the region. Yet Colonel Gaddafi urges Pacific islanders to join a "single front which stretches from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean", to "stage a revolution", to "fight to the end". Libyan organisations have sponsored so-called Pacific meetings in Libya which have no constructive contribution to make to the well-being of the peoples of the South Pacific. And Libyan representatives offer funds to individuals and organisations for destabilising political purposes; arrange training in the techniques of propaganda, agitation and guerilla work; use contacts in one country to develop destabilising networks of contact and influence in others. Libya's record of subversion and terrorism elsewhere in the world justifies the gravest concern.

We have stated repeatedly, and I say it again now, that we respect the sovereign right of Pacific Island countries to establish relations with whatever countries they choose. Australia does not seek in any way to interfere in any aspect of their domestic or foreign policy. It is for our Pacific neighbours to make their own decisions in the light of their national interests.

But Australia has national interests of its own and a vital concern for peace, harmony and stability in the South Pacific. We are only too conscious of the instability already existing in the region in New Caledonia and most recently and sadly in Fiji - and do not welcome a further element.

The Government has made its concerns about these matters known to our Pacific friends and neighbours as part of the constant process of consultation it maintains with them. It has explained frankly and fully its particular concerns about Libyan activities, and their likely impact on the region.

The Government has also carefully reviewed Australia's relations with Libya in the light of the pattern of Libyan activity in the South Pacific region, including that within Australia itself. I note that, despite the care with which Libyan activities are monitored, Libya has begun to intrude into our domestic affairs too, causing dissension and confrontation among communities, something of deep concern to all Australians, whatever their cultural background.

In this context of both regional and domestic concern about the increasingly disruptive activities of Libya, the Government has concluded that a continuing official Libyan presence in Australia serves no Australian interest or purpose, and, indeed, is serving to facilitate Libya's destabilising activities. The decision the Government has taken serves to underline the importance it attaches to the maintenance and development of the closest possible understanding with our regional partners on matters of such grave common concern. It gives further strength to our firm views about the dangers Libyan activities bring to the region.

The Secretary of the Libyan People's Bureau has today been instructed to close the Bureau forthwith and to leave Australia within ten days. His assistant is to leave within three week.