



PRIME MINISTER

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
LUNCHEON IN HONOUR OF THE PRIME MINISTER ALEBUA
OF THE SOLOMON ISLANDS
CANBERRA - 5 SEPTEMBER 1988**

Prime Minister
Parliamentary colleagues
Distinguished guests
Ladies and gentlemen

Australia and the Solomon Islands are this year both celebrating anniversaries.

1988 marks the two hundredth anniversary of the European settlement of Australia. It also marks the tenth anniversary of the independence of the Solomon Islands.

Such anniversaries are important events, both for marking progress and for looking to the future to what new achievements lie before us.

And they offer the opportunity for countries to reaffirm their friendship towards each other.

In the case of our two countries, we have been fortunate in being able to do so through the recent visit of Australia's Minister for Trade Negotiations, Michael Duffy, to Honiara to attend your independence celebrations.

Today we welcome a very distinguished Party making a return visit. To you, Prime Minister, to Minister Rosé and Premier Hagasuramo, may I extend a very warm Australian welcome and express my wishes for a happy and constructive visit.

And in Australia's Bicentennial Year we warmly welcome your generous participation in our celebrations.

As you saw yourself during your National Day at Expo 88 last week, the Pacific Village Display is an outstanding success. The Solomon Islands Pavilion and the presence of your national performers are deservedly amongst the highlights of the Village and the display as a whole is one of the highlights of Expo itself.

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The building of a traditional canoe alongside the Solomon Islands Pavilion excited a great deal of interest. I am told that its launching last week during your visit was something of a spectacular. I hope you enjoyed the ride!

The relationship between Australia and the Solomon Islands is one that rests on the friendship between our two peoples.

It is a friendship forged in the Second World War, when Australians and Solomon Islanders fought side by side in some of the most bitter and devastating battles of the South-west Pacific Campaign.

It is the close bond that led Australians to share the tragedy your people suffered as a result of cyclone "Namu" in 1986, and that saw us involved in the daunting task of reconstruction and rehabilitation. In this connection, I am delighted that Slim Dusty, one of Australia's greatest entertainers, whose performances in your country did much to raise funds after the cyclone, is with us today.

We are indeed close neighbours - and by close I refer not only to our geographical proximity but also to our historical ties and our contemporary capacity to work together to achieve important shared goals.

We are involved in political co-operation at the regional and international level over important issues such as disarmament, economic development and international trading arrangements, issues of central regional concern.

I look forward to working with you again at the South Pacific Forum when it meets later this month in Tonga.

On the bilateral front, the relationship includes important trade and civil aviation matters, including the operation of joint air service by Qantas and Solomon Islands' Airlines. Australia has become increasingly involved in helping the economic development strategies of your Government.

Australia's program of assistance to the Solomon Islands concentrates on infrastructure development, education, training, and most importantly, on activities in the productive fisheries and forestry sectors of the economy.

And, Mr Prime Minister, I might say that your country has given Australia, and Canberra, a special gift in the sporting field. Mal Meninga, our great international Rugby League player, has Solomon Island ancestry.

Australia and the Solomon Islands also have a long-standing defence co-operation program.

I was pleased to hear, Prime Minister, that while you were in Perth on Saturday, you were able to take ceremonial possession of the patrol vessel "Lata", which was constructed in Australia as part of our Pacific Patrol Boat Program.

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I believe the "Lata" will be an important element in your policing and protection of your important fisheries resources, in co-ordination with the Maritime Surveillance Centre which is supported by the Defence Co-operation Program.

I am also pleased that the "Lata" will participate in the Bicentennial Naval Salute in Sydney next month.

Prime Minister,

I believe the relationship our two countries have forged is an important one and one of which we can be proud. But we need to keep at the hard work of co-operation for the benefit of our own peoples and in the interest of the region as a whole.

The relationship should not be taken for granted and I would like to assure you that Australia does not do so.

We value the opportunity provided by your visit to Australia to reaffirm our commitment to the people of the Solomon Islands, and to underline the value we attach to your friendship.

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