



# PRIME MINISTER

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER  
OPENING OF THE CYPRUS COMMUNITY CLUB OF NSW  
STANMORE - 12 MARCH 1989**

---

Mr President,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Tonight's ceremony marks the sixtieth anniversary of your club.

Looking around your new club premises, I see the evidence of the determination of the Cypriot-Australian community to make the very best of life in this great country.

So in celebrating that landmark we are celebrating not just an achievement by the Cypriot community of New South Wales but indeed a genuinely Australian success story.

Australians and Cypriots have been in friendly contact for many years now.

The first Cypriots attracted to Australia arrived in the gold rush days of the 1850s.

In the sixty years this club has been in existence the size of the Greek Cypriot population in Australia has grown substantially.

There are now very strong and very respected Cypriot communities here in Sydney, in Melbourne and in the other capital cities of Australia.

Indeed Australia is now the home of the world's second largest Cypriot community outside Cyprus itself.

Many members of this community have made their mark as entrepreneurs in business.

You have provided leaders in public affairs, most notably Andrew and Theo Theophanous, who represent the Australian Labor Party in respectively the Federal and Victorian Parliaments.

You can be proud in particular of Andrew Theophanous' work as Chairman of the ALP Caucus Committee on Immigration and Ethnic Affairs.

The role of community organisations like yours in Australia is sometimes understated.

But you provide a crucial meeting place for Cypriot-Australians.

The growth and popularity of the Cyprus Community Club is testimony to your community's desire to maintain your cultural heritage, as part of your new life in a new land.

At the same time, your generous donations each year to aid cancer research clearly manifest a commitment to and identification with the broader community.

I recall with pleasure my own visit to Cyprus in 1987 and the talks I held with the then President Kyprianou.

Indeed it was a happy coincidence, in view of the large Cypriot-Australian community, that as part of a longer visit to the Middle East and Switzerland in late January and early February 1987, my visit to Larnaca fell on January 26 - Australia Day.

I also recall the constructive meeting I held in Canberra last May with a delegation of Cypriot MPs led by Dr Vassos Lyssarides, President of the House of Representatives.

And it is always a pleasure to meet Cypriot representatives at Commonwealth meetings.

I share with you a deep concern for the situation in Cyprus.

The Australian Government continues to recognise the Government of Cyprus as the sole legitimate Government in Cyprus and has consistently and strongly supported the sovereignty, independence, unity and non-aligned status of Cyprus.

The Australian Government has condemned vigorously the Turkish invasion of Cyprus and is committed to pursuing a peaceful resolution to the conflict and issues affecting the people of Cyprus.

We remain willing to help, in particular through our contribution to the United Nations' Peacekeeping Forces in Cyprus.

We are strongly of the view that the problems of Cyprus can only be resolved through negotiations and dialogue.

While the Government regrets the circumstances that have forced many people to leave Cyprus, we have never regretted that you chose Australia as your new home.

Cypriots, and millions of other people from all parts of the globe, have come to Australia to build a new home here.

Your efforts, dedication and commitment to your new home have been vital to the foundation and maintenance of our national prosperity.

It is largely in recognition of this vital contribution that my Government so strongly supports the principles of multiculturalism.

It is a source of great strength for our society that we acknowledge and respect the cultural diversity of our nation as well as accept the economic benefits which arise from the immigration program.

In keeping with this commitment, my Government is developing the National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia, a package of principles and policy initiatives that will give tangible expression and long-term direction to our commitment to multiculturalism.

When we release the National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia later this year, the issues it addresses will set a direction of lasting benefit for all Australians as we approach the year 2000.

My Government will not retreat from its commitment to multiculturalism.

To do so - as some of our opponents have done - would be to disown and offend all those Australians who have come here from overseas and whose loyalty and commitment to this country have never been questioned by me or my Government.

We are committed to making better use of immigrants' skills, education and entrepreneurial drive.

We are committed to maintaining and developing our language resources in order to advance Australia's trade, tourism and diplomatic interests.

And we are closely examining the manner by which overseas qualifications are recognised to ensure that the skills of immigrants are more fully and more effectively utilised.

We intend to ensure that all eligible people have access to Government services - that barriers of language and cultural difference are no longer sources of inequality and injustice.

While we are intent on breaking down barriers to Government services, so that no cultural group will be disadvantaged, let me also make clear that, in Australia, social rights are balanced by responsibilities.

And in saying this let me address quite directly the concerns about multiculturalism that have been expressed following certain recent highly publicised events in this country.

Angry demonstrations against visiting Heads of Government or State, such as Prime Minister Thatcher and President Sartzetakis; incitement to religious bigotry, such as that recently directed at Jewish Australians; violent reactions to protests at consulates; and threatened violence against authors and booksellers - events such as these have been perceived or alleged to be somehow a consequence of Australia's policy of multiculturalism.

Let me say at the outset that such events are thoroughly unacceptable to me and to the Government. They are repugnant and in a clear sense of the word, they are un-Australian.

People are right to be concerned if they apprehend that multiculturalism means that the conflicts of another continent and another age can be imported, perpetuated and pursued in this country. We do not ask people to forget their past, but we do require them to express their concerns within an Australian framework of law and tolerance.

Therefore I want to set the record straight for the benefit of those who misunderstand or misrepresent multiculturalism.

Let me say it quite unequivocally and unambiguously: multiculturalism is not a licence to stray beyond the law, least of all to threaten the property or life of any other human being, be they Australian, British or any other nationality.

Let us recognise the regrettable truth that cultural conflict and ethnic rivalry, not infrequently accompanied by violence, is a fact of Australian history. It existed long before the word multiculturalism was heard and indeed long before the era of post-war immigration. I need refer only to the experience of Aborigines, the Chinese, the Irish and the Jews during the first 150 years after European settlement.

Now, as then, the use or threatened use of violence remains anathema to the very concept of the rule of law and the right of the individual to its protection. It is also totally unacceptable in terms of multiculturalism which, above all else, espouses the virtues of tolerance.

The right to the free expression of opinion, within the constraints of the law, works both ways. Freedom of expression is founded on the same principle as the right to disagree with what is expressed. As I said in Parliament last week, Australia sets the highest value on the rights of individuals to express their views freely and without fear of recrimination - providing all parties stay within the limits imposed by the laws of this country.

At its core, multiculturalism is about tolerance - tolerance of diversity, of individuality, of difference. Tolerance means nothing if it is confined to opinions with which one agrees. Multiculturalism is the enemy of intolerance - it is the natural ally of those of us who cherish freedom and individuality, the right to be different, the right to a fair go, the idea of Jack being as good as his master - in other words, the very core of what it means to be an Australian.

I had not intended to inject a partisan note into this event, but I cannot let pass without comment a recent statement by the Opposition Leader, Mr Howard.

In a radio interview on Friday, Mr Howard has, apparently mischievously, distorted an important element of the Parliamentary statement I made on the important issue of The Satanic Verses.

In Parliament last week, I said:

"this Government was not one which was demanding adherence to one set of values. That is not the sort of society Australia is. But that does not mean that there are not values to which we have the strongest commitment and, in particular, we have the commitment to the right to speak freely without fear of violent reprisal or threat."

I would have thought those words were beyond misunderstanding. Indeed I said at the time that I thought both sides of Parliament held that value as fundamentally important.

But to my astonishment, I find Mr Howard has decided to pretend that what I said was that "we don't require any basic set of values in this country". He actually claimed in this interview that "the thinking behind [my] answer was, we don't really require certain basic things".

I can't believe Mr Howard misheard the full comments I made in Parliament. After all, he sits only a few feet away from me. He had the opportunity, then, to dissent but, as one would indeed expect, all the indications from the Opposition were of agreement with what I said.

So I have to conclude that this later distortion of what I said is a deliberate attempt to make it seem I stand on the side of those who advocate violence in Australia. And I conclude too that it is a foolish attempt by Mr Howard to throw fuel onto the fire of this regrettable affair of The Satanic Verses. It is not only foolish - it is utterly contemptible.

So let me repeat, at least for Mr Howard's benefit, what I have said before as to the limits that exist on multiculturalism.

First, all Australians must accept the basic structures of Australian society - that includes the rule of law, Parliamentary democracy, and English as our national language.

Second, the right to express one's own culture and beliefs - within this framework - involves a reciprocal responsibility to accept the right of others to express their views and values.

Third, multiculturalism assumes an overriding and unifying commitment to Australia, to its interest and future. This means, in part, that the conflicts and rivalries of the old world must yield, in the final analysis, to our common identity and our common loyalty as Australians first and foremost.

Within these limits, all Australians are free to express, preserve, develop or share such of their individual heritage and experience as they wish. Indeed, it is this freedom, and the tolerance it presumes, that is one of the most potent sources of loyalty to this great country of ours. It is the very basis of our social cohesion. Those who would circumscribe or compromise that freedom - whatever side of the religious or political fence they come from - do this country, and themselves, a great disservice.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Cypriots who have made their home in Australia have certainly made good their commitment to Australia.

Tonight's function is a gathering of Australians who share a common commitment to the future of Australia.

This new club is a just reward for what you have achieved and will serve as a reminder to you all of the significant contribution you have already made and will continue to make to Australia.

I congratulate everyone involved with the organisation of this evening's celebration.

I have much pleasure in declaring these new club rooms open.

\*\*\*\*\*