



PRIME MINISTER

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
37TH LIONS CLUBS INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION
CANBERRA - 7 MAY 1989**

Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the Australian Government and the people of Canberra, I am delighted to welcome delegates and visitors attending the 37th Lions Clubs International Convention for Multiple District 201. I am particularly delighted to welcome our friends from Papua New Guinea.

This is the fourth occasion your convention has met in Canberra, so many of you will be aware of what a first-class venue the National Capital is.

Since your last convention here in 1981, Canberra has seen the completion of our magnificent new Parliament House. It is a proud symbol of our democratic system of Government and would be well worth a visit during your Convention.

When people hear of Lions they immediately think of community service projects. These are very important, of course, and I congratulate you for them. But Lions encompasses much more.

Few people are aware of the broad objectives of Lions and to this extent their understanding of the richness of Lions International is impaired.

Let me mention one of particular significance. One of the Lions' objectives is "to promote the principles of good government and good citizenship". That is a goal with which I fully agree. Indeed in September 1988, as we celebrated our Bicentenary, I declared that 1989 would be the Year of Citizenship.

During this year we are emphasising the importance of citizenship as a symbol of our commitment to our nation, and we are urging people who live and work legally in Australia but have not become citizens to think seriously about taking on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

Australian citizenship opens the door to fundamentally important rights - the right to vote and to be elected to Parliament, the right to possess an Australian passport and to receive the protection of the Australian Government overseas, the right to permanent employment in the Australian Public Service and the right to serve in the armed forces.

Citizenship also carries real and vital responsibilities to ensure that Australia remains a peaceful, tolerant and just nation. All citizens share the obligation to continue the hard work of earlier generations in building a nation that is free and prosperous. We all must strive to preserve the great traditions of our society: parliamentary democracy, the rule of law, freedom of the individual, and a fair go for all.

So in this way the Government and Lions are working hand in hand to achieve objectives which we regard as fundamental to our society.

Through the Year of Citizenship, Lions International in Australia can encourage as many people as possible who are not citizens to take the opportunity of becoming citizens at one of the many Citizenship Ceremonies being conducted this year.

The essence of citizenship is commitment to our nation. Citizenship carries responsibilities as well as privileges.

In this regard, the Lions objective "to take an active interest in the civic, cultural, social and moral welfare of the community" truly represents citizenship in action.

Since your first club in Australia was formed in Lismore in 1947, Lions has given plentiful expression to your commitment to our nation.

My Government believes that the commitment to a strong nation, and the determination to build a sense of belonging and loyalty, demands that a nation must endeavour to open the door to prosperity for all its citizens. We have a special obligation to ensure that those less well off in Australia are not alienated, by deprivation and lack of opportunity, from the rest of the community.

Citizenship demands that those who are disadvantaged are made to feel that they are not forgotten or written off but, on the contrary, that they are valued and can rely on the assistance of their fellow citizens to help them make ends meet and provide for their families.

In this field of social justice, service clubs and governments work closely together. It is true to say that a partnership has grown up over the years in this area. Social justice in Australia today would not be as strong without your clubs.

While Governments play their part, service organisations like Lions have an important role in complementing the efforts of Governments. For your work you have truly earned the community's gratitude over many years.

Last year my colleague, the Minister for Community Services and Health, Neal Blewett, launched the "Kangaroo Creek Gang", a National Children's Drug Education program. This innovative program is aimed at all Australian primary school children and is based on the premise that the harm caused by drug abuse can only be addressed, in the long term, by convincing our young people of the importance of avoiding experimentation with drugs and the advantages of choosing a healthy lifestyle.

Thanks to the Lions Clubs of Australia this exceptional kit is available throughout the community for general use.

The very long list of projects undertaken by service clubs is impressive. They have assisted in health promotion, in home and community care services, in aged care services, in disability projects and in child care centres.

The first Lions Club in Papua-New Guinea was formed at Port Moresby in 1962 with the assistance of Australian Lions. It has developed an excellent working relationship with the Papua-New Guinea Government since then and provides all the elements of community work that are synonymous with Lions world wide.

The relationship Australia shares with Papua-New Guinea has been forged over many years, and I look forward to strengthening further the already close bonds between us with the visit to Canberra this week by the Foreign Minister Michael Somare, and, later, by Prime Minister Rabbie Namaliu.

Through creating and fostering a spirit of understanding among the peoples of the world and through uniting your clubs in bonds of friendship, good fellowship and mutual understanding, Lions has developed into a genuinely multicultural organisation and one which contributes to building friendly relations throughout the world.

Your 1.3 million members are spread throughout the world. On every continent, hundreds of thousands of Lions, of many nationalities and creeds, are working towards your common goals.

Today you can look at your organisation and see that its cultural and national diversity is indeed a source of strength and unity.

In this respect, Lions has played an important part, and I hope it will continue to do so, in contributing to mutual understanding between the people of diverse backgrounds in Australia.

Australia is one of the most diverse multicultural nations on earth - four out of ten Australians are immigrants or the children of immigrants. Half of them are from non English speaking backgrounds. It is a source of great strength for Australian society that we acknowledge and respect the cultural diversity of our nation.

Delegates and visitors,

I commend the 37th Multiple District 201 Convention Organising Committee for providing this opportunity for you to come together, to discuss, and plan for, the organisation's future. In the true tradition of Lions' gatherings, members and delegates don't just attend, they participate, and I know you will vigorously continue this tradition over the next four days.

The mission of Lions International is one of great significance to the building up of an Australian citizenship expressed in action and in tolerance for others' opinions and backgrounds.

I wish you every success in your task ahead.

Once again, welcome to everyone and all the best for the future and a successful convention.
