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PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

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ASSISTANCE FOR AMAZON RAINFOREST PROTECTION

The Australian Government has agreed to make a substantial donation towards the protection of the Amazon rainforests.

The Government will donate \$250,000 to the Fundacao Mata Virgem - The Rainforest Foundation - in support of its efforts to establish a 180,000 square kilometre ecological reserve in the Xingu region of the Amazon Basin.

The Australian donation - only the second by a national government - will be a major boost to the campaign, which is designed to finance demarcation and management of large extensions to the existing Xingu National Park.

The Foundation estimates that it will cost \$4.5 million to demarcate the large area of rainforest, in co-operation with the Brazilian Government, and create a successful management regime for the reserve.

The request for assistance was made by a delegation travelling the world to raise money for the new reserve, which would protect not only the rainforest but the 17 Amazonian Indian nations which rely on it for food and shelter.

The delegation included rock singer and conservationist Sting; film-maker Jean-Pierre Dutilleux; tribal leader of the Kayapo nation, Raoni, and the director of the existing Xingu National Park, Megaron; and American Indian Red Crow.

The fate of the Amazon rainforests is a matter of international importance; it is a global issue. Their destruction is contributing to the global problem of the greenhouse effect.

The Government of Brazil should not be expected alone to bear the financial burden of preserving these rainforests.

I commend Sting, Raoni, Jean-Pierre, Megaron and their colleagues for their international efforts, covering some 17 countries, and I am pleased that the Australian Government can play a part in this most worthy and vitally important cause.

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I hope the Australian donation will encourage other countries and individuals to take a global approach to the problem of rainforest destruction, and support the Fundacao Mata Virgem in its efforts to preserve areas of the Amazon rainforest.