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PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF NEWS CONFERENCE, BRISBANE SHERATON HOTEL,
4 JUNE 1989

E & O E - PROOF ONLY

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, can you give us your reaction to events in China?

PM: Yes I can. I deeply deplore what has happened in China. I have said before these most recent events that we both welcome the democratic push for reform so that people would have the pleasure of expression in China and, on the other hand, welcomed also the restraint with which the authorities in China had dealt with those demonstrations. Now, of course, that situation has been reversed. The use of violence and force by the authorities which has resulted in the deaths of at least 100, and perhaps many more, of the these people who have been exercising their rights peacefully cannot be accepted. I have instructed the Ambassador of Australia in Beijing who shall transmit this attitude of the Australian Government, and I'm sure the Australian people, to the authorities. Let me also say that I have ordered that the HMAS Parramatta, which was to be visiting Shanghai next week, shall not at this stage make that visit. This is a tragedy because the world has welcomed the processes of economic reform and the gradual processes of social change that have been occurring in China, these have been developments which have been to the benefit, the obvious benefit, of the people of China and to the rest of the world as they have opened up policy of gradual reform and certainly opening to the rest of the world. We, in Australia, have been very closely associated with China and its developments because we welcomed those things, as I say, as being good for China and good for the rest of the world. We deeply regret, and deplore, as I say, what has happened and I hope that this will be a temporary aberration and that there will be a return to the processes which, as I say, we and the rest of the world have to this point welcomed.

JOURNALIST: Are there trade implications for Australia?

PM: It's too early to say that. One should be optimistic and hope that - not merely the expression of view that

I put on behalf of Australia, but the views which I believe are being and will be expressed by the rest of the world will bring the leadership of China to a realisation of two things. One, that as far as China itself is concerned, this is not a viable situation for the future. The imposition of authority by force and by the killing of innocent people, you can't retain a credible authority in that way. Secondly, it is against their interests internationally. So one would hope that there will be change and a reversion to the previous paths of reform and the acceptance of the rights of individuals to express their views.

JOURNALIST: Do you have any concern for Australian nationals?

PM: No, I believe there is no reason to have any concern for Australian nationals. But let me say this, that I have been in contact with events up until the early hours of this morning and then was awake again early this morning and understand that our Embassy in Beijing has been up right through the night, so they are monitoring the situation. To this point there is no indication that we need to have cause for concern. But we have a very efficient Ambassador and staff in Beijing who will be, as I say, watching developments in all their implications, but I have no reason to have concern for the safety of Australian nationals there.

JOURNALIST: Would you consider trade sanctions of some kind if this continues?

PM: It's too early to be talking about that sort of thing. The appropriate sensible course, both from the point of view of China and Australia and the rest of the world, is to make sure that the leaders in China know the unacceptability of this course of action. As I say, steps have already been taken to make that clear as far as we're concerned and I'm sure our friends around the world will be doing the same thing.

JOURNALIST: What about Hong Kong refugees? Are you concerned there may be a flood of refugees, people who want to immigrate from Hong Kong as a result and would Australia accept those people?

PM: Australia's immigration program has clearly laid down. It's determined on the basis of the components which include a refugee component, but we will not be changing that position. The situation, of course, of the refugees in Hong Kong is exacerbated at the moment by an enormous exodus of people from Vietnam to Hong Kong. It is quite clear that the great majority of those are not political refugees, but economic refugees.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, Andrew Peacock said at the Liberal Party conference in Brisbane that he'd like another debate with you and he's written to Mr Barton to organise one for the last Monday of the next election campaign. Will you be in that?

PM: Look we're dealing with a Leader of the Opposition who is devoid of policies and ideas, who is the epitome of grimmickry and emptiness. I won't be accommodating that sort of approach to politics.

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