

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER
PARLIAMENTARY RESOLUTION ON THE
50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE OUTBREAK OF THE
SECOND WORLD WAR
31 AUGUST 1989

Mr Speaker

I move that this House, remembering:

- (a) that 3 September 1989 is the fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War, and
- (b) that nearly 34,000 Australian servicemen and women died in that conflict,

expresses its profound hope that the troubled peace since the end of the War will become a permanent peace in the world, and in particular

- (a) reaffirms its deep and continuing gratitude to those Australian men and women who served their country in that War, both overseas and at home, and its continuing sympathy to the families and friends of those who died or were wounded in combat; and
- (b) resolves to ensure that the sacrifices of those men and women were not made in vain, by meeting our Nation's continuing defence and security responsibilities and by working to preserve and extend the goals for which the War was fought: a peaceful world, in which the human rights and democratic aspirations of all men and women are inviolate.

Mr Speaker

On Sunday the world will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of the Second World War, the second time in our century that the tragedy of global conflict engulfed us.

It is appropriate that the Australian Parliament should mark this event on behalf of the Australian people. As this motion notes, the anniversary of the outbreak of the war is a time for us to recall with deep gratitude the sacrifices made by all those Australian men and women who fought overseas and who served at home during the Second World War. It is a time to recall, in particular, the debt we owe to the 34,000 Australians who died in the conflict, to those who suffer still as a result of their experiences in the war, and to the families and friends of those who died.

So much has changed in the world over the past half century, and in Australia's place in it, that it is sometimes difficult for younger Australians to appreciate how much we owe to the generation which responded so bravely and so enthusiastically to the dreadful challenges of 1939 and the years that followed.

But it was the heavy human and economic price they paid that resulted in the final defeat of fascism and imperialism, and the liberation of the peoples of Europe and the Asia-Pacific region from the crushing weight of two barbarous tyrannies.

And this victory, in turn, permitted the creation of the most positive and dynamic feature of the world we have inherited: the collection of free, democratic and equitable societies in North America, Western Europe and East Asia that has been the driving force behind the development of the more prosperous and peaceful world order that now beckons us.

Australia reaped another benefit from the tragedy of the war: the immeasurable enrichment of our society through the massive influx of new settlers who fled the devastation of their war ravaged homes to build a new life in the clear Australian atmosphere of freedom and opportunity.

It is true that the eventual victory in the Second World War did not secure for all people the democracy and human rights so painfully regained for some. As we have been reminded in the most moving way over the past few months in places as diverse as Beijing, Hungary, Poland and the Baltic states, the democratic impulse has been smothered for long periods throughout many parts of the world.

But it now seems possible, Mr Speaker, that parts of the world which had appeared frozen in repression may finally be able to take their place with the rest of humankind as we move to a more cooperative and prosperous future. We are privileged to be living through an exciting and challenging time in international affairs. For the first time in our often unhappy century we can contemplate the idea of a world in which another global conflict seems improbable.

Appalling problems remain, of course. In places such as the Middle East, where the suffering of the Lebanese people is so tragically prolonged, and the gap between Arabs and Israelis so apparently unbridgeable, and in South Africa under the abhorrent yoke of apartheid, peace still seems a distant and elusive hope.

But, on the whole, we are entitled to permit ourselves a degree of optimism about the future.

So this anniversary, Mr Speaker, gives us opportunity and reason to remember that we have only reached this potentially benign point in human history with the help of the sacrifices that were made by ordinary Australians during the Second World War. It gives us reason, too, to remember one of the great lessons of that war: that peace and security are fundamentally intertwined.

Having recently returned from observing the Kangaroo '89 exercise, I am particularly conscious of the role the men and women of our Defence Force have played not only in time of war, but also in preserving the peace. They serve us and our nation well.

Mr Speaker, just as Australians can look back proudly on the part we played in helping to win the war, so we can reflect with pride on the way we have helped to sustain the peace. In recent years, Australia has made intensive efforts to contribute to an international climate aimed at protecting and expanding peace.

Through our active work in multilateral arms control organisations, by our diplomatic activities in our own region, and through the influence we have exerted within the councils of our alliance relationship, we have been able to work towards a safer world.

In particular, Mr Speaker, we have made our voice heard loudly in support of the very welcome measures that have already been taken by the superpowers to reduce their deadly arsenals of nuclear weapons - although much more has yet to be done; we have worked tirelessly to reduce the risks of other countries joining the nuclear club; and we have been at the leading edge of international efforts to prevent the proliferation of the modern plague of chemical weapons.

And as we consider this motion today, Mr Speaker, Australians are helping to keep the peace on behalf of the United Nations, often in dangerous and uncomfortable conditions, in Namibia, in Cyprus, in Southern Lebanon and on the Golan Heights, and along the battle-scarred border between Iran and Iraq.

I call on Honourable Members to support the motion before the House, and to join me at the conclusion of the consideration of the motion in a moment of silence, recalling the courage of those who died in the Second World War, the resilience of those who survived, and our common hope that by our actions we will repay the debt we owe those Australians in the best way we can: by ensuring that such sacrifices are never again made necessary.
