



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

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I warmly welcome President Bush's proposals for eliminating chemical weapons stockpiles made in his speech to the United Nations General Assembly and which he detailed in a personal letter to me yesterday.

President Bush's announcements are the latest of three significant advances towards banning chemical weapons, which have taken place over the last week. Australia has just hosted the Government Industry Conference Against Chemical Weapons - a unique event in which 65 Governments reaffirmed their commitment to a comprehensive Chemical Weapons Convention at the earliest date and the world's chemical industry declared for the first time its collective support for a Convention.

I congratulate Senator Evans and his Departmental officials for all their hard work, energy and commitment which ensured the success of the Conference.

At their meeting on 22-23 September in Wyoming, Secretary of State Baker and Foreign Minister Shevardnadze signed a memorandum of understanding regarding a bilateral verification experiment and data exchange with the aim of facilitating the process of negotiation, signature and ratification of the Global Convention.

President Bush's proposals build on the progress achieved in the Geneva negotiations, the Canberra Government Industry Conference, and the bilateral discussions between the United States and the Soviet Union, the only two countries which admit to possessing chemical weapons.

There are still challenges to meet as we advance to our common goal of a worldwide ban on these barbarous and indiscriminate weapons. I believe that the events of the last week are a quantum leap forward. I am more hopeful than ever that the remaining substantive issues for negotiation can be completed within the coming year.

The announcement that President Bush and Chairman Gorbachev will hold a summit meeting in the United States in the northern Spring/Summer is also to be warmly welcomed. I am delighted at the considerable range of issues, including indications of further cuts in strategic weapons, on which the USA and USSR were able to make progress in their Wyoming talks.

I fully agree with President Bush, however, that the problem of chemical weapons is a global one, which can only be solved with the active support of many nations. We must all work together. Australia will continue to work tirelessly until the global convention against chemical weapons is a reality and chemical weapons are banned by all countries for all time.