

PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT TO THE HOUSE ON DEATH OF  
LEBANESE PRESIDENT RENE MUAWAD

23 November 1989

MR SPEAKER, I SEEK LEAVE TO MAKE A STATEMENT TO THE  
HOUSE.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS WILL BE AWARE OF THE TRAGIC EVENTS  
WHICH HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN LEBANON OVERNIGHT WITH THE  
BRUTAL ASSASSINATION OF THE NEWLY ELECTED LEBANESE  
PRESIDENT, MR RENE MUAWAD, AND THE DEATH OF AT LEAST  
TWENTY OTHERS.

ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE OF AUSTRALIA, AND  
ON BAHALF OF ALL MEMBERS OF THIS PARLIAMENT, I EXTEND MY  
DEEPEST SYMPATHY TO MR MUAWAD'S WIFE AND FAMILY AND TO  
THE FAMILIES OF THOSE WHO WERE KILLED WITH HIM. THE  
FACT THAT THIS BRUTAL MURDER TOOK PLACE ON LEBANON'S  
NATIONAL DAY ONLY HEIGHTENS OUR SENSE OF OUTRAGE AT SUCH  
A CALLOUS ACT.

MR MUAWAD'S DEATH COMES A MERE SEVENTEEN DAYS AFTER HIS  
ELECTION AS PRESIDENT AT A SESSION OF THE LEBANESE  
PARLIAMENT. THAT SAME SESSION OF PARLIAMENT ALSO  
RATIFIED THE AGREEMENT OF NATIONAL RECONCILIATION  
REACHED AT TAIF IN SAUDI ARABIA BY A MEETING OF LEBANESE  
MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT.

THE TAIF AGREEMENT WAS SEEN AS A HISTORIC BREAK-THROUGH IN THE SEARCH FOR A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT TO THE UNDERLYING PROBLEMS WHICH HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE TRAGIC CYCLE OF VIOLENCE IN LEBANON OVER THE PAST FOURTEEN YEARS. AUSTRALIA AND OTHER WESTERN COUNTRIES HAVE CONSISTENTLY SUPPORTED THE ARAB LEAGUE NEGOTIATIONS WHICH LED TO THE AGREEMENT. THE TAIF AGREEMENT RECOMMENDED A SET OF POLITICAL REFORMS, SUPPORTED BY REPRESENTATIVES OF ALL COMMUNITIES IN LEBANON AND AIMED AT CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR THE RESTORATION OF LEBANON'S TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY, UNITY AND SOVEREIGNTY. THE GOAL WAS TO REBUILD A FREE AND INDEPENDENT LEBANON IN WHICH PEOPLE OF ALL BELIEFS COULD LIVE IN PEACE AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE NATION'S PROSPERITY AND DEVELOPMENT.

IT TOOK IMMENSE COURAGE ON THE PART OF THE MEMBERS OF THE LEBANESE PARLIAMENT TO COME TOGETHER AND NEGOTIATE AN AGREEMENT FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL LEBANESE IN THE FACE OF BRUTAL THREATS.

MR MUAWAD WAS A MAN COMMITTED TO PEACE AND HIS PREPAREDNESS TO STAND FOR THE PRESIDENCY WAS TESTIMONY TO HIS COURAGE. AS HE SAID IN A SPEECH FOLLOWING HIS ELECTION:

I AM ONE OF YOU AND YOU KNOW ME AS A MAN OF RECONCILIATION, DEDICATED TO THE CONCEPT OF UNITY;

A MAN WHO HAS GAMBLED HIS LIFE IN RETURN FOR THE RECONCILIATION OF ALL LEBANESE, IRRESPECTIVE OF THEIR PERSUASION. RECONCILIATION EXCLUDES NOBODY, EVEN THOSE WHO INSIST ON EXCLUDING THEMSELVES. RECONCILIATION IS FOR ALL AND CAN ACCOMMODATE ALL.

LET US HOPE THAT PRESIDENT MUAWAD, LIKE THE LEGIONS OF OTHER LEBANESE VICTIMS OF THE VIOLENCE, DID NOT DIE IN VAIN. LET US HOPE THAT THERE ARE OTHER LEBANESE WITH THE COURAGE TO CONTINUE THE PROCESS BEGUN AT TAIF.

MR MUAWAD'S DEATH WILL BE A SIGNIFICANT SET-BACK TO LEBANON'S SEARCH FOR PEACE AND STABILITY AND MAY IGNITE FURTHER CONFLICT. IT IS NOW UP TO THOSE REMAINING IN THE LEBANESE PARLIAMENT TO RESCUE THE TAIF AGREEMENT. TRAGICALLY THAT TASK HAS BEEN MADE MUCH MORE DIFFICULT BY PRESIDENT MUAWAD'S DEATH.

ONLY YESTERDAY I PLANTED A CEDAR TREE IN COMMEMORATION OF THE LEBANESE NATIONAL DAY AND POINTED TO THE TAIF AGREEMENT AND MR MUAWAD'S ELECTION AS THE MOST PROMISING SIGNS OF PEACE IN LEBANON FOR A LONG TIME. TODAY, IN THE FACE OF THE APPALLING EVENTS OF LAST NIGHT I CAN ONLY REPEAT, IN SADNESS, THE CALL I MADE YESTERDAY IN HOPE, FOR ALL PARTIES IN LEBANON TO CO-OPERATE IN THE PROCESS OF NATIONAL RECONCILIATION; TO BRING ABOUT A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT WHICH WILL ENABLE MUSLIMS AND

CHRISTIANS TO LIVE SIDE-BY-SIDE IN PEACE.

MY THOUGHTS ARE WITH THE AUSTRALIAN LEBANESE COMMUNITY WHO ONLY YESTERDAY WERE CELEBRATING LEBANON'S INDEPENDENCE DAY AND THE PROMISING SIGNS OF HOPE FOR THE FUTURE. THOSE HOPES HAVE BEEN SERIOUSLY SET BACK, BUT NOT DESTROYED. IT IS CLEARER THAN EVER TODAY THAT THE ONLY LASTING SOLUTION TO THE LEBANESE CONFLICT WILL BE A NEGOTIATED POLITICAL ONE. A CONTINUATION OF THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE WILL SOLVE NOTHING.

I CALL ON ALL LEBANESE AND OTHERS INVOLVED IN THAT COUNTRY'S CRISIS TO EXERCISE RESTRAINT AND TO TRY AGAIN TO REBUILD THE PROCESS BEGUN AT TAIF.