



PRIME MINISTER

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E & OE - PROOF ONLY

JOURNALIST: Can you give us an update of the situation in Bougainville?

PM: No, I'll be getting a report, a detailed report in the morning from my Ministers. But the position of Australia in regard to Papua New Guinea and Bougainville should be clearly understood. As I've said, there will be no Australian troops going into Papua New Guinea to take sides in this issue. Papua New Guinea, despite the misapprehension of some people and the implications of some commentators is a totally sovereign and independent nation and it must resolve its own internal disputes. Having said that, some months ago I personally took the initiative to ensure that should be any deterioration of the situation in Bougainville which put at significant risk Australian lives, of Australian residents there, that we should have the understanding and agreement from the Government of Papua New Guinea that we would be able to move in there to protect those lives. That's the position. We will do whatever is necessary to protect Australian lives if that becomes the situation that requires our action. But we will not be involved in the internal dispute.

JOURNALIST: Australian lives are already at risk though aren't they?

PM: Of course they are at risk. But what we're talking about is the situation reaching a stage where there is general risk to Australian lives or a situation for instance where hostages could be taken. Now we were not going to allow a situation as far as I was concerned that if that position arose we would then get into a negotiating position with the Government of Papua New Guinea and waste days and days if that situation were to arise. We've got the understanding in place. I trust that it doesn't reach that position but it's fairly grave.

JOURNALIST: What about the possibility of more equipment, like helicopters?

PM: Well as I've said in response to questions like that in the last couple of days, I'll wait and get the detailed report from my Ministers at the beginning of this week.

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JOURNALIST: What would the Australian Government do in the event of a kidnapping?

PM: You don't expect me to answer a hypothetical question like that surely.

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