



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

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The Government is concerned at the actions of the Soviet authorities in cutting essential supplies to Lithuania. These actions are inconsistent with what in fact is urgently needed now - a genuine dialogue between Moscow and Vilnius aimed at achieving a negotiated settlement in an atmosphere free of tension.

I have written to President Gorbachev expressing our concern and urging the Soviet Government to take early steps towards a negotiated settlement on this issue. I am hopeful that his policy of perestroika, which has resulted in so many positive changes in just a few years on the international stage, will also influence the Soviet Government's actions in this matter and prevent an already delicate situation from deteriorating. Clearly, it carries potentially serious consequences for the improving international climate.

Australia has already recognised for many years the legal right of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to exist as independent States. Like many other Western Governments, we have refused to accept in international law the incorporation of the three Baltic States into the Soviet Union in 1940.

It is the Government's earnest hope that this issue can be handled peacefully, with sensitivity, and with respect for human rights.

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