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PRIME MINISTER



FOR MEDIA

14 JANUARY 1991

The Australian Government deplores the Soviet Government's use of force over recent days in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania.

The use of force is inconsistent with President Gorbachev's past emphasis on seeking a peaceful and negotiated resolution to the question of Baltic independence.

The Soviet military's actions in Lithuania threaten to undermine the more favourable attitude of Western countries towards the Soviet Union since the reform process began. They have the potential to affect the future course of co-operation between East and West.

Australia does not recognise under international law the incorporation of the Baltic States in the Soviet Union. The aspiration of Lithuania and the other Baltic States for independence has been clearly reaffirmed by their democratically elected Parliaments. The resort to force fails to acknowledge the fundamental democratic mandate of the Lithuanian Government and Parliament. Resolution of the status of the Baltic States is a complex matter, but the use of force will be not produce a viable solution.

I urge the Soviet Government to reconsider its despatch of additional military forces to the Lithuanian capital. I urge the Soviet authorities to exercise restraint, so that an already delicate situation is not worsened.

The Australian Government will be carefully watching future developments in Lithuania, in the hope that the tragedy which appears to be in the making can be avoided and peaceful dialogue restored.

We are registering our deep concern about developments in Lithuania with the Soviet Government. I have asked Dr Blewett to call in the Soviet Ambassador this afternoon to make these points.