



PRIME MINISTER

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS CLUB
SYDNEY - 23 SEPTEMBER 1991**

Last year I addressed this club in December. It was a few days after the United Nations Security Council had authorised military action to force Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait. We all hoped then that force would not be necessary. But we accepted that if Iraq would not comply voluntarily with the UN's demands, then Australia, along with many other nations, would commit forces to combat in support of the United Nations.

I explained to you here last year our reasons for taking that momentous decision. I spoke about the importance of the Kuwait crisis for the shape of the world order in the post Cold War era.

Well, Saddam Hussein did not draw back; the international coalition did go to war on behalf of the United Nations; and of course they were very swiftly successful. We will probably never know the true scale of Iraq's casualties; the coalition's were mercifully few. But for all who suffered we grieve. Even short wars impose a terrible cost.

So I think it is proper that I return this year to the propositions I was putting to you last year, to see how the world has gone since the Gulf War; to see whether it is indeed a better place; and to see what more needs to be done.

Looking back over the past nine months, one would have to say that there are many solid grounds for satisfaction about the way the international community is developing.

- . First, of course, there was our swift success in the Gulf itself. Since the First World War, the international community has been trying to build the institutions and summon the will to resist military aggression. This year, for the first time, we made it work, and that has made us all safer.
- . In the aftermath of the Gulf War, the international community organised an unprecedentedly swift and effective response to the plight of Kurdish refugees in and around northern Iraq. Australian soldiers joined an enormous international humanitarian effort which transcended international boundaries, and the United Nations showed unprecedented initiative and resourcefulness in protecting Iraq's Kurds from their own government.

- . Elsewhere in the Middle East, the end of the Gulf War has indeed, as we hoped and believed it would, brought a new urge for peace between Israel and her Arab neighbours, and new hope to the Palestinians. The Gulf War showed the people of the Middle East that they have interests in common, and taught them that they can cooperate to serve those interests. The present moves towards a peace conference are only a beginning. But they are the best beginning we have seen in decades, and we urge all sides to let the conference happen, and to make it work.
- . In South Africa, while violence and prevarication have impeded the establishment of an interim government and the commencement of constitutional negotiations, the promises of President de Klerk's historic speech of 1 February 1991 have been largely fulfilled. The legislative pillars of apartheid have been dismantled, political prisoners have been freed, and exiles can return. Our impatience for the establishment of the new South Africa should not blind us to the enormous progress that has been made. I will return to this issue later.
- . The Australian-French initiative to prevent mining in Antarctica and preserve the wilderness continent has been crowned by the agreement this year to an absolute ban for fifty years, with strong provisions for its indefinite extension. This is one of the most far-reaching international environmental agreements so far. And next year the UN Conference on Environment and Development will aim to extend international action on the environment still further.
- . Cambodia's factions have at last agreed on a settlement process which will lead to free and fair elections for a national government under UN sponsorship. For Australia this is specially gratifying. The Cambodian problem has threatened the stability of our own region, and Australia, through Gareth Evans, has contributed much to the UN plan.
- . Also in our own region, many of the more durable relics of the Cold War are breaking up. North and South Korea have been admitted to the United Nations, holding out hope for a peaceful future for the Peninsula. And China and Taiwan have agreed to participate together in APEC.
- . Almost unnoticed, the conclusion of the START treaty between the Soviet Union and the United States committing them to cut their nuclear arsenals for the first time, marked a stage in the end of the Cold War as decisive as the collapse of the Berlin Wall.

- And lastly, of course, there is the Russian Revolution. There is no irony in that phrase. It is now obvious that the events of the past month take the people of the Soviet Union back again to the point at which, in 1917, they took the path of communism, and offer them again the choice of freedom. Having by their own actions overthrown the largest, most powerful and most intrusive state apparatus the world has ever seen, there can be no doubt what their choice will be. Already, to our great delight, the Baltic States have been restored to independence.

All that adds up to a lot of good news. I do not of course claim that all of these happy developments are the result of the Gulf War. But I do claim that all of these developments, in so many different areas, show that we were right to believe that the end of the Cold War offered not just an end to rivalry and terror, but a beginning of cooperation and hope; that there is indeed a new world order; inchoate, amorphous, but real.

We can see that reality in all of these developments. We see people and nations moved by the same group of instincts and aspirations; peace and freedom from aggression, democratic institutions of representative government, the rule of law, respect for human rights, the economic opportunities of a free market, and respect for the environment.

And in every case we see a new willingness - indeed a new determination - to cooperate internationally to fulfil these aspirations.

Your profession places a premium on scepticism, and there have been plenty of sceptics about the new world order. But journalists, and foreign correspondents in particular, have their own quite central place in this new world order. Because one of its features is a growing acceptance of the role of the international free press.

Journalists under air attack in Tel Aviv and Riyadh - and Baghdad; among the Kurds in the squalid mountains of the Turkey-Iraq border; and with the people of Moscow around the Russian Parliament in August, have done their vital part to build the determination to cooperate which has made the new world order work. So don't knock it - you're a big part of it.

And journalists are part of it again right now in Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav crisis is important, not just because the lives and welfare of millions of people are at stake, many of whom have close links to Australia; nor is the crisis important only because it threatens the peace and stability of an important portion of Europe.

It is also important because, like the Gulf Crisis last year, the way the world responds to the tragedy in Yugoslavia will help to define in important ways the sort of world we are to live in. Like the Gulf, it too is a test of our new world order.

And that is why Yugoslavia matters. Through our Yugoslavian communities, Australia has a direct and vivid stake in the crisis through the most fundamental human connections of family and friends. But beyond even that link, Yugoslavia matters to Australia and other nations all over the world, because it matters to all of us that we live in a world in which the international community will not stand idly by and watch thousands die and millions suffer.

The world has a right to expect that we can find a means to end such senseless violence. It certainly has a right to demand that we try everything that might work. That is why I have from the outset rejected the reasoning of those who argue that the United Nations should not even try to address this problem, and who can give no better reason than that such a thing has never been done before.

In 1991 it should be unthinkable that the United Nations could stand back from a crisis that threatens the lives of millions, and the peace of Europe, on a point of precedent.

And we should all be deeply disappointed if we find the limits of the new world order drawn in the fields and towns of Yugoslavia. I have higher hopes.

That is why I have written to the Secretary-General of the United Nations to urge that the issue should, as a necessary first step, be brought before the Security Council urgently. I am glad to see that my call has been widely supported, and a meeting is now expected later this week.

Ladies and gentlemen

Australia's interests are engaged in Yugoslavia, as they are engaged throughout the world in the emergence of the new values I have spoken about.

- . Australia's security has been enhanced as nuclear confrontation has waned, and as the United Nations has shown that it can respond decisively to aggression.
- . Our economic interests are enhanced as market forces encourage growth in economies long held stagnant behind a wall of centralised bureaucratic command.
- . Our environment is enhanced as more governments are forced by their own people to take greater account of environmental values.

And less tangibly but perhaps most importantly, our humanity is amplified as more and more people around the world start to realise the universal aspirations to dignity, security and prosperity through the institutions of democratic government and market economics.

For every culture and society around the world there will be a unique way of translating that society's aspirations into effective political and economic institutions.

We in Australia understand that fundamental human aspirations may be realised in different ways, reflecting different cultural and political traditions. Within internationally-accepted standards of human rights, different societies place different values on discipline and on freedom; on cohesion and on individuality; on respect for elders and on self-expression. We should not be disturbed by these differences; they exist between neighbours everywhere.

It is an essential element of Australia's cultural tradition that we respect and tolerate values and perspectives that are different from our own. We feel no embarrassment about discussing such differences, because we accept that people of good will may differ on significant issues without respecting one another any the less.

But I am sure that this is not a uniquely Australian or Western characteristic. I have found that some of our neighbours are perfectly happy to discuss these cultural differences. I am sure that they do not intend that Australia should conform to their traditions, just as I know that we do not expect them to conform to ours.

But I know that they do expect that we should make an effort to understand their traditions and institutions before we comment on them, and we expect the same of them. I would have to say that these expectations have not always been met from either side.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Each country has to work out its own way to meet the needs and hopes of its people. But there is great scope for international cooperation to support individual countries' efforts to achieve a better future for their own people, and to the benefit of us all.

Few international bodies are better equipped than the Commonwealth to foster such cooperation. The Commonwealth brings together both developed and developing countries. It draws on the strengths of its politically and culturally diverse membership to address the important issues involved in the development of what we might call 'good government' in an informal and consensual way. By 'good government', I mean the institutions and practices which turn aspirations to democracy and prosperity into practical reality.

At the Commonwealth leaders' meeting in Harare next month we will be looking at the role of the Commonwealth into the next century. Work carried out since the last meeting in Kuala Lumpur has suggested that good government is one area in which the Commonwealth can and should take a larger role.

Clearly this is a role for the Commonwealth which accords precisely with broader international developments.

I look forward to discussions on this with other Commonwealth leaders in Harare. We will be looking at ways to build on our shared traditions and institutions to enhance democratic processes and sound economic practices within Commonwealth member countries.

In many respects the Commonwealth is already leading the way in providing practical assistance to help member countries develop good government. The Commonwealth Secretariat is running training programs on electoral procedures for member countries, and it is providing electoral observer missions in Bangladesh, Guyana, and Zambia.

Within the Commonwealth membership itself, there has been a heartening shift towards the principles and practices of good government. Multi-party democracy is becoming more widely entrenched, and economic policies are becoming more market-oriented.

In Africa, for example, Ghana is making steady economic progress under a freer market. Nigeria's transitional administration is moving towards multi-party democracy. Zambia's first multi-party elections since independence will take place in October, and the Commonwealth will assist in the achievement of this national milestone.

Namibia, only recently independent, is already showing all the signs of a robust democracy and a growing economy. I am proud of Australia's role in assisting that process, and encouraged by the early indications that a stable and functioning democracy has taken a permanent hold in Namibia.

One area where we in Australia and the Commonwealth at large feel a special obligation to help is in the development of just political and economic institutions in South Africa.

South Africa is now approaching a crucial stage of transition from the shameful era of apartheid to what we hope will be a full non-racial democracy.

That South Africa has reached this point, after so many hard years of oppression for the majority of its people, is a testament to the vision and courage of Nelson Mandela and other black leaders, and the foresight of President de Klerk, and to the people of South Africa themselves.

But South Africa's substantial progress towards a free non-racial democratic future is also due in no small measure to the determination and cooperation of the international community in adopting and maintaining sanctions against the apartheid regime.

The Commonwealth has played a leading role in developing and implementing international sanctions. I take pride in Australia's role in this; we have been consistently at the forefront of those who have sought to apply international pressure to South Africa to bring it to its senses. And we remain at the forefront now in formulating appropriate international responses to the process of reform in South Africa.

The barriers in South Africa have not and will not come down overnight. Dismantling apartheid will be a long and difficult process. The continuing bloodshed on the streets is a tragic testimony to the culture of violence built up over many years of distrust and suspicion.

The recent peace accord is a heartening sign but it will be some time before real peace can be guaranteed. International pressure will still be required to ensure that the reforms underway in South Africa are brought to fruition and the aspirations of its people fully realised.

This was recognised by the Commonwealth Committee of Foreign Ministers on South Africa at their recent meeting in New Delhi. The Committee has recommended to Heads of Government in Harare that the reforms implemented to date be acknowledged by the immediate lifting of so-called people-to-people sanctions - including visas, airlinks, and cultural contacts. Trade, economic and financial sanctions will be maintained until further specified progress has been made. We hope that will not take long.

And we must remember that in South Africa, as in so many other countries, the political revolution is only the start. Establishing a resilient, steadily-growing economy which can fulfil the aspirations of all South Africa's people will be an enormous challenge. South Africa's leaders must be careful not to raise unreal expectations in their followers. The struggle for economic prosperity will be no easier than the struggle for political freedom.

The urgent need to rebuild South Africa's economy after the ravages of apartheid means that sanctions should not be applied any longer than is necessary to secure essential political reforms. And we must start now to foster economic as well as political reform.

My Government has already established training and economic planning assistance programs for South Africa. The Commonwealth is also playing a leading role. A Commonwealth working group has studied the needs of a post-apartheid democratic South Africa and in Harare we will be looking at ways in which Commonwealth members can assist in meeting those needs.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, South Africa's economic regeneration will require the same condition that makes other economies flourish; a free international trading system. That system is now under a grave threat.

Ladies and gentlemen

Amidst all the heartening developments over the past year, in one area the world has moved backwards. Against the trend, the world trade negotiations in the Uruguay Round have scarcely moved since last year when the Brussels ministerial meeting which was meant to conclude the Round fizzled out.

You will all know where we stand on the principle issues of the Round. We have sought to bring agricultural trade under the GATT for the first time, so as to reform the gross distortion in this sector of world trade which hurts us so badly. We have succeeded, through the Cairns Group, in bringing agriculture to centre stage. To secure a result we have been prepared to make major concessions both in agriculture and in other areas.

You will know that we hold the Europeans principally responsible for the impasse. But I do not want here to recite our grievances. I want to make a more general point. I have said that the events of the past year have confirmed that there is a new world order, and that it is based on principles of cooperation and liberality. We have seen what can now be achieved through international cooperation which even five years ago would have been undreamt of. And we understand that all of our nations live by trade; it is the foundation of our prosperity.

So how can it be that in 1991, the nations of the world cannot agree to reform the GATT to everyone's advantage? With so much at stake, why can't we get a result? Because I very much fear that without the GATT, the achievements of the new world order will be put at risk. That is why it is so imperative that other vital issues like Yugoslavia - important as they are - do not prevent world leaders from becoming deeply and personally engaged in the complex issues of the Uruguay round. There is no more important issue. Quite simply, the future of the international community depends on it.

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