



PRIME MINISTER

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
LAUNCHING APPEAL FOR THE JOHN CURTIN CENTRE
CURTIN UNIVERSITY
PERTH - 6 OCTOBER 1991**

Thank you for your welcome, Vice Chancellor.

May I at the outset express, on behalf of the Government and people of Australia, our gratitude for the enthusiasm you and your colleagues at Curtin University have brought to this project and for your foundational work towards making it a reality.

Ladies and gentlemen

It is altogether fitting that we should come here today to inaugurate the Appeal for this unique Australian project - the John Curtin Centre.

The time, the place, the purpose - these are things which make our presence here today trebly appropriate.

First, the time.

Fifty years tomorrow John Curtin became Prime Minister of Australia.

John Curtin would have been the last person to see himself as a man of destiny. But certainly, for Australia, his call to office was a turning point in our destiny.

In the two years during which Australia had already been at war with the Axis Powers, this quintessential man of peace had prepared himself - indeed, I believe it could be said, had steeled himself - for the highest responsibilities of war-time leadership.

When it came, as a result of an unprecedented crisis in the Australian Parliament, he was ready - not just to take over the reins of office, but to take Australia through its supreme ordeal which was to begin with Pearl Harbour two months later.

So the timing of this occasion, fifty years on, is singularly appropriate.

Then, the place - this University which bears his name.

John Curtin loved Western Australia and Perth - not just because it had been his home since 1917; not just because this was where his family were, his children growing up; and not just because the electors of Fremantle had given him the opportunity for a parliamentary career. Perth had given him a home and a haven at a dark period in his personal life. And he found here, among the people of Western Australia, a special simplicity and generosity of spirit. He often spoke of that. He responded to it. He was always grateful for it.

I come to the third and most important reason for our presence - the purpose of the John Curtin Centre.

Professor Maloney will later give you a brief outline of the multi-faceted nature of the project - the repository of the Curtin and related archives, a library, a gallery, an audio-visual theatre, and an international study centre. This special combination of facilities will make the Centre unique in Australia, and, I should imagine, unique in the region.

But the concept goes beyond these important practical purposes.

It will stand as a national tribute and an international symbol - not only a tribute to the life and work of John Curtin but as a symbol of the friendship and cooperation in war and peace between Australia and the United States of America.

That is why President George Bush has already expressed his warm support for this project.

And I emphasise here the completely bi-partisan - or rather, the non-partisan - nature of the project and what it represents.

That fact is attested by your representative presence here today, and, if I might mention just one name, the very welcome presence of Sir Charles Court, who, with Dr Carmen Lawrence, Premier of Western Australia and the Leader of the Federal Opposition, Dr John Hewson, joins me as a Patron of this appeal.

Ladies and gentlemen

Last night I had the honour of delivering the John Curtin Memorial Lecture at this University.

I pointed out that Curtin had foreseen the need for an Australian-American partnership as early as 1936, in times when such a concept had none of the acceptability it acquired through the supreme necessities of Australia's fight for survival during the war.

Indeed, when he said, in the House of Representatives in November 1936, that Australia should work for closer relations with the United States - his words were "a degree of fraternity" - he was thinking not only in terms of an armed partnership in war, but of a partnership to maintain peace in the Pacific and Indian Ocean regions.

It was a proposal of extraordinary vision for its times, for, as history has unfolded, it was nothing less than a charter for the next half century.

Not the least remarkable aspect of his vision, as expressed in that speech of November 1936, was that he acknowledged that the relation between Australia and the United States would sometimes involve differences, in trade matters for example, for all the overriding community of interest and common bonds.

Curtin was a visionary, but he was also a realist.

It will be fifty years in December since Curtin made his famous call to America.

That will be at the end of a year which has seen the real meaning of the Australian-American partnership illustrated with greater force and clarity than in any year since the Second World War.

It began with our two countries again allied in a war - but this time, as a result of the United Nations accepting the role and responsibilities envisaged for it by men like Curtin and the great Franklin Delano Roosevelt - both of whom did not live to see the final victory for the cause for which they had sacrificed so much.

It has been a year which has seen the triumph of the spirit of democracy over totalitarianism - the issue at the very heart of the Alliance formed fifty years ago.

Above all, in the same week in which we are recalling the formation of the first Curtin Government, the President of the United States has taken his mighty step forward in the supreme cause of human civilisation - the removal of the threat of the nuclear holocaust.

And we can now see that this moment of hope for humanity could never have occurred, had it not been for the long vigilance of the United States and its allies, over these agonising years through which we have passed together.

Ladies and gentlemen

If we consider the John Curtin Centre against the background of these events, the launch of this appeal could hardly occur under more auspicious circumstances.

I commend it most wholeheartedly to all my fellow-Australians, not just as a tribute to the past, but as a symbol of hope for our deepest aspirations for peace and democracy.

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