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**PARLIAMENTARY STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER
ON HIS VISIT TO ZIMBABWE AND THE
1991 COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING, HARARE
WEDNESDAY, 6 NOVEMBER 1991**

Mr Speaker

I seek leave to report to the House on the outcome of the visit I made to Zimbabwe between 14 and 24 October.

My visit had four main components: a meeting of the High-Level Appraisal Group on the future of the Commonwealth, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting itself, a short bilateral visit to Zimbabwe at the invitation of President Robert Mugabe, and my separate bilateral discussions with a number of Heads of Government of countries important to Australia. In all its elements, my visit significantly advanced important Australian foreign and international economic policy interests.

Mr Speaker

The High-Level Appraisal Group on the future of the Commonwealth was established by the 1989 Commonwealth Heads of Government in Kuala Lumpur to examine Commonwealth priorities for the 1990s and beyond, and to consider the adequacy of Commonwealth institutions to meet these priorities. It was the first review of the Commonwealth's priorities to be undertaken by Heads of Government. Ten Commonwealth leaders took part, under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Mahathir of Malaysia. Our meeting, on 15 October, considered preparatory documents prepared by a special group of senior officials, and by the Commonwealth Secretary-General. The main result of our deliberations was the draft Harare Declaration on the future of the Commonwealth, which was later endorsed by all Commonwealth Heads of Government.

My colleagues on the High-Level Appraisal Group agreed that the Commonwealth should seek to make a distinctive contribution in particular areas where it has a comparative advantage and proven expertise, and where its efforts complement, rather than compete with, larger or more specialised multilateral agencies.

A particular priority which we identified for the Commonwealth is the protection and promotion of the fundamental political values enshrined in the Commonwealth's Singapore Declaration of 1971. These values include democracy, democratic processes and institutions, the rule of law, just and honest government and fundamental human rights.

The steady spread of these values around the world has been one of the most heartening international developments of the past few years. And I was struck by the degree of commitment to them which I found among my colleagues in Harare. But we all recognised that the Commonwealth countries are not perfect in this regard.

At Harare it was agreed that Commonwealth members should help one another to do better by developing institutions of democratic government. We recognised that in these areas the Commonwealth's unique strengths of a shared heritage and common language can contribute to a pragmatic and cooperative approach to solving problems.

We are already seeing that happen. The Commonwealth's role in election monitoring, guidelines for which were approved by the High-Level Appraisal Group, is one important area of assistance. The President of the Senate, Senator Sibraa, and the Hon Member for MacKellar have been involved in just such a monitoring exercise in Zambia in the past week.

The peaceful and orderly transfer of power in Zambia over the weekend is a sign of hope that the democratic principles of the Commonwealth will at last take deep root and flourish in Africa. I have sent messages both to Zambia's new president Mr Chiluba and to his predecessor, my old Commonwealth colleague Kenneth Kaunda, congratulating them on this historic achievement.

Other priorities which we identified for the Commonwealth include the promotion of sustainable development; further help to bring about a free, democratic, non-racial and prosperous South Africa; action to combat drug trafficking and abuse; and help with the particular economic and security problems of small Commonwealth states, many of which are in our own region.

Mr Speaker

The full Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting was held between 16 and 21 October. Forty-seven countries were represented, forty-three of them by their Heads of State or Prime Ministers. President Mugabe of Zimbabwe chaired the meeting.

Issues on the agenda for the meeting included global trends and prospects, South Africa, the world economic situation, environmental issues and Commonwealth functional cooperation.

On South Africa, the principal issue facing CHOGM this year was to determine the Commonwealth's response to the fundamental process of reform which had been initiated in South Africa during the two years since Commonwealth Heads of Government last met.

The major steps which have been taken in South Africa to dismantle apartheid and commence the work of building a non-racial constitution were symbolised for us in Harare by the presence amongst us of Nelson Mandela. Two years ago when CHOGM met in Kuala Lumpur, Mandela was still a prisoner in a South African jail.

The change of heart in the South African Government symbolised by his release, and by the dismantling of the legislative pillars of apartheid, has been a spectacular vindication of the principled stance and practical measures that the Commonwealth, often at Australia's urging, has adopted on the South Africa issue in recent years.

But equally the massive progress in South Africa is a challenge to the Commonwealth to move with the times. It must respond to that progress in an imaginative and forward-looking way which will ensure that the Commonwealth continues to lead international opinion in working for the well-being of all South Africa's peoples.

This is a challenge which the Commonwealth Heads of Government took up with alacrity. Even before CHOGM proper began, at the High Level Appraisal Group meeting on October 15, my Commonwealth colleagues showed their determination to ensure that the Commonwealth remained relevant and constructive.

They were determined in particular to establish a direct and vigorous dialogue with the principal parties to the reform process in South Africa, so that the Commonwealth could learn directly from those involved how it could best contribute to that process. CHOGM decided to despatch the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Chief Anyaoku, to South Africa. This week he will explore with the principal parties how the Commonwealth might assist in lending momentum to the process of negotiating a new constitution. Australia strongly supports this forward-looking step.

The same spirit was evident in the discussions of the future of Commonwealth sanctions on South Africa. The meeting recognised the significance which sanctions undoubtedly had in bringing the South African Government to the negotiating table.

And they recognised that as long as the process of reform continued to be frustrated and obstructed by acts of bad faith, sanctions would be important to maintaining the momentum of negotiations.

But equally they recognised - as Nelson Mandela himself said - that sanctions are doing serious damage to South Africa's economy, and to the welfare of ordinary South Africans. For that reason, sanctions should not be kept in place any longer than necessary.

In the light of these considerations, CHOGM decided to adopt the recommendations of the Commonwealth Committee of Foreign Ministers on South Africa (CFMSA) for a phased approach to the lifting of sanctions. The CFMSA's recommendations strongly reflected Australia's long-standing views, which had been vigorously put forward by Senator Evans at successive CFMSA meetings. We were therefore delighted with this outcome.

In accepting the CFMSA proposals, the CHOGM agreed to the immediate lifting of people-to-people sanctions, covering visa and consular matters, cultural and scientific ties, and air links. We are already implementing these decisions.

Trade and investment sanctions will be lifted once appropriate transitional mechanisms have been agreed, and financial sanctions will be lifted when a new constitution has been agreed. The arms embargo will be lifted only when a non-racial, democratic government is in place.

I was heartened by the views put to me by Nelson Mandela in my long and detailed private discussions with him on the prospects for reform in South Africa and the future of the Commonwealth's role. Mr Mandela told me he was confident that the pace of reform would allow rapid lifting of both trade and investment sanctions and financial sanctions. His confidence reflected a belief that the South African Government shared his concern about the effect of the sanctions on South Africa's economy. It also reflected his belief that the Government accepts that transitional arrangements must be finalised quickly, as it recognises that it cannot continue to be both umpire and player in the reform process.

The Commonwealth is now looking to the future South Africa. Its new focus, underscored in Harare, will be to help the people of South Africa manage the changes now upon them in ways that will ensure a new non-racial nation re-enters the international community in the best possible shape.

Australia is helping develop the democratic anti-apartheid movement's role in the sound economic management of post-apartheid South Africa. This was cited by a number of Commonwealth colleagues as a model for the sort of help the Commonwealth can provide.

Mr Speaker

The Commonwealth meeting unanimously endorsed the proposals of the CFMSA Ministers on the re-entry of South African sporting bodies into international competition as long as they achieve unity and are endorsed by the appropriate non-racial sporting organisation in South Africa. It was particularly gratifying that we were able to have included in the meeting's communique specific reference to the Commonwealth's support for South African participation in the cricket World Cup in Australia and New Zealand early next year, and that the International Cricket Conference has since agreed to this.

Mr Speaker

In the discussion of the world economic situation, Commonwealth leaders demonstrated their firm commitment to greater trade liberalisation. This diverse group of countries - developed and developing, and from every continent - recognised the perils of a drift towards greater protectionism.

They called for a successful, substantive and comprehensive outcome to the Uruguay Round, laying particular emphasis on a marked reduction in trade barriers and other distortions in agricultural markets. I told my colleagues that it would be tragic if, at the very moment the Cold War has ended and the world's hopes for peace seem closer to fulfilment than ever before, we were to undercut our achievement by a reversion to selfish, but finally self-defeating, forms of protectionism.

I was heartened by the strong support this message received from my Commonwealth colleagues. Like all Honourable Members, I hope that in the critical months ahead the leaders of the major trading nations take careful note of the message sent to them by one quarter of the world's population through their leaders in Harare.

Mr Speaker

The Commonwealth leaders also emphasised their continuing support for the protection of the global environment and the achievement of sustainable development. They pledged themselves to work for a successful outcome of the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development next year. I announced my own intention to attend that meeting, as did many of my colleagues. Commonwealth members will be cooperating closely in the months ahead to help ensure the success of this important meeting.

Another issue discussed at the meeting, which I should mention briefly, was the report of a working party on the role of sport in the Commonwealth, including the Commonwealth Games. As Honourable Members will know, both Adelaide and Kuala Lumpur have applied to hold the 1998 Commonwealth Games. I made clear, in both my formal and informal contacts with my colleagues, that although Australia supports the principle of involving as many countries as possible in the future of the Games, we firmly believed Adelaide has the best bid for 1998 and that we would continue to work for its success.

Mr Speaker

In addition to my participation in the formal CHOGM sessions, I was also able to undertake a range of bilateral discussions with leaders of a number of countries important to Australia. Among these were Prime Ministers John Major of the United Kingdom, Brian Mulroney of Canada, Jim Bolger of New Zealand, Rabbie Namaliu of Papua New Guinea, Dr Mahathir of Malaysia, Goh Chok Tong of Singapore and Rao of India. I was also able to hold discussions with President Vassiliou of Cyprus and Prime Minister Fenech-Adami of Malta as well as the Heads of Government of our Pacific Commonwealth neighbours.

My stop-over in Mauritius gave me an opportunity to talk at length to Mr Madun Dulloo, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Natural Resources about our growing economic relationship with Mauritius, our second largest trading partner in Africa.

It would not be appropriate for me to canvas the details of all my bilateral discussions, but there are a couple of specific points which I should mention.

Prime Minister Rao and I had a particularly useful discussion of Australia's relations with India and of the opportunities now opened up by his government's far-reaching moves to liberalise the Indian economy. He and I agreed that we should put renewed effort into our existing trade, economic and broader political exchanges. As he put it to me, "it is now time to take the initiative and push hard" to develop our relationship to its full potential. Officials from both countries will be working actively towards this goal.

With Dr Mahathir, as has been reported, I had a very amicable and productive conversation about a range of economic and political issues, including the tensions which had entered our bilateral relationship as a result of Malaysian concerns about some reports and portrayals in the Australian media. Both of us fully accepted that the role of the free press in Australia was not at issue; my Government regarded this as a fundamental feature of our society and would not in any circumstances seek to undermine it. But we also acknowledged that there were times when inaccurate or distorted reports or portrayals were of such a kind that it was proper for governments to dissociate themselves from them, and we each agreed that we would be prepared to do this if the circumstances made this appropriate. We agreed that our relationship was now fully back to normal.

I had a valuable discussion with President Vassiliou about the situation in Cyprus. I told him that I was greatly looking forward to his visit to Australia later in the year.

I was also able to discuss the tragic situation in Sri Lanka with the Sri Lankan representative in Harare. I have since written to President Premadasa, who was unable to be present at CHOGM, reaffirming to him my Government's support for a Commonwealth good offices role in Sri Lanka, if that could help to bring an end to the violence.

Mr Speaker

My short bilateral visit to Zimbabwe at the invitation of President Mugabe was a particular pleasure for me. In part, President Mugabe's invitation was a mark of appreciation for the role which Australia played in the long and difficult process of securing Zimbabwe's independence - and I pay tribute here to the part which my predecessor Mr Malcolm Fraser played in this; for the support we offered through our peacekeeping forces and election observers in the transition period; and for our aid and assistance in the immediate aftermath of independence and since.

I was able to discuss in a long meeting with President Mugabe a range of regional and international issues, including his views on the future of southern Africa, as well as developments inside Zimbabwe and our bilateral relationship. I was heartened by the commitment to multi-party democracy in Zimbabwe which President Mugabe evinced in our discussions.

With the introduction of the Zimbabwe Government's Structural Adjustment Program, Zimbabwe offers growing opportunities for Australian trade and investment. I was glad to obtain from President Mugabe his assurance that he would take a personal interest in the negotiations at present underway between the Zimbabwe Government and a Delta Gold - BHP consortium for a proposed platinum mining project which would represent the largest single foreign investment in Zimbabwe since independence.

Mr Speaker

It was a privilege for me to be able to see the ways in which Australian aid, both official and non-official, is helping Zimbabwe's development.

I visited a World Vision aid project in the UMP district of Zimbabwe and saw at first hand the changes that this relatively small project - only \$1.29 million of Australian aid - is bringing through practical improvements in water supply, health and agriculture to a region where per capita income is around \$150 a year.

I was pleased also to be able to hand over to a Harare Primary School a selection from thirty tonnes of school books collected in Western Australia for Zimbabwe schools.

Both visits brought home very vividly to me and my staff, to the accompanying members of the press, and to those Australians who saw it on television here, just what a difference modest amounts of aid can make in the daily lives of people who are struggling to survive.

Australia's aid program will continue, properly, to be directed primarily towards our own region of the world. But I do not believe that Australians will ever want to turn our backs on projects such as that in the UMP district, directed towards the poorest and most marginalised of the world's people.

My Government will continue to maintain its support for this project, and for others like it.

Mr Speaker

My visit to Zimbabwe and my attendance at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting were a reminder that Australia is an important and well-respected member of an increasingly inter-related and inter-dependent international community; and that in such a world, policies of isolationism or narrow regionalism will never be adequate to secure either this country's security or its prosperity.

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