



PRIME MINISTER

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
ASIA-PACIFIC PARLIAMENTARY FORUM
CANBERRA - 10 DECEMBER 1991**

I am very pleased that you have chosen Australia for the second preparatory meeting of the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum. It is fitting that you are meeting in our new national Parliament House, in our national capital. Both capital and building are symbolic of Australia's commitment to parliamentary democracy.

The development of relations between our region's parliaments and parliamentarians, in my view, is crucial to the process of breaking down barriers between nations and of promoting mutual understanding and respect.

As we approach the 21st century, it is vital for nations in the Asia-Pacific region to learn more of each others political values and systems, and to understand better the cultural bases from which they derive.

I commend the organisers of this Forum for their initiative and farsightedness in bringing together such a distinguished group of parliamentarians.

The parliamentary system, as instituted in one form or another by all countries represented here today, is essential not only for the enhancement of representative and participatory government, but for the promotion and preservation of political liberty itself.

In the last few years, the world has witnessed a fundamental transformation of political life. Many countries are discovering or re-discovering the virtues and the benefits of representative government. Systems that have denied the importance or relevance of parliamentary institutions are slowly, or, in some cases dramatically, failing.

Authoritarian and totalitarian systems in Europe, Africa, Latin America, and our own region are learning the art of give and take, and of that necessary compromise essential to a representative parliamentary system.

It is this philosophy of compromise which is the hallmark of limited government, the hallmark of a state where liberty is paramount.

In this context, the establishment of the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum is an important and positive step. It is a recognition that the region is becoming a major political and economic grouping of countries alongside Europe and the Americas.

It is a recognition also that the increasing intensity of trade and investment in the region has political and social implications which demand the attention of legislators.

The challenge for all of us is to improve the quality of life of our peoples, to create conditions conducive to growth and prosperity, and to maintain and enhance the security and stability of the region.

The Forum provides us with an ideal opportunity to discuss and exchange information on the common challenges and problems which are confronting us all.

Speaking for Australia, no element of our international policy over the coming years will be more important than maintaining and increasing the momentum of our growing enmeshment in the Asia-Pacific region. Our policies are geared towards this end, and the results are plain. In the economic area, fully 35 per cent of our total trade is now with North East Asia, and 8.7 per cent with South East Asia, while 55 per cent of our exports are bought by the countries of North East and South East Asia. This compares with 49 per cent five years ago.

By the end of the century, given the economic and political developments that are taking place, well over half of our trade will be with the region.

Central to refocusing our regional perspective is the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) process. Initiated in Seoul in 1989, and carried forward over three ministerial meetings since then, it aims to promote a broad ranging regional dialogue which identifies and advances common economic interests.

APEC is not designed to be an exclusive trading bloc, but rather a grouping which promotes the liberalisation of trade in the region. APEC provides a collective voice in broader forums such as the GATT negotiations, and a voice that speaks with authority. APEC provides a clear and practical example of an open and non-discriminatory trading system.

In the political and security area, the end of the cold war, the increasing influence of multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, and the growth of international co-operation on a wide variety of issues, provides us now with an unprecedented opportunity to build a prosperous, just and secure Asia-Pacific region.

The peace process in Cambodia, the gradual liberalisation taking place in Vietnam, Japan's development of a political role more in keeping with her economic importance; these developments and others are all positive steps leading towards regional stability and co-operation.

The Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum will, I am sure, develop to become an integral part of these processes of integration and development with the Asia-Pacific region.

I have, therefore, much pleasure in opening the second preparatory meeting of the Forum and I wish you well in your deliberations.

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