



PRIME MINISTER

EMBARGO: AGAINST DELIVERY

**STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING MP
CAMBODIA PEACEKEEPING**

Mr Speaker

It is appropriate that the House focus today on the subject of Cambodia, and on the prospects for a lasting peace in that long-suffering country.

Great crimes have been committed against the Cambodian people. The tragedy of the conflict has been brought home to us all through the personal witness of many Cambodian Australians.

On 28 February, the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution formally creating the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia or UNTAC, the body responsible for implementation of the historic Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict.

In response to the UN Secretary General's request for contributions to UNTAC's operations, Australia has agreed to provide 495 Defence Force personnel to form the Force Communications Unit.

This total includes 65 communicators already deployed as part of the UN Advance Mission in Cambodia.

If conditions are right in Cambodia, the Government expects that the main Australian contingent will begin deploying during this month.

They will be joined in the field by 40 signallers from the New Zealand Defence Force.

Furthermore, Australia has provided UNTAC's military commander, Lieutenant-General John Sanderson, who commenced duty in Cambodia on 15 March. Australia will contribute six staff to his headquarters unit.

The Government also expects to contribute to UNTAC's civilian component, whose composition is still under consideration by the United Nations.

As part of this, we have decided to provide ten police officers.

In addition, Mr Michael Maley, an officer of the Australian Electoral Commission, has taken up duty in Phnom Penh as Deputy Electoral Commissioner for UNTAC.

Mr Speaker

The creation of UNTAC is the culmination of years of complex and difficult negotiation.

The peace plan embodied in the remarkable agreements signed in Paris on 23 October 1991 provides a way of ending the nightmare of Cambodia's recent past.

The main objectives of the settlement are to end the civil war, and to allow the Cambodian people to choose a new government through genuinely free and fair elections.

Reflecting the complexity of the Cambodian conflict, the Paris agreements provide for an unprecedented and ambitious role for the United Nations in the implementation of the peace plan.

UNTAC will have a peacekeeping role supervising, monitoring and verifying the cease-fire, partial demobilisation of armed forces, and the cessation of external military assistance.

UNTAC most definitely will not have a role enforcing or imposing the peace if hostilities break out.

In the civilian sphere, not only will UNTAC have a role in organising and conducting the elections, it will also play a role in monitoring and supervising the interim administration of the country to ensure a neutral political environment for the elections.

In addition, the United Nations will be responsible for coordinating and assisting the repatriation and resettlement of some hundreds of thousands of Cambodian refugees and displaced persons.

Mr Speaker

The Cambodia peace settlement is a striking demonstration of the fundamental changes that have occurred in the international system.

Unprecedented cooperation between the Permanent Five members of the Security Council has greatly enhanced the scope for resolving regional conflicts. The UN system has been able to harness broad-based support for its peacekeeping role.

The subtle and dynamic balance of interests in the Cambodia peace agreements reflects the close involvement and cooperation of the Permanent Five members of the Security Council in the negotiating process.

The efforts of the Indonesian and French governments deserve special mention. Their initiative, courage and persistence were essential to the success of the peace plan.

Great credit must also go, of course, to the Cambodians themselves. Those of us who have not known their suffering, or seen the evil they have seen, can only wonder what human qualities it takes to sit down and talk about the future, about peace, and about national reconciliation.

Mr Speaker

Australia played a significant role in the long process leading up to the Paris agreements.

In the mid 1980s, former Foreign Minister Hayden was active in regional diplomacy which sought to identify a basis for dialogue between the parties to the Cambodian conflict.

In late 1989, Senator Evans played a key role in breaking the impasse following the first Paris Conference on Cambodia in July and August 1989. The core of Senator Evans's proposal, which was taken up by the Permanent Five members of the Security Council, was an enhanced role for the United Nations in the transitional period preceding elections in Cambodia.

Senator Evans's resourceful and energetic pursuit of peace in Cambodia has earned him nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize. It has also earned international respect for Australia.

Mr Speaker

In moving this resolution today I pay regard to the achievement of Senator Evans and his Department.

In light of our diplomatic contribution, it was appropriate that Australia was the first country to establish accreditation to the Supreme National Council, the interim body in which Cambodian sovereignty has been vested during the transitional period.

Australia was also among the first to supply troops to carry out the vital task of establishing communications and infrastructure in preparation for the deployment of the main UNTAC force.

It is appropriate that we now help to see the process through.

The return of Australian soldiers to Indo-China in the cause of peace is a matter for us to reflect on with justifiable pride.

With peace secured in Cambodia, we shall be able to welcome the countries of Indo-China back into the mainstream of regional activity.

We can confidently expect them to become part of the dynamism of Asia.

Vietnam will now be able to emerge from its isolation and, with Cambodia, play its part in regional and international affairs.

In parallel with the improved prospects for peace in Cambodia, Australia will resume direct bilateral aid.

The Minister for Trade and Overseas Development announced today that, over the next four years, Australia will provide approximately 49 million Australian dollars in development assistance to Cambodia. This total includes 23 million dollars for new bilateral aid.

In addition, during this financial year, we are providing approximately 7.7 million Australian dollars in disaster relief and assistance to displaced Cambodians.

Mr Speaker

Aspects of the comprehensive settlement have been criticised by some observers.

It is suggested that it would somehow have been better to exclude the Khmer Rouge from the peace process because of their responsibility for the atrocities committed by the former Pol Pot regime.

Involvement of the Khmer Rouge in the process does not reflect a judgment by the Australian or other governments that the Khmer Rouge can now be trusted. Rather, it reflects a realistic assessment that the only available effective way of containing the military threat they pose, and of ending the civil war, was to involve them and their main backers - China - as parties to the agreement.

Put simply, a peace settlement without the Khmer Rouge and China would not be a peace settlement at all.

It has also been suggested that the settlement could have been improved by providing for 100 per cent rather than for at least 70 per cent demobilisation of the armed forces of the Cambodian parties.

Obviously such a provision would have been preferable, but the outcome set out in the Paris agreements is the best that could be negotiated.

It is the judgment of the United States, Russia, China, France, Britain, all significant Asian states and Australia that the Paris settlement represents the best available, realistic basis for a just and durable peace in Cambodia.

Mr Speaker

UNTAC will be the costliest, as well as the most comprehensive peacekeeping operation yet undertaken by the United Nations.

It is expected to involve approximately 15,900 military personnel, 3,600 civilian police and 3,300 civilian administrators. More than 50 countries have been requested to contribute to this complex undertaking.

The initial UN estimate of the cost for a duration of 18 months is 1.9 billion US dollars. Australia's share of assessed contributions for this amount is 1.51 per cent or 28.7 million US dollars.

I should also advise the House that Cabinet agreed in October 1991 to provide supplementation to the Defence Budget of 49 million Australian dollars to fund the estimated costs involved in making our contribution to UNTAC and the United Nations Advance Mission in Cambodia. This is separate from our assessed contribution to UNTAC's budget, described above. We expect this will eventually be partially offset by reimbursements from the UN of some 19.7 million Australian dollars, but this will take some time to materialise.

The final UNTAC plan and budget are now being scrutinised in New York by representatives of major donors including Australia. It will be some weeks before the final budget is approved.

Along with other donors, Australia hopes that, as implementation of the settlement proceeds, an increasing habit of cooperation among the Cambodian parties will allow savings in UNTAC personnel and costs.

Mr Speaker

Generally speaking, the settlement is working.

In the five months since it was signed, the remarkable thing has been not the number of violations or the number of disputes, but the way in which the Paris agreements have held firm, and the way in which the parties have repeatedly reaffirmed their commitment to the settlement in all its detail.

Of course, there have been incidents which threaten the whole process, and the Government has viewed with particular concern the recent fighting in Kompong Thom province. But we must look beyond these hurdles without in any sense trivialising them.

Implementation of the peace plan may well prove more difficult than its negotiation.

There are bound to be further setbacks.

We should expect them and not be disheartened when they occur.

The Government's decision to commit Australian forces to the Cambodian peacekeeping operation was not taken lightly.

The UN forces will face risks from mines, from disease, from banditry, and possibly from fresh outbreaks of fighting.

The Government has assessed these risks and has weighed them carefully. It does not underestimate them, or the need to take every prudent precaution to protect our troops.

We have made this commitment, however, because the opportunity to help restore peace to Cambodia is one which the international community cannot lightly let go.

The UN commitment to help Cambodia also serves Australia's direct interests, and those of our neighbours, by helping to create a more peaceful and prosperous region.

But it is important to emphasise again that Australian forces will not be participating in the UN operation in order to enforce or impose the peace in Cambodia.

That is a task beyond the UN mandate.

Rather, the Australian forces will be in Cambodia to help keep a peace on which the Cambodian parties themselves have agreed.

That is the condition under which UNTAC is being deployed. It is the whole basis of the Paris peace accords. It is the condition under which Australian troops have been offered to the United Nations.

If we conclude that there is no longer a peace to keep in Cambodia, the Australian and other UN forces will have to be withdrawn.

But we do not expect that to happen. All sides in the conflict have invested so much effort in the peace process, and the Cambodian people have so much to gain from its success, that we think the prospects for a successful outcome remain promising.

If we turn our backs on this opportunity to help consolidate the hard work of the peace-makers, we shall be sentencing the Cambodian people to further years of cruelty and suffering.

Mr Speaker

As I already mentioned, UNTAC's primary military functions will be supervising and verifying the cease-fire, partial demobilisation of armed forces, and the cessation of external military assistance.

UNTAC will also assist in the clearance of hundreds of thousands of mines.

Australia's contingent will provide the crucial communications network for the UNTAC military operation.

Our service men and women will be operating in a difficult and sometimes dangerous environment.

Already Lieutenant-Colonel Russell Stuart has been wounded in the course of his duty with the UN Advance Mission in Cambodia. That incident underlines the risks which the peacekeeping personnel face.

But Australians can be proud of the skill and professionalism which Australian Defence Force units have brought to UN peacekeeping and other operations around the world - from the Sinai, Iraq and the Red Sea, to the Western Sahara and the Afghan border.

Their reputation is reflected in the UN Secretary-General's decision to appoint Lieutenant-General Sanderson commander of UNTAC's military force.

I am sure all members of this House will join me in extending congratulations to General Sanderson on his appointment and in wishing him well in his assignment.

I am equally sure members will want to express their confidence in and support for the Australian Defence Force men and women deployed in Cambodia.

There is no more honourable duty than the one they will go to perform - to preserve the peace.

We know they will serve Australia and the cause of peace with distinction, and we look forward to their safe return.

Mr Speaker, we hope that return will not be long delayed.

The aim of the United Nations presence in Cambodia is not to oversee developments there indefinitely but to manage a transition from war to peace, from factional distrust to national reconciliation.

May 1993 has been set as the target date for the UN-organised elections. The UN Secretary-General intends withdrawing UNTAC about six months after that date.

I know it is the earnest desire of all members of this House that the Cambodian people will seize this opportunity to establish a just and lasting peace in their country.

I commend the motion to the House.

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CAMBODIA PEACEKEEPING: PARLIAMENTARY RESOLUTION

That this House

- . recalls the long suffering of the Cambodian people
- . notes the remarkable diplomatic achievement enshrined in the Agreements on the Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict signed in Paris on 23 October 1991
- . recognises the difficult task ahead of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC),
- . affirms Australia's commitment to assist the Cambodian people to take control again of their own affairs and return to peaceful and productive lives
- . affirms Australia's support for the United Nations in its new and enhanced role in promoting world peace and solving long-standing regional conflicts
- . affirms its support for Australia's positive response to the request made by the UN Secretary General for support in implementing the Cambodian peace accords
- . expresses its full confidence in, and support for, Australian Defence Force men and women deployed for peacekeeping in Cambodia and looks forward to their safe return
- . congratulates Lieutenant-General Sanderson on his appointment as UNTAC military commander and wishes him well in his assignment