



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP,
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PM: Well I might just give you a few introductory comments. I think that's the order of the day. The first thing I'll say is I found my attendance for the first time at the Forum a worthwhile experience. This is the main mechanism for high level dialogue in the Pacific, and I think it provides a sense of community to Pacific Island countries, indeed to all the countries of the Pacific, but there is a place to come to talk, and there is a clear and definable, not only sense of community, but community, and that we've got a forum for sensible discussion of important political and strategic interests.

There was a strong sense at this meeting that the South Pacific is not immune from recent dramatic changes in the world. The environment is obviously an area of concern here, global warming worries are concerns to a number of forum countries, particularly where some don't rise much more than about 4 metres above sea level, and that's an issue of concern to them. I was able to announce yesterday new environmental assistance measures, which I outlined in a press release, I think that you have. And that was a matter of great interest to some members of the community here because they know that the things that Australia has already been doing, in terms of monitoring patterns in tides and sea patterns and further climate change monitoring which we'll do by yesterday's announcement, was I think regarded well.

The Forum also welcomed the moratorium on French nuclear testing in the Pacific. I suggested that Forum members write formally to President Mitterand. That suggestion was taken up. The Cook Islands then suggested that other nuclear powers be written to in similar terms over nuclear testing, as the French have said that the longevity of their moratorium will in part depend upon what other nuclear powers do in relation to testing. So it was, I suppose, appropriate that we write not simply formally to the French but to others.

Today I will sign, on behalf of Australia, the Niue Treaty on Fisheries Surveillance, which is the treaty which will provide a cooperative relationship between countries in surveillance of fisheries, and means that each will come to the aid of the other in protecting those fisheries, and in that sense is I think an important treaty.

We expect the Forum to approve a declaration on regional law enforcement, that's a pledge of cooperation to address such issues as drugs, money laundering and tourism, by improving cooperation in legal and law enforcement areas.

I've had a number of bilateral meetings with Mr Bolger yesterday, in the evening I arrived with Prime Minister Mamaloni, and this morning with Mr Rabuka, also late yesterday with Mr Tofilau Eti of Western Samoa, and I may have another one or two before I leave.

You've already covered, I think, some of the substance of the meeting I had with Mr Bolger. You might be interested in the meeting I had with Prime Minister Rabuka this morning. I told him that Australia welcomes the restoration of representative Government in Fiji and the continued effort towards constitutional reform. As a result I told him, and I am prepared now to be able to tell you, that I think it is now appropriate to resume defence cooperation with Fiji. Initially that renewed defence cooperation will concentrate on maritime surveillance and training, and will include a resumption of operational Royal Australian Navy visits to Fiji, resumption of aerial maritime surveillance patrols in and through Fiji's exclusive economic zone, and also offering Fiji training places in the joint services military college in Canberra for the training of Fiji military force personnel.

Prime Minister Rabuka indicated to me that he was intending to visit Australia privately in September. I have extended to him an offer to visit Australia as a guest of the Australian Government, which he was very glad to accept. So he shall come in September. I think Senator Ray is planning a visit in October. So other defence cooperation can be discussed on those two occasions.

I think I might leave my introductory remarks at that.

J: How do you now view the relationship with Fiji, just summing it up?

PM: I think there is an opportunity for Prime Minister Rabuka to open up a dialogue with the whole Fiji community about its future, about its constitutional future, about giving everybody a place in representative government in Fiji. And one gets that sense that an opportunity is present. I'd like to see us maximise that opportunity. And now they've returned to representative government and he has made clear his commitment to constitutional reform and dialogue that this is the time for a restoration of full relations and cooperation between us, and can I say, good will.

J: Are you confident that the racial weighting in the constitution will be done away with?

PM: We didn't discuss the constitution in detail, but I'm sure he believes there is some historic opportunity to consider Fiji as a community in a broader sense, as a result of the events of the last five years. And we in Australia would certainly welcome that opportunity.

J: Will you be pushing for Fiji to be allowed back into the Commonwealth?

PM: This is a matter for Fiji, I think, as much as for anyone else. It's not particularly a matter for Australia, but naturally we would be sympathetic.

J: Were you able to meet with the Vanuatu Prime Minister?

PM: No, not yet. I'll probably see him later today I think.

J: Any change of the position there, Mr Keating?

PM: No, not that I know of, but I'll speak to him later.

J: Prime Minister, how much is the resumption of military links with Fiji worth in dollar terms?

PM: I don't know. But I think its worth goes beyond ... it's assessed by the Prime Minister and the Government of Fiji, I'm sure, beyond simply the monetary value or monetary cost of any operation.

J: Should the review of their constitution not result in changes, will we change our attitude towards Fiji?

PM: Why jump to those sort of conclusions? Let's wait to see what happens.

J: Mr Rabuka's visit in September, is there anything planned for while he is here?

PM: Well it was for him a private visit, but I'm extending the offer, the invitation to come as a guest of the Government, which he has accepted. So, no doubt the visit will widen and he will do other things. I should hope he would.

J: Do you have any concerns about the situation in Bougainville, even though it was not formally on the agenda?

PM: Well one always has concerns, naturally, about these things. I mean there is an armed cessationist movement on Bougainville which the Papua New Guinean Government is trying to deal with. It's a matter of concern to us, to the neighbourhood, but I think the Forum regard it as internal problem for Papua New Guinea, as we did.

J: What about the allegations of Australian weaponry and bullets being used against civilians?

PM: The Papua New Guinean defence minister and defence commander have stated publicly that the conditions under which we provided Iroquois helicopters have not been breached. Now we are seeking to establish whether this is so. Were it to be so, of course, we would make plain our objection. But I've already said, and so has the Foreign Minister, that we expect the conditions under which those equipments are being provided to be maintained, and adhered to, and honoured.

J: How are we seeking to establish that, Mr Keating?

PM: The position there is unclear and it's not going to be easy for it to be established, but as quickly as we can, we will.

J: Will that be through intelligence agencies?

PM: Let's say we will try to establish it.

J: How concerned are you about reports of abuse of human rights in Bougainville?

PM: We've sought an official response to the allegations made the other day, collected on Bougainville by the Australian lawyer, Rosemary Gillespi, and it is to that which we seek a response from the Government of Papua New Guinea, a considered response.

J: Doesn't there come a point where it stops being an internal situation, as we have seen in Dili for example?

PM: We're hoping that a political settlement can be arrived at, and in my discussions with Prime Minister Mamaloni I urged that the quicker a dialogue be re-established between the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea the better, as well. And I think that when the Government settles down in Papua New Guinea after next week's sitting then it might be possible, and that could help as well.

J: Isn't it clear that machine gun fire from our helicopters is consistent ...?

PM: I don't think it's clear, no. The claims may be made, but whether the aircraft is responding to fire against itself is not clear. But were it to be clear that these gun ships are being used in a offensive manner, this would be contrary to the conditions under which we have provided them to Papua New Guinea, and we would then be suggesting to the Papua New Guinean Government that they be withdrawn from the service area.

J: Is there anything Australia can do? They can't take them back?

PM: No.

J: In your meeting with Mr Bolger did you assure him whether the New Zealand economy wouldn't be an issue in the run up to the next election in Australia?

PM: Of course not, he didn't ask for that assurance and I didn't give it. We're all grown up, and we are all in the position I think, as mature nations, to discuss issues of substance and political and economic ideas, whether they have said to emanate or be part of New Zealand's economic policy or anyone else's. I mean, this sort of 'thought police' routine on our political debate is immature and silly.

J: Is that what Mr Bolger was suggesting?

PM: No, I don't think so. What he was suggesting, he thought that some of our Ministers had taken New Zealand's name in vein. I notice in one report this morning that he thought I had. I don't think I had, well I told him not to regard that at all very seriously, but he might have regarded it more seriously than I did.

J: The issue of policing arrangements in the region. How serious a threat are criminal activities, or is this just a preventative measure?

PM: It's a preventative measure and a cooperative framework to deal with the problems. These are very open borders, naturally, and the more willingness there is on the part of member states to cooperate with one another in these areas the better.

J: What impact does it have on Pacific tax havens?

PM: Nothing, not in that sense. Our national governments have laws which cover tax havens, as Australia does with its Foreign Source Income Legislation, so that's how we treat income as a matter for us.

J: Mr Bolger has written to the Governor General of the Solomon Islands to apologise for being late. Will you?

PM: No. This is a very small issue. I know some of you have been sold a line on this by some of the local journalists on a day short of news. This is standard tact for the Australian press corps to go back to irrelevancies.

J: Just domestically, interest rates ...

PM: I'm not here to discuss this. As I said before I left, I'm not discussing domestic policy issues.

J: Can you clarify the position on the aviation agreement that you discussed with New Zealand yesterday, and to abolish visa-free entry into New Zealand?

PM: Australia would like to arrive at a position where we have an Australasian airline market. And that would involve flying domestic terminal to domestic terminal, rather than through the international terminals which have always got pressure on them, and where movements of passengers is delayed by the processing time, and where generally movements of aircraft through international terminals can be delayed by all sorts of extraneous factors. So, given the fact that New Zealand is closer to the East Coast of Australia than other parts of Australia it makes sense, therefore, that we should have an Australasian airline market. That necessarily involves being clear about our emigration procedures, and will inevitably involve consideration about a common border. So therefore we would insist that our border not to be a porous one, or made porous by concessions provided to people of other countries for access to New Zealand. And we're saying, I made this point to Prime Minister Bolger, that I think that there is a lot of value in, if we are talking about closer economic relations between Australia and New Zealand, this must go to services as well as goods.

And one of the most basic services is transportation of people, obviously. And the more that this can be regarded as one market, the better, but ipso facto means that we need to come to some agreements about the way in which our migration processes are and how they work. We're just saying that if New Zealand is considering extending, in a concessional way, non visa access to New Zealand from other countries then this would need to be viewed against the backdrop of what I think would be a huge benefit of an Australasian airline market.

J: Did Mr Bolger give any undertaking on the issue?

PM: No, but he took the issue on board, I'm sure.

J: Is this the first time this has been raised?

PM: I shouldn't think so. I think that Senator Collins has probably raised this.

J: Is this an indication that New Zealand has been moving slowly?

PM: I notice some report in today's Australian about how this process has been moving slowly. It's gone more distance in three months than it's gone in forty years. If some of you had been around a bit longer you'd know how long this paralysis has been there.

J: Will Australia yield at all with any of the visa requirements?

PM: Not unless there is a proposal put to us which is sensible and reasonable. But at this stage I don't think any have. And we try to run a rational, sensible, immigration policy, and if we were trying to extend this for the purpose that I mention then obviously we've got to get some agreement as to how we extend it.

J: New Zealand has been aware of your concern about this for some time, there has been a letter to Mr Hand.

PM: I don't know whether they have had this process in hand, or in mind over time. It's not that long ago - it's February that the One Nation Statement was made, and it was some time after that before we got down to some of these issues. So, New Zealand is entitled to consider this sensibly.

J: How did you feel when you saw the plethora of Union Jacks on the flags at the Forum?

PM: I just make the point that I've made in Australia - that one can't claim to have a unique symbol of oneself when others have the same symbol.

J: Has anyone raised the issue with you about what you've had to say on the flag?

PM: Yes, a couple have said to me that they were very encouraged about what I had to say, and that this has promoted debate in their own countries about their own constitutional arrangements, symbols, standing, et cetera.

J: Did Rabuka give you any tips on setting up a Republic?

PM: I think he's interested in constitutional government.

J: Can you say which leaders raised the issue of the flag?

PM: They're all entitled to their private remarks, I think.

J: Radio New Zealand, Mr Keating, did Prime Minister Bolger over-react by apologising to the Governor General?

PM: Look, it's so trifling an issue that it's hardly worthy of further comment.

J: On plutonium shipments, the Forum has expressed a view, what is your own opinion about that?

PM: I think that general international safe-guards are important, particularly with these sorts of commodities. And I think that Japan, who envisages having the traffic in this, would be aware of the concerns of Pacific Island countries, both directly, communicated bilaterally, and also from the Forum. And that's how it should be.

J: How do you see this region fitting in with Australia's push into Australasia?

PM: I've said before, and I said yesterday in my opening remarks, that Australia will always reserve its right to deal with issues in world forums and play a role as appropriate, subject to subject, on the world stage. But the focus of its attention will be the region in which we live, the increasing focus. This is true now of our trade, where nearly three quarters of it, both imports and exports, are with the Asia-Pacific area, and where we can be I think a useful influence in this area of the world, and at the same time give Australians a more secure place in the region for themselves. And the various things that Australia does in the Pacific, whether they be, as you saw yesterday, the Pacific patrol boat program, or the wharfs program here, or the climate and sea monitoring programs, or whatever it

might be, I think we can play a useful role, and that is above simply our bilateral aid arrangements to various countries. And it's important that they have an influence on us. So I think you'll see Australia and Australian foreign policy directed more expressly to the region, notwithstanding obvious and genuine concerns and other issues in the world context.

J: Are there concerns about Australia's relationship with Japan, as Australia has backed the Forum's protest to Japan over its plan to ship plutonium?

PM: I don't think the Japanese will be unduly offended by press reports from Australia.

J: But a letter will be signed by the Forum Secretariat including Australia.

PM: That's right, that's true.

J: How do other nations see Australia - as a bully or as a help?

PM: We're obviously not a bully. How could anyone sustain the remark that we're a bully. That's a gratuitous, I know that you don't mean it gratuitously, but it is a gratuitous remark. Australia looks for obviously no territorial gain in its foreign policy. It has, I think, altruistic objectives in its foreign and aid policies generally and in the region, and I think its role has been generally regarded well and appreciated by countries of the Forum. Just as I was leaving, what delayed me was Sir Robert Rex from Niue was making what was, in a sense, his farewell speech, and he reflected over forty years and said some complimentary things about Australia and New Zealand in that context. And I think that would be the general view. There will always be some matters of difference, I'm quite certain that some countries think that our treatment of Papua New Guinean development aid is too generous, and would prefer some of that to be spread more widely across the Pacific. You'll find some of those issues often given vent, but in terms of the general standing of Australia, its motivation, and the good will towards it, I think that's pretty clear, and pretty much in Australia's favour.

J: We've had one of the closest relationships with Japan. Will you use it to take up the Forum's protest with them?

PM: You keep coming back to this like a song. There is a statement there, and the statement is by the Forum. It's not for Australia to bilaterally take the matter up.

- J: Some countries have raised it bilaterally, will we?
- PM: I don't think so. I wouldn't be certain of it, I'd have to ask Senator Evans.
- J: Are the resumption of military links with Fiji immediate or contingent on the September meeting?
- PM: No, as far as I'm concerned it's from here out. But obviously the talks in September and October will help round out cooperation between us.
- J: We've moved much further than New Zealand in this relationship. Did you talk about that with Mr Bolger?
- PM: No. New Zealand is free to make its own mind up about the issues, obviously, and it will.
- J: Are you satisfied with the progress that Rabuka has made?
- PM: I think there is a real opportunity here for improvement for the community of the Fijian people, and I think there is a lot of good will on the part of the Prime Minister towards that objective, and I think it would be counterproductive for Australia to maintain the position which we have previously held in the circumstances of five years ago. OK? Thank you.

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