



PRIME MINISTER

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON PJ KEATING, MP FAREWELL REMARKS TO AUSTRALIAN CONTINGENT TO SOMALIA TOWNSVILLE, THURSDAY 14 JANUARY 1993

Ladies and gentlemen

I am honoured to take part in this ceremony to farewell Australian troops deploying to Somalia.

Tomorrow you will be in Somalia, joining colleagues who have gone ahead to prepare for your arrival.

You will be part of an historic international undertaking, involving military personnel from more than 20 other nations.

Never before has the United Nations sanctioned intervention on such a scale in the internal affairs of a member state for humanitarian purposes.

The world has been appalled by the human disaster in Somalia.

A quarter of a million people have died as a result of famine and clan warfare.

Last year Somalis continued to starve while food donated by the international community was plundered by armed gangs or remained in warehouses because safe passage could not be guaranteed.

Operation "Restore Hope" is the international response to this terrible situation.

Its objective is to establish as soon as possible a secure environment for humanitarian relief operations in Somalia.

Australia's contribution to "Restore Hope" is a further demonstration of our support for a stronger UN role in peacekeeping and humanitarian intervention.

We have a proud record in peacekeeping.

Today, Australian personnel are serving in UN-mandated operations in Cambodia, Iraq, the Red Sea, Western Sahara, Cyprus, Pakistan and Afghanistan, Israel and Syria, as well as the multilateral operation in the Sinai.

When you join up with the remainder of the battalion group, you will become part of Australia's largest contribution to UN operations since the Korean War and our largest overseas deployment of ground forces in more than 20 years.

This deployment is also significant in providing an opportunity for Australia's infantry to demonstrate the professional skills for which you are so highly regarded.

I know you are well trained and equipped for the challenging tasks that await you.

The risks that you will face are real.

The Government is acutely aware of what this means for you and your families.

Your assignment is limited to 17 weeks, and this is accepted by Australia's partners in the operation.

We have no doubt you will be able to make a valuable contribution to Operation "Restore Hope" in this period.

It is appropriate that you have been assigned duties in the Baidoa area where Care Australia has maintained a major relief operation in the most difficult circumstances.

You leave these shores with the full support of the nation as affirmed in the joint resolution passed by both Houses of Parliament on 17 December.

On behalf of all Australians, I should like to express our deepest gratitude for your service.

You go to do what Australians want to see done:- security re-established; humanitarian relief resumed.

Less suffering. More hope.

I know that they are proud of you, and that they wish you God-speed and a safe return to Australia.

I should now like to invite the Leader of the Opposition to join me in wishing you every success in your important assignment.

CANBERRA
14 January 1993