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## PRIME MINISTER

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

### **RECOGNITION OF ERITREAN INDEPENDENCE**

I am pleased to announce that the Australian Government has decided to extend formal recognition to Eritrea following the overwhelming vote in favour of independence by the Eritrean people in the referendum held on 23-25 April 1993.

The referendum was the final stage of the peace process agreed by the Provisional Governments of Eritrea and Ethiopia in 1991.

Senator Kerry Sibraa, the President of the Senate, led the Australian group to observe the recent referendum. He has confirmed the view of all the international observers that the vote was free and fair and decisively in favour of independence.

The Eritrean independence struggle has attracted the sympathy and support of many Australians and has had the strong support of the Australian Parliament. Prominent Australians, such as the late Professor Hollows and author Thomas Keneally, have also taken a personal interest in the problems of Eritrea.

In 1990, Professor Hollows initiated a blindness prevention program to reduce the incidence of surgically curable eye disease in Eritrea. As a contribution to this effort, the Australian Government provided funding for an intra-ocular lens factory to be assembled in Wollongong and shipped to Eritrea.

Australia has also provided other assistance to Eritrea under the aid program. In 1992-93 the Government will provide \$4.3 million in emergency relief, training and development assistance through Australian non-governmental organisations, and from this year Australia will also provide a number of scholarships for Eritreans under the John Crawford Scholarship Scheme.

I congratulate the people of Eritrea on attaining their independence and wish them well for the future.

CANBERRA

4 May 1993