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PRIME MINISTER

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP
WELCOME TO HIS EXCELLENCY DR CENSU TABONE PRESIDENT OF
MALTA, CANBERRA - 16 JUNE 1993**

President Tabone

It is my pleasure to welcome you to Australia.

Our two countries are friends of long standing.

It is a unique friendship. It is one built much less on economic or security concerns than on people.

It is the 56,000 Malta-born Australians and twice that number of Maltese descent who unite us. I'm told that almost every family in Malta will have some relatives in Australia.

You cannot have stronger links than such human ones as these.

The Maltese have been great contributors in Australia - and in those things which really matter, like politics and sport, the Maltese have been there. And I'm pleased to say that in politics their preference has generally been for the Labor side.

They have been coming here since 1810, I'm told; and down the years they could be found not just in the major capital cities but out on the frontier - in places like Innisfail, Mackay and Broken Hill.

So they were among the pioneers of Australia's economic development, and since the Second World War they have also been pioneers of our social development.

They have played a substantial and creative role in the post-war development of Australia's cities, and in the emergence of a multicultural society which has been one of this nation's great achievements.

Of course the bonds between our two countries were strengthened during the Second World War, when Australians helped defend Malta during three years of continuous bombing by the Axis powers.

Last year when your government announced the issue of a medal to mark the 50th anniversary of the award of the George Cross to Malta some 2000 Australians were eligible - and I believe about 1400 have so far received it.

Mr President, Australia and Malta are pursuing similar objectives in different parts of the world.

For us the development of economic and other linkages with the Asia Pacific region is the highest priority.

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I know that your Government is keen to improve its institutional links with the European Community.

But in the past such differences have no more stood in the way of our friendship than have the thousands of kilometres which separate us; and it will continue far into the future, I am sure.

With Malta, as with all those countries from whence have come Australia's people, there is a thread of kinship which is bound to survive our pursuit of different destinies in our different parts of the world.

So Mr President, welcome to Australia and please enjoy your stay. I am sure as your travel around the country you will find among Australians - of Maltese origin and otherwise - that the bonds between us are very warm and very strong.

Thank you