



PRIME MINISTER

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP
REMARKS FOR REPLY TO ADDRESS OF WELCOME
COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING, NICOSIA
THURSDAY 21 OCTOBER 1993**

President Clerides, Your Majesties, Excellencies, fellow Heads of Government, Ministers, Secretary-General, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a great pleasure and honour for me to be invited to join my colleagues in thanking you, Mr President, for your welcome to this Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting.

I am happy to see many familiar faces as I look around this room. I met some of you, fellow members of the South Pacific Forum, recently on Nauru, the smallest of all the Commonwealth's fifty members and associates.

I am also looking forward to meeting others over the next five days.

For a newcomer to these gatherings, the diversity of the group is the most striking thing about it.

The members of the Commonwealth come from every continent and border every ocean. We are large and small, developed and developing, a very representative sample of the community of nations.

The Commonwealth gains strength from its diversity, because its differences co-exist with important things we hold in common - the principles and practices of our law, administration and education; a shared commitment to democracy; a language - even if often a second language - in which we can communicate directly with one another.

In one important sense, an Australian Prime Minister feels immediately at home in a Commonwealth meeting. Australia's population today includes citizens who came originally from each of the forty eight countries represented here.

Our rich multicultural society - drawn from more than 140 nations - is a great asset for Australia, just as cultural diversity gives the Commonwealth its own distinct and lively identity.

Mr President,

Australia like many countries has been going through a period of profound change.

We have been retooling our economy and reexamining the fundamentals of our society.

Our economy has been changing at an unprecedented rate, moving from an inward-looking economy to one focused outwards.

We have moved from feeling somewhat remotely connected with our own region to a commitment to economic, political and cultural engagement with our neighbours.

We have been debating the forms of our own constitution to have it reflect better our national identity.

And just before I left Australia, my Government put in place the framework for historic legislation which will provide greater justice for Australia's indigenous population by recognising their original tenure of our land.

We have accepted that Aboriginal or native tradition and culture is a source of Australian common law.

Australia is not alone in facing change.

Many of the countries represented here are undergoing economic and social changes of similar magnitude. These changes reflect and respond to profound changes taking place in the wider world.

The Commonwealth itself is not exempt from this process of change. Like every other organisation, it needs constantly to re-examine itself to ensure that it is directing its activities where they are most useful and deploying its resources where they are most effective.

It should not duplicate what others can do better, but use its distinctive advantages creatively and well.

Mr President,

Some of the issues which we will discuss over the next five days will be new, some will be old, some will come in different form.

One which is different is South Africa. The political change there is cause for great satisfaction, despite continuing problems and obstacles.

The Commonwealth has had an important part to play in encouraging that change. We need now to look for practical ways to help South Africans to entrench it.

All of us hope that at our next meeting we will have the pleasure of welcoming the Head of Government of a non-racial, democratic South Africa as a new member of the Commonwealth.

I offer my congratulations to Mr Nelson Mandela and President De Klerk on the award of the Nobel Peace Prize. It is a fitting reward, not just for them but for all those who have had the courage to negotiate and work together in the interests of creating a new South Africa.

Other issues will engage us at this meeting.

The challenges of development, remembering that more than half our Commonwealth members qualify as least-developed or low income countries

The ways in which we can better use the talents of women and young people to enrich our societies and economies

The ways we can strengthen the role of democratic institutions and practices, as the Commonwealth has been successfully doing with its election monitoring.

One of the major challenges facing the world at present is the need to bring to a successful conclusion the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations by the mid-December deadline.

Nothing would do more to increase world trade and expand the opportunities for growth of all countries, developing and developed alike.

It would mean a boost to the world economy of 213 billion US dollars a year.

The time is very short for us to prevent the Round's collapse.

Some "rich countries" still seem to believe that they can avoid making difficult concessions, but still reap the advantages of the Round.

I think they are completely wrong - and are likely to wear the opprobrium and contumely of the whole world.

It is important that this meeting make every effort to examine what the Commonwealth can do to help bring about an outcome from the Multilateral Trade Negotiations that will benefit each of us, and the world at large.

Finally, Mr President, I want to say something about the special pleasure for an Australian Prime Minister in being here in Cyprus.

More than 50,000 Australians have their family origins in Cyprus, giving Australia the world's second-largest Cypriot community after this island.

Australian Cypriots have been an enormously energetic and creative community. Among their contributions to Australian life, has been one of my colleagues in the Parliamentary Labor Party, Dr Andrew Theophanous, who left Cyprus at the age of eight.

Our meeting in this city, Mr President, is a reminder that the division of this island, with all the human tragedy that has entailed, has continued for far too long.

Australian police, whom I met this morning, have been helping to keep the peace in Cyprus since 1964. Their task should have ended long ago.

We urge those who are not cooperating with the United Nations and its Secretary-General in exploring a basis for settlement to enter into constructive negotiations forthwith.

Thank you for your very warm welcome this morning. Like all of us here, I am looking forward to five days of constructive deliberations - as well as five days of Cypriot hospitality.