



## PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING, MP  
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J: Prime Minister, it has been another long day of talking, as we are getting towards the end of this conference, do you think the Commonwealth is any more or less relevant now than it was at the beginning?

PM: I think it is a very useful body, it is a disparate body drawn from right across the landscape from the countries of the world and it can play a very useful role. It does deliver, apart from concentration on issues like South Africa which it has done effectively and Rhodesia in years gone by, this year the GATT. It has also focussed attention on things it can do itself as a program deliverer of things like education and health into certain countries and that was the subject of today's discussions. There is the Commonwealth fund for technical co-operation; Commonwealth health programs and the some evaluation of the efficiency of the Secretariat - it was an administrative day. But these are the things, I think, the Commonwealth does and does rather well.

J: How do you feel about the sort of big picture demands that people like Dr Mahathir are calling for Commonwealth intervention or action of Bosnia. Do you think there is a role there?

PM: No, the Commonwealth is not a crisis management organisation. That is a role which is properly with the UN. I think if it tries to extend itself into those sorts of areas, I think it will get into trouble. Now there was some of this discussed yesterday and I made that point, that the Commonwealth should pick its mark and do the things it can do and not try and do the things it is not set up to do. I know people get distressed about these various situations in various parts of the world. Indeed here in Cyprus - a country which is divided. But, the Commonwealth can't fulfil that role, but it can do other things and it is a matter of deciding what it can do and what it can't do.

- J: Do you have majority support Prime Minister, amongst the other leaders?
- PM: I think so, I think that was very broadly reflected yesterday - that view about what the Commonwealth can do and can't do and what it should do. It is an effective body I think, for certain things, but there is no point in over claiming for it or over reaching for it because to do that is to transgress upon the field of other organisations like the United Nations or the World Bank or the IMF. So, it is a case of ... the specialised dialogue it can promote and the work it can do and the programs it can deliver are things of substance and they are important in they're right and it doesn't have to go doing things which other agencies and organisations, in fact, are set up to do.
- J: Prime Minister in your view, what are the major threads that Commonwealth leaders will have to pull together in preparation for the final communique?
- PM: I think that is probably all revealed now in terms of the discussion on the GATT. I think some of the themes which we discussed yesterday - that is, some of the things around the agenda for peace themes run by the UN Secretary-General and the program delivery issues which we discussed today.
- J: Prime Minister, the Queen talked the other day of changing the Commonwealth. Some of the British papers are now canvassing the idea that Prince Charles perhaps could become Head of the Commonwealth, what do you think of that idea?
- PM: I have never heard of that idea. I think, the Queen has managed to keep, obviously, a personal association with the Commonwealth all these years and takes the opportunity on every Commonwealth meeting, I think, to meet each Head of Government and to participate appropriately in the proceedings of the meetings. So in that sense, I think, she is a unifying and binding element on the Commonwealth.
- J: Do you think she should stay on in that role?
- PM: It is not for me to say, nor is it for me to comment on Fleet Street stories.
- J: Do you think it is the sort of job that someone like Charles would be able to handle?
- PM: I think, Prince Charles is quite competent at whatever he has turned his hand to in the various things he has taken an interest in, but to say that is to say the obvious isn't it, rather to endorse him for any role with the Commonwealth. That is a matter entirely for the Queen herself.
- J: Prime Minister, the Commonwealth is made up mainly of developing countries. Is there a danger that there just won't be enough money to keep an organisation like this doing the things that the Commonwealth wants to do?

- PM: There is always a discussion every meeting about resources and there was a discussion about resources today. These are in the main made up, the great bulk of them are made up by the developed countries and countries are assessed, but most countries make a contribution. So, the body is well funded and there has been efficiency reviews in the last year or two and the Secretary-General was talking about those today. So, I don't think resources are a problem, it is a matter of having it adequately resourced and efficiently delivering its programs.
- J: Would you prefer a shorter CHOGM next time perhaps?
- PM: I think they could be shorter. I made those remarks today. In fact they meet every two years, I suggested they could meet every three and probably for three days rather than five.
- J: How did that go down?
- PM: I am not sure all that well, but the fact is it had to be said and I said it.
- J: Prime Minister, you got a round of applause when you mentioned Mabo reconciliation in the opening speech, there are suggestions at home that the Coalition ... there are divisions within the Liberal party about the way the leadership is handling the issue, do you think that the Liberal party and the leaders specifically, there is an element of racism in their response to Mabo?
- PM: That is extreme language, but I think the federal Opposition would be wise to join the rest of the country in supporting a Mabo settlement, a comprehensive one. I think it is better for the Aboriginal and Islander community of Australia that such a settlement enjoys the full support of the parliament. But, there is a lot of interest in it here at CHOGM because I think that countries are interested in Australia and they are interested to see what we do with our indigenes.
- J: Has this been a particularly successful CHOGM in terms of Australia's role and Australia's interest given the predominance of issues such as GATT and other things?
- PM: We pursue our interests and I think single mindedly on the issues that matter to us, obviously trade at the moment is topical to us and the GATT and we have pursued that because we think this is a very effective forum to promote a successful conclusion of the GATT. We have a thought through position I think, on most things and on an agenda such as the one which has been promoted at this meeting. We have had a position on each and every item. So, I think we have come well prepared and we take the business of the Commonwealth seriously.
- J: Prime Minister, one more question on reconciliation and that is the entombment of the unknown soldier. Dr Hewson has is apparently wishing to be one of the pall bearers, do you think that would be reasonable for him to be joining you?

- PM: I will think about that when I get home, if he says anything about it to me.
- J: Prime Minister, you are to meet the Singapore Prime Minister tomorrow, what do you hope to get out of that and what sort of subjects are you going to rely on?
- PM: I think mutual trade and investment issues, the politics of the area and also APEC because Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong is going to Seattle and he will be interested in APEC and I would be interested in his thoughts about how the APEC discussion is developing.
- J: Would you hope that a person like the Prime Minister of Singapore would act as an honest broker if you like in further discussions with Dr Mahathir?
- PM: I didn't raise ever with him yesterday whether he should go to Seattle or not. If he goes good, if he doesn't go the meeting will go on and I think be successful. It doesn't have to be entirely inclusive, people have choices here, so I think we would like to see Dr Mahathir there, I would, but if he is not there the meeting will succeed, I think, anyway.

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