



PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING MP
DOORSTOP, OMNI SAIGON HOTEL, HO CHI MINH CITY, 12 APRIL 1994**

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- J:** Prime Minister, Dr Hewson in Australia has said that it is another mistake in relation to the so-called apology, what would you say to Dr Hewson?
- PM:** If there are any apologies to be made the Liberal party should make it to the 504 Australian families who lost sons in Vietnam in a war they should never have made a commitment to and I would have thought the Liberal party would have been the last organisation in Australia to be talking about the war in Vietnam. I thought they would just go away and hide.
- J:** Why is that?
- PM:** Because of the unprincipled nature of their commitment. The same kind of reasons why they are making the same utterance today - for unprincipled political reasons, domestic political reasons. That is why the commitment was made in the first place.
- J:** By the same token wouldn't it make sense in terms of trying to achieve final reconciliation of opposing views in Australia which have been re-opened by events of the past few days to make some kind of gesture on the ground here?
- PM:** I made it at the appropriate place which was the one cemetery that I was able to visit in this area which was Kanchanaburi.
- J:** But there is a memorial at Long Tan?
- PM:** I have said enough about it and I don't want to go on about it.

- J: Can I ask you, in relation to the discussions you had with the Vietnamese President Le Duc Anh, what was the message you were seeking to get across in relation to ... about acknowledging the difficulties the Vietnamese face which is being interpreted in some areas as being some sort of apology for the war?
- PM: There was no apology. I notice the beat up by that in The Australian this morning, that was a complete fabrication without foundation. I sought here to establish further Australia economically and strategically with the two fastest growing countries in the region - Thailand and Vietnam - I think, those interests have been advanced. The kind of relationship which I have been able to develop with Indonesia in the last few years, I think, I have seen more than the beginnings of in the relationship with Vietnam and with Thailand. That is, coming to understand better and, I think, in both these countries we found genuine enthusiasm for the role Australia has been playing in Asia. Whether it be APEC or Cambodia or the strategic dialogue or the post ASEAN Ministerial Forum - the ASEAN strategic regional discussion of which we are full members and Vietnam is now a member - that Australia's role in the region is very well appreciated.
- J: Can I clarify what you meant though when you said Australia had met its responsibility to Vietnam.
- PM: I'm not even sure the word 'responsibilities' was used. What I made clear was that Australia would do that which it could sensibly do to help build the Vietnamese economy and that is with the aid program, in education, in health, in writing bodies of commercial law which they don't have. All these things will be about the more rapid development of the Vietnamese economy.
- J: When the question of human rights came up with the Parliamentary delegation, how did the Vietnamese respond?
- PM: Prime Minister Kiet gave me a commitment in Canberra that there would be an exchange of delegations to look at the relationships between our two countries including human rights. He has honoured that commitment and the resultant consultative delegation, I think, will be very useful in establishing the relationships between our two countries in these areas. That is, in all areas including human rights.
- J: Would you be distressed if that delegation were not able to consider individual cases, merely to consult?
- PM: I am not here to be making judgements about something which might or might not happen in the future. The thing was they have recognised

that was an issue between us and they have put an instrument in place to discuss it within. But again, I think, this relationship is going to be one of many struts, of many piers and they will include economic development, trade, investment, strategic interests and an interest in the development of the whole Asia Pacific area.

J: In terms of economic development of Vietnam, what was the main message that you wanted to get across to the Vietnamese in the way in which they went ahead into the future?

PM: Just that they should think about the region in terms of structures, that is, they should see where the developments are coming, what the strategic influences are going to be. They, I think, will be important on them, how the strategic and the commercial are intertwined, how they should try and set their economy up, what things they might do first, which things are best pursued by government, which things are best pursued by the private sector, these sorts of things.

J: And in that transition from the command to a market economy which are things you think they ought to be doing that should be left to the private sector not the ...

PM: I think the Government should principally invest in human capital. They should invest in the creativity of their kids, through their education system because if they get those levels of education and creativity up they will find the opportunities and they will make the pace. I said to the Government, to Prime Minister Kiet, and I also made the same point in Laos that many things in the public infrastructure can be provided privately and there is not a real lot of point for a Government with scarce resources providing funds for things like telephones or certain reticular roads.

J: ... (inaudible)

PM: I think so, because I think they understand that with scarce resources it is basically the investments ought best be made in the areas of social development, human development like education, like health.

J: What point do you want to make to the Secretary-General this afternoon?

PM: Where Australia stands, how we see the area basically better viewed as a Asia-Pacific rather than simply as Asia; that there is an important role for the United States in the area, particularly in relation to Japan bringing a high degree of strategic certainty and peace to the area, at any rate the trading links are trans-pacific and that they should be thinking in terms of arrangements which allow them to freely participate in multi-lateral trade through the GATT, but also things which build on the GATT that allows them a greater level of

participation more rapidly and that those structures are the ones. Now, whether that means extending the ASEAN Free Trade Area or pushing along the agenda for APEC, these are the sort of structures which are ...

J: So you will be urging him to take a less hard line, a more tolerant line?

PM: I don't think one has to urge that at all, I think, that has already been taken. It is a matter of trying to inform some of the views from our perspective.

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