



PRIME MINISTER

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

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FAMILIES

(embargo 12.01 am 15 May, 1994)

International Day of Families is a day to reflect on what families do for all of us, and on how we might strengthen family life.

Most families go through difficulties at some time or another. Illness or injury, trouble in balancing work and family responsibilities, any number of unexpected events can put families under strain. These days there is no greater cause of pressure and hardship than unemployment.

In a good society those in need of help receive it. They are not left to fend for themselves, but are supported by their communities and governments. Throughout this International Year of the Family, Australian communities should take up the challenge which unemployment presents to us all. Because it has the capacity to cause a breakdown in family life, the effects of unemployment go beyond the damage done to individuals - it strikes at the basic unit of our society and squanders our greatest national resource.

The Australian people rightly expect their Government to devise programs which meet the needs of families in difficulty. They also expect that these programs will be tailored to the different needs which exist among various sorts of families. They must be programs which recognise diversity and change. In Australia we have devised a system of family payments which is equal to the best in the world. Our Medicare, child care and aged care services provide real support; and in part they do it because they also provide real choice.

My Government's White Paper on Employment and Growth will play a major role in relieving some of the pressures on our families by creating opportunities for jobs and training and reforming the Social Security system in ways which will greatly assist families to balance domestic and work responsibilities.

The White Paper requires more than an effort from Government - it requires a national response. All Australians must recognise the threat that unemployment poses to our society and rise to meet the challenge. There can be no greater incentive than the need to defend our families against the stress of unemployment.

In the International Year of the Family the Australian Government is anxious to find ways to make life easier and more secure for families. That is why the National Council for the International Year of the Family, chaired by Professor Bettina Cass, is holding consultations around the country, seeking the opinions of communities, groups and individuals and advising the Government of their views. On the basis of the Council's investigations, at the end of the year, we will release a blueprint for future policies called the Australian Government Agenda for Families.

There is much to celebrate today about Australian families, and much to thank them for. There is also much to resolve to do - to build a healthy environment and strong foundations for family life, and to assist those families in need.

We should remember also that the greatest responsibility for the health of our family life rests with Australian families themselves. In the end, families must recognise their essential role in the support and nurturing of new generations of Australians, and their responsibility to deliver the things which our children need.

It is in families that our essential values and traditions lie. It is through families that they are passed from one generation to another. The quality of our lives and the strength of our community and nation depend to a large extent on families.

15 May 1994
Canberra