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PRIME MINISTER

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

EMERGENCY RELIEF FOR RWANDA

The humanitarian crisis in Rwanda deepens each day. Australians have been shocked by the pictures of horror and suffering in the refugee camps on the Rwandan borders.

The refugees of Rwanda have issued an international distress call, and Australia must respond.

There are two challenges facing Australia and the rest of the international community. The first is to deal with the crisis on Rwanda's borders. The second, equally important, is to create the circumstances inside Rwanda which will encourage the refugees to return home.

Federal Cabinet has today decided to respond to both these challenges by boosting Australia's total humanitarian relief to \$10 million, and by providing an Australian Medical Support Force of more than 300 personnel to support the United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR).

The Cabinet decision provides an additional \$6.5 million aid package, on top of the \$3.5 million already committed to humanitarian assistance.

Of the additional spending announced today:

-- \$3.25 million will be provided to Australian aid agencies working in the field. Of this, \$1.75 million will go to the public appeals conducted by Australian aid agencies, with the remaining \$1.5 million going directly to specific relief programs.

-- \$3 million will be provided to the UN consolidated appeal announced last Friday. This will address immediate humanitarian needs, the repatriation of refugees, and the long-term rehabilitation of Rwanda.

-- The Government has also arranged for the immediate despatch by the first available plane of urgently needed medical supplies, including oral rehydration kits, vitamins and anti-malarial drugs. These are valued at a further \$250,000.

In addition, the government will deploy as soon as possible two RAAF C-130 aircraft to Rwanda with water purification and other aid equipment.

As I said, there is an equally urgent need to make it safe for the refugees to return to their homes in Rwanda. The deployment of the Medical Support Force is directed to this end.

The force, based in Kigali Central Hospital, will be deployed for a period of six months, with an option for a second six-month deployment.

They will be supporting UNAMIR in its mission to contribute to the security of civilians at risk in Rwanda, and to provide security and support for the distribution of relief supplies and humanitarian operations. The Australian Medical Support Force will also be able to provide assistance to Rwandan civilians at the nearby King Faisal Hospital.

An advance party will leave Australia on 6 August, with the remainder leaving two weeks later.

In sum, this represents an appropriate response from the Government to an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. It builds on the very generous \$7 million already donated directly by the Australian community.

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