



PRIME MINISTER

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING, MP
FAREWELL TO THE MAIN CONTINGENT OF THE AUSTRALIAN
MEDICAL SUPPORT FORCE TO RWANDA, TOWNSVILLE,
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Well let me start by saying how pleased I am to be here in Townsville. It is an occasion for great national pride to farewell the main group of the Australian Defence Force that will travel to Rwanda as part of the Australian Medical Support Force.

And it is yet another example of Australia responding to an international humanitarian emergency.

You see, one of the great things about this nation of ours is that it boasts a people with a profound generosity of spirit.

And it is a fundamentally Australian generosity of spirit.

It is a generosity of spirit that extends from what we do for our own people - be it fighting floods or bushfires - to what we do for those in other parts of the world who face even more devastating events like the death and violence, the disease and starvation of Rwanda.

When Australians are faced with a humanitarian crisis, we respond immediately, instinctively and we do something practical.

We are a nation of doers and helpers, not talkers and watchers.

There are many great stories of individual Australians giving of themselves for the people of Rwanda - from well known artists like John Farnham, to the Darwin nurse Judith Chappell a veteran of Cyclone Tracey who now, at 59, is making her own way to help in Rwanda. And, of course, there's the many other Australians already working with Australian and international aid agencies on the ground in Rwanda.

As a nation, Australia has responded to the crisis in Rwanda: the people of Australia have given more than \$12 million in public appeals and the Government of Australia has given \$10 million in humanitarian aid.

Worldwide, that easily puts Australia among the top five aid donors to Rwanda.

But it's not merely a question of dollars - our assistance will help the Australian individuals and agencies working under enormously difficult conditions in the camps. And it will also help the United Nations to repatriate refugees and rehabilitate Rwanda with projects for its longer-term economic development.

This humanitarian aid is vital. But it can not do the job by itself.

What is needed just as much is the creation of conditions inside Rwanda that will encourage the refugees to return to their homes.

After what so many of them have seen and experienced, it is not surprising that they are reluctant to return and suspicious of Rwandan authorities.

This is where the United Nations Assistance Mission In Rwanda (UNAMIR) comes in, and it's where you come in.

You are part of a group of around 300 men and women of the Australian Defence Force who will serve in Rwanda - some of you in the medical group, some of you as infantry and support personnel or in headquarters and liaison positions.

Those of you who are leaving today will join the 76 members of the Australian advance party who arrived in Kigali on 8 August and who are already at work preparing the Kigali Central Hospital for your arrival.

Your main job will be to provide medical support which will keep UNAMIR effective.

Elements of your team will provide support to UNAMIR forces deployed outside Kigali through the provision of mobile casualty collection posts.

And any of your excess capacity will be directed to helping ordinary Rwandans.

The next six months will be tough. Your experiences may be unpleasant. They may be dangerous.

They will certainly be different from anything most of you have encountered before.

But I know that you will rise to these challenges and draw great fulfilment and satisfaction from your work - because that's what the members of the Australian Defence Force do.

You are well trained and well prepared for your operation.

And you follow in a fine tradition of outstanding Australian service to many United Nations operations, in places like Cambodia, the Middle East, Mozambique, Somalia, Cyprus and the Sinai.

In all of these places, Australian service men and women have been known for the practical way they get on with their job - with discipline, good humour and innovation.

Each of you will be changed by what lies ahead of you. But more important than what we do for ourselves is what we do for others - what you do will help change the lives of many people in Rwanda, it will help build a future for Rwanda.

It's as simple and as powerful as that.

And what you do is also part of a broader national effort.

At the end of the day, yours is a very practical contribution, and, for mine, that makes it a distinctly Australian contribution.

On behalf of the Government and on behalf of all Australians, I want to say how proud we are of you.

I want to thank you and wish you every success in the tasks before you. And a safe return to your families and loved ones when your tour of duty is over.