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PRIME MINISTER

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

DINNER FOR MR ALBERT REYNOLDS, TAOISEACH OF IRELAND
PARLIAMENT HOUSE, TUESDAY 20 SEPTEMBER 1994

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to Australia.

Our two countries share so much history, so much tradition and culture, so many attitudes.

There is a sentiment we share.

We Australians feel it when we go there.

Prime Minister, we hope you feel it on your visit here.

I have fond, indelible memories of my visit to Ireland last year.

The day I spent in Tynagh, the place from which my forebears migrated to Australia, was quite simply one of the great days of my life.

Addressing the Irish National Parliament was one of the great honours of my life.

I have been to Ireland before - and been enchanted.

Nowhere outside Australia have I felt more at home.

I suppose this is not surprising.

The tragedy of Ireland in the nineteenth century was in some way's Australia's blessing.

The mass migration of Irish to Australia in the 19th century and the preservation of their values in the institutions of the church, politics, the law, academia and many other other realms of our national life, mean that Irish tradition has fed and will go on feeding our own - and that the friendship and affection between our two countries will always endure.

Yet it would be a mistake to think that the regard in which we hold Ireland is built entirely on the past, or is nourished entirely by the past.

These are not dead traditions - great ideas whether they are legal, political, religious or literary live do not readily die.

Traditions adapt to circumstances. They find new shapes and new expressions in new places and new eras.

Irish songs become Australian folksongs. Irish football becomes Australian football. The Irish St Leger becomes a practice race for the Melbourne Cup.

Prime Minister

Down the years Ireland and the Irish have contrived a powerful place in the international landscape.

They have contrived it from literature - from their love of the creative and the life of the mind.

They have contrived it from their energy and genius - at home and abroad.

We are not talking only about past glories. Irish literature continues to flourish. Films and music emerge from modern Ireland with the power to charm and excite people all over the world.

The essential point is that the Irish are still creating this place in the world. On cultural and economic fronts - in the European Community and beyond - they are consolidating and expanding their place as never before.

Ireland is becoming a modern nation - a sophisticated, competitive and dynamic economy, an outward looking economy to serve the aspirations and rights of the Irish people in the next century. To bring new opportunities and prosperity to Ireland.

And, what is to be celebrated most, Prime Minister, we are now seeing the creation of that on which the future of Ireland most critically depends - the foundations of peace.

For so long the Irish place in the world has been defined by tragedy as well as genius - by inhumanity as well as humanity.

For so long to think of Ireland has meant to think of violence - of the violence done to the Irish and the violence the Irish have done to themselves.

We now have cause to hope that those days may have ended - that we might see economic modernity and integration with the world married to peace at a home, to a triumph of the Irish passion for fraternity over ancient animosities, to the Irish genius for humanity over inhumanity.

Prime Minister I know what a pivotal role you have played in the peace process in Northern Ireland.

Your determination to succeed in this great endeavour, allied to your understanding of the human and political issues, your skills as a mediator, your courage, and the trust in which you are held, has been crucial to the progress which has been made so far.

We congratulate you for this.

And we also congratulate Prime Minister Major and the British Government for the constructive role they have played.

The Australian Government welcomed the IRA's announcement on September 1 that military operations would cease. The Australian people welcomed it.

You have said that the opportunity now exists to take the gun out of Irish politics forever.

All Australians hope that the opportunity can be seized, and that peace comes to Ireland.

They hope - as people throughout the world would hope - that the parties on whom peace depends understand that because Australians love Ireland they hate the war that goes on there.

Unionists and Nationalists now have an opportunity to build relationships of trust, to pursue the goals of cooperation and reconciliation.

To help this process I am very pleased to announce tonight that, following my discussions with Prime Minister Reynolds, the Australian Government will contribute \$7 million over five years to the International Fund for Ireland.

Not everyone here tonight will know about the Fund.

The Fund was set up in December 1986 following an agreement between the British and Irish governments to promote - in its own words - "economic and social advance and to encourage contact, dialogue and reconciliation between nationalists and unionists throughout Ireland".

The Fund does this by stimulating private investment and enterprise, supplementing public programs and supporting voluntary effort, including self-help schemes.

The Fund's role in economic development, particularly in disadvantaged areas, will help to underpin progress towards peace and reconciliation in Ireland.

It is the most valuable material assistance we can give, and we are very pleased to join the United States, Canada the European Union and New Zealand - among other countries - in giving it.

Prime Minister

We have a great deal of shared history and shared traditions upon which to build our relationship.

It is essential that to the warmth of our relationship we continue to add the threads which join our common interests and ambition.

We need to build on those people to people relationships, especially tourism.

We need more of the kind of institutional cooperation which saw that great exhibition of European Masters from the National Gallery of Ireland come to the National Gallery of Australia.

We want to see the two way flow of investment grow. We are each of us primarily concerned with our own regions - but that does not mean we turn our backs either on old friends, or on new opportunities.

We hope that Irish business people will increasingly use Australia as a base for doing business in Asia and that Australia will use Ireland as a springboard to Europe.

We need the sorts of exchanges which will help our young people get to know each other.

And we need, Prime Minister, visits like this one.

Visits which strengthen the bonds between us and remind us that we share not only an extraordinary past, but a future which really has never been so promising.

I began by saying that we share so much history. It might be appropriate to this occasion and to the times we live in if I close by saying that nothing in our history is so important as the future.

On behalf of the Government and people of Australia I welcome you and wish you a most enjoyable and rewarding stay.

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