



# PRIME MINISTER

**STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER THE HON PJ KEATING MP**

**HIROSHIMA DAY - 50 YEARS ON**

When an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima fifty years ago the world was changed forever. We had been through the most destructive war in human history. At the very moment we emerged into the peace we learned that there were weapons in the world of unimaginable destructive force. We entered a Cold War and with it came the threat of **nuclear war** - which, it became increasingly apparent, meant the annihilation of civilisation.

We were not the first generation in history to live in fear of the end of the world. But we were the first to have proof that it could happen. From what we knew of Hiroshima and Nagasaki we knew what it would be like. And as first the Soviet Union and then other countries developed weapons, and tested them, and the weapons became infinitely more powerful than the Hiroshima bomb, the threat grew.

For half a century we have lived with this threat: that a miscalculation or a moment of madness among a handful of men in Washington and Moscow might bring an end to human life.

To say that this knowledge profoundly changed our thinking is to understate the case. The mushroom cloud has lived in all our minds. It has pervaded our thoughts about the future; about our children, about human nature.

So long as the Cold War continued, the shadow of nuclear war grew larger. New technologies emerged to make weapons and their delivery systems ever more efficient and deadly. We became familiar with terms like Mutual Assured Destruction, but we never got used to the idea.

The Cold War limited our options, but many countries did what they could to make the world safer. Australia was among those countries. In fact, at the forefront of them.

We worked through international organisations to persuade the international community to heed the dangers of nuclear competition and prevent nuclear proliferation and reduce nuclear stockpiles. We created a new post - an

Ambassador for Disarmament. In 1985 we took a leading role in developing the Treaty of Rarotonga which established the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone. Protocol 3 of that Treaty prohibits nuclear testing in the South Pacific.

The end of the Cold War came as an unexpected and promising coda to the century. It promised a way out of the nuclear prison. For a moment it seemed possible that what we had assumed to be a permanent feature of our lives might have been a temporary nightmare.

It created a great opportunity: but to seize this opportunity the two great questions of nuclear proliferation and nuclear testing had to be addressed.

At an international conference in May this year, it was agreed to indefinitely extend and strengthen the operation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). The purpose of the NPT is to prevent the emergence of new nuclear weapons states. Without the NPT it is likely that many countries would have found it impossible to resist the temptation to develop nuclear weapons.

It was a key to the agreement that non-nuclear weapons states were assured the nuclear powers would play their part in diminishing the nuclear threat and exercise 'utmost restraint' in testing weapons before a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) was agreed.

A commitment to conclude an internationally binding and genuine CTBT no later than the end of 1996 was one of the most important outcomes of the NPT conference in May. This would achieve a goal for which Australia, among other countries, has long fought in the United Nations.

Australia played an influential role at the May conference. We have been active in the work underway to complete the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty as soon as possible and have tabled a draft text. The conclusion of the CTBT should bring a permanent end to nuclear testing and will be a major boost to the cause of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. It is a key policy aim of the Australian Government.

The 50th anniversary of Hiroshima and Nagasaki - the only times nuclear weapons have been used in war - is an appropriate moment to urge all governments to redouble their efforts for the completion of a Test Ban Treaty.

Continued testing gives comfort to would-be proliferators and sours the atmosphere in which the Treaty negotiations will take place. Australia calls on all nuclear weapons states to put an immediate end to nuclear testing.

We have made our position on this clear to the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of France.

The Australian Government recently sent a high-level delegation to the nuclear weapon states to underline our concerns. I am pleased that all five

nuclear weapon states have confirmed their commitment to a successful conclusion to the CTBT in the agreed time. We intend to hold them to this.

In addition to the effort for a CTBT, Australia is supporting another measure flowing from the Non-Proliferation Treaty conference: the immediate negotiation of a convention to cease the production of fissionable material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear devices.

The French Government's decision to resume testing at Mururoa caused anger in Australia and throughout the world not only because of concern for the Pacific environment, but because it puts all this work at risk. It puts at risk our hopes for a post Cold War world which does not have the nuclear shadow hanging over it.

The French nuclear testing program is a symptom of the wider problem - the problem of what we do to reduce and eliminate nuclear weapons in the 21st century.

Since 23 June when I announced the measures we have taken to bring home to the French Government the extent of Australian concerns about their policy, we have continued to build coalitions with other countries which share our view of the testing program.

We have been particularly pleased at the way many people in Europe, both within governments and outside, have spoken out against the French decision. Similarly welcome expressions of concern have been made by Japan, by our ASEAN neighbours and by the countries of Latin America.

A central aim of our policy is to work with this international coalition, not only in our opposition to French tests but also on wider nuclear issues.

The South Pacific Forum Regional Action Committee has begun its work. An important meeting of Environment Ministers from the fifteen South Pacific Forum countries will be held in Brisbane on 16 and 17 August to discuss the environmental impact of testing.

At the international level, the Government has decided that Australia will join with other countries, including Japan, in bringing before the 50th anniversary session of the United Nations General Assembly a resolution calling for a complete and immediate end to nuclear testing.

We also believe that progress towards a nuclear weapons-free world may be aided by the creation of linkages between the existing or potential nuclear-weapon free zones which already cover most of the Southern Hemisphere. We will be exploring this with the members of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone and the other zones involved.

In order to strengthen our communication with the governments and people of the European countries, many of whom share our views, and to ensure that our position is fully understood, I have asked the Minister for Pacific Island

Affairs, the Hon Gordon Bilney MP, to lead a Parliamentary delegation to Europe in early September. This will be additional to a delegation, led by the President of the Senate, Senator Beahan, which will also be in Europe meeting members of the European Parliament.

The Government has been considering the issue of whether Australia can take action in the International Court of Justice against the French tests. At present, the legal advice suggests that such avenues are not open to us. We will, however, be making oral submissions to the Court on the advisory opinions sought by the World Health Organisation and the UN General Assembly on the legality of using nuclear weapons. As the French tests raise important issues relevant to these proceedings, our position will be firmly on the record before the court.

There have been a number of calls for the Government to send a ship to Mururoa Atoll as part of an international protest against the testing program.

I have previously ruled out sending a naval vessel. The Government takes the view that naval vessels should be used for naval purposes.

We have also considered the possibility of sending a non-naval vessel. The Government has decided against such an action in the current circumstances. Our reasons are principally strategic and financial. It would be a costly exercise and it is by no means certain that it would have any practical effect. We believe, on balance, that our resources can be put to better use developing other elements of our campaign.

The Government is, however, concerned about the safety of Australian participants in the flotilla. Present indications are that around ten Australian yachts could be involved. The Australian Maritime Safety Authority, in consultation with the Australian Defence Force, will be in touch with relevant South Pacific search and rescue agencies to offer any additional support if this is required.

The Government will also strengthen consular support for Australians in French Polynesia.

With the tragedies of World War II and Cold War tension now behind us, we have for the first time in many generations an opportunity to remake our concepts of world security and take positive steps towards a world without nuclear weapons.

Hiroshima is a most powerful reminder that we must not waste that opportunity.

**CANBERRA**  
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