



PRIME MINISTER

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER THE HON P J KEATING, MP
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*****CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY*****

This has been a very good year in the life of Australia. It was a great year when the war was won, and I think this fiftieth anniversary year will go down as a very good one.

We could not live up to the deeds, but I think we can say that in the year of "Australia Remembers" the people of Australia lived up to the memory.

And we *have* remembered. We *do* remember. We have felt the bonds between us and those Australians who, with our allies, fought and won the greatest of all victories fifty years ago.

VP means Victory in the Pacific. It has also been called VJ Day - Victory over Japan - and some people thought that is what we should call it in Australia.

I think most of us feel that first letter is the really important one - the "V" for victory.. The victory over tyranny and aggression. The victory for freedom, decency and justice. The victory for peace.

That is what we are celebrating.

And I think there is reason to believe that we have a little more cause to celebrate after today's statement by the Prime Minister of Japan.

Today Mr Murayama acknowledged the "irrefutable facts" of Japanese aggression in World War II and the "tremendous damage and suffering" it caused.

Mr Murayama said: "I regard, in a spirit of humility, these irrefutable facts of history, and express here once again my feelings of deep remorse, and state my heartfelt apology".

I am sure all Australians welcome Mr Murayama's statement. We all feel that it is essential for the Japanese people to know and acknowledge the truth about the past.

Australians have learned a lot about the past this year. We have learned a lot about the war and what victory meant.

And we have learned how fortunate we are that we still have the things for which Australians fought.

We are free - few people were ever so free, few countries were ever so democratic.

Few have ever enjoyed for so long the peace we have enjoyed in the past fifty years.

We have our liberty, we have our rights, and we are at peace - few nations were ever so fortunate.

"Australia Remembers" has been a way of saying that we do not take this for granted - a way of reminding ourselves that we never can.

To remember has been to recognise that these great gifts were delivered to us at immeasurable human cost.

It has been to remind us all that peace and freedom are hard won and we must be prepared to defend them.

To remember has been to be reminded that when democracy needed defending in Europe, Australia sent help.

And when we needed help, it was sent to us.

When Australia remembered this year we remembered the help we received from the United States.

We remembered all those from Britain and the countries of the Commonwealth who fought alongside Australians, suffered in prison camps with Australians, died and lie buried with Australians.

To remember the Second World War is to be reminded that free people have a duty to freedom everywhere.

That might be the greatest lesson of all.

This year has been a great one for another reason.

It has reminded us that while our world has changed dramatically, and while the young Australians of today are very different to those who fought the war fifty years ago, the bonds between our generations are unbreakable.

It has reminded us that the passage of time and changes in perspective and fashion cannot alter the fact that we are the same people - that we are part of the same Australian story.

We have all drawn inspiration from remembering the deeds of the war generation. I sincerely hope that that great generation has drawn some comfort from seeing us inspired.

We are all a little stronger for this year. And Australia is a little stronger.

We not only know more about the war and what we won from it; I venture to say we know more about *how* to win.

We know more about each other, more about the value of men and women from all parts of the continent, all backgrounds and all parts of the world, working together and sticking together.

We certainly know more about what it is to be Australian - and we know more about the duty that implies.

Celebrating the generation of 1945 has taught us that it is our duty to live up to their love for this country and the sacrifice they made for it.

It has taught us to believe in ourselves, defend freedom and cherish peace.

Above all, it has taught us to be like those at Kokoda, or in the camps of Thailand and Burma - to keep up the faith and keep going.

I thank everyone who has made Australia Remembers such a wonderful event - every organiser, every worker and every participant.

And most of all, I thank every member of that magnificent generation of Australians who won that victory for all of us fifty years ago.