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PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP
SPEECH TO THE AUSTRALIA REMEMBERS NATIONAL YOUTH FORUM,
BRISBANE GIRLS' GRAMMAR SCHOOL, BRISBANE, 15 AUGUST 1995**

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Can I say I am delighted to be at Brisbane Girls' Grammar School and to say how pleased I am that so many young Australians have taken up the theme of Australia Remembers and have engaged themselves with it.

I think it is apparent to you, if it wasn't earlier, that most of the things we celebrate and the people we remember were young Australians - in the main, young Australians as you are today young Australians - and that they had all the hopes and aspirations that you have. They were very much at the point in their own lives, as many of you are at today, and yet at this level of the emotional development they carried the brute force of an assault upon themselves, upon their life, upon Australia and it was belief in this country, a belief in what we have created here, of what have we represented and faith in themselves and those around them that let them fight the fight against tyranny and oppression to a hard won victory which has given us all liberty and peace. I mean that is what we remember. Remember that faith and remember that belief.

Perhaps it came home to me most when I was in Kokoda in 1992 on that same little green square that exists today, that existed then, where the first shots by Australian combatants against the Japanese marines in defence of Australia were fired. And that morning at 6.00 am, with the mist low over the village as it started to clear, young Australian men in shorts and singlets some 18 years of age, fought the best the Japanese Imperial Army could throw at them.

Now that is people at Year 12 age, or approaching Year 12, to be sitting there in that tropical environment facing the strongest and the best combat troops the Japanese could throw at our country. So you had to believe in something and you had to have faith in something to carry on and they did and they fought a valiant fight for Australia and the rest is the history we know.

That is who we are remembering and we see the diggers, now in their late 60s or their 70s or even the First World War diggers older than that, and you are prone to think about them, but you must think about them as young people because it was their young lives which were disrupted and it was the younger lives, the lives of even younger people, who were lost.

I remember walking through the cemetery at Kanchanaburi in Thailand, not far from the Burma railway, looking at the number of young men, young Australians who died, the day that I was born - 18 January 1944. And you know that it makes the point poignantly to you, they died so that your life could be complete and I said in the speech for the Unknown Soldier, when we buried the Unknown Soldier, that he was all of them, one of them, but one of us. And they - all of them - were one of us.

I know we think today that we being the people of democracy and liberty, that of course we would have won the war. We will back it up that the right side won, the good people won, the good guys won. But it didn't necessarily have to go that way and in the war in Europe which is so inextricably linked to the war in the Pacific, that had Hitler made an assault on Britain in 1940, had he not attacked the Soviet Union in 1941, had the Russian people not held out Leningrad from 1941-1944, then we might have faced a completely different world.

With a successful Nazi Germany, with the Russians not in the war, where we faced the Japanese with the United States, and the toe-hold in Normandy might just simply have been that - a toe-hold - and been simply as we remember Gallipoli from the First World War.

The fact that we succeeded and had we not it would have been a race between Hitler and the United States to develop the nuclear weapon and it might not have been Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but it could have also been British cities and American cities. So it was close and I have no doubt that the United States once that great machine finally wound itself up, under the leadership of Franklin Roosevelt, that we would have defeated the Japanese in the Pacific. But it might have been a different war. The whole environment may have been different. But notwithstanding our sense of democracy and liberty in our righteousness we may not have been at least the early victors.

So Australia was a more innocent country then and a small country. A smaller much more innocent place than today, where we are perhaps less naive and more worldly and so the assault and the affront was greater and one had to have that deep sense of democracy and that clear installation of the values to actually run a fight like this and to win. And so when we see our relatives, our dead relatives, laying around the battlefields of East Asia and Europe, we know that they were there confronting with some substantial uncertainty that period in their lives which may have seen a different world for them and for us.

So it had to mean something. 50 years on, we can't say oh well that was just something in the past. This sort of stoicism, this sort of bravery, heroism,

belief in Australia, belief in what we created here, belief in our values, had to mean something. And so I am exceptionally pleased that so many Australians remember and so many young Australians remember and have learned about the period.

Now today the Prime Minister of Japan made a statement and one that I think will bring substantial pleasure to many of us in this country and many of you - I think all of you. And I will read some of it because I think it is a testimony to the battle that we fought. And he said, and I am reading part of it, "our task is to convey to younger generations the horrors of war so that we never repeat the errors in our history." This is what we have always asked of the Japanese. That they teach their children what happened. And he is saying that "our task is to convey to younger generations the horrors of war so that we never repeat the errors in our history. Furthermore I will continue in all sincerity to do my utmost in efforts being made on the issues arisen from the war, in order to further strengthen the relations of trust between Japan and those other countries. Now upon this historic occasion, the 50th anniversary of the war's end, we should bear in mind that we must look into the past to learn from the lessons of history and ensure that we do not stray from the path to peace and prosperity of human society in the future. We do not stray," he says. "During a certain period, in the not too distant past, Japan followed a mistaken national policy. Advanced on the road to war only to ensnare the Japanese people in a fateful crisis and through it colonial rule and aggression caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly those of Asian nations. In the hope that no such mistake be made in the future, I regard in the spirit of humility, these irrefutable facts of history and express here, once again, my feelings of deep remorse and state my heartfelt apology. Allow me also to express my feelings of profound mourning to all victims, both at home and abroad, of that history. Building from our deep remorse on this occasion of the 50th anniversary of the end of the war, Japan must eliminate self-righteous nationalism, promote international coordination as a responsible member of the international community, and thereby advance these principles of peace and democracy." He finishes, amongst other things, by saying "it is my conviction that in this way alone can Japan atone for its past and lay to rest the spirits of those who perished. It is said that one can rely on good faith and so, in this time of remembrance, I declare to the people of Japan and abroad my intention to make good faith the foundations of our Government policy and this is my vow."

Now that is a powerful statement and one that acknowledges for many Australians the hurt that happened, the wrong that was done, the nationalism which was invested wrongly, mistakenly and the sorrow that it expressed.

(tape break)

We should never be at any stage sanguine about liberty and democracy. Those of you who are studying modern history will know that probably one of the shots that started the First World War was in Sarajevo in 1914 where a member of the then ruling royal family was assassinated and yet now, in

Sarajevo 80 years later we saw the force last week of 2700 people machine gunned and buried in mass graves, the sort of numbers that we as a country lost on the death march in Sandakan, which we now remember the detail. I think all that means to us is that we must be eternally vigilant about democracy and liberty and about the value of each human person and about human rights and it underlies again why we should remember, if not simply to remember the fight for liberty and democracy by those young Australians 50 years ago. But, to remember how we need to be vigilant to preserve those liberties today. Thank you for being interested in this remembrance program.

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