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## **PRIME MINISTER**

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP  
DINNER FOR PRESIDENT RAMOS OF THE PHILIPPINES  
PARLIAMENT HOUSE, TUESDAY 22 AUGUST 1995**

**PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

On behalf of the Government of Australia and all Australians, I warmly welcome President Ramos, his wife and his party to Australia.

Before you left Manila, Mr President, you said that you were embarking on a journey of friendship and opportunity.

That is exactly how we see your visit, too.

And although you are making your first visit here as President of the Philippines, you - and your service to your country - are widely known in Australia.

People here - along with much of the rest of the world - were deeply moved in early 1986 by the images we saw of the tense struggle taking place in Manila where the People's Power movement and Mrs Aquino stood their ground in support of democracy. You played a courageous and vital role in that struggle.

In the following years, when the restoration of democracy was threatened time after time, we observed and deeply admired your loyalty in defending the rebirth of your country's democratic political institutions.

And in your first three years as President, you have displayed the same tenacity and courage in implementing reform, in opening up the Philippines economy and allowing it to regenerate.

The Philippines return to growth - well over 5 per cent expected this year - and the large amounts of foreign investment now flowing into your country, are reflections of your personal commitment to responsible economic management and deregulation.

In your efforts, you have been able to draw on a private sector with business and managerial skills that are highly regarded throughout the region. We particularly welcome the members of the business delegation you have brought with you.

Mr President, you made an important point in a speech last year, and you have since demonstrated its truth: the truth that political democracy, social discipline and sustained economic development are not incompatible.

By your success at home in consolidating democracy and reforming the economy you have also given the Philippines a new standing in the regional and international community. It is very fitting that you and the Philippines will have the honour of hosting the summit meeting of APEC leaders in 1996.

Mr President, you will find Australia much changed since your last visit in the late 1970s.

We, too, have opened up our economy. With the assistance of eight successive accords with the union movement we have ensured that the Australian business environment has become more competitive. Last year Australia had one of the fastest growing economies in the OECD and corporate profits were at historic highs. Moreover, that growth has come with low inflation and high job growth.

Our utilities, telecommunications industry, waterfront, civil aviation, and rail transport have undergone dramatic reform. We have introduced a national superannuation scheme to help lift our savings. Our education and training systems have received massive investments.

But beyond these changes, Australia has been coming to terms with its history, with its region and with its own society.

With native title legislation, a new epoch has begun for our indigenous peoples - an historic wrong has been righted, at least in legal terms, and we are determined to see that social justice follows.

Our place in the Asia-Pacific region is no longer disputed. Geography and economic integration have driven this trend. But there is more to it than geography and commerce.

Important changes are taking place in the way Australians think about themselves - not least because more than half the immigrants joining Australia's multicultural society each year come from Asia.

And Australians are now debating our future constitutional arrangements.

The changes have been fundamental. But they have been achieved without rejecting our history.

In all this, it seems to me, there are important parallels with the recent experience of the Philippines. Both of us have had to come to terms with our history and the necessities which global change is imposing on us. We understand that we have to make our own way in the world. We have thought hard about the sort of societies we wish to be, and what our role will be in the world of the 21st century.

And, not least, we have had to work hard to rework the images others hold of us.

I am sure that your visit will contribute to this process for both our countries, Mr President.

Australia and the Philippines have a good foundation on which to build.

Mr President, you said you come here as a friend - and the commemorations this year for the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war remind us what close and longstanding friends we are. The Philippine government-in-exile of President Quezon was headquartered in Australia during the war. Earlier today we launched at the War Memorial a book on the Battle of Leyte Gulf. This was the largest engagement by Australian vessels during the war, and that victory began the liberation of the Philippines.

Australia has provided economic assistance to the Philippines for many years. We are a significant source of training for your defence force.

Our trade is growing well. But there is no doubt that our economic ties ought to be more substantial than they are at present.

I am confident that this will happen. The opportunities have never been greater as our two economies have opened up. A sign of what lies ahead can be seen in the MOUs and agreements we witnessed being signed this morning and in the number of very senior Australian businesspeople who are present at this dinner tonight.

I am very pleased to join you, Mr President, in urging our business leaders and investors to look at the new opportunities which are opening up for Australia and the Philippines to do business together.

In all we do together bilaterally, we have the invaluable resource of the Filipino community in Australia, now numbering around 120,000. It has doubled in size at every census since 1961.

Let me assure you, Mr President, that Australia and its government value our citizens of Philippine origin, and we will care for them.

Our bilateral links will also be strengthened by regional developments, like APEC and the discussions we are having about closer links between the ASEAN Free Trade Area and the Australia- New Zealand Closer Economic Relations Agreement.

Australia and the Philippines - and you and I, Mr President - have been working very hard to set up in APEC a structure which will strengthen the region economically and increase its stability as it enters a period of historic economic and strategic change.

This visit has a particular significance. Not only are you the first President of the Philippines to visit Australia, but you are the first foreign Head of State I have ever welcomed here who has an Australian grandchild.

That makes you doubly welcome - as the leader of a great regional country with which we want to develop close relations.

And - even more deeply - as family.