



PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP,
AND THE PRESIDENT OF THE PHILIPPINES, HIS EXCELLENCY MR
FIDEL RAMOS, JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE, PARLIAMENT HOUSE,
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PM: Well can I just say a few words by way of introduction. Firstly, how delighted I am to see the President in Australia. I thank him, sincerely, for coming, for showing this interest in the bilateral relationship, for spending so much time in Australia and seeking to learn more about this country and define the relevance in the relationship between the two of us. We very greatly appreciate the visit and his conscientious effort in it. During the course of our discussions this morning, we have had a talk around the issues which are of interest to us and which we have in common. Of course, the, if you like, stewardship of the region in which we live. We are all bound by the Pacific Ocean, we're Pacific countries and we have that community of interest. Of course the President and I have been part of the founding group of APEC and we both were at the Bogor summit meeting in Indonesia last year. We will be attending the Osaka meeting of APEC this year where the action plan we hope will be advanced coming from the Bogor Declaration and, of course, many of you will know that the meeting the following year will be in the Philippines, under the stewardship of the President. So we have both a direct and active interest in this issue and I think we are, let's say, quietly excited about the prospect of putting a Pacific Rim organisation together with free trade objectives that advance intercommunal trade and the movement of people that will go with it. In other words, building a comprehensive and effective regional economy which also has its own natural strategic value and people-to-people values as well. So we have that between us. On the bilateral relationship, I think we see us having a growing bilateral relationship. The Philippines is a country of just on 70 million people, it is a member of ASEAN, it provides a lot of the weight in ASEAN, and I think it is true to say Australia has not done enough with the Philippines. We are finding together that we have things in common and the President and I, I think, are committed to advancing those things both by way of investment, by trade, tourism, etc. We are, of course, democracies. We have very similar cultural and democratic

values and the President and I think that this is something we bring to the Asia Pacific area and something we can be proud to proselytise about. So we have had, I will round up my remarks on this, a discussion about the bilateral relationship, about the multilateral relationship in the region, our relations with other countries in the region and a commitment by both of us to see us do more together, country to country. Could I conclude, again, by saying how pleased I am to see the President in Australia on such an extended visit and invite him to make some remarks to you.

FR: Thank you, Mr Prime Minister. Ladies and gentlemen, firstly let me express the deep appreciation of the Philippines Government and our people for this opportunity to visit Australia on the invitation of His Excellency Governor General Bill Hayden and Prime Minister Paul Keating. The relationship between the Philippines and Australia goes a long, long way back, even before World War II. But that relationship, of course, has been strengthened and reinforced by our common defence of freedom and democracy in our part of the world. Maybe not too many Australians now remember the very valuable contribution of Australia to the liberation of the Philippines under General Macarthur in late 1944 up to Victory in the Pacific in August 1945, but the record is there. And I am here to express the appreciation of our people for that very valuable contribution on the part of the Australian people. Of course our relationship is reinforced by our bilateral relations in this contemporary age, cooperation in trade investment, but beyond the economic and material aspects, we also have continuing and deep cooperation in education, in health, in environmental protection and in human resource development. All this within our bilateral framework as well as within the larger framework of APEC and between us and itself, which the Philippines is a founding member and Australia and New Zealand. We have discovered during this visit that aside from the longitudinal, or north-south, kind of flow that we can create an even more beneficial relationship between Australia, the Philippines and the rest of ASEAN through a lateral or a latitudinal flow which we hope to develop some more. For instance, the Philippines pioneered - together with Brunei, Indonesia and Malaysia - the establishment of the East ASEAN growth area and we see now that the Northern Territory of Australia has become a very active player in that almost borderless kind of an economy and this has to do not only with trade investment, environmental protection, forestry, but also tourism, education and sports. Mrs Ramos, in fact, is President of the Philippines Badminton Association and part of the Philippines Olympic Committee is now meeting with your sports leaders to create a new momentum between the Philippines and Australian sports. Australia being recognised as part of the world leaders in physical fitness and sports development. We are also looking at the APEC meetings together as neighbours. The one in Osaka in 1995 and, of course, the one that we will host in the Philippines some time in November or December 1996. And already there are projects and programs being put on the ground in the Philippines which are the result of Philippine/Australian initiatives during our first leaders summit at Blake Island in Seattle in November

1993. Australia supported the proposal of the Philippines for something tangible on the ground to be put in by APEC and this will be a centre for the transfer of technology for small and medium enterprises. We have broken ground in the community of Los Banos, which is a college town in the Philippines south of Manila, for this centre and by mid-1996 this should be an ongoing concern for the benefit of the 18 member economies of APEC with the more advanced countries like Australia contributing to the fund of knowledge for the developing countries like the Philippines in small and medium enterprises, upon which the economy of Australia has been founded from the very beginning. All in all I would like to assess that so far, up to this point, this visit has been most productive. We are just about two-thirds finished with it, but we are seeing even more opportunities as we move on to Brisbane, Queensland, tomorrow and eventually to Darwin, which is so close to the Philippines that you might say Darwin is mid-way between Manila and Sydney and so we thank you Mr Prime Minister for all the hospitality, all the support, all the cooperation and I am sure that all of this will lead down to great mutual benefit between our two peoples.

PM: Thank you, President. Thank you very much for those sentiments. I am happy to take questions.

J: inaudible

PM: Well the President and I had a quite extensive discussion on this topic this morning. I think that this is a theme we have been over at other times when we have met, perhaps not as well defined as the President has defined it in the last day or two. I think Australia sees itself having a strong partnership with the countries of ASEAN. Particularly the countries which like Australia are not a part of continental Asia - Indonesia, the Philippines, etc - and we think that there is some value in some more formal commercial links between Australia, and New Zealand can I say, and the ASEAN group of countries and this can perhaps most obviously come through AFTA, some linkage between Australia and New Zealand and AFTA, and I think if we get that commercial linkage going then the natural strategic linkages come, in a sense, with it. In North Asia though there are very big economies and societies - Japan, the second largest economy in the world, China, the largest emerging economy, the largest nation in the world - in a sense, they stand in their own right. The rest of us, being smaller, can have quite a large economy of influence by doing things together and I think these sentiments, which the President has expressed, fall on very fertile ground here in Australia. That is, there is, I think, the possibility of creating a South East Asian regional economy and group of countries and community with a very clear community of interest which is not part of the orbit of Japan, or China, or the United States, or any of the great powers. But a regional economy in which we all share and benefit.

J: Mr President, you have spoken of Australia and the Philippines as both being democracies in Asia. Do you think [inaudible]?

FR: I do not think it would be necessary for any nation to curtail its democracy or democratic system or culture in order to accommodate with the rest of the countries in the Asia Pacific. I think the trend now, under this freer world trading regime, is for countries to become more transparent, for the economic environment to be more level and fair and predictable, and this is where we are in the Philippines and, I would say, also Australia. I think that in the end, and we are seeing this already in Taiwan and also the Republic of Korea, that it will be the freer, the more transparent and the more predictable kind of regimes that will predominate. If I may amplify on my proposals about Australia, the Philippines, ASEAN itself, being effective, counter-veiling, or counter-balancing, forces in our part of the world. This is not to say that I favour a military or a defence alliance. No, there is no way that it could be that way. But the combined economic clout and influence of countries like Australia, New Zealand, all of ASEAN, must eventually C-10 - as we call it in the Philippines and in the rest of Asia, meaning the ten countries of South East Asia, to include Cambodia, Laos and Myamar - could exert great effective moral-suasion over the big powers in the Asia Pacific to the extent that there would be no unpredictable happenings, no sudden shocks, that would threaten the stability of the Asia Pacific. Afterall, it is the stability and the peace that continue to reign in this region that ensures our dynamic economic growth and our social cohesion. So this is the road that I see for countries like Australia and the Philippines and Asia being the middle forces - the moderating forces - in our part of the world.

J: Mr President, you clearly see Australia as playing a role in the region. But other countries in Asia, most notably Malaysia, has some problem with Australia playing a greater role. Why do you think they have that problem with Australia and what is your view of Australia's overall position in Asia? Are we Asian, are we on the fringes, where do you see us?

FR: Well the Philippines itself has no problems with any of its neighbours in the Asia Pacific and around the world in fact. I do believe that in the end, really not too far from now in terms of years, that everyone will come around to seeing that the most important condition that we must all try to attain is inter-dependence, mutual support and accommodation. There is no question that our cultures, our histories, our societies are uniquely different from each other. But there is enough room, there is enough benefit in the world, for each one to enjoy. I have said it in the past, I have said it here in Australia, I said it over in New Zealand, that what is more important about becoming, or being a part of Asia, or Asia Pacific to be more specific about it, is just to be there, just to do what you have to do. And this must be a two-way kind of thing - Australia to Asia-Pacific and the rest of us in Asia-Pacific to Australia. Let's just do it. Let's not be tied in with labels, intentions and proposals. Let's just be there, let's just do it.

J: Do you see that role being emphasised through APEC and, if that's so, how happy are you with the preparations for Osaka?

FR: Yes, well, APEC is a very important forum and it has proven to be effective since it was organised on the proposal of Australia back in 1989. The ASEAN regional forum is another important venue for really ensuring the stability of our region and the AFTA is another framework that provides beneficial opportunities for everyone. Certainly, if Australia and New Zealand, through the CER, come into that framework for freer trade, we, in the Philippines, would welcome that.

PM: I think we might have one more question, because I know that the President will be addressing the Press Club, which will give you an opportunity to invite other questions, so perhaps one from the other Philippines side if there is one.

J: Can you just summarise your points of discussion?

FR: Yes, first we talked about our bilateral relations which have always been very good and new opportunities for reinforcing the bilateral relationship, especially in regard to the people-to-people kind of thing - education, tourism, small and medium enterprises, social development and values, forms for personal interaction among ordinary people. We also, of course, reviewed our regional situation under the framework of APEC, the ASEAN regional forum, as well as new opportunities for increasing trade investment, tourism, other forms of economic and educational cooperation.

J: Prime Minister, did you talk about nuclear testing by France and China?

PM: We did. We discussed that and I think the President and I agreed on this point. That is, one, that the countries of the South Pacific should be respected, the small island states particularly and, secondly, runs counter to the non-proliferation objectives of the rest of the world for a major power and a major democracy to be, in a sense, flouting those objectives with a testing program and the same is true, of course, of China. I think we were, I can say, happily at one on this point.

J: Prime Minister, on another matter closer to home if I may, [inaudible]?

PM: Well I think he is doing a press conference today and I think courtesy would demand that I let him speak for himself. Thank you very much indeed.

FR: Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. See you in the next one, at the Press Club.

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