



PRIME MINISTER

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING, MP

FRENCH NUCLEAR TESTS

It is almost certain that the French government will very soon - possibly within the next few days - detonate an underground nuclear device at Mururoa.

They have no moral right to conduct these tests. It is an expression of contempt for the people they wish to call their neighbours.

Mururoa is a French territory, six thousand kilometres from the east coast of Australia. Scientific opinion generally inclines to the view that the tests are unlikely to cause immediate harm to our environment, or, indeed, the environments of countries much closer to the test site.

The Government of France may think we have no cause for concern. If this is their calculation, they are wrong. Not only are Australia and the countries of the Pacific outraged at the French action, so are countries everywhere, including France's European neighbours.

The Pacific environment may not suffer damage from these tests this year or next - but no-one can guarantee this. And no-one can guarantee that there will not be damage in 20 or 50 or 100 years time. If there was no risk, the French government would conduct the tests in France itself.

The world is at a crucial stage on the path to a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. France is committed to signing such a treaty, and we welcome that. But France along with the other nuclear weapon states - including China, whose testing program we also vigorously oppose - is also committed to exercise "utmost restraint" on testing.

A series of eight nuclear tests by France is clearly not an exercise in restraint.

It is not an action which will encourage the hopes we all hold for a nuclear-free world. It is not an action which will help to solve the nuclear problems which lie at Europe's door - namely the Chernobyl-style nuclear reactors still functioning in the former Soviet Union and the nuclear materials and expertise seeping into illicit markets.

Rather it is an action which will give comfort to other countries with nuclear ambitions, and one which will diminish France's reputation as a great democracy and a good citizen of the world.

To try to persuade President Chirac to reverse this decision, the Australian Government has been forced to take the most wide ranging diplomatic measures we have ever taken against another democracy.

We have frozen defence contacts. We have taken the argument to the French people directly through the pages of their newspapers and television.

We have acted in concert with our South Pacific Forum partners, and with them sent a protest delegation to Paris.

We have argued our case in every available international forum. We are working to bring a resolution on testing before the UN General Assembly.

We have applied to intervene before the International Court of Justice in support of New Zealand's attempt to reopen its 1973 nuclear tests case against France; and the Minister for Pacific Island Affairs, Mr Bilney, is leading a Parliamentary Delegation to Europe to build a coalition of interests with those many Europeans who oppose the tests.

But for all the Government's efforts, we know that nothing has more dramatically brought home the message to the French government than the protests of the Australian people and the people of the region.

I hope that these protests continue: that they continue to be peaceful and constructive, and directed where they should be, at the French government and not the French people. The French people are not to blame for this, and it is both wrong and counter productive to act in any way which suggests that they are.

It is not for us to tell the French Government what their national security interests are. But we must tell them in every possible way that their tests are an affront. And that it is time for France to recognise that, whatever our concepts of national sovereignty, we share the world's environment - we share the earth.

Our protests will not end with the first test. Until the tests stop, we will continue to remind the French government that with every test they conduct, the good name of France is diminished in this part of the world.

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