



# PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING MP  
DOORSTOP, MILLBROOK RESORT, QUEENSTOWN,  
12 NOVEMBER 1995**

## **E&OE PROOF COPY**

**J: Prime Minister, what concrete action is Australia going to take over the Nigerian issue?**

**PM: In the first instance, we will be withdrawing our Ambassador to show our anger and our objection to this sort of behaviour, the denial of human rights and human values in Nigeria and, of course, I have been part of the majority here - the overwhelming majority - of Commonwealth Leaders which has made clear that Nigeria will be suspended from the Commonwealth until it demonstrates that it has had a change of heart and a change in the way in which the country operates and is moving back towards civilian government.**

**J: What impact does suspension have, I mean, how does this hurt Nigeria?**

**PM: There are two things, I think. This was a test of the Commonwealth's moral authority. The Commonwealth's moral authority has been important in Zimbabwe. It has been important in removing the racially based government of South Africa, the policy of apartheid. On that occasion it introduced economic sanctions which were completely effective. I might just say John Howard today on television, said that he doesn't regret not supporting economic sanctions against South Africa. Let me record that, had those sanctions not been used, Nelson Mandela would not be at this meeting today. He would not be at this meeting as the President of South Africa, but for the fact that the Labor Government in Australia and other like-minded governments around the world employed economic sanctions against South Africa.**

**Now, these options always exist for other countries. The Commonwealth has no constitutional authority over sovereign countries, but it is a very large representative group of countries and it does have moral authority. Its moral authority would not have been**

maintained were it to be, in a sense, scrubbed, defied by the Government of Nigeria in executing these nine people. The fact that they were executed means, I think, that the Commonwealth had to act and the Commonwealth has acted.

**J:** What sort of a push was there for expulsion?

**PM:** Not very much, in fact none. Because with expulsion there is no incentive to return and there is no continuing link with the country. Whereas with suspension, we can keep that pressure on. That pressure has been kept on a number of countries in the past and most obviously, of course, South Africa.

**J:** Any indication from the Nigerian Foreign Minister as to whether they will take up any of that incentive as you say?

**PM:** Well, I think, they will have to think about their position and no doubt, I think, probably today, we will think further about what might be done. But we did adopt yesterday a set of principles around the Harare Declaration which will be applied now, I think, consistently over time to any countries that break the conventions of decent behaviour in government or human rights.

**J:** Will we be expelling Nigeria's legation from Australia?

**PM:** We are withdrawing our Ambassador for consultations and we will consider where we go from there, but this is very strong action by the Commonwealth in suspending Nigeria and it was unanimous bar two countries.

**J:** What countries were they Prime Minister?

**PM:** The Solomon Islands and Gambia.

**J:** What further actions would you like to see taken against Nigeria to give some effect to what you are hoping to achieve?

**PM:** The problem here is the question again of the nation state. Countries which are called nations are often a collection of regional areas or tribal regions and politics in many countries of Africa have been organised tribally. It remains to be seen whether a political party structure of the kind we have in Australia can actually apply effectively where there is good government and justice for all. I think these are some of the issues, but one thing is certain, a return to civilian government is the key ingredient for Nigeria.

**J:** Just one last question on Nigeria if I may, there was talk last night of setting up a time frame for possible expulsion, what is your view of that?

- PM: I think probably the time frame should be between now and the next meeting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government, which is two years. Some may argue for it earlier than that, but I think to have the sort of plenary force of the Commonwealth, there really needs to be a Head of Government Meeting. And I don't think that, if you like, further solid action can be taken without a meeting of the Heads of Government. So I think that is probably the way it might go.
- J: By having to confront issues such as Nigeria and nuclear testing, do you believe this has strengthened the Commonwealth, or CHOGM, as a forum?
- PM: Well one of the things I said yesterday was that if the United Nations didn't exist, we would have to invent it. If the Commonwealth didn't exist, we wouldn't have to invent it. But it does exist and it exists because of the linkage we have all had with Britain at one point or another. So it is a trans-regional body that runs across the world's regions and it has been effective in speaking about democracy, the rule of law, justice, human rights and development issues and I think it can continue to do that. Yesterday was a test of that and I think it passed that test.
- J: You would be aware of Mr Howard on the Sunday Program today, Prime Minister. What would you like to say about his comments?
- PM: Well he said today, he gave us this pat line again that he is in favour of families, arrogantly, as if the rest of us don't come from families, or we are not in favour of them. But what he said is he was in favour of orthodox family arrangements. What he means is he is not in favour of the unorthodox. In other words, he is only in favour of the nuclear family and the picket fence, he is not in favour of single parent families and he said, I thought rather ominously, that "a Government under him will not be a society where the Government picks up the pieces of families". In other words, they won't be supporting giving income support to families, income support per child for children, as the Government does. You see Mr Howard says he believes in families, but he doesn't believe in family support. He believes in families, but he doesn't believe in decent wages for them. He believes in families, but he doesn't believe in overtime rates. He believes in families, but he doesn't believe in Medicare. I mean, and what he made clear today, when pressed about the orthodox families that he is supporting - and as, I think, every Australian knows the so-called nuclear orthodox family is but a minority of families in Australia - he said he was not going to debate in 1995 the definition of the family. In other words, what he is telling us .... it's the same old John Howard with the picket fence. If you are, you know, mum and dad and three kids with a comfortable bungalow and a car in the driveway, well you will be supported. If you are a single parent with children, you won't be. If you are any other category of family, you will be called into question. That was one of the things he said.

4

The other thing he said was about integrity in Government. He said we need integrity in Government and Mr Oakes asked him the question, "Well why, Mr Howard, did you say coming up to the 1983 election that the Budget deficit was \$6 billion, when you knew it was \$9.6 billion?" He then told a lie. He said, "I found out about it the night before the election." That is untrue. He found out about it about the Tuesday before the election and he sat on it for four days. In a key matter, in a key election, and then he has got the gall to talk about integrity in office and honesty in policies. He was asked, also, this question: did he regret his non-support of economic sanctions in South Africa? And he said, no he didn't. The point was made, well Nelson Mandela wouldn't be at this meeting of the Commonwealth had your view obtained. Now Nelson Mandela wouldn't be here had John Howard's view obtained. This is the same John Howard who said be very careful of Mikhail Gorbachev and perestroika, he is essentially leading you on, it is just the old sort of communist bogey, giving us another misleading line. In the meantime, of course, the Soviet Union has fallen apart, the Berlin wall has come down. On every foreign policy issue he has ever touched, he has been wrong and he was wrong a month ago when he said we have got to be suspicious of Asia, it is a threat, we want security from Asia and not in Asia. But the thing about him is, he never learns. He is out there today beating his breast about his policies on South Africa. In fact, they were dead wrong and he was in a minority against the rest of the world.

ends