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**PRIME MINISTER**

1 May 1996

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**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON. JOHN HOWARD MP
DOORSTOP INTERVIEW - PORT ARTHUR, TASMANIA****E & OE.....****PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, I just want to say a very brief word because we have to get back to Hobart. I've come with my two parliamentary colleagues, Kim Beazley and Cheryl Kernot to demonstrate to the people of the Port Arthur district the extent to which the whole nation is shocked about what occurred. I hope it's a gesture that gives some support and encouragement to those who have been so badly affected, not only through the loss of family friends and loved ones but also whose livelihoods have been affected by these terrible events. I have had discussions with the Premier and with local authorities and we'll be having further discussions about ways in which practical assistance can be given by both levels of Government. I don't want to at this stage go into details. I have asked for certain proposals to be put to me and there are obviously some legal procedures in relation to the site that have got to be respected. I understand very much the feelings of people in the area. I can't begin of course personally to comprehend the anguish and pain that they must be feeling. I do want, and I know I speak for my two colleagues, that this is an event that has shaken the core of this country and in a way that no other individual crime has done in my lifetime, and the very least that the three of us can do is in a direct and sincere manner, identify ourselves with the difficulty and the pain and the anguish that the people of Tasmania and the people of Port Arthur and through them, the people of Australia are experiencing at the present time.

JOURNALIST:

How does it affect you coming here sir?

PRIME MINISTER:

It's quite a traumatic experience, it is and I want to take the opportunity to express my admiration for the work done by the Tasmanian police. Being a policeman is not an easy job and sometimes a very unpopular job, and people are often very quick to be critical of the police. The sort of strain that's placed on young policemen and women to protect the victims of crime, to look after dead bodies, to notify next of kin, to handle distraught relatives - it all poses an immense strain and I think on an occasion like this, the job that the police forces of Australia do for the community should never go unremarked, and I think they've been absolutely magnificent, and the Commissioner can feel very proud and the Premier can feel very proud of the Tasmanian police for the job they've done and to the staff here and to the nurses and the doctors and everybody who has been associated. It must have been an awful moment in their lives and they deserve our understanding and our gratitude.

JOURNALIST:

Mr Howard, what did you say to the residents?

PRIME MINISTER:

I talked as best I can from one Australian to another and I'm sure inadequately expressed my sense of sorrow and my desire to offer by the presence of not just myself but the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Australian Democrats because this is an event that utterly transcends any political differences. No one side of politics has a mortgage on compassion and concern for human suffering and I just wanted to express as best I could my sorrow and that of my colleagues and of the entire Australian nation.

JOURNALIST:

Do you think anyone can comprehend what these people have been through?

PRIME MINISTER:

No. I can gather words. I can use words, I can try and express it but you never can but you can help. By coming it helps, by saying as best you can, you're sorry and that you're conscious of what they're feeling. That helps. Every little bit helps and we're all pretty inadequate when it comes to some of the great challenges of life, and if you can do something, make some contribution then the sum of this is all just a little bit better.

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