



# PRIME MINISTER

29 May 1996

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER  
THE HON. JOHN HOWARD, MP  
LAUNCH OF A PETITION SUPPORTING  
UNIFORM GUN LAWS AND THE GUN LEVY  
PARLIAMENT HOUSE - CANBERRA**

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Thank you very much Judy; to Kim Beazley, to my other parliamentary colleagues, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a rare event in Australian politics that brings together the leaders of the two major political parties, and indeed the leaders of other political parties, in a united commitment to a piece of legislation and a political Act, clearly designed to improve the future of this country. I can't think of an event in the 22 years that I've been in politics which has so galvanised the political leadership of this country, has so brought together the major political parties of this country for a purpose which will achieve a permanent change for the better in the way in which this country conducts its affairs, and the circumstances in which the men and women of this country live out their lives.

We have been united on other occasions where the unity has been quite properly and quite appropriately around as symbols and demonstrations and commitments. But here we came together to achieve a permanent change in the attitude of this country towards the possession and use of dangerous firearms. We resolved as a community not to go down the American path. We resolved as a community to send a very strong message all around Australian society that violence as a method, particularly through the use of firearms, of settling disputes, of playing out emotions and then getting rid of pent-up passions with something that is unacceptable to us in Australian modern society, irrespective of our political or our religious beliefs.

I say very happily, that I have received on this issue, total support from Kim Beazley as Leader of the Australian Labor Party, and I thank him and I compliment him for that. I

have received total support from Senator Kernot, the Leader of the Australian Democrats, and indeed from a wide cross-section of the Australian community.

I congratulate all of the women's groups that have come together in formulating this petition. I think it's fair to say that it's a very broad spectrum of women's groups coming together unitedly behind a very important cause. A cause that's important to women particularly, but not only to women, but to men and women throughout our community. Men and women both died at Port Arthur, and men and women both have been the victims of other massacres, not only here in Australia but around the world. Those who argue that it is people and not guns that kill other people might state a truism, but they ignore a fundamental fact that there is a clear and irrefutable link between deaths and homicides through the use of guns, and the availability of guns around the world. There has to be a reason why a nation like the United States has something like a 14 in 100,000 murder rate, whereas a country such as the United Kingdom has a rate which is less than one seventh of that. There is a clear link between the availability of weapons, and those who argue otherwise are arguing in the face of all of human experience in the 20th century.

I do feel very strongly about this issue. I regret the fact that some law abiding people who have never done anything violent or anything wrong in their lives are going to be inconvenienced by these new laws. That happens in other parts of life and in other parts of society, and I think it is a small price to pay to give to people, not only the reality of a more secure future, but also the feeling of a more secure future. And I say to this audience again that the Government remains firmly committed to the implementation, without variation, of the policy guidelines that were put down during the Police Minister's Conference here in Canberra, just over two weeks ago.

But most importantly of all I want to congratulate the women's groups. I want to congratulate those who have put today's gathering together, because it's not easy to get disparate groups together. I wish the petition well. I will certainly encourage all with whom I come into contact to sign it. And I encourage all of you in your quiet, firm, but articulate way to demonstrate that there is overwhelming majority support in the Australian community for the laws that were agreed to by the Police Ministers' here in Canberra two weeks ago. Don't be, anybody in Australia, be deluded into imagining that there isn't overwhelming support for what the two sides of politics are doing on this issue. There is a deep feeling that this is a once in a lifetime opportunity to change things permanently for the better, and it's an opportunity that is our responsibility as leaders, and your responsibility as articulate citizens of Australia, not to squander. I congratulate you for your initiative. I wish the petition well. I assure you of the continued commitment of the Government and of the Liberal and National parties to the cause that the petition supports.

Thank you.