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**ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP
TO ROTARY CLUB OF AUSTRALIA**

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Thank you very much Tony; to Malcolm, and to all the other very distinguished office bearers of the Rotary Club of North Sydney and all the other members of Rotary, both here in Australia and around the world and can I say how very touched I am by this award. Those symbolic gestures in life are always in a sense more rewarding and have a lot more meaning than more material gestures. And to be recognised in this honouring way - I am not a rotarian, although I have attended so many Rotary functions in my life as all of my Parliamentary colleagues present here, and I acknowledge their presence particularly Joe Hockey and Gillian Skinner who are the two local members for this area, federally and State. I feel as though I know and understand Rotary extremely well and I take the opportunity as Prime Minister to acknowledge the tremendous contribution that Rotary makes towards building a better Australia and building a happier more cooperative world.

We'd never be able to keep Australia going without the help of literally hundreds of thousands, if not millions of Australians who volunteer their time and their energy and their effort to doing those things that no government, whatever its attitude may be, no government can ever do. Australia has a tremendous tradition of volunteerism. Being a volunteer and getting out and helping people in an unsung, very very selfless fashion has always been an important characteristic of being an Australian. We're very good at it, and although of course as you all know the Rotary movement started in the United States. The natural appeal of Rotary to Australians was very understandable. And the way in which so many Australians joined Rotary and through the years have cooperated in the local efforts of Rotary, have involved themselves in the international exchanges, the encouragement to community involvement and community self-help, the building of an understanding of what good citizenship is all about. The nurturing of the notion that our society is really a lot about mutual obligations. We have mutual obligations each to the other. We have rights but we also have responsibilities. As a society we also have an obligation to look after those within our midst who are less fortunate than we are and from time to time we have a right to say to people who are assisted that it's part of the mutual obligation of being a member of the Australian community that something is done in return for the effort that is extended to help them. And Rotary has been very much part of this and in the process hundreds of thousands of Australians have found a great deal of personal satisfaction in involving themselves

in the affairs of Rotary, in raising funds to help needy causes, in promoting very importantly international understanding. And I was reflecting as I drove here tonight from Gladesville just how many people, how many young people I know, including members of my extended family who have been the recipients of those great international student rotary exchanges which are one of the great ways in which young people have learned about other countries and the understanding that is so important, particularly in a world where communications and the globalisation of the world economy has demolished and removed the differences that used to exist.

So in many ways Rotary is owed a great debt of gratitude by the Australian community, and I want on behalf of the Government to express my personal gratitude to all of those rotarians in Australia who over the years have done so much to build and nurture the spirit of Rotary and have made such a magnificent contribution to improving understanding here in Australia and for making it between peoples and between nations.

I am very touched by the honour that you have paid me tonight. I do feel a quiet pride in the fact that it was possible in the wake of that awful tragedy to seize the opportunity and the moment to do something very positive to change at least in one area for all time the direction of our society.

It was a very interesting as well as a very challenging exercise, and may I acknowledge the assistance I received from both sides of politics; from the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Beazley; the Leader of the Australian Democrats, Senator Kernot; from the NSW Labor Premier Mr Carr; from Peter Collins, the Leader of the Opposition here in NSW and all of the other state Premiers. And I particularly acknowledge the contribution that was made by my deputy and the Leader of the National Party, Tim Fischer whose constituency found the adjustment process more difficult for reasons I hope you all understand. If you were an urban Liberal Member or an urban Labor Member it was a little easier to put your hand up for gun control laws than if you were a rural member and I think that should be acknowledged and in that context I also especially acknowledge the leadership role taken and displayed by the Premier of Queensland, Mr Rob Borbidge.

It was one of those occasions when a community wanted something done and a community wanted something done very decisively and those who hold public office in this country are often criticised for failing to match the moment or failing to seize the occasion. I think on this occasion the elected representatives of the Australian community whatever their politics overwhelmingly did the right thing by the Australian community and the significance of the event cannot be underestimated. I never accepted the inevitability that Australia should go down the American path so far as personal violence, particularly gun violence was concerned. I am a great admirer of many things American. That country has contributed enormously to the stability of the world and contributed enormously to the way of life that people in, what is loosely called the western world, enjoy. Like any other country which is a role model in some areas, it is not in other areas and the pattern of urban violence, the number of deaths from gunshot wounds in that country. The systemic violence that is found in so many parts of the United States is something that I certainly wanted to do all in my power to stop spreading to this country and I think in a small way what the governments and the

political parties of Australia were able to achieve in the wake of the Port Arthur disaster in a small way we have made a contribution to building a safer Australian community and what impressed me was the reaction across the board of people to what was done. I had people coming up to me in the streets and saying I didn't vote for you last time and I never will vote for you but I do agree with what you did in relation to gun control.

I remember going to a test match, it was a Rugby Union test match between Australia and South Africa at the Sydney Sports Stadium in June of last year and I was invited onto the field to meet the teams and I was still in the infancy of my Prime Ministership so I didn't get boo-ed. It is a great Australian tradition after you've been in office for a couple of years to get boo-ed when you go onto the field. And I met the team, and I was very interested in the reaction of the crowd because the gun control issue was still raging very strongly and I was interested in the reaction of the crowd and the number of people who called out "hold the line on gun control laws" and afterwards at the reception, interestingly enough two or three members of the South African football team spoke to me about it because that is a country that is wracked by an enormous amount of violence and has tragically enough a murder rate that is amongst one of the worst in the world, and so it was a very interesting experience and it did remind and it did remind I think all of those who were involved in it of the capacity of people in public life if they act in concert and they act out a sense of commitment to the common good that you can achieve things, you can change directions and you can give to the community a sense of reassurance and I think it is particularly important and in a sense symbolic that this award and this event should take place on the eve of the international day for women which is tomorrow because amongst the strongest expressions of support that I received for what I did and what my government did was from women in Australia including a very large number of women who lived in rural Australia and the number of women.... Security from violence is a very important thing to all of us and it is a particularly important thing to women and to children and if we've made a small contribution to building a safer and more congenial and beckoning and more reassuring and dare I say it more relaxed and comfortable Australian community as a result of that then I am very very grateful indeed.

But finally can I say that it wouldn't have been possible for us to have achieved what was achieved without the goodwill and the cooperation of other people in public life. It wasn't just achieved by me alone and I again acknowledge the contribution of others including people who are normally my political opponents.

But to you gentlemen of the North Sydney Rotary Club and of the broader Rotary movement, again my very warm thanks both for the contribution that your magnificent organisation makes to the people of Australia and the Australian community and most especially for the personal compliment that you have paid me and the honour that you have done me tonight, I treasure it greatly and I regard it as a very special honour indeed.

Thank you.