
OPENING CEREMONY

MONDAY, 10 JANUARY 2000

Mr ANDREW, Speaker of the House of Representatives—Your Excellency the Governor-General of Australia, Sir William Deane; the President of the Senate, the Hon. Senator Margaret Reid; His Excellency the President of the Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum, Mr Nakasone; Excellencies of the diplomatic corps; parliamentary colleagues visiting Australia and parliamentary colleagues and senators and members from Australia; ladies and gentlemen: I welcome you all to this the 8th annual conference of the Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum, with a particular welcome to and on behalf of the President of the 8th annual APPF meeting and the inaugural President of the APPF, His Excellency Mr Nakasone.

I extend a particular welcome to you to Canberra and to this great Parliament House of which we are all so proud. This building was opened in 1988. We believe it is a remarkable building, and as parliamentarians we are pleased to say that every parliamentarian serving in this building is proud of it and that every Australian who visits this building leaves it with a greater sense of the capacity of Australian craftspeople to achieve great things in building skill and architecture.

I extend to you all a welcome to Australia. In terms of European settlement, this is a very young country. In fact it is fair to say that a youthful couple such as Madam President and I have lived in this country for over a quarter of its European settlement. But it is also a very ancient land. We stand today on a site once occupied by the Ngunnawal people, and we stand today at a new millennium and recognise that for 40 millenniums the Ngunnawal people or their predecessors occupied this ancient land. Within the vicinity of this building, ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal occurred. We acknowledge their history, and we acknowledge their role in our community today.

We are in a parliament building at the opening of a conference that has chosen as its logo the eucalypt leaf, as you will see on the logo symbol and on the walls behind me. We have chosen this because it is characteristic of what this building is all about. Guests, when you visit both the chamber of the Senate and the chamber of the House of Representatives, you will be visiting chambers that, as you know, have grown up in the Westminster tradition. They lack the stark red and green of their equivalent chambers in Westminster and instead have a delicate ochre colour, supposed to mark the ochre shades of the Australian outback, the ochre blossom of the gum and the delicate green-grey which mark so many of the Australian eucalypts.

We are in a building containing a tapestry which tells something of the great Australian environment and of our natural heritage. It is a tapestry woven by people chosen for their tapestry skills from across Australia and a tapestry woven on a model prepared by the great Australian artist Arthur Boyd. We have chosen the eucalypt leaf because from the leaf comes an essence, in fact an oil, used by Australians for its healing qualities, for its medicinal qualities and for its capacity to provide a soothing balm whenever people have been bruised. We believe it is consistent with the role of the APPF, for the APPF seeks to be a bridge builder in the Asia Pacific to provide healing between nations and to reflect what successive Australian parliaments hope has always been the emphasis of this great institution – that is, to be an institution that facilitates healing and bridge building around the globe.

You have invited me this evening to introduce to you the Governor-General of Australia, Sir William Deane. The Governor-General of Australia appropriately comes to open our conference

because he is someone marked now in Australian history as a man concerned to be a bridge builder and as a man concerned to bring healing in every situation. Our Governor-General was educated at St Joseph's College in Sydney, a school most of us passed as we made our way from Sydney's centre to the Olympic site yesterday. He graduated from the University of Sydney in arts and law and studied international law in Europe. In 1955 he was awarded the Diploma of The Hague for international legal studies. He returned to Australia to practise law in New South Wales and was for a time a teaching fellow directly associated with teaching international law at the University of Sydney. In 1966 he was appointed a Queen's Counsel and from there followed a lively interest in constitutional law, in commercial law and in trade practice law. In 1982 he became a Justice of the High Court of Australia, and in 1995 he was appointed the Governor-General of Australia, the highest office in this land that any Australian can aspire to.

My friends, most of all our Governor-General is known for his unassuming way. He in fact is the person who, to celebrate this millennium this New Year's Eve, invited children with renal disorders to Admiralty House on Sydney Harbour so they could witness the fireworks display that some of you would have seen around the globe. He invited them to come for what has become an Australian tradition – and, I suspect, a worldwide tradition – of a sleepover. They were invited to take their swags and spread out on the carpeted floors of Admiralty House and spend time with the Governor-General and Lady Deane.

We have recognised that our Governor-General has done as his predecessor did and has taken a floral tribute of Australia – in this case the wattle – and made it the symbol of his office. Every Australian will remember their Governor-General standing in the Swiss Alps, following the Interlaken canyoning tragedy, paying a tribute to those young Australians who had lost their lives and offering comfort to their parents. I introduce to you someone who, in the great tradition of the APPF, is here to build bridges, a Governor-General who has a real concern for everyone in Australia and of whom Australians are rightly proud. Ladies and gentlemen, I present the Governor-General of Australia, Sir William Deane.

SIR WILLIAM DEANE, Governor-General of Australia—Mr Speaker, Madam President, Your Excellency the Hon. Yasuhiro Nakasone, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen: it is a truly great pleasure for me to be here as Governor-General of Australia for this official opening of the 8th annual meeting of the Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum. I express sincere hope that the meeting will provide an opportunity for the renewal and development of friendships, both personal and national, and for many productive discussions about the region in which we all live. I am confident that it will be, like previous meetings, a significant force in promoting the region's stability and welfare and in the advancement of the economic and social wellbeing of both the member countries of the region and their peoples.

It is particularly pleasing to us Australians that the forum is being held for the first time in our country and in our national capital. As you know, Australia is a federation. That federation will be 100 years old on 1 January 2001. The first fleet, as we call it, arrived from Europe only a little more than 100 years before the federation came into being – in 1788, to be exact. Yet, as the Speaker has pointed out, our continent is perhaps the most ancient of all the world, and the history of our indigenous peoples goes back for at least 40 millennia.

This city and this Parliament House stand on the ancestral lands of the Ngunnawal people. In the language of the Ngunnawal, the name Canberra is a metaphorical reference to the plain between the mountains. From time immemorial, that plain provided a traditional meeting place for the indigenous peoples of this region as they gathered for the annual bogong moth hunting expeditions in the surrounding mountains. Now, of course, Canberra has assumed a different

importance to modern Australia as the permanent meeting place of the elected representatives of our whole nation. For practical purposes, the story of modern Canberra goes back only to the 1920s, when real development commenced some 10 years after the area had been designated as the site of a completely new city to serve as the young Australian nation's national capital.

The city is an unusual one in that, from its earliest days, it was developed in accordance with an overall design. The delegates from the United States of America will be particularly interested to know that that design was the vision of a great United States architect and town-planner, Walter Burley Griffin, and his wife. Today the lake, which is an artificial one caused by the damming of the old Molonglo River, bears his name and constitutes an ever present reminder of the debt we owe him.

The Asia Pacific region has a rich diversity of peoples, civilisations and cultures. Its economies are all highly varied and therefore have enormous potential for mutually beneficial trade and investment relationships. For many years, the great potential for peaceful and productive cooperation in the region was inhibited by the tensions and stresses of the Cold War. Since the late 1980s, however, new prospects have emerged for cooperative activities in the region which can help both to advance economic growth and to preserve a stable and secure regional environment.

The inauguration of the Asia Pacific economic cooperative process in 1989 has provided the region with a forum for development of outward-looking cooperation. At the Bogor meeting in 1994, the members committed themselves to the achievement by 2020 of free flowing trade and investment amongst all members. Progress has also been made towards improving dialogue on political and security issues in the region. Since 1994, the Asian regional forum has provided means for regional countries to explore ways of reducing the basis for suspicion and tension in the region, both through annual meetings and through a number of specialist working groups. However, until the Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum was initiated in 1991, there was no organised forum in which Asia Pacific parliamentary representatives could meet and develop dialogues. Since the pioneering meeting in Singapore in August 1991, the forum has devoted its efforts to the promotion of cooperation for the further advancement of peace, freedom, democracy and prosperity; for open and non-exclusive cooperation for the expansion of free trade and investment and sound environmental practices; and of non-military cooperation which gives due consideration to issues relating to regional peace and security. These cooperative efforts have helped bring a very diverse region closer together. Inevitably, there remains room for further advances. In particular, there continues to be a need for improved contacts among the region's peoples and their political representatives and leaders. It is here that this forum is making a specific and most valuable contribution.

Let me conclude these opening comments with a special word addressed to all our visitors from overseas. To all of you on behalf of all Australians I say welcome. We are delighted and privileged to have you with us as honoured visitors for this most important meeting. I express the wish to all of you that your visit to our land will be enjoyable and fulfilling from a personal point of view. More important, I express the wish to each of you that your visit will contribute to friendship and understanding between your country and all the other countries of the region including my own. I add the hope that you will see as much of our country as your limited time with us permits and that when the time comes to return to your own lands you carry with you fond memories of Australia and of all Australians. Now with very great pleasure, I declare the 8th Annual Meeting of the Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum to be officially open. Thank you.

Mr ANDREW, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Australia—I thank the Governor-General. My friends, it is my pleasure to introduce to you my friend and colleague the President of the Senate, Senator Margaret Reid. Senator Reid and I go back some time because we

were in fact born and educated in the same state. She graduated from the University of Adelaide with a Bachelor of Laws and found that her legal practice brought her to Canberra. In 1981 she was elected as a member of the Australian Senate from the constituency here in the ACT. So we are in fact in Madam President's electorate.

In 1996 she became the President of the Senate and the long association and activity that she had had with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association began to bear fruit through her Senate presidency as she showed a direct and active interest in the successes and fortunes of our friends and neighbours in the Pacific, particularly the smaller parliaments. In a conference held here last week, it was quite obvious the affection with which all of those parliamentarians regard my colleague, the President of the Senate.

Madam President Reid is quite parochial in defence of the ACT and no less parochial in defence of the chamber, the Senate. I find working with her a pleasure and I know her commitment is to parliamentary democracy and effective representation, and in that way she has been actively associated with the APPF. I am pleased to have her co-hosting with me this international event. Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the Senate, Senator Reid.

SENATOR MARGARET REID, President of the Senate of Australia—Thank you, Mr Speaker. Your Excellency Sir William Deane; Your Excellency Mr Nakasone, President of the APPF; conference delegates; Your Excellencies the members of the diplomatic corps and other members of the corps who are here with us this afternoon; members and senators of the Australian parliament; and distinguished guests who have joined us for this very special occasion: this is the first time, as has been noted, that Australia has hosted the APPF, and we have been looking forward to doing so.

Just being here this afternoon reminds me of the only other meeting of the APPF that I have attended, and that was just 12 months ago when many of us were together in Peru. That was indeed a splendid meeting and a wonderful opportunity to see something of that country, to get to know and understand it better and to enjoy the fellowship of being parliamentarians together, concerned about the things that we have the opportunity to do in our various countries.

I am delighted this afternoon to thank His Excellency for his opening, for the way in which he put the role of parliamentarians in context with all of the other things that go on with organisations in our region and round about. I believe that there is an important role for us to play as parliamentarians on both sides of the Pacific Ocean and of course in all of those smaller countries which are totally surrounded by the Pacific Ocean. Some are here with us at this conference; others are not. But I think we can all assure those who are not here and who are not able to be members that we do know and care about them and will keep their interests in mind in our deliberations.

His Excellency referred to Canberra and its place in Australia. It is the place that symbolises the federation which occurred 100 years ago when the six colonies then came together to be one country on this large island continent. This place, the national capital, is an important symbol. It has within it the great institutions of the nation: the High Court of Australia, the National Library, the National Gallery, the very important Australian War Memorial and many others. I do hope that while you are here you will have an opportunity to see at least some of them and gain some appreciation of our background, our culture and how we have come to exist politically – I think, successfully – for 100 years.

But Canberra is also the home of 300,000 people who enjoy living in a wonderful setting. I hope that, as we travel a little way away from the centre for at least a couple of the social functions, you will have an opportunity to see a little of the city of Canberra, the way it operates and the way

people are able to live here. When all is said and done, I suspect that it will be the spouses who will know most about it. Perhaps those of you who have been able to bring them with you will learn from them a little of what they have seen and learned while they have been here and we have been talking.

His Excellency referred to the things that the APPF has done. In its short life, there have been a number of things that I think indicate that the organisation is worth while – resolutions covering the nuclear test ban treaty, terrorism, anti-personnel mines, the drug trade, human rights, education, literacy, trade liberalisation and environmental issues and others – and there are things that we will discuss this time. It goes to indicate that open dialogue of this nature, talking about things of common concern to all of us, is of value. It enables us to understand more readily each other's culture and the way of life in each other's country.

But I do come back to the point that, as parliamentarians representing people who have elected us to represent them, there is a very important place for a meeting such as this to discuss these issues, to learn from each other, to know that other people think about so many things in the same way as we do, and to have the confidence to go on within our own societies working for those things to bring a better world for the people of the Asia Pacific region and the small islands in between. I look forward to this week and the things that we will discuss here. I look forward to the opportunity of renewing friendships I made in Peru last year and of cementing the relationships between the countries that we all represent.

I am delighted also to join with the Speaker in his welcome to His Excellency the Governor-General in thanking him for being here to open the conference and in having the opportunity to say what a splendid person we think he is. He has given great leadership to this country in so many ways. He is actually supposed to be on holidays right now. But, when the Speaker and I asked him if he would come to open our conference, he readily agreed to be here today to join with us in marking this important and significant occasion of a meeting of parliamentarians of this region and in being a part of the opening ceremony. On your behalf to him I say, 'Thank you very much.'

MR NEIL ANDREW, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Australia—As someone without any qualifications in the law, I am feeling a little lonely on this podium this afternoon, because I must introduce to you someone else who has been eminent in legal practice. I introduce to you His Excellency Mr Yasuhiro Nakasone, inaugural President of the Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum.

Mr Nakasone graduated in law, and in 1947 he was elected to the parliament of Japan. He has been re-elected on 19 occasions. It is little wonder that the APPF, in its 1997 gathering, recognised this remarkable parliamentarian for his 50 years of service not only to the parliament of Japan but to the people of the world. He has served his country in a range of disciplines, including science, technology, transport, trade and defence, but he is best remembered internationally as the Prime Minister of Japan. He became Prime Minister in 1982 and held the post for five years, until his resignation in 1987. In that time, he formed a firm and lasting friendship with the then Prime Minister of Australia, the honourable Bob Hawke. The friendship has lasted to today and has helped him to take a very kindly view of Australians and Australia. We thank you, sir, for your support in a number of international forums.

Ladies and gentlemen, you and I know His Excellency Mr Nakasone not only as the President of the APPF but as an international figure. He has endeared himself to all longstanding members of the APPF because of his identification with them and because of the common touch that he brings to his office. Nowhere has that been more marked than in this so far very brief tour of Australia in the year 2000, when he has climbed the steps to the Opera House, climbed the steps to

a number of sites in the Olympic village, climbed on and off buses, and associated with all of us as if he were one of us. He has also shown a very human touch in the references he has made to his grandchildren and the affection he has for them. He has been enthusiastic about finding appropriate ways in which to remember this tour of Australia by returning with gifts for them. Apart from politics, he has an interest in painting, golf, tennis and swimming. I introduce to you the very youthful President of the APPF, His Excellency Mr Yasuhiro Nakasone.

MR YASUHIRO NAKASONE, President of the APPF—His Excellency the Governor General; the honourable Neil Andrew, Speaker of the House; the honourable Senator Margaret Reid, President of the Senate; parliamentarians; distinguished guests; ladies and gentlemen: it is a great pleasure for me to join with you in this hall. I would like to offer my greatest appreciation to you for making this assembly possible. Since yesterday, we have had a delightful time together, thanks to the consideration of the Australian parliamentarians. We have studied a lot and we have had a lot of fun. We made a bus journey across Australia, and I had the experience of a transcontinental tour. I come from Japan, which is a very small country. After the transcontinental bus journey, I understand why the Australian people are so tolerant and so broad-minded. They love wildlife and they respect human rights so much. Above all, in diplomatic policy and foreign relations they have a broad-minded position, and their policy positions are very open and well advanced. I really think that the wide expanse of land that they have has created this kind of psychology. I really feel that I understand, first-hand, why Australians are so broad-minded.

Having come to this Parliament House. I thought it was like a museum rather than a parliament house. I thought it was a museum, an art gallery of grandeur and that the parliamentarians must be pieces of art or artefacts. I even felt the parliamentarians' artistic presence. It is very bright, very colourful and a lot of natural light comes in when you are in this Parliament House. I come from the Northern Hemisphere, you see, and we have conspiracy and suspicion. Perhaps in the Southern Hemisphere you do not have so much conspiracy or so many very nasty fights and so forth. That is my impression.

So this is the memorable first meeting of the APPF in the new millennium. As I said yesterday, we are at the watershed in history. We are at the watershed between the 20th century and the 21st century. In the final analysis, as you can understand, from past history we will discard the evil things and we will incorporate new, good things as we go into the new century. That is the mission for us as parliamentarians. We will discard all the wrong things that we acquired in the past century and we will incorporate new things for the coming century. We will keep on holding onto the pride, culture and civilisation that we have carried so that we can hand it over to the next generation. I think that is the very serious responsibility of us parliamentarians. So, I would like to discuss such matters with you from tomorrow, here in this hall. It is a great pleasure that I have this chance.

Since last year, we have seen the debacle of the WTO Ministerial Conference. We have seen natural disasters hitting various places in the world. In India and in Pakistan, the launching of rockets and testing of nuclear bombs have taken place. In other words, problems have hit us one after another. An even bigger problem is to what extent we are going to identify DNA. How are we going to proceed with the genome decipherisation? Are we allowed to make copies of human beings? Of course, this is not allowed but, if the DNA is studied and elucidated to the finest point, probably we will come to the cardinal question of where life comes from. I do not think chemical formulae will produce life but such a serious issue awaits us in this 21st century. So, including all these problems, we have to consider the destiny of mankind. Bearing those in mind, we have to seek the development of the APPF. I think we have come thus far.

We have day-to-day problems, routine problems, and these problems are the ones that parliamentarians also have to seriously tackle, so I would like to study seriously with you in this forum. Once again, I would like to offer my heartfelt appreciation for the most affectionate, most meticulous and most perfect arrangements made by the Australian parliament and the Australian government. Together with colleagues, I would like to offer my appreciation to our Australian friends. With that word of thanks, I would like to complete my remarks. Thank you very much.

Mr NEIL ANDREW, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Australia—Thank you, your Excellency. Along with all other delegates, I look forward to a very productive three days under your presidency and to a communique that will indicate that we have indeed taken steps to rectify those things that we do have concerns about at the end of this millennium in the interests of an even more productive millennium that is just emerging. It is my pleasure, on your behalf, to express our particular appreciation to His Excellency, Sir William Deane, for joining us this afternoon and for his opening remarks. I can only echo the sentiments of Madam President and say how pleased we have both been once again to have you here and to be identified with what you stand for in this country. I also express our appreciation once again to His Excellency, Mr Nakasone, for his support of this conference and his role as its President.
