

FOREIGN POLICY AND GOOD INTERNATIONAL CITIZENSHIP

Address by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator Gareth Evans, Canberra, 6 March 1990.

Good international citizenship is the area of foreign policy in which community values most influence the pursuit of national interests. Unlike a nation's strategic interests or commercial interests, which can be said to exist quite independently of community values, good international citizenship cannot be fully understood without reference to the community's self-image, and what it judges to be its guiding principles.

The elements of good international citizenship. This is not to say that good international citizenship does not also contain many elements of "objective" national interest. It is, for instance, clearly in Australia's national interest to cooperate with the international community to solve environmental problems like global warming or the depletion of the ozone layer which, if unchecked, can cause irreparable harm to us. Similarly, it is obviously in the interests of the health of the Australian community to help eradicate epidemics like AIDS which do not respect national boundaries. It is in our security interests to see the total elimination of chemical weapons and so on. In this sense, good international citizenship is no more - and no less - than the pursuit of enlightened self interest.

But there are also other well-springs to the concept of good international citizenship which are not directly linked to specific Australian interests: the humanitarian impulse to help refugees find food and shelter; the wish to alleviate poverty in developing countries through aid programs; the desire to protect fundamental human rights wherever they are threatened. These aspirations flow less from a calculation of national interest than from a commitment to certain values; to what Hedley Bull used to call "purposes beyond ourselves".

Today, I wish to say something about how these various elements combine together in Australian foreign policy. I want to explain why the Government accords a high priority to being, and being seen to be, a good international citizen. And I also wish to outline what we as a Government have been doing to give effect to this commitment.

At one level, good international citizenship is simply a recognition of global interdependence which is today of an order unprecedented in human history. The drive of the financial markets, advances in communications technology, the mobility of capital, all these are pushing us closer together. At the same time the number of international

problems - those so called "non-military threats to security ranging from drugs to terrorism - are growing and can only be dealt with effectively through global cooperation. In short, international cooperation - which in a past age may have been seen as essentially an idealistic endeavour - is today a practical necessity. This does not require us to set aside national interests, anymore than a citizen who lives as a law-abiding, socially cooperative member of a national community, sets aside personal rights. It simply means that good international citizenship is a logical response to an international environment in which globalism is on the rise.

There is a direct link between our pursuit of good international citizenship and Australia's long standing support for multilateralism. Because we recognise the interdependence of the world and because we need to have a say in how we are to solve global problems, we have placed, and will continue to place, a considerable emphasis in our foreign policy on multilateral diplomacy. This is particularly important at this time of extraordinary fluidity in the international environment which does create rather more opportunities for successful multilateral cooperation than have previously existed. Whether the issue is the convening of an international conference on Indo-Chinese refugees, or the creation of new international frameworks to tackle environmental problems, we think that important national interests are served by strengthening the machinery of multilateralism.

We have a deep attachment, in particular, to the United Nations itself. The UN is the forum where our good international citizenship objectives are most actively pursued. The achievements of the United Nations have inevitably fallen short of its founders idealism, but it remains the only truly universal organisation we have; both the symbol and the hope of that international cooperation which lies at the heart of good international citizenship.

So far, I have emphasised the practical, problem solving aspects of good international citizenship. But we ought not to be shy about the projection of values and ideals which is also very much a part of good international citizenship. In one sense, being a good international citizen involves extending into our foreign relations the basic values of the Australian community: values which are at the core of our sense of self and which a democratic community expects its government to pursue.

It is proper, if for no other reason than to maintain our own sense of worth in pursuing ends that are inherently valuable, to seek improved standards worldwide in human rights and equal opportunity; to work for an end to apartheid in South Africa and racial intolerance everywhere else; to try to remove the barbarism of the death penalty; and to assist through substantial aid programs the economic and social development of those countries struggling with debt, poverty or national calamity. Put simply, we are committed to good international citizenship because a moral obligation is its own justification.

Against this background - and having painted good international citizenship in what I

hope are accepted as the complementary hues of pragmatism and idealism, let me briefly outline some of the areas in which the Government has sought to put flesh onto the rhetorical bones. In doing so, it is not my intention to suggest that good international citizenship is a matter for governments alone. Perhaps more than any other aspect of foreign policy, good international citizenship is a national interest which can benefit greatly from active and informed public support. It is also the case that on such issues as human rights, the environment, peace and disarmament, and aid community groups can and do make an important contribution to the formulation and achievement of our international objectives.

Human Rights. Of all the strands of good international citizenship, we give special emphasis to human rights. This reflects a national - and a philosophical - interest in defending and extending international standards of human rights and the observance of international law. We are active in the cause of human rights because we recognise that a right not defended is a right easily lost.

Australia raises more individual cases in our bilateral human rights representations than probably any other country in the world: over 400 cases with 68 different countries in the past year. These representations covered both the plight of individuals and situations of widespread and systematic abuse. We received responses to 25 per cent of our representations, and calculate that there has been some form of positive result in at least 14 per cent of cases. This includes, for example, advice that a detainee has been released, or an assurance that steps are being taken to ensure the human rights of an individual are being protected.

As well as consolidating existing standards and structures, Australian human rights policy also seeks to expand them. We played an active role in the recent adoption by the UN General Assembly of a second optional protocol on the abolition of capital punishment to the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights. Australia was closely involved in the negotiations on the Rights of the Child Convention. We have supported calls for the development of a set of international standards on the rights of indigenous populations. And we have indicated our intention to ratify further international human rights instruments such as the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

It is important to emphasise that here - as elsewhere in our advocacy of good international citizenship - Australia is concerned with rights and values which the international community accepts as having universal application. Good international citizenship is not about arrogantly insisting that the rest of the world should be judged by the values of the Australian community. It is obviously important, especially in foreign policy, to appreciate the cultural and social context from which other nations assess questions of individual rights, although there is a big difference between understanding and endorsing. But if we judge that certain rights are fundamental and universal, then there is an

obligation on us to defend those rights.

After all, we are not dealing here with rights that exist only within a particular cultural context, but with rights which are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in widely ratified, legally-binding Covenants and Conventions. There is no culture that does not value human dignity and no country which seriously suggests that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights does not apply to it. We do the victims of injustice no good to dress their tormentors in the respectable garb of cultural relativism.

Apartheid. We have given particular priority in our human rights policy to the systematic abuse of human rights which is apartheid. This Government has been active in support of international efforts against apartheid, not because it serves any direct Australian commercial or strategic interest, but because the system of apartheid is so manifestly immoral, that we cannot just wash our hands of it on the comfortable but indecent justification that it is too far away from narrow Australian interests. On this issue, which is first and foremost a moral issue, there can be no refuge in distance. Australia knows from the ghosts of its own past how destructive a force racism is.

The recent changes in South Africa show that good international citizenship, pursued with determination, can make a difference. President de Klerk's historic statement to the South African Parliament last month and the subsequent release of Nelson Mandela were in part a result of concerted international pressure on the South African government. There is still, however, a way to go before South Africans realise the objective of a democratic, non-racial government. It is only when there is evidence of clear and irreversible change effecting the pillars of apartheid that Australia and the international community will be able to consider relaxing sanctions. That day has, hopefully, come very much closer but it has not yet arrived.

Arms control and disarmament. Arms control and disarmament is the area where our interest in good international citizenship overlaps directly with our national interests in preserving our own security and in contributing to global security. Disarmament and arms control are not matters exclusively for the great powers. The superpowers, for obvious reasons, bear a special responsibility to make real progress towards the elimination of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. The rest of the international community, however, cannot afford to sit back and await agreements between the major military powers. There is a vital role for multilateral disarmament efforts which involve the middle and small powers; indeed, there are some arms control issues which can only be dealt with effectively through multilateral negotiations.

The outstanding example of a multilaterally negotiated convention is the effort being made in Geneva now to abolish chemical weapons. It is no exaggeration to say that today Australia is one of the leading country in the world in the effort to abolish chemical

weapons. This is demonstrated by our hosting last September of a successful 70 nation Government-Industry Conference against Chemical Weapons where, for the first time, the world's chemical industry collectively signalled its unequivocal commitment to assist governments to conclude a chemical weapons ban. It is demonstrated by our continuing chairmanship of the so called "Australia Group" on the control of chemical weapons precursors; by our regional initiative to build support in the South Pacific and South East Asia for a chemical weapons convention; and by our current role of Western Group coordinator on chemical weapons issues in the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva.

Nuclear disarmament remains a high priority for Australian policy. The government welcomes the progressive, stabilising reductions in existing nuclear arsenals represented by the INF and prospective START agreements. This is properly recognised as an imperative in its own right. But it is also closely related to another vital objective - preventing the further spread of nuclear weapons. Australia remains a dedicated supporter of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the single most effective and widely supported international arms control agreement in existence. The world would be a very much more dangerous place without the NPT and the standards of international behaviour it sets.

Preparations have begun for the Fourth Review Conference of the Treaty to be held later this year. Australia is actively participating with other NPT members in this important process, with the aim of further strengthening the Treaty to meet the proliferation challenges of the 1990s. Such challenges are emerging strongly in a number of regions. The Treaty's effectiveness would be increased by still wider membership and we will continue to appeal to those States which have not already become parties to do so as a matter of priority.

A ban on nuclear testing also occupies a central place in the quest for disarmament and in Australian policy. We welcome the progress being made in the bilateral superpower negotiations on nuclear testing and the developments on a number of fronts on the key issue of verification. What is clearly lacking is a consensus in the Conference on Disarmament - the body that has the relevant authority and competence - to establish an Ad Hoc Committee to pull all these strands together and systematically put in place the building blocks for an effectively verifiable comprehensive test ban treaty.

Efforts at the global level are important in securing the objectives of peace and disarmament. But good international citizenship also involves constructive and balanced endeavours at the regional level. Endeavours like the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty in the negotiation of which Australia took a leading role. The SPNFZ Treaty signals to the world that the peoples of the South Pacific, while they may be remote from centres of conflict, are no less deeply committed to the cause of world peace.

It is worth emphasising the point that Australia is active in global security issues not because we still cannot subdue that old proxy-imperialist desire to strut the world stage, but because a collapse of global security will envelop us all - big powers, middle powers, small countries and micro-states alike - wherever we are on the globe. It is true that Australia's immediate strategic environment is relatively benign. But everything I have said about the growing interdependence of the world applies with equal force to the interdependence of the strategic world in the nuclear age.

The Environment. That interdependence also applies to the world of the environment where all nations are bound together in many complex ways. We cannot erect national fences to insulate us from the threats of environmental degradation which are global in scope. We cannot legislate to keep out of our national territories gases that destroy the ozone layer or upset the finely tuned rhythms of nature.

It is vital that the international community rises to the challenge posed by the environmental threat. For its part, Australia is committed to constructive participation in international efforts to address environmental problems. I made this clear on behalf of the Government at the summit in March last year which adopted The Declaration of The Hague on Protection of the Atmosphere.

We have followed through on this commitment with our strong support for the conclusion or improvement of international treaties on global warming, the destruction of the ozone layer, and the preservation of biological diversity. Much of our efforts here - as elsewhere - have focussed on the South Pacific where concerns about rising sea levels and other possible changes induced by global warming are understandably high. With the concerns of South Pacific countries again very much in mind, we have also taken a leading role in the international campaign for a ban on driftnet fishing; a technique which has rightly been described as a "wall of death".

Our concern about international environmental issues is further reflected in the Government's decision to appoint a very distinguished Australian - Sir Ninian Stephen - as Australia's first Ambassador for the Environment.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we have taken the lead, initially against the opposition of many important countries, to prevent once and for all any future mining and oil drilling in Antarctica; to turn this magnificent and fragile wilderness continent into an international nature reserve and land of science. For thirty years the Antarctic Treaty has protected the Antarctic environment, kept Antarctica free of political conflict, and preserved it as an area of scientific inquiry from which nuclear weapons and military activities are prohibited. Australia's Antarctica initiative seeks to build on this unique achievement. We recognise that on this issue we have set our sights high, and that the road ahead will be neither easy nor quick. But we have made a solid start and we are

determined to see it through.

Development assistance. If our interest in international cooperation and our commitment to good international citizenship are not to be judged as pious platitudes, Australia must maintain a credible and effective aid program.. This means continuing attention to both the quantity and quality of Australian aid. On quantity I would be the first to admit that we need to do better. The economic circumstances that have forced cuts in our aid budget in recent years are understandable enough, but it is my own objective to bring the ODA/GDP ratio up to 0.4 per cent as soon as possible.

Concern about declining aid levels should not, however, blind us to the very real advances that have been made to the quality of Australia's aid program. In almost all areas of that program, quality has improved markedly during the eighties. The goals are clearer, implementation in the field is better, the geographical focus is sharper, sectoral concentration is more effective, and the administration is tighter and more professional.

The obligations and benefits of good international citizenship. Let me conclude with some general observations about the obligations and benefits, the demands and the returns, of good international citizenship. The most basic obligation of good international citizenship is to ensure that our own house is in order before we raise issues on the international scene. Credibility is, simply, the most important asset a country can have in the pursuit of good international citizenship. Our ability to secure advances in the areas of human rights, refugees or development assistance rests on our being, and continuing to be seen to be, a liberal democracy with a solid record at home; a country which articulates and applies human rights and similar principles with absolute consistency and impartiality; a country which puts our money where our mouth is when it comes to aid delivery.

We won't achieve much if in our national policies on Aboriginal affairs, immigration or the like we are seen to be indulging in double standards. Hypocrites are not only disliked, in international relations as elsewhere, but - if they are our size - they are ignored.

None of this is to suggest that the pursuit of good international citizenship involves the uncomplicated application of high principle irrespective of the consequences. There are obviously occasions when we have to make choices about how best to handle issues such as human rights in order to be effective and protect our national interests at the same time. With careful handling there need not be a conflict between our good international citizen objectives and our other objectives to advance political, defence, trade, investment, tourism or other interests.

I don't pretend that there will never be occasions when taking a principled stand carries costs for us, including commercially. But I do believe that an international reputation as a good citizen in the kinds of senses I have mentioned enhances any country's overall

standing in the world, and that there will be occasions when this reputation will prove helpful to us in pursuing our other international interests, including commercial ones.

It is also the case that in the longer term the evolution of just and tolerant societies brings its own international returns - in higher standards of international behaviour, and in the contribution that internal stability makes to international stability and peace.

As we begin the last decade of the twentieth century amid fundamental changes to the structure of international relations, we should bear in mind that a new era for a new century cannot be built by individual nations pursuing individual interests. We already live in an age where no nation, however mighty or, indeed, however small, can opt out of the demands of international citizenship. We work in societies which simply cannot be hermetically sealed; economies which thrive best in conditions of expanding trade and open commerce.

In such an age good international citizenship is not an idealistic distraction or a quixotic quest. Nor is it the foreign policy equivalent of boy scout good deeds. Rather, it is the essential spirit of the future, and its reaffirmation today is a practical and pressing necessity.

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