PRESS STATEMENT:

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MALCOLM FRASER REPORTS ON A VISIT TO THE UNITED NATIONS

TRUSTEESHIP COUNCIL:

Before returning to Washington I visited the United Nations for some days and spoke with members of our Mission and with people from other countries. During this time I was fortunate enough to be able to sit in on the work of the Trusteeship Council, the Committee of twenty-four and the Security Council. The Security Council was discussing the race problems that have arisen once again in British Guiana, here the main difficulty seems to be the animosities that have occurred between the Indians and the African people of that country. Full independence for the territory of British Guiana is prevented by the inability of these two people to get on together and to go forward in a mutual development towards self-government.

NEW GUINEA:

The general opinion amongst many people I spoke to was that the work that Australia is doing in New Guinea is very greatly respected. Of course it is true that the Russians and some other Communist countries attack us in all the conventional terms as being a Colonial power, but the feeling seems to be that this is not taken all that seriously because the problems that Australia is facing and the people of New Guinea are facing are well recognised that Australia is not a Colonial power in the traditional sense. For example, many countries in the past were Colonial powers because of the investment and rewards that they were able to get out of those countries. This has never been so with Australia. The very large sums that the Australian taxpayers put into New Guinea each year are put there with no thought of return. This is no investment that is going to give a monetary reward, it is done to build up a viable and stable community which will be able to stand on its own feet. The reward that Australia will get will be to see the success of its efforts - an independent, proud and prosperous New Guinea, but this will be a long time off.

I heard spokesmen from the indigenous people of New Guinea putting their point of view to the Trusteeship Council. One in particular, who had written a most able speech, said that the people of New Guinea wanted Australia to stay until their work was done. He did not want people or third parties trying to force the rate of political development too much because he recognised the difficulty of implanting democracy in a Territory of this kind. He seemed to put the view that the people of New Guinea and Australia should be able to choose their own time table for further democratic development and this, of course, is the only sensible conclusion.

The debate in the Trusteeship Council was also well timed because the opening of New Guinea’s first fully franchised Parliament was taking place in the same week. This is a very large step forward in the development of independent political institutions in the territory of New Guinea, and this is again recognised by the Trusteeship Council. It may be recognised more in private than in public because there are probably people here who are prepared in private to say or to recognise the work that Australia is doing, but because of political reasons at home or because of international political reasons in a country like Africa they may be unprepared to give recognition to this in public. This feeling does mean that a great majority of countries don’t appear to give Australia too much trouble over New Guinea - the worth of our work is recognised. This does not mean that we should be complacent or slacken our efforts - Australia will not do this.
NAURU:

The Nauruan debate was also interesting and a distinguished representative of the Nauruan people was present to answer questions. I learnt more about Nauru than I had known before.

I think it is well known that the 2,000 Nauruans will have to be re-settled on some other territory when the phosphate deposits are exhausted in twenty or twenty-five years time, and there have been negotiations between the Australian Government and the Nauruan people on the terms and conditions under which they would like re-settlement. For example, these people were offered full Australian citizenship on the mainland but this offer was refused by the Nauruan Leaders. I had been unable to understand the refusal of this offer because most people would have thought it a pretty reasonable one. However, when you look at the background and history of these people the reason is not difficult to find. The 2,000 people are nearly all related to each other. Each Nauruan feels a responsibility for all his friends and for all the people of Nauru. They want to keep their own identity and they are fearful of losing it, therefore they want some territory where they can maintain this and live as one community. This is a simple desire but it is one that we can understand. Largely as a result of this the Australian Government has followed its original offer with full citizenship on the mainland with an offer of their own development of their own community being established on Curtis Island off the Queensland Coast. This is potentially a very valuable piece of land about twenty times the size of the present island of Nauru. Details of the transfer and of the conditions of the transfer, if and when it takes place, have not yet been worked out and finally agreed upon between the Nauruan people and the Australian Government, but I think it likely that agreement will take place.

Even if the phosphate deposits were not becoming exhausted on Nauru the people would have to be re-settled somewhere or some of them would have to leave because their numbers are expanding and they have in fact outgrown the very small island of Nauru that they now possess. This is a difficult human problem. The Australian Government is approaching the position in a generous fashion and I hope and believe that it will continue to do this.

SOUTHERN RHODESIA:

The other matter that I heard discussed in the United Nations was the problem of Southern Rhodesia. Here we have a white minority of about a quarter of a million people denying the vote and any kind of political right to something like three million Africans. Southern Rhodesia looks at present as though it is going on the same road as South Africa. However, the complications arise because Southern Rhodesia, although it has been largely self-governing for nearly forty years, has never been given full independence from the United Kingdom and therefore various organs of the United Nations try to bring pressure on the United Kingdom to force the Southern Rhodesian Government to widen the franchise. Power of the United Kingdom in this matter could be pretty limited. It is not impossible that the Southern Rhodesian Government might unilaterally declare its independence from the United Kingdom then, if it was able to maintain its own unity in its own country, the United Kingdom would be faced with the alternatives of recognising the decision, in which case its influence to work some rights for the Africans would be lost, or opposing by military means such a unilateral declaration. This would be a pretty difficult choice and the United Kingdom clearly doesn't want to be forced into the situation of having to make this choice.
I spoke to the Chairman of the Committee of 24. This is the Committee established by the General Assembly of the United Nations to try and hasten the process of de-colonization. The Committee is at the moment giving most of its attention to Southern Rhodesia and is very concerned about this. The Chairman was a likeable person, a French speaking African, and he had just returned from a visit to the United Kingdom to speak with Mr. Duncan Sands and others on this particular problem. He believes that this question will be raised at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference being held very shortly, and it could present some difficulties to the Prime Ministers at that Conference.

The position taken by the present Government to Southern Rhodesia is basically indefensible. It appears contrary to everything that Australia stands for and works for in New Guinea for example, but it may not be easy to get the Government of Southern Rhodesia to alter its views and widen its franchise.