

PRIME MINISTER'S
PERSONAL MESSAGE
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Prime Minister

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OPS
Subject on
Foreign Policy
Meeting of the
Forum in Tarawa
June 1980
South Pacific

TEXT OF MESSAGE DATED 18 JULY, 1980 FROM
PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA TO
THE RT. HON. MARGARET THATCHER, M.P.
PRIME MINISTER

My dear Prime Minister,

In view of the importance of the issues raised, I am sending you this brief personal message setting out some of the first-hand impressions I gained at this week's meeting of the South Pacific Forum in Tarawa.

This annual meeting of Heads of Government in the Pacific has assumed a new importance in the past few years. The Island countries of the South Pacific are speaking more and more with one voice on a range of world issues in such fora as the United Nations, and in particular in the Forum, their principal regional meeting.

Discussions at the Forum meetings naturally focus most closely on issues of regional importance. Of the issues discussed this year, two were of particular significance in a broader international context. One of them, the emergence of the New Hebrides as a new and independent country, is of particular interest to Britain as a joint administering power. Another, the storage of nuclear waste outside home countries, is an issue to which we shall all have to give greater attention.

The West now enjoys a generally friendly and constructive relationship with the South Pacific countries. We must recognise the value of this relationship and ensure that it is not lost simply because of failure to recognise its importance in the international scheme of things. We should seek to build on the present foundation of good relations.

What struck me most forcibly in Tarawa was how strongly the Island leaders feel about their progress towards attaining self-government and independence. These feelings will have to be given proper weight if we are to succeed in avoiding serious unrest in the South Pacific in the years immediately ahead.

Uppermost in everyone's minds at Tarawa was the question of the New Hebrides. There was complete support for Father Walter Lini, whom I met for the first time. He made a very favourable impression on me at the Conference with his articulate and moderate presentation of his views. He drew a strong and even emotional response from the other leaders in terms of commitment to the New Hebrides achieving independence as a united country on 30 July. I sensed an equally strong commitment to the continuing processes of self-government and independence elsewhere in the Pacific, even though no resolutions were put forward on other Island territories.

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On nuclear matters only one actual resolution emerged - on an American proposal to store nuclear waste on the island of Palmyra - but more generally there was a strongly expressed feeling that the time had come when the Pacific should no longer be made use of in the nuclear context. This feeling could likewise have important political consequences for us all in the wider international sphere, if other powers - in particular the Soviet Union and its associates - sought to exploit it.

Even though Australia borders the Pacific we have perhaps been slower than we should to recognise its importance and significance. In recent years we have sought to make up lost ground in various ways including greatly increased aid and by increased involvement in the area at Ministerial and Prime Ministerial level. In terms of our geographical location, and of our direct interest, this makes obvious sense. But what may not be so obvious, and that prompts me to write to you now, is that in addition to your own direct interests in the Pacific region we and you share a broader interest in stability in this area as a whole. This interest will only be served effectively if our Governments at the highest levels are responsive to the views and aspirations of the South Pacific island countries.

Yours sincerely,

(Malcolm Fraser)