12 December 2007

His Excellency, the President of Indonesia, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, His Excellency, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, fellow national Leaders, Ministers, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, and all people of goodwill committed to the future of our planet.

I join with the Secretary-General and with the President of the Indonesian Republic in expressing our combined condemnation of this obscene terrorist attack in Algiers. An attack on innocent civilians, an attack on the agents of peace, those working for the United Nations, and therefore, an attack on us all. And I join with them in extending our thoughts and our prayers to those directly affected by this obscene attack.

A little over a week ago I had the honour of being elected as Australia’s 26th Prime Minister.

In my first act as Prime Minister, I signed the formal instrument for Australia to ratify the Kyoto Protocol.

And just a few moments ago I handed, personally, that instrument of ratification to the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

I did so, and my Government has done so, because we believe that climate change represents one of the greatest moral, economic and environmental challenges of our age.

Australia now stands ready to assume its responsibility in responding to this challenge – both at home and in the complex negotiations which lie ahead across the community of nations.

For Australians, climate change is no longer a distant threat. It is no longer a scientific theory. It is an emerging reality.

In fact, what we see today is a portent of things to come:

   In Australia, our inland rivers are dying.  
   Bushfires are becoming more ferocious, and more frequent.  
   Our unique natural wonders – the Great Barrier Reef, Kakadu, our rainforests – are now at risk.

This will sound familiar to many of our Pacific neighbours who are experiencing the impacts of rising sea levels, more frequent severe weather events and diminishing access to freshwater.
And regrettably it is now an increasingly familiar story across the globe, as reflected in the critical conclusions of the Fourth IPCC Report released last month.

Climate change is the defining challenge of our generation.

Our choice will impact all future generations.

This is, therefore, a problem which requires a global solution.

It requires a multilateral solution.

Unilateral action is not enough.

We must all share the burden.

Australia has a long tradition of multilateral engagement:

- Australia was a founding state of the United Nations at San Francisco in 1945.
- The Cambodian Peace Settlement.
- The Chemical Weapons Convention.
- The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.
- Australia was, in fact, among the first to sign the Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1992.

In the past we have been willing to put our shoulder to the wheel.

And what I say to this conference today is that under the Government I lead, we are doing so again.

For too long sceptics have warned of the costs of taking action on climate change.

But the costs of action are far less than the costs of inaction.

We must lift our national and international gaze beyond the immediate horizon - to comprehend the magnitude of the economic and environmental challenge that is unfolding before us.

Action to tackle climate change will not be easy. It will require tough choices.

And some of these will come at a political price.

But unless we act, the long-term costs will threaten the security and the stability of us all.

The truth is that we – the community of nations – are in this together.

The truth is that this challenge of climate change transcends the old ideological, political and developmental divide.

As our host, President Yudhoyono, said to me when we met yesterday, there can be no North or South, given the dimensions of this challenge.

Together we are custodians of the planet.

Together we are custodians of the planet’s future.
That’s why these deliberations here are so important.

That is why climate change is a top priority of the new Australian Government.

We have embraced a comprehensive plan of action.

The Government has committed to reducing Australia’s greenhouse gas emissions by 60 per cent on 2000 levels by 2050.

Last year – when my party was not in government – we commissioned a major study to help us to set shorter term targets along the way.

This study, the Garnaut Review, will report in mid 2008.

Together with modelling underway in the Australian Treasury, and also critically, informed by the science, this Review will drive our decisions on short and medium term targets.

These will be real targets. These will be robust targets.

And they will be targets fully cognisant of the science.

And they will set Australia firmly on the path to achieving our commitment of a 60 per cent reduction in emissions by 2050.

But it is not enough just to have targets.

We have to be prepared to back them with sustained action – because targets must be, must be translated into reality.

Australia will implement a comprehensive emissions trading scheme by 2010 to deliver these targets.

We will increase the proportion of renewable energy to 20 per cent of our national electricity supply by 2020.

We will invest in research and development to deliver transforming technologies.

But whatever one country does alone, it will not be enough.

This conference must agree to work together on a shared global emissions goal.

A goal that, on the best advice available, recognises the core reality that we must avoid dangerous climate change.

We must now move forward as a truly ‘United Nations’ with developed and developing countries working in parallel.

We expect all developed countries to embrace a further set of binding emissions targets – and we need this meeting at Bali to map out the process and timeline in which this will happen.

And we need developing countries to play their part – with specific commitments to action.
And we need all developed nations, all developed nations – those within the framework of the Kyoto Protocol, and those outside the framework – to embrace comparable efforts in order to bring about the global outcomes the people of the world now expect of us.

The approach we take must be comprehensive and must incorporate critical challenges, including deforestation.

Australia believes that action on climate change and action on development must proceed in tandem.

We understand that development is a top priority.

We strongly support the Millennium Development Goals, reinforced by our policy as a new Government of Australia, to increase our level of ODA from current levels to 0.5 of GNI by 2015.

We must all respect the aspiration of developing nations to secure their economic development and deliver rising living standards for their people.

But failure to act on climate change will make the development goal even harder to achieve.

Australia recognises the particular responsibility of the developed countries to assist developing nations in this process of transition.

In the form of technology transfer.

In the form of financial incentives.

And in the form of support for adaptation.

Around the world, great steps forward are being taken by individuals, by households, businesses, communities, organisations, scientists and governments.

But the effectiveness of all those efforts rests on the negotiations that begin here.

As we work towards achieving a new global compact in 2009, Australia is committed to working hard to build bridges between nations with differing circumstances and differing outlooks.

The world expects us to deliver binding targets.

The world expects us to deliver specific commitments.

It expects us all to pull together and for us all to do our fair share.

The Government I lead is only 10 days old.

It is a Government that is realistic about the difficult challenges ahead, particularly in the two years leading up to the Copenhagen conference.

It is a Government now prepared to take on the challenge, to do the hard work now and to deliver a sustainable future.
The community of nations must reach agreement.

There is no Plan B.

There is no other planet that we can escape to.

We only have this one.

And none of us can do it alone.

So let’s get it right.

The generations of the future will judge us harshly if we fail.

But I am optimistic that with clarity of purpose, clear-sightedness, courage and commitment we can prevail in this great task of working together to save our common planet.

I thank you.