Wed, 4th June 2008

ECONOMIC AND STRATEGIC PROGRESS WITH JAPAN ONLY SOLUTION TO RUDD SNUB

The Hon Andrew Robb AO MP
Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs (to 22 September 2008)

Next week’s visit to Japan by Mr Rudd must see real progress on both our bilateral economic and strategic relationships if the damage done by the Rudd snub of Japan is to be repaired.

After six months in government all the talk in our region is about Mr Rudd’s obsession with China at the expense of all other important relationships in North, East and South-East Asia.

To begin to get consistency and balance back into Australia’s regional relationships, Mr Rudd must start by repairing the bi-lateral relationship with Japan. Mr Rudd must:

- Provide the long-term assurances on energy resources to Japan commensurate with the strength of the 50 year partnership;
- Get the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) discussions back on track after downgrading the negotiations;
- See real meat added to the bones of the historic 2007 Australia - Japan Joint Declaration on Security Co-operation;
- Explain why Australia unilaterally abandoned the quadrilateral dialogue between Japan, India, the United States and Australia;
- Explain why the announcement of this abandoned commitment to the dialogue needed to be made at a joint press conference with the Chinese Foreign Minister;
- Tackle climate change, by resurrecting the Asia Pacific Partnership on Climate Change with Japan and other nations, on a bi-lateral and regional basis, given that the Budget insulted Japan by effectively destroying our shared partnership designed to reduce emissions growth in China and India;
- Propose that Australia and Japan mutually agree to initiatives that each country should take to enhance nuclear disarmament in the Asia-Pacific region; and,
- Explain to Japan what, if any, legal action Mr Rudd intends to take against Japan over whaling, given the iron clad campaign commitment to take Japan to the International Court of Justice (rather than the International Whaling Commission which the Government says is ‘not working’ and whose resolutions, according to Labor, ‘are not worth the paper they are written on’.)

So far Mr Rudd has indicated that he wants the four day program in Japan to focus on shared regional concerns over climate change, regional architecture and other regional issues.

Strengthening the bi-lateral relationship must be the priority of this Rudd visit. The bi-lateral relationship is where the problems are, not on shared regional concerns.
Regional concerns are best tackled from the position of a strong bilateral relationship.

Serious progress on initiatives within the Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Co-operation, and speeding up the comprehensive Free Trade negotiations, are critical starting points for a successful visit.

The historic Joint Declaration means that Australia was the first country outside of the United States with which Japan has signed a security agreement. It is based on shared strategic interests and shared political values.

The Joint Security Declaration was a starting point, rather than an end point. It intentionally created a framework for extensive progress going forward on initiatives such as further defence co-operation, co-operation and training on humanitarian relief efforts, jointly preparing for new security challenges and threats, and much more.

Every year for 41 years Japan has been our largest export market, and remains so by a long stretch. Japanese investment made the extraordinary Pilbara potential, a reality.

Japan was our main supporter in efforts to create APEC, and to join the East Asia forum.

Against this background, it has not gone unnoticed in Japan that in major foreign policy speeches by Mr Rudd over recent years Japan has rated no more than a passing, and often perfunctory, reference.

Yet, Japan is a true friend and major strategic ally.

Mr Rudd has a repair job to do in Japan, and fast.