HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF
THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

SPEECH

Monday, 17 November 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (15:39): Madam Speaker and Mr President, it is a joy to have friends come from afar. With free trade negotiations concluded and with a comprehensive strategic partnership established, this is a historic and memorable day.

No Chinese President has ever known more about Australia than President Xi. Tomorrow, when he completes his visit to Tasmania, he will have visited every single one of our states and territories. This President of China is, in fact, more widely travelled in our own country than most Australians! But it runs in his family. Thirty-five years ago, the President’s father, Xi Zhongxun, visited New South Wales as party secretary of Guangdong Province. The President’s father visited markets, farms, ports, docks, factories, schools and research institutes, and along with the then New South Wales Premier, Neville Wran, he signed a joint declaration on Guangdong-New South Wales friendship and cooperation. It was the first official sister-state relationship between Australia and China, and it was so successful that 80 sister-state and sister-city relationships have subsequently been concluded. Just as the friendships between our cities and our states have flourished, our national friendship and cooperation have grown and prospered. Xi Zhongxun saw the potential of our two peoples working with each other and learning from each other.

Today, we should also remember the foresight of the father of Australia’s modern relationship with China, Prime Minister Whitlam. When he established diplomatic relations with China, our two-way trade was 1/1,500th of what it is today. So we acknowledge Prime Minister Whitlam—you on the other side might at least say, ‘Hear, hear’—just because I say it!—and all the leaders of our countries who have put aside ideology to see Australians and Chinese as people with common interests and shared aspirations for a better life. Yes, Australia and China have different systems of government. One is a young country; the other is an ancient one being renewed. But we have become a model of how two peoples and two countries can complement each other. We are testament to the saying that a wise man seeks harmony, not conformity.

In April this year, I saw firsthand Chinese ships and planes working together with those from Australia, Japan, Korea and Malaysia, on the sea and in the sky searching for the missing Malaysia Airlines flight MH370. In the saddest of circumstances, our peoples worked side by side to seek resolution to this baffling mystery. We mourn the loss of the 154 Chinese passengers, along with the six Australians and 79 others on board. To the Chinese families of those who were lost, I promise that we will not rest until we have done everything we can to solve this mystery.

Two of those on flight MH370 were Chinese Australians. They were two of almost one million Australians of Chinese background. Chinese people first came to Australia in large numbers during the gold rushes of the 1850s and 1860s. Not all of them returned home once the diggings were exhausted. Even before the Great War there were more than 20,000 Chinese Australians, and at least 198 of them enlisted to fight for king and country. Four won the Distinguished Conduct Medal and 14 won the Military Medal as members of the First Australian Imperial Force.

In every part of our national life, Australians of Chinese ancestry have helped to build our modern nation. Around this parliament today there are members and senators of Chinese ancestry. Professor John Yu is a former Australian of the Year. Dr Victor Chang was our foremost heart surgeon. His school report card said:

Victor conquered language difficulty to obtain matriculation; gave us all an example of persistence: now doing Medicine at the University.

This is the story of the Chinese in Australia. All of them form a human arch, connecting us to what Prime Minister Menzies first called ‘our near North’.

Earlier this year I led the largest and most high-powered delegation ever to leave this country for the inaugural Australia Week in China. With me were two ministers, five premiers and a chief minister, the chairman of CEOs
of companies worth 50 per cent of the value of our stock exchange and hundreds—literally hundreds—more business people. Chinese direct investment in Australia, with just 23 million people, is only a little less on some data than Chinese direct investment in the United States, with more than 300 million people.

This is very significant. We trade with people when we need them but we invest with people when we trust them. A relationship might begin with commerce but it rarely ends there once trust has been established, as I believe it has between Australia and China. Trade and investment have made China wealthy. The advance of hundreds of millions of Chinese from subsistence to the middle class in just 40 years is probably the greatest material advance in all of human history. China is richer and stronger and the whole world is richer and stronger as a result.

China is by far Australia's largest trading partner. Indeed, China is now the largest trading partner for more than 100 countries. But trade and investment are just one part of how we help each other. For at least a decade, over 100,000 Chinese students a year have been learning in our universities and from our experts. But from next year under the New Colombo Plan, Australia will start to return the compliment, with thousands of young Australians soon to be studying in China. They are our new ambassadors to China and to the region.

The success of Australia's G20 presidency owes a very great deal to China's like-minded leadership of APEC over the past year. Australia was only able to mobilise G20 members to make specific policy commitments to deliver inclusive growth and jobs, and freer trade, because China was already pursuing similar goals. On behalf of Australia, I thank President Xi for his personal contribution in Brisbane. I congratulate China for hosting the G20 in 2016 and I am sure that under China's presidency the world will build on the Brisbane action plan for growth and jobs.

As President Xi told the G20 just two days ago, 'If you want to walk fast, walk alone. But if you want to walk far, walk together.' This is true of Australia and China. It is true of Australia and the world, because all of us have a long journey to make and only one planet to share. Our challenge is always to seek the best in each other. We are all walking into the future and, provided we stay together, there is no limit to how far we might go.

The SPEAKER: I call the honourable Leader of the Opposition to support the remarks of the Prime Minister.