Australia's Foreign Minister The Honourable Alexander Downer introduces Mr Mikhail Gorbachev

Mr Gorbachev; Vice-Chancellor Deane Terrell; Roland Rich, Director of the Centre for Democratic Institutions; my parliamentary colleagues; and ladies and gentlemen.

Mikhail Sergeovich Gorbachev occupies a special place in the history of the twentieth century. His role during the 1980s in dismantling the Cold War structures which dominated international affairs for four decades cannot be understated. Well known for his initiatives in the field of nuclear disarmament, he was also responsible for transforming Soviet relations with the West more broadly and enabling real dialogue to replace the arms race and Cold War rhetoric. As General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and then as President of the Soviet Union from 1990 to 1991, Mr Gorbachev presided over massive political change which had long-lasting global ramifications. His policies of Glasnost and Perestroika set in train democratic forces which would politically and economically transform the countries of the former Soviet Union and East Europe. That was a remarkable achievement.

Mr Gorbachev's initiatives within the Soviet Union also enabled then communist countries to have a more open outlook towards the rest of the world. We are fortunate in Australia now to have strong people-to-people and cultural contacts with the peoples of the former communist bloc, as well as growing trade and investment ties.

Since the break-up of the Soviet Union, Mr Gorbachev has continued to work in the fields of economic liberalisation and democratic reform. His Gorbachev Foundation in Russia, like the Centre for Democratic Institutions here, is active in promoting and researching democratisation processes. In recognition of his efforts towards world peace, in 1990 Mr Gorbachev was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. But Mr Gorbachev's greatest achievement and his legacy to us all must surely be a world no longer dominated by ideological conflicts and the ultimate futility of the Cold War.

Ladies and gentlemen, Mr Gorbachev.