



Speech by

**Hon. J. FOURAS**

**MEMBER FOR ASHGROVE**

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Hansard 19 February 2002

### **ELGIN MARBLES**

**Hon. J. FOURAS** (Ashgrove—ALP) (7.29 p.m.): In 1801, agents of Lord Elgin began the task of removing about half of the Parthenon marbles and these are now housed in the British Museum. The Greek government is building a new 55 million pound Acropolis Museum which is to be completed in time for the 2004 Athens Olympics. The marbles celebrate the Panathenaic games held BC. What a splendid gesture it would be if Britain returned the Elgin marbles so that all of the sculptures connected with the Parthenon were again reunited in Greece, the home of both the ancient and modern Olympics.

There is nothing so unique as the relationship of the Parthenon to Athens and the marbles to the Parthenon. Greece has continued to call for their return since 1829, when it won independence from Turkey. The campaign for the return of the Parthenon marbles is gaining worldwide momentum. British politicians, academics and celebrities, Bill Clinton and the majority of the members of the European Parliament are part of a worldwide movement urging the British Museum to do the right thing.

Lord Elgin had no authority to remove the marbles. There is a strong legal argument for their return. Gough Whitlam is on the public record as saying they were stolen. Former Prime Ministers Whitlam and Fraser have lifted the profile of the Australian campaign for the return of the marbles to Athens. John Howard has not supported Greece's claim by making representations to the British government. However, John Howard has indicated a preparedness to raise this issue with Tony Blair at next month's CHOGM. But the issue has not made the CHOGM agenda.

During CHOGM I will be joining other members of Brisbane's Greek community in a protest to bring this matter to the attention of British Prime Minister Blair. Earlier this year, Blair ruled out any possibility of the marbles being returned to Greece, arguing that the British Museum has no authority to return the marbles—the striking stone friezes that in 1801 decorated the sides of the Parthenon. British public opinion polls taken in 1998 and 1999 have indicated overwhelming support for the return of the marbles. Earlier this year, a leading London museum director urged the British Museum to change its intransigent position.

At CHOGM I will be holding a placard urging Tony Blair to show some understanding of the emotional and historic significance of the return of the Parthenon marbles prior to the 2004 Athens Olympics to their true home, the resurrected Parthenon at the Acropolis Museum. We should not be looking backwards at whether Lord Elgin was a saint or a sinner. It is time for a truly historic gesture.

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