



**MINISTRY FOR ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION AND
CLIMATE CHANGE**

PARLIAMENTARY STATEMENT

BY

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Mr Speaker,

I thank you for giving me the floor to speak. For the benefit of all you Honourable Members of this Honourable House, I will briefly highlight the milestones that have been attained since the enactment of the Climate Change (Management) Act 2015 by this Parliament on 28th July 2015. In so doing I will also briefly touch on the way forward regarding its implementation in the light of the recently adopted Paris Agreement.

Mr Speaker,

Before I may do so, allow me to paraphrase a passage from the Genesis chapter 1, verse 26 of the Bible where it states that our

heavenly Father and Creator has given mankind “dominion” over the Earth. Entailed in that passage is the command for mankind to manage and sustain the flora and fauna, and generally to upkeep the environment above, below and around us. However, greed and quest for happiness of mankind has destroyed the environment contrary to what God initially intended. Amongst others, climate change is the direct result of mankind’s mismanagement and abuse of the environment by polluting the atmosphere with the emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. Honourable Members, this issue needs urgent attention now than later because its effects are real and our people are being affected on a daily basis.

Mr Speaker,

As you may know, the Honourable Prime Minister led the Official PNG Delegation to the Conference of Parties (COP 21) Meeting in Paris last year where I also attended as Deputy Head of Delegation. At this point I am humbled to take this opportunity to thank the Prime Minister for his leadership in setting the pace in the first few days of the COP and for delivering the National Statement during the opening plenary.

After the Prime Minister as the Head of Delegation departed, I led the high level negotiations with support from the Foreign Affairs Minister, his Foreign Service officers and other civil servants.

Mr Speaker

In the National Statement delivered by the Honourable Prime Minister during the high level session, there were six (6) items we, as a country, identified as priority areas to be captured in the new Paris Agreement.

(1) Temperature Goals;

The Agreement declares that an increase of 1.5 degrees Celsius would severely exacerbate the particular challenge facing the most vulnerable smaller island states such as countries in the Pacific including Papua New Guinea. Therefore, all effort must be made to stay within the global temperature goal of 1.5 degrees Celsius.

To hold the increase in global average temperature below 2 degrees Celsius or 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre industrial levels, this long term mitigation goal of the Agreement is, in accordance with the latest science as reflected in the assessments of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, to phase out net global green house gases.

However, at 1.5 Degrees Celsius Pacific Island countries are facing adverse effects of climate change such as sea level rise, inland flooding and vector borne diseases amongst others. So for PNG, our position will be to continue to urge Developed Countries to maintain a range below 1.5 Degrees Celsius.

(2) Adaptation;

Adaptation is critical for PNG and the Pacific as it allows us to develop our region to be climate resilient; in terms of addressing the impacts of climate change through building sea walls and other climate compatible infrastructures and activities.

(3) loss and damage;

Loss and damage was intended to address issues that go beyond adaptation and mitigation activities. This was a challenge for PNG and the Pacific because under the previous Kyoto Protocol which PNG ratified, issues associated with loss and damage, such as climate change refugees, were not recognized. Therefore, it was difficult for PNG to get proper recognition and support to assist our sinking islands such as Catarets Islands in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville. Catarets Islands is a classic example where you cannot adapt or mitigate the effects of climate change. That is, we cannot reverse this phenomenon through adaptation and mitigation programs and activities. Unfortunately all we have to do is; find a way to assist the people to settle somewhere, somehow.

Mr Speaker,

(4) Mitigation & REDD+;

REDD+ is a mitigation activity that encompasses efforts from reducing emissions from deforestation, forest degradation, conservation and environment sustainability. It is significant because PNG is already implementing all these activities under various State entities. Honourable Members, as you can see, REDD+ was non-negotiable for PNG, and therefore we had to fight hard to include it in the Paris Agreement.

Mr Speaker,

Negotiating REDD+, brought us to sit up to odd hours from early in the morning to the next day; something I have never been exposed to on an ongoing basis but that was the only way, myself and the State Team could work to protect and ensure REDD+ was captured. It even became a show-down between Brazil and PNG, where Brazil was strongly opposing REDD+.

But I am grateful to the support of countries like Guyana, Panama, Ghana and the Democratic Republic of Congo that ensured REDD+ became a reality for all the rainforest nations.

I was pleased with the inclusion of REDD+ as a separate article to establish REDD+ as an implementation framework.

(5) Climate Financing;

This was another critical element for the Pacific Region including PNG, because of the central issue regarding accessibility to finance. Climate financing has never been easy for our region in the past with so many stringent processes imposed by the international delivery partners. PNG championed the fight for accessibility to finance and therefore the new agreement compels developed countries to simplify their stringent requirements so that developing countries can have reasonable access to finances.

Mr Speaker,

We also had a key bilateral with Green Climate Fund (GCF) officials and invited them to visit Papua New Guinea to assist us with the readiness and preparatory stage for the purposes of accessing climate finance. In response, a senior GCF official has arrived in the country and discussions are now underway to finalize an agreement on privileges and immunities which will enable GCF officials to travel into country to kick start capacity building, amongst others.

(6) Legally binding nature of the Agreement.

Our final position was to ensure that the Paris Agreement has a legally binding effect amongst the member countries and organizations.

For the first time, the global community have agreed to a legally binding commitment to curb carbon emissions and maintain a temperature goal below 2 Degrees Celsius through their commitments based on their national targets and circumstances.

Mr Speaker,

I am pleased to inform this Honourable House and the people of this great nation that the mentioned priority areas were successfully negotiated and are now captured in the Paris Agreement. This is a historic milestone we achieved with the global community and is a testimony to the leadership and political support given by the Prime Minister and the National Government.

On this note, credit must be accorded to the Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare GCL GCMG CH KStG MP for his leadership and initiation in addressing climate change issues in PNG and abroad during the formidable years.

Further, I have never been so grateful for being supported by the State Team on the ground; who, from my assessment, were aggressive, visionary and above all smart-and-tactful.

Mr Speaker,

Given the successful negotiations, the obvious questions that come to mind are, “*when will the Paris Agreement be implemented; and what benefits will we draw from it?*” These questions though seem so simple; but by nature are cross-cutting and complex.

What I mean by that is that the questions require a paradigm shift in the way we do things and conduct ourselves. Holistic and coordinated approach is needed now than later to implement the Paris Agreement and realise the benefits offered by it.

This is not the time for us to close our eyes and focus only on the monetary benefits offered by the Paris Agreement. No. Let’s think beyond the monetary veil. It’s about mankind losing their home called planet Earth. So much is at stake. If we do not save this earth from the effects of climate change, will it be possible for us and our future generations to migrate to another planet like Mars? No, I do not think so. NASA’s Mars exploration vehicles had never returned to earth. And we will never migrate there because that planet and others for that matter were never intended for our inhabitation in the first place. So Honourable Members, we must find a common ground; a focal point through which we can work together as a team for the common interests of our peoples and others.

Mr Speaker,

Unlike many other countries, we are fortunate to have legally established our focal point and, that is the Climate Change and Development Authority (CCDA). This is the sole entity in our country that is recognised by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to deal with climate change issues. UNFCCC allows only one focal point in any one country. To me, the reason for that is obvious; why setting up many focal points when, mankind's primary goal is to reverse the effects of climate change to a manageable level. Honourable Members let's not gamble with our lives and that of our future generations' lives.

I encourage us to work with CCDA to implement the Paris Agreement and utilize the opportunities presented by it. With respect, I cannot think of any other way in which we can manoeuvre that requirement for whatsoever reasons.

Mr Speaker,

Allow me once again, to say that, we are amongst the few countries in the world and the region to put together an overarching climate change legal and policy framework. Insofar as legal and policy framework is concerned, we are ready to implement the Paris Agreement.

Though, the Climate Change (Management) Act 2015 pre-empted the outcome of the Paris Agreements, it gave the Honourable Prime Minister and the State Team the leverage to speak and negotiate since it represented our sovereign country position. Apart from the ratification process, I am advised that our present legal and policy framework sufficiently caters for the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

Mr Speaker,

On that note, I inform this Honourable House that my Ministry through CCDA has completed its alignment process. This is to ensure that the Paris Agreement is effectively aligned with our current policy and legislative framework.

Mr Speaker,

Now that we have the institutional structure in place the main goal is to ensure transition into a low-carbon economy. To achieve this, our planning and implementation efforts must be climate-compatible.

The climate smart agriculture policy formulated by the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock is a classic example of how sectors should develop their policies and strategies to align with the overarching climate change policy and legislative framework. This will enormously benefit our country and the people.

Mr Speaker,

At this juncture, may I inform this Honourable House that PNG stands ready to implement the Paris Agreement, but for the purposes of formally giving it legal effect, I am being advised that the Minister for Foreign Affairs will table the necessary instruments on the floor of Parliament in the near future to ratify the Paris Agreement.

Mr Speaker,

My Ministry acknowledges the Paris Agreement as a landmark and historic milestone we attained for our country and the world. In that regard, may I pledge for the continued support and commitment from all stakeholders to work together to achieve the objectives of the Paris Agreement. I believe such an action is needed not only for the benefit our people but also for the greater benefit of mankind as initially planned by our heavenly Father and Creator.

May God bless this beautiful country.

I thank you Mr Speaker.

Hon. John Pundari, CMG, MP

Minister for Environment and Conservation and Climate
Change