



PAPUA NEW GUINEA HIGH COMMISSION

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STATEMENT AT THE LAUNCHING OF THE ARTS EXHIBITION OF DR ELIZABETH DURACK BY MR SAKIAS TAMEO, ACTING HIGH COMMISSIONER ON 19 MAY 2017

Thank you, Moderator.

Distinguished Guests, Academics, Students Ladies and Gentlemen-good afternoon.

I am honoured to be invited to be part of this event to launch the Art Exhibitions of the art work and paintings of Dr Elizabeth Durack here in Canberra. I am also pleased join two other distinguished panellists: Prof. Margaret Jolly and Associate Professor Christopher Ballard for this important event.

Moderator,

The art exhibitions constitutes drawings and paintings of Papua New Guineans by Dr Durack who travelled to the country in 1968.

Dr Durack travelled to many parts of Papua New Guinea - begins in Port Moresby, Hanubada. Travels to Lae and up to Kainantu, Goroka, Kundiaawa, Mount Hagen, Wapenamanda. From there went to Madang, Sepiks, and Rabaul.

The visits to these places are captured in her two books titled FACE VALUE - WOMEN IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA, and SEEING THROUGH PAPUA NEW GUINEA.

The overall purpose of the trip to Papua New Guinea was " ... to observe, record and draw some of the indigenous women who, taking advantage of the Australian Government's encouragement and educational opportunities, were participating in their country's efforts to come abreast of the 20th century".

She searched for the "New Women" and found many in training centres and colleges, in hospitals, aid posts, clinics, welfares centres, schools and missions.

Apart from the commentaries of *what she did and what she saw*, she drew 400 sketches, and portraits of girls and women, especially the “*New Women*” in Papua New Guinea.

She says, as an Artist, the sketches and portraits of the *New Women* told her a lot of stories: the diversity of our culture, their past ancestral history, their exposure and experience with the Administration, Missions and so forth. Dr Durack says in the book *Face Value – Women in Papua New Guinea*, I quote “The faces of the girls and women I drew held the incarnate history of their country and its past.”

That is what you can see on the drawings and paintings exhibited today.

Moderator,

Many writers have written many books about the early experiences of Papua New Guinean, but there is no replacement for the good work that Dr Durack did. Her drawings and paintings conveys the facial communication of the feelings, emotions and experiences of our people.

I therefore would like to pay tribute to the good work done by Dr Durack - a great Australian that will go a long way in preserving the visual history of the past experiences our people went through during the formative years of our nationhood.

As you enjoy Dr Durack’s read books, I wish to make one observation that you need to keep in mind. That is, in the Highlands, the people had very limited exposure to the Administration and Missionaries. They did not understand their culture or even the English language. Consequently, there was break-down in communications and both parties did not fully understand each other.

Hence, the accounts, interviews, and commentaries are based on the perceptions and experiences of Administration officials and Missions. On the other hand, the Highlands people also had their own experiences and perceptions that could not be shared with Dr Durack due to communication break-down.

To be fair and balance to both sides, it may be helpful to interview some elderly people of the Highlands of their early experiences and perceptions of the White men, his ways, his culture, the modern business systems, administration and so forth.

Moderator,

Through the drawings and paintings of Dr Durack, it will continue to retell and preserve the experiences of the past history of Papua New Guineans in the times to come.

May I also thank the Menzies Library at the ANU for providing a home for these art work that is an important treasure to the history of both Papua New Guinea and Australia.

Thank you for allowing me to say these few words at this important event to launch the Arts Exhibitions of paintings and drawings Dr Durack.