

**PAPUA NEW GUINEA HIGH COMMISSION
CANBERRA, ACT AUSTRALIA**

2007 Annual Report

Prepared by High Commissioner

Charles W Lepani

22nd December 2007

1. Introduction.

The operations of PNG High Commission in Australia were severely hampered by the Moti Affair. The Australia government declared in October 2006 that there would be no Ministerial travel to Australia for official business and the invitation to PNG Prime Minister by his counterpart for an official visit was postponed until the Moti issue was resolved. There were however, efforts at officials' level and between the two Ministers of Foreign Affairs of both our countries to continue to meet and discuss other bilateral issues and Pacific regional issues during the year.

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders meeting was hosted by Australia's Prime Minister in September 2007. Before the Leaders meeting, Australian government and other organizations such as the Australia Business Council and Universities were also involved in organizing lead-up meetings throughout the year. The Canberra Mission was called upon to attend all the meetings except the Mining Ministers Meeting in Darwin, where the Consul General in Brisbane was asked to attend to share the burden of meetings and resources. Both the High Commissioner and the Deputy shared the workload in attending the APEC meetings. Therefore, while the Moti Affair slowed the pace of the Mission's activities at bilateral level, the APEC Officials, Sector Ministers, Business, Educational and Leaders meetings were covered adequately by the Mission even though it strained our resources both financially and in staffing without a First Secretary being appointed and being posted.

The Mission also continued to work in its People-People contact activity to promote PNG and spread information on PNG to Schools, Councils, Rotary Clubs with High Commissioner attending to these areas on speaking engagements. The Spouse of the High Commissioner and staff of the Mission also played their part in various charity fundraising activities with other Diplomatic Missions and with charity organizations. There was a heightened awareness of PNG by some of our friends and colleagues in other Missions leading to greater interest for establishing bilateral accreditations through the countries' Canberra Missions. The High Commissioner attended most of the Australia-PNG Business Council quarterly meetings and the annual Forum in Cairns. The Australian elections and our elections this year brought our two governments in with a promise of better bilateral relations.

2. Summary of Year's Activities

(a) GoPNG and GoA Relations.

The Moti Affair soured relations for both our governments. However, at people to people level Australians in the main were bemused by their previous government's stance and openly spoke of the need to respect Australia's Pacific neighbours' sovereignty. In some forums I attended at Universities and at Independent Think Tanks, there seemed to be a sense of embarrassment by Australian Academic and Business Community at their government's behaviour in the Pacific Islands Region and its belligerent policy to PNG over the Moti Affair. I have stated publicly in my speeches in various Fora (see copies of Speeches attached herewith) that I have never in my work with Australian Governments come across such a significant disparity between the Howard government's negative stance on PNG and the positive attitude of Australian people to PNG. While Foreign Minister Downer was being belligerent towards PNG and their Australian DFAT was issuing travel advisories and warnings for Australian citizens to take care traveling to PNG because of the law and order and political situation, Canberra Mission was overwhelmed with Visa applications for Australians to walk the Kokoda Track, Investors and Business people as well as Australian officials traveling to PNG resulting in our Visa staff working overtime to 8pm for a period of 3 months or so to clear the applications. At one public Forum in the presence of Mr. Richard Rowe, now Divisional Head for PNG, I pointedly told the gathering that Canberra Mission may consider implementing the Australian government travel advisories by not approving Visa applications for Australian Officials. Of course, this was said in jest, but the Travel advisories add to the continuing negative perception of PNG in Australia.

At the bureaucratic level, there was a complete overhaul of the PNG Division of DFAT with new senior and junior staff who seem more willing to move issues forward and with greater PNG experience such as in Geoff Tooth who was Deputy High Commissioner in PNG in 1990s. The Deputy, Third Secretary and myself met with the new Team and we plan another meeting in early 2008 to commence preparations for JMF and follow up on other matters such as Quarantine issues for PNG export of root crops and MOU for Short Term Work Permits for skilled PNGNs to work in Australia while Training of just for additional work experience.

The new Australian Rudd government has made overtures to our government at various levels for us to move forward respecting each other's sovereignty, and putting Moti Affair aside. Our two Prime Ministers have met in Bali at a side bilateral and the sentiments expressed were positive. The Minister for Foreign Affairs has asked the Secretary and Chief of Protocol to set up a meeting with me which was never the case in the previous Howard government. I have informally met the Minister for Trade Hon Simon Crean, and have met with Hon Bob McCallum, now Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Aid, at his invitation over Lunch, (see Report of our discussion attached herewith which I sent to Secretary Pepson on 19th July 2007 and attached as **Attachment 1**).

The way is now clear to commence preparations for the Joint Ministerial Forum planned for the first quarter of 2008 in PNG. Canberra Mission has forwarded to HQ, some of the issues that may be included on the Agenda preparations for the JMF. It seems from latest information that our Development Cooperation Assistance, particularly Australia's aid and form and direction of its use, and ECP may be two very important matters to be

discussed. Emphasis on Trade and Investment would also be significant as well as Border and Defence Cooperation arrangements going forward.

(b) Trade, Commerce and Investment Promotion.

Due to staff limits, the Mission did not actively undertake promotional activities in Trade Commerce and Investment. I have attended and actively participated in the PNG - Australia Business Council quarterly Executive meetings as well the annual Forum meeting. The key areas of on-going concern are transport, utilities infrastructure and work permits delays. However, the confidence at the buoyancy of PNG's Economy has never been better for a long time, driving much of the interest and flows of potential investors to PNG over the last 12 months (see my speech to Tonkin Conference on Petroleum and Gas as **Attachment 2**).

Related areas are the APEC Finance Ministers conclusions and recommendations as well as other APEC sector Ministers' meeting recommendations. (see my APEC Meetings Report as **Attachment 3a**; and my Finance Ministers' Meeting Report attached herewith as **Attachment 3b**.)

© People to People Goodwill Promotion in education, culture and charity work.

The staff and I continued our work and activities in this area, as I view people to people contact as crucial to promoting our two countries' interests. I have spoken and attended many Fora where either PNG's interests are involved or Pacific Regional issues are debated. The PNG Australia Association whose members have worked in PNG and now retired, is very active in promoting PNG's interests. This year once again, I was invited as guest speaker for their Christmas Party. The Willoughby Local Government Council in North Sydney, dedicated a Park in honour of Sir Justice William Prentice a Chief Justice of PNG (just after independence), and the Council invited me to speak at the dedication. Schools and international students have visited the Mission, where I and the Deputy High Commissioner, did Power Point Presentations on general international relations but also focusing on PNG's relations with Australia and in international community (see summary Power point Presentation as **Attachment 4**.) I was invited to be a member of a Reference Group in setting up a Degree Program for Pacific Islands at ANU, and also was asked to speak at the European Union Studies Centre at ANU, on EU's role in the Pacific Islands. I have been asked to launch several books, one on PNG by Gloria Chambers, and the other, an academic Book on collections of artifacts in PNG and Pacific Islands region (see my speech on launch of "**Hunting the Collectors**" (eds. Sue Cochrane and Max Quanchi, as **Attachment 5**).

The spouse of the High Commissioner, Katherine Lepani and the Third Secretary, Helen Sanny, were also active in several charity and fundraising activities, including an East Timorese or Timor-L'est charity fundraiser where Kathy, prepared a PNG (Trobriand Basket of Coffee, and bilums to be raffled) contributed food, as well as run the Power-Point Presentation on Timor-L'est children and mothers' state of health and educational opportunities. Kathy, with women staff of the Mission and PNG women in Canberra,

were also involved with a Women's Charity Group in Canberra to prepare and pack birthing kits to be sent to PNG. PNG women in Canberra provided the entertainment with perovita and other PNG songs.

(d) Conclusion

Lastly, I attach what could only be termed as the crowning **good news item** in Australia not because of PNG Canberra Mission's activities but because PNG has again made an impact internationally and Australia Media for once acknowledged and widely publised the **good** that we do instead of the usual negatives. Attached herewith are several press cuttings on our " PNG as David vrs Goliath (USA)" achievement at the Bali Climate Change meeting.

Enjoy the Season's Festivities and may 2008 be even Kinder and More Prosperous for you and staff and families.

Charles W Lepani
High Commissioner