

**Summary Working Report of Official Visit to Brisbane for the period  
13<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> February 2006**

1. The visit was an official visit to Queensland State.
2. A very comprehensive program of meetings (see attached Program and People met) was arranged by the Protocol Officers of Office of Premier, I met with the Governor of the State, Her Excellency, Ms. Quentin Bryce AC, the Speaker of State Parliament, Hon. Mr. Tony McGrady MP, the Chief Justice, the Honourable Mr. Paul de Jersey AC, the Premier Hon. Mr. Peter Beattie MP, Minister for Child Protection, Hon Mr. Mike Reynolds MP, Minister for Energy and Aboriginal Affairs and Torres Strait Islander Policy, Hon Mr. John Mickel MP, Leader of the State Opposition, Hon Mr. Lawrence Springborg MP, Brisbane City Councillor, Ms. Jane Prentice (representing Lord Mayor of Brisbane), Coordinator General for State Government and Director General for Department of Premier and Cabinet, Mr. Ross Rolfe, other Heads of State Agencies and Senior State Government officials, representatives of NGOs, Multi-cultural Organizations, Business Community, Academia and Media.
3. First meetings on the program were with Senior Academic staff of University of Queensland, Queensland University of Technology and Griffith University (see Program for list of academic staff met). The meetings were very useful and relevant to some aspects of PNG's development effort and High Commission's annual program of activities and Plan. The academic staff discussed their respective universities' key degrees and those courses and programs of research which may be of relevance and interest to PNG. I expressed keen interest in a number of degree and research programs which we could further explore for support funding by AusAID and GoPNG to source staff expertise for projects in PNG and education and training opportunities for Papua New Guineans at these Universities. The following are some of these programs:
  - For Papua New Guineans further training and Education:
    - a) Pacific Law Course in the Centre for Public, International and Comparative Law, and The Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Queensland. Faculty visiting staff, have already assisted with Bougainville peace and conflict resolution talks.
    - b) Governance and Ethics degree at Griffith University. There is potential for collaborative work with Centre for Democratic Institutions, Research School of Asia and Pacific Studies ANU's program of seminars to bring political party executives from PNG, other Pacific Island states, Indonesia, for exchange of views on managing and strengthening political parties.
    - c) UQ's Agriculture Faculty at Gatton for training of PNG agriculture workers keeping in mind PNG is essentially an agriculture based economy and most of our people live on their rural agricultural subsistence production.

- For Expertise/Technical Assistance support:
  - a) The Coastal Fisheries and Environment Management Program, Griffith University, for potential collaborative work with a UN, AusAID, Japanese etc; funded \$US 7million Coastal Marine and Environment Project for Milne Bay Province which was slow to get started because of lack of technical personnel and EU funded Commercial Coastal Fisheries Project already commenced in Lae with potential for expansion to East/West Sepik, Milne Bay, New Guinea Islands, Gulf and Western Provinces.
  - b) The Export of Root Crops to Australia for Pacific Island Community market- Quarantine and Heat Treatment facilities Project- Expertise in pest control and quarantine matters in Faculty of Sciences QUT. In my discussions with Premier Beattie, he was keen to encourage trade in fresh food from PNG's Western Province to Qld's Torres Strait Islands Community due to proximity. Canberra Mission has already commenced discussion with AusAID and DFAT on this issue which was raised by PNG at the Joint PNG-Australia Annual Ministerial Forum at Gold Coast in December 2005.

I requested the senior officials from each of the Universities to provide the details of these degree and research programs for me to facilitate linkages and delivery to appropriate authorities in PNG and Canberra and may even provide opportunities for dialogue with seminars on these programs.

4. My meeting with Premier Beattie was significant as he was concerned not much has transpired after his visit a few years ago to PNG when he signed an MOU on economic cooperation between Queensland and PNG. He sought my support to move some of the issues in the MOU forward. He was particularly concerned to see trade in fresh food from Western Province of PNG to Torres Strait Islands of Queensland to commence soon. The Premier plans to take a delegation of Q'ld Business Leaders, and Officials to PNG in mid 2006 after the announcement of financial close of PNG-Australia Gas Pipeline Project. He called in his Coordinator-General and other Departmental Heads to follow- up on the discussion including a brief up-date of the Gas Pipeline Project.

After the meeting with Premier Beattie, a meeting with the Mr. Ross Rolfe, Director General of Premier's Department and Coordinator General (equivalent to PNG's Chief Secretary to Government), Mr. Rob McCarthy, Director General of Department of Natural Resources and Mines and Mr. Geoff Dickie, Assistant Coordinator General Major Projects. I was interested to learn about the role and functions of the Office of the Coordinator-General, as it seems similar in nature role and functions as those of the Office the Chief Secretary to GoPNG. Further, I raised the issue of some assistance on non-policing element of ECP. The Officials expressed willingness to assist. This matter is particularly significant when Federal agencies involved in seconding key staff may face potential strain on their capacity when and if GoA agrees to extend terms from 18 months to 3 years as

was requested by PNG's Minister for Finance and Treasury at the Joint Ministerial Forum at Gold Coast in December last year. The Gas Pipeline Project was not the focus of the visit as it was handled at a different level. Nevertheless brief exchanges of views took place with the Premier and with Minister for Energy and the respective Departmental Heads on the progress of the project and the continuing keen interest and support from the Q'ld government. I expressed PNG 's gratitude for this support.

5. The meetings with State Officials in Commerce, Trade and Employment and Business Community (see Program for list of attendees) were also very focused and issues discussed ranged from training opportunities, potential and actual cases of employment and employment opportunities on reciprocal basis, potential for agriculture training and extension services, and health issues such as HIV-AIDS and continuation of discussion on Premier Beattie's concern to move forward on matters contained in the MOU signed by him and PNG Ministers a few years ago. Q'ld Fire Services has generously provided assistance in Fire Engines and Firefighting equipment including firefighters uniforms to PNG.

The discussions also focused on effective use of Australia's bilateral aid program and the business community leaders present raised concerns on accessing AusAID funding for private sector sourced agricultural extension services (offer from Ramu Sugar Chairman Mr. Peter Colton,) access for funding support for private sector commercial projects particularly in areas supporting PNG government's development priorities such export-driven economic growth (agricultural industries and downstream processing based on agriculture and extractive industries). Some Company representatives sought for Australia to relax its employment and immigration laws for these companies to bring their PNG employees to work in Australia.

A few questions were raised on what is being done in PNG to combat the alarming rise in HIV-AIDS infections and PNG leadership commitment to assist in awareness campaigns. I responded that a Parliamentary Committee on HIV-AIDS has been set up under the chairmanship of Hon. Bunare Bun, the National Aids Council has been brought under the oversight of Central Agencies Coordinating Committee, and members of Parliament have been involved in awareness campaigns in their constituencies. There is strong leadership and action provided by major private sector companies and Mining and Petroleum industries are very active in their workers welfare once employees have been diagnosed with positive HIV-AIDS infections in PNG. I also canvassed sporting ties and access to Queensland's elite sporting facilities for PNG's elite athletes and sports administrators to be trained.

I also had the occasion to meet with the senior executives of the Brisbane Courier Mail. There were concerns expressed on delays in approving visas for media representatives to travel to PNG. I reminded them of Prime Minister, Grand Chief

Sir Michael Somare's open invitation at Australia's National Press Club in Canberra in October 2005, to media to travel to PNG with easy visa access. I raised with them, PNG's concern at Australian Media's preponderance in reporting negative aspects of PNG's development and problems and very little attention to describing the challenges and the positives and achievements of PNG. In response, a question was put to me "Well, what is good to report about PNG." I mentioned admittedly, there are problems but they should report of some of the achievements of the silent majority of our rural people who form the success story of our 30 years of independence. I have expressed this view before in other forums, but the UN development indices on PNG's low development performance ratios in health, education etc; particularly in the Pacific region are misleading when compared to small Polynesian countries whose people have easy access to metropolitan health and education services and whose development efforts are not constrained by mountainous terrains etc;. If these indices are to be meaningful for comparisons, then they should be weighted appropriately taking into account access to metropolitan social services and physical constraints.

6. In concluding this summary report, at each level of political and civil society engagement and discussion, it is very clear Q'ld of all the Australian States, is concerned to continue to promote the strong and close links with PNG. These ties can be further enhanced meaningfully at economic, political and social/cultural levels. On PNG's side greater effort needs to be made at defining our development policies and priorities better and greater effort at all levels of our society need to be made to engage with various levels of Q'ld society and its various communities.

I wish to put on record my appreciation and gratitude to the Governor, the Premier and his Ministers, the Chief Justice, the Lord Mayor, The Leader of the Opposition, State Government Officials, Business and Multicultural Community Leaders, and Senior Academic Staff for their individual and collective interest in PNG and their willingness to meet with me.

I also wish to express my thanks to Mr. Steve Webb, Protocol Officer, Office of the Premier of Q'ld, and the PNG Consul General Mr. Paul Nerau and his staff particularly Mr. Forster Ivaroa for preparing and coordinating the very interesting and fruitful program of meetings.

Charles W Lepani  
Papua New Guinea High Commissioner to Australia  
Canberra.

20<sup>th</sup> February 2005.