

High Commissioner's Report, Update from July 2005 to February 2006.

Since arriving in July 2005, I have taken steps to ensure Canberra Mission is effectively representing PNG's interests in Australia. In saying this, I and my family and the Mission staff and their families, pay due respect and gratitude to my predecessor, H.E. Mr. Renagi Lohia and his wife Patty and family for all their efforts for, and service to, PNG in various capacities of public service over the years.

The Mission staff morale was a key concern when I arrived and I took steps to address them some of which steps, have proven and continue to prove unpopular but the measures were necessary to ensure we take a collective TEAM approach in our work. The unity of PNG based Canberra Community was also an earlier priority and continues to be so. In August, I prepared and dispatched to Headquarters a Mission Corporate Plan for period 2006-2008 but its implementation is only now underway once resources are fully known. The Annual Expenditure and Program of Action will be rolled over quarterly after evaluation of our Mission performance each quarter. This has commenced this year.

The Canberra Mission Expenditure Plan involves pursuit of policy objectives of PNG government in enhancing our bilateral ties with Australia, enhancing people to people relations at cultural, economic, political and sporting levels. The PNG resident community in Australia and PNG students studying in Australia are crucial to this effort. The annual program of activities outlines the specific areas of focus.

The 30th Anniversary of Independence celebrations in September of 2005 was a success. It involved a week long program of events from an Ecumenical Service, a Book launch and launch of a Gift of Books on PNG project for these books to be distributed to schools and the National library in PNG, Australia and Pacific Islands. The Gift of Books Project is a Joint effort between Canberra Mission and ANU's Pandanus Books. My thanks and note of appreciation to all the PNG Business Houses and few large Australian Businesses who have come forward to co-sponsor this project in response to my letter of request. They have all been acknowledged in the Book Package. In addition, a PNG Student-organized seminar at ANU, a medals presentation ceremony, Canberra schools visits to the Mission for students to view PNG exhibits, all were part of the weeklong celebrations, culminating in a formal reception on the 16th September and a PNG Community Mumu at the Mission on 17th.

The highlight of the six months of my initial tenure in Office as High Commissioner was the visit of our Prime Minister, Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare, to speak to the Australian National Press Club and to open the refurbished Chancery, the "**Somare Kamasan**". The Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare also officiated in awarding the former Prime Minister of Australia, Hon Gough Whitlam, PNG's high honours award, the Grand Chief, to Hon. Gough Whitlam and at the same time awarding four leading PNG Community leaders in Canberra the 30th Anniversary Independence medals. We are very proud of, and grateful for their contribution to the lives of PNG community members and

Canberra community in general and in promoting unity amongst us. They are Mrs. Hane Dietz, a long term resident of Canberra, Mrs. Erue Steven, Mr. Sam Vuvuai, and Mrs. Anna Westcott.

The Prime Minister's Speech to the National Press Club is included here in the Mission Webpage.

The other highlight is the visit of 8 year old Mathew Ruatoka to recuperate after surgery at Sydney. The PNG Canberra community assisted but our most sincere appreciation goes to the Yuaieb family for hosting Mathew and his mother at their home.

I have, in between these events, managed to fulfill some of the work of the Mission by attending APEC conference in Sydney (see Report herewith) where I also met with executives of our PNG Community after the Conference, and Gas Project Sponsors (see Report), a seminar in Melbourne on Australia's draft White Paper on Australia's aid program for the future, launched Dr. David Peebles Book on Pacific Regional Cooperation (see Speech herewith), invited as speaker at a Gas Conference in Brisbane on PNG Gas Pipeline Project (see Speech herewith), at the invitation of Port Phillip Bay Council in Melbourne, I attended the trial Launch of Melbourne Commonwealth Games and took the opportunity to meet with our PNG community at the ceremony. Ms. Helen Sanny was assigned to coordinate our program with Port Phillip Bay Council and she has also traveled to Melbourne and met with the Council Officials and some members of PNG community. Port Phillip Bay will be hosting our PNG athletes to the Commonwealth Games and the Mission will be co-sponsoring a reception to welcome our athletes in early March before the start of the Games.

The Canberra Mission, with our Brisbane Consulate, were involved in organizing and contributing to the preparation of the agenda for the Joint Ministerial Forum hosted by GoA at Gold Coast. The meeting resulted in substantial issues for our Mission to follow-up. We are currently in discussions with DFAT and AusAID on these policy issues and assisting in coordinating and developing the format and agenda for the next Joint Ministerial Forum to be held at Kokopo in East New Britain in December of 2006.

Earlier this year, we were beset with the sad news of the passing away of our former Prime Minister, Sir William Skate. I flew to Brisbane (as Consul General was away on leave) to take charge of arrangements from the Chief Secretary, Mr. Joshua Kalinoe, with staff of our Brisbane Consulate, and to accompany the body of Sir William and the widow Lady Rarua Skate and family to return home to PNG with dignity and decorum. I released a media statement in response to some ill-informed complaints in PNG Media by a few about such arrangements,(See media statement herewith).

Last week I paid my Official visit to Queensland State (see Report attached herewith) and on Tuesday this week, Mrs. Lepani and I drove to Sydney, at the invitation of AusAID and Lowy Foundation to be present for the launch of a joint effort amongst, Clinton Foundation, AusAID and Lowy foundation for China, Vietnam and Papua New Guinea to be the recipient beneficiaries of retro-viral drugs to treat aids patients in these countries. In our brief meeting with President Clinton, he expressed he and his family's long-

standing interest to travel to PNG and I assured him PNG will send an open invitation to the former First Family to visit us.

We also are very pleased to welcome the new Deputy Head of Mission, Mr. Mataio Rabura, his wife Patricia, and children Mathew, Geita and Shelley. Mr. Rabura has been a long serving foreign service officer who comes to the Mission with wide ranging skills and experience in various aspects of diplomatic and foreign service work. The First Secretary, Mr. Joe Nobetau and Third Secretary Ms Helen Sanny, have both competently and with professional integrity carried out their respective functions as well as those of the Deputy Head of Mission until the arrival last week of Mr. Rabura. I express my sincere appreciation to both of them, the Defence Attache, and the LES staff of the Mission.

The Canberra Mission staff are involved on a daily basis in discussions with various GoA Agencies, NGOs and Business Community and Universities and their Institutes other Mission diplomats and general community to promote PNG's interests.

In the forth-coming weeks and months we look forward to a visit we have arranged of our Minister for Finance and Treasury Hon Bart Philemon MP to speak at the Australian National Press Club and other officials and dignitaries from PNG who will be coming to Canberra for Official business. We will keep you updated on these visits so that you may have enough time to meet them if their schedules permit.

This is the legitimate Webpage of PNG Canberra Mission. We aim to disseminate information on PNG and be a source of networking for PNG community, PNG students and any and all interested persons on PNG matters and issues. Your questions and comments on our work or any aspect of PNG are welcome. The Mission will not respond to or comment on those views whose authors choose to make comments or raise questions anonymously.

Charles W Lepani
High Commissioner