



Independent State of Papua New Guinea
High Commissioner

**OFFICIAL ADDRESS ON THE OCCASION OF THE 49TH
INDEPENDENCE ANNIVERSARY**

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Friends, Fellow PNG Citizens, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good day to you all, gutpela dei lo yupela olgeta, dina namona iboumuai, oma namana maparami.

I want to begin by acknowledging the original and traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today, the Ngunnawal and the Ngambri people, and pay my respects to their elders, past, present and emerging. The building in which we meet today, while it captures the traditional and ancient architecture of PNG, this was a gift to us by the Australian Government following our independence.

49 years ago today on 16th September 1975, the Australian Flag was ceremoniously lowered (not torn down or burnt as was the case in other developing countries around the same period) and the Papua New Guinea flag was proudly raised for the first time, marking the birth of the biggest island nation in the Pacific and her independence from Australia.

Since then, both nations have cultivated a unique and strong and robust relationship, built on our shared history, geographical proximity, common interests, and profound mutual respect which are proudly reflected in many different Treaties, agreements and understandings penned over the past 49 years. There has been an increased level of genuine engagements at the highest level between our two nations never before experienced over the past fifty plus years.

This has been especially so over the past two years where the Australian Prime Minister, Hon Anthony Albanese was the first Head of Government, extended the honour, to address our Parliament early last year. After his historical address to our Parliament, he was accompanied by toured some parts of country, especially being the first head of Government to visit the sacred and hallowed burial site of our Founding Father in Wewak and paid his respects to the late and revered Grand Chief Sir Michael Thomas Somare.

Papua New Guinea High Commission

39-41 Forster Crescent, Yarralumla ACT 2600; P O Box 6317, Kingston ACT 2604;
Tel: 61-2-6273-3322; Email: hc@pngcanberra.org; Website: www.pngcanberra.org

Our own Prime Minister, Hon James Marape was also granted the same privilege as the First Head of Government from the Pacific to address the Australian Parliament early this year.

Both Prime Ministers also jointly traversed the treacherous and the historical Kokoda Track to mark ANZAC day in late April this year, the first time ever in the history of bilateral relationship for any two heads of government from our countries to walk the track.

This year also, PNG played host to the biggest delegation of seven Ministers with their huge contingent of advisers and business leaders ever to visit our shores.

A most significant agreement is the long term Comprehensive Strategic and Economic Partnership (CSEP) signed in August 2020. This agreement is a testament to the strength and depth of our collaboration, spanning over ten years from 2020 to 2030 and encompassing various areas of cooperation in security, trade and investments, economy, infrastructure, health, education and people to people and beyond.

The recent signing of the Bilateral Security Agreement in December last year demonstrates our joint commitment to addressing common security challenges within our region and beyond. This heightened collaboration has also extended to a more open and transparent cooperation between our disciplinary forces to address internal as well external security challenges through robust institutional partnerships resulting in exchange of expert and skilled personnel, modern ICT infrastructure, building and sharing of research & development and knowledge leading to the development, growth and evolution of *personal* as well as more importantly **STRATEGIC TRUST**.

These exchanges included the gifting of Guardian-class patrol boats to Papua New Guinea to support maritime security in the Pacific region, appointment and positioning of PNG security personnel in the Australian Defence Force and the AFP and vice versa of highly qualified and competent Australian personnel amongst our disciplined institutions. We also have constructive engagements in our immigration, airports, ports, civil aviation, information and communications and other key security sectors.

In terms of trade, Australia is Papua New Guinea's largest trading partner, with bilateral trade totalling over \$5 billion (K13.3 billion). Australia as the major investor in PNG, contributes a little over \$26 billion (K70 billion) with more than 4,000 Australian firms engaged constructively in the resource sector, critical economic and social infrastructure projects, manufacturing and in the non-renewable industries across all other sectors.

Whereas Papua New Guinea only has \$795 million (K2.1 billion) of investments in Australia clearly indicating an imbalance in the trade between our two nations. It is our vehement desire to turn this around and tip the balance in our favour going forward in the next fifty years. We want to do this by improving quality downstream processing in our economy in the rich resource sector and the non-renewable sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries and tourism as well as opening up markets here in Australia and elsewhere for our organic PNG products such as our coffee, cocoa, coconuts, oil palm and our fresh and loveable fisheries products.

The engagements fostered through the Australia-Papua New Guinea Business Council and the Australia/Pacific Business Council have contributed significantly to strengthening our economic partnership in achieving some of the above outcomes.

Regarding our people-to-people connections, there has been a growing flow of individuals between our two countries through various initiatives notably at the younger generation levels. For instance, around December 2023, more than 1,300 students from Papua New Guinea visited Australia through programs such as the Australian Awards Scholarship, the Colombo Plan and the Australia-PNG Emerging Leaders Dialogue.

These exchanges also include young Australians visiting our country and our educational institutions and in so doing, they are developing a connection and a love for our beautiful nation. Most importantly, these programs and exchanges are directly and indirectly contributing to the development of effective and ethical future leaders for both countries grounded in strong values in leadership and governance. This is particularly critical for PNG's future where new breed of leaders are needed.

Imagine a future where young leaders who come through these exchanges end up in key and strategic roles, either in government or commerce, where they can jointly make an impact on policies that promote better and friendly relations between our nations moving forward.

PNG's NRL entry will likely take place in 2028 and this truly underscores our two nations' deep cultural and sporting connections. ***A national team that participates weekly in the NRL will bring together different tribes to watch their national heroes compete at the highest level, thus unifying this highly diversified nation.*** It is moments like this that will reform our nation.

The famous Kokoda Track region holds a special place in the relationship between Papua New Guinea and Australia for its military history and her socio-economic and environmental significance. For it was in the jungle clad mountains of Kokoda where the mateships developed between the fearless warriors of our two nations impacted on the attitudes and policies of the Australian colonial administration leading to a greater level of development in education and infrastructure post war.

The Kokoda campaign itself was a watershed moment in the development of nation, because the Australians came to appreciate PNG natives as equals – as soldiers, warriors, carriers, best known as the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels. Because prior to the war racial discrimination had been rampant between the whites and natives, where Papuans and New Guineans, as we were known then were working for the whites. The war changed the attitudes of the white regime where we became equal partners in development after the war.

The Institutional Partnership Program is a crucial capacity and capability development initiative which aims to enhance the leadership and management skills of the PNG Public Sector, the tertiary and related institutions. The program also aims to share best practices, experiences, and knowledge to enhance performance and governance in the public sector.

Through the bilateral Labour Mobility arrangements, Papua New Guinea is committed to providing Australian employers with a high-quality workforce. This commitment is shown through our rigorous recruitment processes and pre-departure training to ensure focused, productive, and hardworking workers where we want to create a brand for PNG.

Gender-based violence is a significant socio-economic issue that Papua New Guinea faces. We have PNG as well as Australian-based non-government organizations actively engaged at all levels to assist victims and survivors of gender-based violence. We at the PNG High Commission are working closely and collaboratively with the Australian Government authorities and have also established strong and robust partnerships with a number of these NGO's in pursuit of this wonderful cause to reduce violence against women and children.

Speaking of children, I have with me my daughters and two of my grandchildren who welcomed you at the entrance. We have borrowed their future, and we owe it to them to ensure we leave behind a legacy where they can enjoy peace freedom and prosperity over the next fifty years.

God Bless Papua New Guinea, God Bless the Commonwealth of Australia.



H.E. John Ma'o Kali, CMG OBE

High Commissioner