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SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON. E.G. WHITLAM,  
At a Dinner attended by the Government of Papua New Guinea.  
PORT MORESBY

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18 February 1973

Mr Chief Minister, I suppose one would be less than human if one did not feel some measure of gratification at the recent changes in our personal and political situations: all I need say, Chief Minister, is that we have both come a long way from the lounge of the Sepik Hotel at Wewak in January 1970, when we were both virtually under siege and when we were both deemed in certain quarters to be committing political suicide by daring to talk about early independence for Papua New Guinea.

I may say, Chief Minister, that the courage and foresight you showed in those years marked you as a coming man and as a genuine leader of your people. It is a deep personal pleasure to me as well as a matter of great pride that you and I shall be working together in the coming years in the great work of creating a new nation in the South Pacific, this nation of Papua New Guinea.

In the whole of modern history there is only a select band of men and women to whom such a task has been entrusted, and you Chief Minister, have joined with lustre and honour the chosen few who have led their people to nationhood.

In the few short years since 1970 when even self-government, much less independence, was scarcely to be mentioned in polite circles, Papua New Guinea had a piece of unexpected good fortune. I refer to the appointment of Andrew Peacock as the Australian Minister for External Territories. I am glad, here, to pay my public tribute to him and his work, as I have in Australia. I have been able to appoint an admirable successor in Bill Morrison who, one way and another, has had a remarkable record in working himself out of a job - and that, of course, is the duty of the Minister for External Territories.

I was never a believer in the idea that the Australian political parties should adopt throughout the early '60's a bipartisan approach on the future of Papua New Guinea. I am convinced that the attempt to do so did great harm in those years. Too often, Australian apathy, Australian arrogance, Australian indifference masqueraded as a national consensus. Nevertheless, what was a disadvantage in the '60's could well be an advantage in the mid '70's as Papua New Guinea emerges towards independence. Andrew Peacock did go a long way towards restoring the consensus - a genuine, progressive, concerned consensus, not the phoney consensus of the '60's.

There are now three great areas of agreement among the Australian political parties about Papua New Guinea's future. The first is that a timetable for self-government and independence must be set, and that essential elements for the timing of the decision are the views and wishes of the House of Assembly.

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As the Chief Minister and Mr Peacock agreed, resolutions of the House on important issues should be by recorded vote and by a substantial majority representative of the nation as a whole. My Government reaffirms that position.

I cannot stress too often that the decision for independence is not only a decision about Papua New Guinea. It is about Australia and Australia's view of her own proper role in the world. Australia is no longer willing to be the ruler of a colony. And my Government is determined to divest itself of that role in the lifetime of the present Australian Parliament.

The second area of firm agreement is that Australia's aid to Papua New Guinea will continue after independence. You will recall, Chief Minister, that in my visits in 1970 and 1971, I made the most solemn pledges to your people on this matter. The pledges that I made to your people are as binding upon me, my Party and my Government as any undertaking I have given to my own people in seeking their support. I am acutely aware of the fact that if I had not given these undertakings in 1970 and in 1971, the cause of independence could never have made its spectacular progress in the past three years. I repeat that undertaking now.

The Australian Government has decided to give the Papua New Guinea Government an assurance of continuing aid over the period of the three year Improvement Program beginning in 1974/75. The detailed arrangements to give effect to this assurance will be formulated in connection with the preparation of the Improvement Program. These arrangements will, of course, need to provide for review during the period of the Program as necessary in the light of changing circumstances.

Papua New Guinea will have the first call on our substantially increased foreign aid programme. We shall be working with the Papua New Guinea Government through a specific and guaranteed programme.

The third area of complete agreement between the Australian political parties is that it is Australia's duty and responsibility to hand over to the Central Government and the House of Assembly a united Papua New Guinea.

My Government's policy, and it was the policy of the late Government, is to hand over our remaining powers to a national and representative government, freely elected by the people of the whole of Papua New Guinea and able to represent the wishes of the majority of the people. Relations between our two countries will be conducted through the National Government in Canberra and the Central Government of Papua New Guinea. Australian aid will be allocated solely through the Central Government.

On 20 December 1971 the United Nations General Assembly, by resolution, urged Australia to discourage separatist movements and to ensure that the unity of Papua New Guinea is preserved throughout the period leading up to independence. On 14 December last year the General Assembly again reaffirmed "the importance of ensuring the preservation of unity."

I know we cannot underestimate the difficulties in maintaining unity. I know the strength of tribal and regional feelings. These ties and loyalties are themselves valuable - an essential ingredient in the life and culture of the nation. But if Papua New Guinea is to survive, if it is to progress, if it is to find an honourable and honoured place among the nations of the world, if it is to have an effective voice in the affairs of our region, then the Central Government and the House of Assembly must have sufficient powers over the whole nation to plan for the nation and to speak for the nation.

I hope you won't think it patronising of me to remind you that Australia herself - a federation of states - has problems in dealing with national matters. For example, you will know the difficulties and delays we have met in carrying out our determination to negotiate between our two countries in the Torres Strait. Even in a country as developed and sophisticated as Australia, one hears from time to time rumbings and mumblings about secession. But it is folly for anybody to believe that any section of Papua New Guinea would serve its interests by going it alone. For it would truly mean going it alone.

Soon I shall be leaving for a visit to our great neighbour, Indonesia. It's worthwhile reflecting that that country has faced similar problems of diversity of cultures and customs and suspicion from time to time of the Central Government. But Indonesia is an example of one of the outstanding facts of the post-colonial era. Newly independent countries in Asia and Africa have made extraordinary exertions to maintain the integrity of the borders inherited from their colonial rulers. For such countries those borders are regarded as the very foundation of the legitimacy of their government, as the very guarantee and symbol of their independence, and of their nationhood. It must be so with Papua New Guinea.

The members of this Government and the members of the House of Assembly have, as I have said, a tremendous and difficult task ahead. But it is a task of great honour and privilege - to be in truth the founding fathers of your nation.

You are writing a great page in your nation's history. In Australia you have an assured friend and I believe we shall forge a true partnership to the great advantage of both our countries and for the welfare of both our peoples.

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