



PRIME MINISTER

Press Statement No. ~~540~~ 541
11 August 1975

PAPUA NEW GUINEA - BOUGAINVILLE

Following his discussions with the Chief Minister of Papua New Guinea, Mr Michael Somare, today, the Prime Minister said that he wished to make crystal clear the Australian Government's position in relation to Bougainville.

The Prime Minister recalled that, in advising Mr Somare on 19 June that the date of 16 September for independence nominated by the House of Assembly was acceptable to the Australian Government, he had taken the opportunity to reaffirm that the Australian Government's policy was that Papua New Guinea should come to independence as one country in accordance with the wishes of the overwhelming majority of Papua New Guinea's elected representatives. This remained Australia's firm policy.

The Prime Minister also recalled that he had informed Mr Somare on 19 June that the Australian Government would give no sympathy, aid or support in any form to any group in Papua New Guinea working to undermine their country's unity. This remained the firm Australian position.

The Prime Minister said that he had today advised Mr Somare that a unilateral declaration of independence, if given effect, would be an illegal act. It could not by itself alter in terms of the law of Papua New Guinea the authority of the Government of Papua New Guinea over the whole of the territory of Papua New Guinea. Nor could it detract from Australia's international rights and duties under the Trusteeship Agreement.

Australian policy was to regard Papua New Guinea as virtually independent. Powers of Administration had been transferred to the Government of Papua New Guinea. In this situation Australia regarded any discussions on questions of regional autonomy or financial arrangements as essentially a matter for the Government of Papua New Guinea. The Prime Minister wished to make absolutely clear, however, that any move for Bougainville to become independent before 16 September would require not only the assent of the Government of Papua New Guinea but also that of the Australian Government and the United Nations. The Australian Government would not assent nor, in the Prime Minister's judgement, would the United Nations.

The Australian Government naturally remained interested and concerned about developments in Bougainville. The Prime Minister and Mr Somare had agreed to keep in the closest touch.

The Prime Minister said that he had given Mr Somare renewed assurances of Australian support and had every confidence that the move to independence on 16 September of a united Papua New Guinea would proceed smoothly. He understood that the way was open for further discussions between the central government and the Bougainvilleans. He hoped that all concerned would use their best endeavours to find an amicable and enduring solution.

CANBERRA. A.C.T.