



PRIME MINISTER

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PARLIAMENTARY LUNCH FOR THE PRIME MINISTER OF
PAPUA NEW GUINEA, MR PAIAS WINGTI
CANBERRA - 9 DECEMBER 1987

It is my very great pleasure today to welcome you to Canberra on your first visit to Australia as Prime Minister.

Australia and Papua New Guinea have a strong and a very special relationship, one which is firmly based on a shared history, a shared participation in the dynamic growth of the Western Pacific region and, most importantly, the warm friendship of our two peoples.

My own association with and affection for Papua New Guinea date back to my involvement as ACTU advocate in a wage case for Local Officers in 1965. Since then I have followed events in Papua New Guinea closely; and I made sure that Papua New Guinea was the first nation I visited after I became Prime Minister in 1983. I have since visited twice and had the pleasure on the last occasion of experiencing the pride with which Papua New Guineans entered their second decade of independence.

Papua New Guinea has been an independent nation now for twelve years, and it is significant that you, Mr Prime Minister, are the first leader of a new generation of Papua New Guineans whose principal experience has been of independence.

Throughout the South Pacific, nations are facing up to the new challenges of established membership of the world community. In many of these nations, the issues now are concerned with complex economic management, sophisticated foreign policy choices and profound social questions. It is therefore natural that members of this generation should seek to redefine Papua New Guinea's place in the world and its key foreign relationships.

That they should initiate such a wide-ranging document as the Joint Declaration of Principles guiding relations between Papua New Guinea and Australia is testimony to the strength of our ties in a new era.

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Mr Wingti and I signed that Declaration this morning.

The Declaration represents the recognition by both our Governments of the enduring importance of the relationship between us and of the way in which that relationship is changing over the years.

Its themes are mutuality, reciprocity and consultation.

It stresses the sovereign equality of our two countries and the linkage between all elements in our relationship, so that decisions on any issue should be taken with due regard for the relationship as a whole. It spans the entire range of our contacts, which includes trade, investment, transport, communications, aid, defence, legal co-operation and border administration.

It is, first and foremost, an intelligent document which confirms the worth of existing arrangements while opening the way for new arrangements to be concluded under its ambit.

As part of measures to deepen our relationship I have been encouraging my Ministers to visit Papua New Guinea and would urge Papua New Guinean Ministers to visit Australia for regular discussions with their counterparts on issues of mutual interest.

On economic issues, the direction and priorities of your economy are now of course firmly in Papua New Guinean hands. We applaud the progress made to date in defining those priorities, setting achievable targets and moving to implement them. We recognise the pressures on Papua New Guinea's economy and the urgency of developing strategies to meet the demands of a growing population with rising expectations. Australia has been and will continue to be a committed, responsible partner in Papua New Guinea's development. The Joint Declaration of Principles makes this plain even as it, rightly, removes "aid issues" from the centre of our bilateral stage.

The way is open for Australia and Papua New Guinea to continue to engage in and promote fully co-operative activities of mutual benefit. For example we have just this month completed a jointly funded resource-mapping project between CSIRO and Papua New Guinea's Department of Agriculture and Livestock. Papua New Guinea now possesses perhaps the most comprehensive store of information on its land resources of any developing country.

The co-operative and friendly character of the ties between us assume even greater importance in view of the developments taking place in our region.

Without in any sense being alarmist, I have said on a number of occasions that the South Pacific is now a less stable place than it was when my Government came to office in 1983.

I refer to the uncertainty over the future of New Caledonia, the unwelcome interest displayed in our region by Libya, and of course the troubling implications of the two military coups in Fiji.

My Government was dismayed at the events in Fiji and we have not as yet recognised any government in that country. I believe the coups have made much clearer the potential for regional instability and have consequently underlined the importance of countries such as Australia and Papua New Guinea cooperating closely to achieve our mutual goal of peace and prosperity in the region.

We have cooperated in the efforts of our region to terminate nuclear testing at Mururoa Atoll, to resolve the problems in New Caledonia, and to bring into being the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty.

In all these efforts the South Pacific Forum, of which Australia and Papua New Guinea are members, has been a valuable sounding board for regional problems and a useful means of co-ordinating action to help solve those problems.

In line with the view the Forum expressed in Apia, and in line with the Vancouver CHOGM, I took the opportunity of my recent visit to Moscow to ask Soviet leaders to ratify the Treaty of Rarotonga in a full and unambiguous fashion. They have said they will consider their position again.

A strong and constructive relationship between Australia and Papua New Guinea - both bilaterally and through institutions such as the South Pacific Forum - is one of the essential requirements for the maintenance of peace and stability in the South Pacific.

And this brings me again to the declaration Mr Wingti and I signed this morning. It marks a new phase in our relations with Papua New Guinea. Future discussions, like those this morning, will be between friends who are equal friends: fully consulting each other when common interests are involved; vigorous in making our point when we disagree; but strongly supporting each other on the much more numerous occasions when we agree.