

Embargo. 4.30 pm

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON. E.G. WHITLAM,  
Q.C., M.P., AT THE OPENING OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA HOUSE,  
SYDNEY, FRIDAY 26 JULY 1974

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THIS IS AN IMPORTANT DAY IN THE HISTORY OF BOTH OUR COUNTRIES - IMPORTANT IN SUBSTANCE, IMPORTANT IN SYMBOLISM. THE BUILDING ITSELF, ITS LOCATION IN AUSTRALIA'S OLDEST, GREATEST CITY, EXPRESSES THE CHANGING NATURE OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA'S RELATIONS WITH AUSTRALIA AND THE REGION IN WHICH WE ARE NEIGHBOURS AND PARTNERS. NOW PAPUA NEW GUINEA WILL HAVE ITS OWN OFFICES IN AUSTRALIA'S INDUSTRIAL AND COMMERCIAL HEART AS WELL AS THE COMMISSION IN THE NATIONAL CAPITAL. PAPUA NEW GUINEA ALREADY IS REPRESENTED IN INDONESIA AND IS SHORTLY TO ESTABLISH COMMISSIONS IN NEW ZEALAND AND FIJI.

THESE MOVES ARE PART OF THE RAPID ASSUMPTION OF INDEPENDENT STATUS BY A VIRTUALLY INDEPENDENT NATION. BY THE BREAKING OF THIS SPEAR AND BY MY ACCEPTANCE OF HALF OF IT WE SYMBOLISE THE WAY IN WHICH THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PAPUA NEW GUINEA AND AUSTRALIA IS CHANGING SWIFTLY YET DEVELOPING IN A SPIRIT OF MUTUAL TRUST AND CLOSE FRIENDSHIP. IN ACCEPTING HALF OF THIS SPEAR, I AGAIN REASSERT AND REAFFIRM AUSTRALIA'S ABSOLUTE WILLINGNESS TO CONTINUE TO CO-OPERATE CLOSELY WITH A UNITED PAPUA NEW GUINEA IN THE FULFILMENT OF ITS HOPES FOR A UNITED, PROUD AND FREE NATION.

THE BREAKING SYMBOLISES A BREAK FROM THE OLD DEPENDENCE; MY ACCEPTANCE OF ONE OF ITS HALVES ON BEHALF OF AUSTRALIA FROM THE CHIEF MINISTER ON BEHALF OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA SYMBOLISES THE CONTINUITY OF OUR CO-OPERATION, OUR TRUST AND GOODWILL - BETWEEN THE CHIEF MINISTER AND ME, BUT MORE IMPORTANT, MORE ENDURING, BETWEEN PAPUA NEW GUINEA AND AUSTRALIA.

TO THOSE OF US WHO HAVE CLOSELY WATCHED THE UNFOLDING OF EVENTS IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA IN THE 70'S, WHAT HAS OCCURRED, WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED, SEEMS LITTLE SHORT OF MIRACULOUS. IT IS BARELY THREE AND A HALF YEARS AGO SINCE I FORESHADOWED IN PORT MORESBY THE POLICY FOR INDEPENDENCE WHICH WOULD BE ADOPTED BY A LABOR GOVERNMENT IF WE WERE RETURNED AT THE 1972 ELECTIONS. WE ALL REMEMBER THE EXTRAORDINARY SHOCKWAVES WHICH THAT ANNOUNCEMENT GENERATED, BOTH IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA AND AUSTRALIA. YET EVENTS HAVE MADE MY SUGGESTED TIMETABLE APPEAR IN RETROSPECT, MODEST AND MODERATE, INDEED. WE HAVE HAD A CLASSIC ILLUSTRATION OF THE POWER OF AN IDEA WHOSE TIME HAD COME. THE FORCES FOR INDEPENDENCE ALREADY EXISTED; THEY NEEDED ONLY EXPRESSION TO SPRING INTO VIGOROUS LIFE.

AT THAT TIME I WORKED FROM ONE BASIC ASSUMPTION. IT WAS THIS: THAT PAPUA NEW GUINEA WAS ALREADY PROVIDING, FROM HER OWN RESOURCES, MORE SKILLED MEN AND WOMEN THAN AUSTRALIA WOULD BE ABLE OR WILLING TO MAKE AVAILABLE FOR PAPUA NEW GUINEA PURPOSES FROM HER RESOURCES. SO IT HAS PROVED. IT IS THIS FACT WHICH PROVIDES THE BASIS FOR PAPUA NEW GUINEA'S INDEPENDENCE. WHAT COULD HARDLY HAVE BEEN FORESEEN IN 1970 WAS THE SPEED WITH WHICH EFFECTIVE POLITICAL PARTIES WOULD EMERGE IN THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY. THIS NEW FACT HAS PROVIDED THE FIRM BASIS FOR THE AMAZINGLY RAPID ASSUMPTION OF THE SUBSTANCE OF INDEPENDENCE, IF NOT ALL THE FORMS, IN THE LAST THREE YEARS.

ABOVE ALL WE COULD NOT HAVE RECKONED ON BEING SO FORTUNATE IN THE CHOICE AND STATURE OF THE LEADERSHIP WHICH HAS EMERGED. AT A CRUCIAL TIME IN HER HISTORY, PAPUA NEW GUINEA HAS FOUND LEADERSHIP OF THE HIGHEST QUALITY AND INTEGRITY, A LEADERSHIP WHICH HAS ALREADY WON RESPECT THROUGHOUT THE REGION.

SO SUCCESSFUL HAS THE TRANSITION BEEN THAT NEITHER THE GOVERNMENT OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA NOR OF AUSTRALIA NEED ANY LONGER FEEL UNDULY PREOCCUPIED WITH THE FORMALITIES OF INDEPENDENCE. IN ALL BUT FORMALITY, PAPUA NEW GUINEA IS INDEPENDENT. LET ME REPEAT THE WORDS OF THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL IN HIS SPEECH OPENING THE PARLIAMENT:

"MY GOVERNMENT IS COMMITTED BY THE CLEAREST PLEDGES TO CONTINUE SUBSTANTIAL AID TO A UNITED PAPUA NEW GUINEA BEFORE AND AFTER INDEPENDENCE. SINCE PAPUA NEW GUINEA ACHIEVED SELF-GOVERNMENT IN DECEMBER 1973, THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENTS OF AUSTRALIA AND OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA HAS BEEN BASED ON THE PRINCIPLES OF EQUALITY, MUTUAL RESPECT AND MUTUAL CO-OPERATION. PENDING THE FINAL DECISION OF THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY TO DECLARE INDEPENDENCE FOR PAPUA NEW GUINEA, THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT WILL CONDUCT ITS RELATIONS WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA AS A GOVERNMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT NATION TO WHICH AUSTRALIA HAS CERTAIN SPECIAL AND INESCAPABLE OBLIGATIONS."

IN OTHER WORDS, THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY AND THE GOVERNMENT OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA WILL MAKE ITS OWN DECISION AS TO THE ACTUAL DATE OF INDEPENDENCE WHILE FOR ITS PART, THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT WILL DEAL WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA AS THE GOVERNMENT OF AN ALREADY INDEPENDENT COUNTRY.

BEFORE INDEPENDENCE AND AFTER INDEPENDENCE, ALL AUSTRALIAN AID WILL BE DIRECTED THROUGH THE GOVERNMENT OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA. IT WILL BE DIRECTED TOWARDS THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES SET BY THE GOVERNMENT OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA. AUSTRALIAN AID WILL NOT INVOLVE INTERFERENCE IN THE PREPARATION OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA'S IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMS AND ANNUAL BUDGETS. THESE ARE AND WILL CONTINUE TO BE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE GOVERNMENT OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA.

THE PROGRESS BEING MADE BY PAPUA NEW GUINEA, OF WHICH THIS BUILDING IS ONE OF THE EXTERNAL SIGNS, GIVES GROUND FOR THE HIGHEST OPTIMISM. YET WE SHOULD NOT SEEK TO UNDERESTIMATE THE DIFFICULTIES IN THE PATH ON WHICH WE HAVE ALL EMBARKED. THE EFFORT TO BUILD A UNITED DEMOCRACY AT ANY TIME IS ONE OF THE GREATEST CHALLENGES STATESMANSHIP CAN EVER FACE; AND THESE ARE NOT ORDINARY TIMES; THEY ARE NOT EASY TIMES. DEMOCRACY EVERYWHERE IS UNDERGOING GREAT STRESSES AND GREAT CHALLENGES.

EVEN THE VERY OLDEST AND GREATEST DEMOCRACIES ARE NOT EXEMPT FROM TURMOIL AND TRAVAIL. PAPUA NEW GUINEA IS DEVELOPING A CONSTITUTION FOR A NEW AND INDEPENDENT NATION. IT WILL DEVELOP THAT CONSTITUTION IN ITS OWN WAY, IN ITS OWN TIME. IT WILL COMBINE FOREIGN PRECEDENTS WITH ITS OWN TRADITIONS. THERE IS SOMETHING HOWEVER FAR MORE IMPORTANT TO DEMOCRACY THAN THE LETTER OF A CONSTITUTION. IT IS THE SPIRIT IN WHICH THAT CONSTITUTION IS APPLIED BY THE ELECTED MEN AND WOMEN WHO HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF OPERATING IT. IT IS NOT ONLY WRITTEN RULES WHICH MAKE A DEMOCRACY STRONG; THE UNWRITTEN RULES ARE JUST AS IMPORTANT. IT IS ALL TOO EASY TO SUBVERT DEMOCRACY BY PERFECTLY LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL MEANS IF THE WILL TO ABIDE BY THE UNWRITTEN RULES IS ABSENT. NO NATION, NOT EVEN AUSTRALIA ITSELF, IS EXEMPT FROM THE DANGERS WHICH FOLLOW A BREAKDOWN IN THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE UNWRITTEN RULES. THIS IS A MEASURE OF THE CHALLENGE FACING PAPUA NEW GUINEA. WE ALL RECOGNISE THE DIFFICULTIES, YET AGAIN IT MUST BE SAID THAT THE REMARKABLE PROGRESS OF THE LAST THREE YEARS GIVES THE BEST GROUNDS FOR CONFIDENCE THAT THEY WILL BE TRIUMPHANTLY OVERCOME.

MAY THIS BUILDING BE A SYMBOL OF THE NEW MATURITY OF OUR PARTNERSHIP AS TWO FREE DEMOCRATIC INDEPENDENT PARTNERS.

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