



**PRIME MINISTER**

PRESS STATEMENT NO. 399  
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PAPUA NEW GUINEA - TRANSFER OF POWERS

The Prime Minister, Mr Whitlam, said this evening that the Australian Government welcomed the initiative of the Papua New Guinea Government in requesting that authority over defence and foreign relations, the Papua New Guinea Supreme Court and other legal matters be transferred to Papua New Guinea as soon as practicable.

Mr Whitlam said that such a transfer was in accordance with long-standing Australian policy which was to enable Papua New Guinea to exercise final authority in all matters of government before the formal step to independence. The existing close consultations on major foreign policy and defence matters would continue.

Mr Whitlam said that the transfer of authority over the defence and foreign relations functions in the period to independence would necessarily be subject to Australia's continuing international and treaty obligations including its obligations to the United Nations under the Trusteeship Agreement and the Charter, and the Papua New Guinea Government had agreed to this. However, the transfer to Papua New Guinea of these matters would enable the Papua New Guinea Government to give effect to its own policies and priorities which it was already determining.

Mr Whitlam said that Australia, by legislation at present before the Senate, was preparing itself to be able to transfer these matters and he was confident that the administrative and legislative details regarding the transfers could be settled in time to meet Papua New Guinea's requests.

CANBERRA. A.C.T.