

ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON. E.G. WHITLAM, Q.C., M.P.  
AT THE PAPUA NEW GUINEA INDEPENDENCE CELEBRATIONS,  
PORT MORESBY, 16 SEPTEMBER 1975

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This is a day that will live in history.

There can never be a more important day in a nation's history, than its birthday. But the significance of this day in the broad sweep of history goes beyond even that - for Papua New Guinea, for Australia, for our region and for the Commonwealth of Nations around the world.

Today Australia, herself once a group of colonies, has ended the role as a colonial power imposed upon her by an irony of history. Australia could never be truly free until Papua New Guinea was truly free. In a very real sense, this is a day of liberation for Australia as much as for Papua New Guinea.

Further, Australia has today finally discharged her mandate from the old League of Nations and her trusteeship to the United Nations.

The presence of the heir to the Crown reminds us that Papua New Guinea is the last of the significant nations to be newly created under the authority of that crown - the final act in that remarkable process so brilliantly inaugurated by his great-uncle Lord Mountbatten, 28 years ago. Nothing became the life of that Empire more than the manner of their leaving it.

I came here two days ago as the last Australian Prime Minister to visit a Papua New Guinea constitutionally linked to Australia. At midnight last night I became the first Australian Prime Minister to visit the new nation of Papua New Guinea. I accept the change of status with complete equanimity. It is good for the soul, in these times which try men's souls.

Let me congratulate your Government, Mr Prime Minister, on the excellent arrangements made to allow us all to take part in your independence celebrations. The ceremonies, the festivities, the displays - all quite splendid. And I noticed the excellent security arrangements. In fact, I haven't felt so well protected since our first meeting five and a half years ago - January 1970 - in the lounge of the Sepik Motel in Wewak. The Australian security eavesdropped on our subversive talk - and well they might, for we were talking about early self-government and early independence for Papua New Guinea. We brought great criticism, even ridicule and contempt, upon us in those far off days - a whole five and a half years ago - when together we first stated that the independence of Papua New Guinea was imminent and inevitable.

I said then that independence for Papua New Guinea was an idea whose time had come and nothing could resist the power of that idea. In you, Mr Prime Minister, Papua New Guinea found a man whose time has come.

In the event, Papua New Guinea's independence was her own decision and this day for independence was decided by her own House of Assembly - a modern, single chamber parliament with equal electorates - indeed, an example for other parliaments. Her Constitution, was not devised in another land or imposed by foreigners. It emerged from her own democratic processes, from within her own democratic institutions, from her own people and their elected representatives. It has been a remarkable demonstration of political maturity.

Mr Prime Minister, our two nations cannot ignore and escape our historical links, our geographic proximity, the past we share, the future we share. I am convinced neither of us wish or will ever wish to do so. At yesterday's flag lowering ceremony, Sir John Guise stressed that the Australia flag was being lowered, not torn down. This spirit, the strength of which comes from a shared past in peace, in war, is a firm foundation for our future relationship.

Australia wants the closest possible relationship with her nearest neighbour, the new nation of Papua New Guinea. A relationship of equals, based on mutual respect, understanding and trust. That trust, that understanding and that respect, is necessary for us to develop a relationship which will go well beyond normal diplomatic ties.

This does not mean that we seek an exclusive relationship with Papua New Guinea. On the contrary, we recognise and appreciate that you will want to find your own place in the international community, based on your own independent assessment. The independence which we celebrate today is a genuine independence, not a phoney independence.

The Australian Government has stressed that a united and independent Papua New Guinea will continue to have first call on Australia's expanding aid program. I re-affirm that pledge in the strongest possible terms; re-affirm it with the full support of the Australian Government, the full support of the Australian political parties, the full support of the Australian people. I give a categorical and unequivocal assurance to the Government and people of Papua New Guinea that this nation will continue to have first call on our expanding aid program.

Mr Prime Minister, tonight, I also want to re-affirm the Australian Government's absolute, unqualified support for a united Papua New Guinea. Even when there was disagreement in Australia about the time-table for independence there was never any disagreement on this fundamental objective. Australia's policy over the years of bringing a united Papua New Guinea to independence has been supported by the overwhelming majority of your elected representative. It is a policy which

has been endorsed by the United Nations many times - as recently as three weeks ago by the Trusteeship Council. Indeed, it was the fundamental condition of Australia's trusteeship. Representatives of the Trusteeship Council, of the Committee of Twenty Four and of the United Nations Secretary-General are here for the celebrations. It is more than the hope of Australia, the hope of Papua New Guinea - it is the world's hope for Papua New Guinea and, one might pray, the hope of the universal church.

On an occasion like this its hard to avoid euphoria, the feeling of unqualified optimism, particularly when so much of all that we hoped for, worked for, fought for, has been achieved - is now a living fact. It seems almost churlish to remind ourselves that there are difficulties, dangers, pitfalls ahead. But, of course, that is also a fact. It is in the nature of things. In particular Papua New Guinea is embarking on that most difficult of all courses - that effort to make democracy work. Nowhere in the world is this - man's noblest experiment - altogether beyond challenge, beyond the possibility of failure.

The particular forms, the techniques, the institutions by which democracy can prevail are always subject to development and change. Each nation will make its own experiment, its own choices. The substance of democracy, however, can be achieved if we keep in mind its basic aim - the aim set out by the first group of colonies to achieve independence, 199 years ago, now the United States of America - that all men are born equal and have equal rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

In the great task ahead Papua New Guinea will have many friends. Australia, of course; Australia firm and unswerving in her friendship. But the representative presence in this room of so many of the nations of the world is a sure sign that of all the great strengths which this nation enjoys - the strength of her people, the strengths of their diverse and rich cultures, the strength of her leaders - not least is the strength of the friendship she has throughout the region and the world.

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