



PRIME MINISTER

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SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
PARLIAMENTARY LUNCHEON FOR THE
PRIME MINISTER OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA
THE HON. RABBIE NAMALIU
CANBERRA - 24 MAY 1989

It is always a great pleasure to welcome a visiting Head of Government from a neighbouring country. It is, however, a special pleasure when the visitor happens to be the Head of Government of Australia's closest neighbour, Papua New Guinea. I, therefore, most sincerely and warmly welcome you, Rabbie, your wife Margaret and members of your party to Canberra today on this, your first official visit to Australia as Prime Minister.

Mr Prime Minister, the ties of history and sentiment between our countries, and the personal relationships between our citizens, are strong and binding. We have known each other for some time, of course, and Hazel and I have very warm memories of the times we have spent in Papua New Guinea. I know that the Leader of the Opposition also has a long standing interest in your country.

One of the many real virtues of a visit such as yours is the opportunity given to all of us to reaffirm and to strengthen those already strong and close links.

For Australia and for Papua New Guinea, the South Pacific is a region of the highest significance for our foreign, economic and defence policies. We share fundamental interests - to encourage peace and stability throughout the region, to foster trade and economic development, and to maintain vital and robust democratic institutions.

It is in pursuit of these interests that Australia seeks to develop and maintain partnerships embracing all Pacific Island countries. It goes without saying, Mr Prime Minister, that of these partnerships, Australia's ties with Papua New Guinea are particularly warm and enduring.

These common interests are, of course, summed up in, and encompassed by, the Joint Declaration of Principles signed by our two countries in December 1987.

This Joint Declaration is important at a number of levels. It provides an overall framework for the development of our bilateral relationship - a framework of mutual respect between sovereign nations.

It enjoins our governments to consult on all matters of mutual interest.

The Joint Declaration recognises that by virtue of both history and geography, Papua New Guinea and Australia will always be vital to each other's strategic interests.

Over the years the focus of the defence co-operation program that Australia maintains with Papua New Guinea has moved from direct involvement in Papua New Guinea's defence effort to training, advisory and material assistance.

The essential thrust of our defence co-operation today - a program that accounts for around half of Australia's entire defence co-operation effort - seeks to assist Papua New Guinea develop its capacity to field independent operational forces.

In recent years we have had brought home to us the fact that in our region we cannot take for granted the continued maintenance of democracy and democratic institutions.

At times - as with the recent tragedy of the senseless murders of Jean-Marie Tjibaou and Yeweine Yeweine - we see evidence of an undercurrent of potential challenges to peace and stability in the Pacific.

Even so, the region's political evolution has, overall, been relatively peaceful; even, when compared with other areas of the globe, exemplary.

One of the principal vehicles of that evolution has been the South Pacific Forum.

Through the Forum our two countries, and our neighbours in the region, have created a valuable process of consultation on all the issues we face, and we have achieved substantial gains in social and economic development, including in fisheries and communications.

The South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone is another internationally significant regional achievement.

Mr Prime Minister,

Our shared trade and economic interests are manifest and are indeed central to your visit. In your discussions over the next few days, Australia's business community will be listening very closely to what you have to say.

We also share broader trade and economic interests. We are both vulnerable to the uncertainties of international commodities markets. In a world where commitment to free trade is too often eroded through short-sighted protectionism, countries such as ours have to work that much harder to safeguard our legitimate interests.

Papua New Guinea is not a GATT member, and thus is not participating in the present Uruguay Round of trade talks. However, your support in pursuing the objective of a fairer and freer world trading system is always most welcome.

Australia will continue to work with Papua New Guinea to bridge the trade gap between our two countries. Papua New Guinea already enjoys virtually obstacle-free access to the Australian market. We will continue to assist you to develop your export capacity to take full advantage of the market opportunities which already exist, and to develop new opportunities, including through the current review of our bilateral trade agreement.

Papua New Guinea faces a most significant challenge in transforming its huge potential wealth of natural resources into sustainable and balanced economic growth.

I am optimistic that Australian capital and technology will be able to continue making a contribution to your development.

My own Government's commitment to assisting your development is symbolised by the Treaty on Development Co-operation, which we signed this morning.

In that Treaty, we have agreed to continue the present level of budget support for a further two years beyond the previous three year commitment and, then, to taper it off as Papua New Guinea's own proclaimed objective of fiscal self-reliance is realised.

Mr Prime Minister,

Economic prosperity engenders its own pressures. In the closing years of the 1980s these pressures in many areas of the globe have been manifested in enormous social change, in threats to the environment and, at times, in dislocation and upheaval.

Papua New Guinea has had its own share of challenges of late - particularly of course, on Bougainville.

Yours is a diverse and complex society, but since independence, Papua New Guinea has shown itself capable of negotiating periods of difficulty with flexibility and commonsense.

Like Australia, Papua New Guinea is immeasurably strengthened by the resilience and vitality of democratic Government. This is an achievement of which all Papua New Guineans can justifiably be proud - and I am confident it will stand you in good stead for many years to come.

Mr Prime Minister, last November the first meeting of the Australia/PNG Ministerial Forum took place in Wewak. That meeting - itself a product of the Joint Declaration of Principles - was an outstanding success : substantive and mutually productive but also marked by great informality and friendship.

These, of course, are the hallmarks of the Australia-PNG relationship, and they were abundantly evident in our discussions today.

Mr Prime Minister,

Let me reiterate, on behalf of the Government and of the Australian people, the sincerity of our welcome to you and your party. Rabbie, you could not be more welcome here. We wish you well, in the knowledge that your visit will be both successful and constructive.
