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PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

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Following a request from the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, Mr Namaliu, during talks I held with him in Canberra on 24 May, the Government offered to provide four Iroquois UH1H helicopters, and associated training for Papua New Guinean aircrew, to assist the PNG Defence Force develop a rotary wing capability.

Subsequently, the PNG Government indicated that it wanted to secure the early delivery of these helicopters, particularly against the background of developments on Bougainville.

After consultations between Australian and PNG Ministers, Mr Namaliu wrote to me on 5 July outlining his Government's intentions on the ways in which the helicopters would be used.

Mr Namaliu said the use of the helicopters in Bougainville would be in keeping with a political strategy aimed at, among other things, minimising offence to the local population. The helicopters would not be used as gunships. They would be used for troop transportation, for patrolling and surveillance activities, and for medical evacuation purposes for both civilians and military.

He emphasised that the PNG Government's political objectives were to secure the reopening of the Bougainville copper mine, the protection of the population, and the surrender of all the militants.

I have written to Mr Namaliu today telling him that, on the basis of his letter, my Government will now make arrangements for the early provision of four UH1H helicopters, plus a 28 days spares package for each aircraft to cover normal operations. The provision of the helicopters will be subject to the completion of the normal end user arrangements governing the possible transfer of the aircraft to third countries.

In addition, I have confirmed that the Australian Government will provide \$1 million per annum for the next three years as a contribution towards the cost of the PNG Government arranging the operation and maintenance of the aircraft under civil contract.

This assistance will be in addition to the training of Papua New Guinea Defence Force aircrew under our Defence Co-operation arrangements.