



## **PRIME MINISTER**

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP  
SIGNING CEREMONY  
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Your Excellency, the President of Nauru, other distinguished Nauruan guests, and ladies and gentlemen.

I am very pleased that President Dowiyogo and I have been able to sign today these three inter-related agreements which make up the Compact of Settlement between Australia and Nauru.

These are solemn and binding commitments, and I think it is fair to say they define a new phase of cooperation between Australia and Nauru.

The terms of settlement were made public yesterday and I am heartened that the Compact of Settlement has been warmly welcomed in both countries. That is what the President reliably tells me, and I am sure that is true in Australia as well.

There is a wide recognition in both countries that Australia and Nauru are long-standing friends and partners. There is relief, I think, that an issue which has divided us has been resolved, well I think both amicably and reasonably, and honourably, to the satisfaction of both parties.

The reaction of our partners in the South Pacific Forum was also positive, and a number of members of the Forum I am sure came up to both of us, certainly to myself, saying that they were pleased to see that countries within the Forum could resolve differences, and that particularly some of the larger donor countries who have benefited from trade and commerce with the area could also make such an arrangement. I think this was very comforting to them.

They welcome the demonstration that Australia and Nauru are able to work together to settle our differences and solve problems as neighbours and friends, making the obvious point that such processes should also be able to take place between ourselves and ourselves.

This is called, of course in this part of the world, the Pacific way, and if this is the Pacific way obviously it works.

On the Australian side negotiations were conducted by my colleague, Gordon Bilney, the Minister for Development, Cooperation and Pacific Island Affairs, and I should like to note publicly my appreciation of the skill and care with which he has handled this sensitive task.

The Foreign Minister said to him, how come you can do this, Gordon, when I wasn't able to? And a lot of the rest of us knew the answer but I won't (inaudible).

At any rate this is a feather in Gordon's cap, and I am sure that the relationship he has developed with the people of Nauru will be one of long-standing, one which there is, I am sure, respect on both sides which will now obtain for many years, and in this important post, particularly in the Pacific Island Affairs this is, I think, a very solid foundation for Gordon representing the Government to have in its relations with Nauru.

Mr President, the agreements we have signed today not only record an amicable out of court settlement of the ICJ case, they also set out a frame work for the future conduct of Australian-Nauru relations.

The joint declaration of principles covers a large number of field where Australia and Nauru are already cooperating, and where we have scope to develop further our partnership.

All these fields are significant, but there is one I should particularly underline, at paragraph 20 in the document it says this, "Both Governments recognise both the challenge presented by rehabilitating the worked out phosphate lands on Nauru and the fragility of Nauru's ecosystems, and will work together to facilitate the progressive rehabilitation of Nauru and the protection of Nauru's environment."

This is an important commitment and one which the Australian side takes very seriously, and already the President and I had some substantial discussions a day ago about how and which ways that might be addressed and progressed.

So we should like to see the proposed rehabilitation and development cooperation agreement contribute in a real way to the process of rehabilitation on Nauru, where the people of the country feel they have a very tangible stake in this settlement, and where there are tangible and obvious benefits for them.

So, Mr President, I am pleased to have the opportunity to visit Nauru and attend the South Pacific Forum. Could I take the opportunity of congratulating you and the Government for hosting the Forum and for the way in which it has been organised. It is a difficult thing to host a Forum like this, for any country, particularly when you are not doing it often, and to do it so well, and of course chairing the proceedings as you have done today with great aplomb and dexterity and smoothness, I think attest to the decision which was taken a year or so ago for Nauru to be the host.

I am especially happy that during this visit it has provided an historic opportunity to sign this historic Compact of Settlement, as well as attend the Summit. Can I say I was also very pleased to lay a wreath on the Cenotaph yesterday in remembrance of the sacrifice which Australians and Nauruans had made together as long ago as the Second World War, again underpinning and underlining the strength and depth of the Australia-Nauru relationship.

As I said, our relationship is unique and it is one to which we are committed on a long-term basis and I hope that this historic settlement, the statement of principles, which for the first time Australia has written down a set of principles which will govern the relationship that it has with another country, and the general warmth of the relationship between Australians and Nauruans on this occasion at this signing and at this point of the Forum of your host, your hosting of the Forum, this should be I think, let's say, a milestone, another milestone, in Australian-Nauru relations.

So could I again congratulate the President on agreeing to this settlement, and again congratulate Gordon Bilney on negotiating for the Australian side. But more particularly, on behalf of the Nauruan people for a stake in their future development and rehabilitation, which I think this agreement does and in so doing underlining this partnership with Australia.

Thank you.