



23rd Papua New Guinea-Australia Ministerial Forum

Joint Communiqué

15 December 2014

The Airways Hotel, Port Moresby, PNG

1. The 23rd Papua New Guinea – Australia Ministerial Forum was held at the Airways Hotel in Port Moresby on 15 December 2014.
2. The Forum was co-chaired by Hon Rimbink Pato, LLB, OBE, MP, PNG Minister for Foreign Affairs and Immigration and Hon Julie Bishop, MP, Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs.
3. Ministers' discussions reflected the depth of the bilateral relationship and its strategic importance to both countries, as expressed in treaties and arrangements, including the Joint Declaration of Principles Guiding Relations between PNG and Australia, the Joint Declaration of Partnership and Economic Cooperation Treaty, which reflect the maturity of the relations between Papua New Guinea and Australia as equal partners. Ministers agreed to a flagship program to encourage public sector strengthening, as well as continuing strong cooperation against people smuggling and a long-term policing partnership. Ministers emphasised their commitment to a strong defence and security relationship and agreed to enhance cooperation on security for major events, including support for Papua New Guinea's hosting of APEC in 2018.
4. Ministers looked forward to celebrating the 40th anniversary of Papua New Guinea's independence in 2015. They agreed that this significant occasion in PNG history provided an opportunity to reflect and build on the deep and long-standing friendship between our two countries. The anniversary would mark a milestone in the dynamic Australia-PNG relationship, built on a foundation of historical links, shared democratic history and close personal ties.

Development Cooperation

5. Ministers welcomed the ongoing support for the PNG-Australia Partnership for Development and reaffirmed their commitment to the ongoing close alignment of the Aid Program to PNG's development priorities, including the direction of fifty per cent of the aid program to infrastructure development.
6. Ministers acknowledged the PNG Government's commitment to the four sectors it is currently partnering with Australia on: health and HIV; education; transport infrastructure; and law and justice. These sectors remain key priorities of the PNG Government through the various reforms that have been introduced and are currently being implemented, such as free basic primary health care, free education and significant investments in major infrastructure developments as reflected in recent budgets.

7. Ministers looked forward to a new aid partnership arrangement between PNG and Australia. This new partnership will be finalised in mid-2015 and will capture the recommendations of the PNG Aid Assessment, Australia's new development policy and the PNG Government's new foreign aid policy and revised Medium Term Development Plan (MTDP) 2015-2018 and their associated targets.

Public Sector Strengthening

8. Ministers signed a Memorandum of Understanding to establish a program to support public sector education and training that supported PNG's Values-based Leadership and Management Capability Framework. This will include support to establish the University of Papua New Guinea School of Business and Public Policy and strengthen the Institute of Public Administration. Ministers looked forward to the program delivering high-quality tertiary-level programs, intensive executive leadership courses and a wide range of competency-based training courses.
9. Ministers welcomed the contribution made by the Strongim Gavman Program in support of PNG Government priorities as well as measures to further enhance the efficiency of the program including its expansion as agreed under the PNG Aid Assessment.

Cooperation against people smuggling and implementation of the Regional Resettlement Arrangement

10. The Forum welcomed Papua New Guinea's strong leadership role in combating people smuggling in the region, particularly in implementing the Regional Resettlement Arrangement. Ministers welcomed the progress Papua New Guinea had made in respect to final refugee determinations and settlement policy considerations for refugees and noted that PNG had issued final determinations for fifty refugees as of 15 December 2014. Ministers noted that the PNG Government has introduced arrangements whereby refugees declining to apply for a refugee visa would not be given the option of remaining at Lombrum indefinitely.
11. Both governments reiterated their commitments under the RRA. Ministers agreed that senior officials would review the RRA and that until the conclusion of this review the RRA would remain in effect.
12. Ministers noted the progress of initiatives under the Joint Understanding and the additional development cooperation assistance provided to Manus Province. Ministers further noted the economic growth and employment opportunities that were available for Papua New Guineans in Manus Province and the importance of more inclusive engagement with the local people of Manus Province.

Police Cooperation

13. Ministers acknowledged that the PNG-Australia Policing Partnership is helping to strengthen PNG policing capabilities. The Forum welcomed discussion around an enhanced and reshaped AFP deployment to Papua New Guinea that will contribute to improving law and order and provide the foundation for a long term and sustainable policing partnership. The reshaped deployment would focus on: improving the professionalism of the RPNGC; combating crime, particularly family and sexual violence; assisting with preparations for major event security, including Papua New Guinea's hosting of APEC in 2018; and increased training in Australia. Ministers welcomed the PNG Government's continued commitment to modernisation of the RPNGC.

Gender and Women's Empowerment

14. Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to working together to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in Papua New Guinea. They welcomed the second phase of Australia's flagship program Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development which will focus on increasing women's leadership and influence in decision-making, increasing economic opportunities for women, and strengthening the national response to violence against women.
15. Ministers also acknowledged the PNG Government's efforts including through implementation of its gender equality and social inclusion policy.

Defence and Security Cooperation

16. Ministers recognised the strong defence cooperation between Papua New Guinea and Australia, particularly on maritime and border security, which is vital to our shared security interests in the region. Ministers welcomed the commitment to and expansion of Australia's Defence Cooperation Program with Papua New Guinea – its largest with any country.
17. Ministers agreed to further discuss Papua New Guinea's participation in the Pacific Maritime Security Program, including an aerial surveillance component, noting both nations' mutual interest in maritime security and protecting maritime sovereignty.
18. Ministers agreed to stronger collaboration across and between their respective agencies to support Papua New Guinea combat illegal fishing and transnational crime.
19. Ministers welcomed the outcomes of the inaugural Security Dialogue in 2014 and looked forward to the Dialogue being held annually to advance our shared security interests.

APEC

20. Ministers welcomed Papua New Guinea's role as a regional leader and a growing economy symbolised by Papua New Guinea's hosting of APEC in 2018. Australia reiterated its commitment of support to Papua New Guinea, including security assistance. Ministers agreed to establish a Bilateral Task Force to coordinate Australia's assistance in an interagency context, with the first meeting being held early in 2015.

Bougainville

21. Ministers noted the PNG Government's ongoing commitment to the full implementation of the Bougainville Peace Agreement. The Forum welcomed the success of Operation Render Safe, which disposed of explosive remnants of World War II in Torokina.
22. Ministers also acknowledged the ongoing capacity-building assistance being provided by the PNG Government to the Bougainville public service.

Trade and Investment

23. Ministers highlighted the increasing importance of trade and investment in the bilateral relationship.
24. Ministers agreed that "Aid for Trade" must be given prominence in the implementation of the Economic Cooperation Treaty to allow flexible market access opportunities to advance trade and investment relations between the two countries.

25. The Forum welcomed the successful commencement of LNG exports from the PNG LNG project, noting this should drive economic growth and contribute to PNG's macroeconomic stability.
26. Ministers welcomed Papua New Guinea's commitment to establish a Sovereign Wealth Fund (SWF). Ministers acknowledged the importance of a SWF with a robust governance framework, integration into the broader macroeconomic policy framework and compliance with the Santiago Principles. The Forum noted a SWF will assist in sharing the economic gains of Papua New Guinea's resource sector with the people of Papua New Guinea for generations to come.
27. Ministers renewed their commitment to fighting corruption. Australia welcomed the progress Papua New Guinea has made towards establishing an Independent Commission Against Corruption, and looked forward to its operation in 2015. Ministers noted that improving law and order remained vital for the quality of life of the people of Papua New Guinea, including through strengthening Papua New Guinea's economy and increasing PNG trade and investment links with the international economy.
28. Ministers acknowledged the high rates of youth unemployment and a shortage of vocational training opportunities in Papua New Guinea. They noted the success of the PNG-World Bank Urban Youth Employment Project and welcomed Australia's willingness to consider supporting an expansion over the next three years.
29. Ministers noted the importance of the development of Papua New Guinea's agricultural sector to broad-based economic growth. Ministers welcomed the new DFAT-ACIAR Agribusiness Development Partnership, which will use Australia's expertise in agriculture to help Papua New Guinea's farmers and agribusinesses to improve yields and productivity of key commodities, and develop better quality products.

Health

30. Ministers noted that Australia works in partnership with PNG to improve the quality of the health workforce in Papua New Guinea, refurbish rural health facilities, improve maternal and child health outcomes, and to support communicable disease control, with a particular focus on HIV, malaria and tuberculosis (TB).
31. Ministers committed to increasing resources and implementation efforts to address TB in Papua New Guinea. Ministers noted the significant social, economic and trade related costs of high rates of TB and drug-resistant TB (DR-TB) in Papua New Guinea and the need for concerted joint action given the close economic relationships, shared borders, and people-to-people ties between the two countries.
32. The Government of Papua New Guinea committed to supporting the response to DR-TB in the National Capital District (NCD), Central, Gulf and Western Provinces; to create TB health workforce positions in provinces and districts; manage the effective procurement and distribution of quality-assured TB medicines; and convene an annual Ministerial Taskforce meeting on TB, commencing 2015.
33. The Government of Australia agreed to support ongoing efforts towards TB control in Western Province and NCD, with a focus on managing DR-TB, TB treatment and prevention programs in community settings, laboratory services, patient support services and engaging the private sector.

34. Ministers welcomed efforts made by both governments to prepare for a potential response to an Ebola Virus Disease outbreak in Papua New Guinea. This has included the establishment of an Ebola Taskforce in PNG, the strengthening port of entry controls at Jacksons International Airport and the Government of Australia's decision to support the World Health Organisation to assist PNG to develop Ebola response strategies.

Travel facilitation and People-to-People links

35. Papua New Guinea reiterated its request for Australia to provide visa on arrival facility to Papua New Guineans and noted options for travel facilitation to enter Australia in the interim report provided by the Australian Expert Panel.
36. Ministers noted that electronic visitor visa applications had reduced processing times and welcomed further consideration of ways in which this could be streamlined further.
37. Ministers noted Papua New Guinea's concern on maintaining reciprocity in the implementation of visa arrangements.
38. Ministers welcomed progress on finalizing the necessary arrangements to bring a Work and Holiday visa into effect. The new visa will allow up to 100 Australian and 100 PNG young adults per year (aged 18-30) to enjoy a working holiday in the other country for up to 12 months. Ministers further noted that implementation of the work and holiday visa will commence in 2015.
39. Ministers welcomed Papua New Guinea's participation in the New Colombo Plan from next year and emphasized the value to both nations of having Australian undergraduates travel to PNG to study, conduct research and undertake internships.
40. Ministers acknowledged progress in establishing the Australia-PNG Network, a people-to-people initiative that Ministers announced at the 2013 Australia-Papua New Guinea Ministerial Forum. Ministers welcomed the recent participation of 20 young Papua New Guineans and Australians in the Emerging Leaders Dialogue in Sydney from 2-4 December 2014, as a step towards strengthening links between the next generations of leaders from both countries.

Kokoda Initiative

41. Ministers welcomed the development of the next cycle of the Kokoda Initiative, reflecting shared Australian and PNG interests in the Kokoda Track. This cycle will focus on keeping the Track open and safe; economic and social development; and environment and heritage protection.

Pacific Islands Forum

42. Ministers agreed to reaffirm that the Pacific Islands Forum is the paramount regional organization for the Pacific Region.

Business Dialogue

43. Ministers welcomed the dialogue with representatives of the Australia Papua New Guinea Business Council and the Business Council of Papua New Guinea, and reaffirmed their commitment to creating opportunities for private sector-led growth. Ministers committed to develop further the business dialogue through the Bilateral Business Officials Working

Group, which should continue to meet not less than twice each year, including through discussion of new issues brought forward by business and reporting to Ministers on its work.

Implementation of Forum decisions

44. Ministers agreed that the Forum continued to be an important mechanism to focus on the key current and strategic issues in the bilateral relationship. Ministers emphasized the importance of regular engagement between Papua New Guinea and Australia at Prime Ministerial and Ministerial level throughout the year and our ability to work closely together to achieve results. Ministers agreed that a joint schedule of bilateral cooperation would be established to progress key bilateral issues. Regular senior officials meetings would track progress against the schedule to assist in ensuring timely implementation of decisions.

Date and Venue of Next Meeting

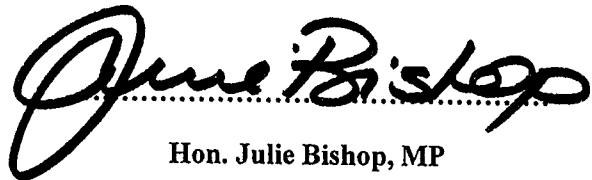
45. The Ministers agreed that the 24th Ministerial Forum will be held in Australia in 2015.

Signed on 15 December 2014 in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea By:



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Hon. Rimbink Pato, LLB, OBE, MP

Minister for Foreign Affairs & Immigration
of Papua New Guinea



.....
Hon. Julie Bishop, MP

Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia