

ADDRESS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL JEFFERY AC CVO MC
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
ON THE OCCASION OF
**DINNER HOSTED BY THE HON DR ALLAN MARAT, ACTING GOVERNOR-GENERAL
OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA**
PARLIAMENT HOUSE, PORT MORESBY, PAPUA NEW GUINEA
3 AUGUST 2008

Dr Marat, Marlena and I thank you for welcoming us to your country once again and honouring us with this occasion.

This being my last official visit to Papua New Guinea as Governor-General of Australia, I have naturally been reflecting on many previous visits and some memorable associations and events.

Some of you may be aware that Marlena and I were married in the 'Haus Lotu' at Taurama Barracks over forty years ago, when I was posted here from 1966-69 with the 1st Battalion, The Pacific Islands Regiment.

Indeed in 2005 the Battalion piper who piped Marlena down the aisle of the Taurama Chapel some 41 years earlier, walked from his village for several days, bringing with him his pipes and old green juniper uniform and played the wedding march at a reception held in our honour, evoking many tears of happiness.

In those days we did a great deal of 'hearts and minds' patrolling throughout Papua New Guinea and I learnt much about the rugged history of this country and the rich cultural diversity of its people.

For these reasons, Papua New Guinea has always held a special place in our affections.

A few years later I returned to command 700 very fine soldiers of the Second Battalion in Wewak, and as a result was privileged to be here at Independence on 16 September 1975.

In those days we conducted border security operations on the PNG / Irian Jaya border as a battalion and I can say to all of you present here that I would have been honoured to take that battalion to any operational theatre in the world.

We were a happy, well trained, highly disciplined family with our wives and children living and growing up together in a beautiful barracks environment.

Independence in Wewak was a very special occasion, with, in the words of Sir John Guise, the Australian flag being lowered rather than torn down for the last time and the beautiful Papua New Guinea flag being raised in its stead.

It was deeply touching to be personally farewelled at Wewak airport afterwards by Prime Minister Somare, with the pipes and drums of the Regimental Band and a large crowd in attendance.

The most impressive aspect of Independence was the positive and joyful spirit in which it occurred.

I believe the positive spirit displayed then between our two nations, provided a solid foundation for the multifaceted relationship, based on mutual respect, shared experiences and geo-strategic realities that remain to this day.

In 2000 I returned to PNG as a member of an Eminent Person's Group tasked to review the size, structure and role of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force.

Charles Lepani, the current High Commissioner in Australia, was a valued friend and fellow EPG member on that study.

And with Marlana, I had the pleasure as Governor-General of representing Australia at the 30th anniversary of Independence in 2005 here in Port Moresby and then flying to Wewak to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the surrender of the Japanese 16th Army at Cape Wom.

Whilst in Wewak we were greeted by thousands of citizens bedecked with flowers and smiling, cheering and waving. We will never forget that experience.

And last year, I was greatly honoured to be invested as a Grand Companion of the Order of the Logohu by Sir Michael Somare when he visited Australia for the APEC leaders meeting. I have renamed my small fishing boat 'Logohu' as a permanent reminder of my association with a country for whom I hold such great affection.

The regular postings and other visits I undertook in Papua New Guinea as a junior, mid-level and senior officer, and then as Governor-General have meant I developed a very close linkage at a fairly young age with my PNG counterparts.

This model of regular contact and renewal of associations and friendships during my career means that I can speak honestly with my friends here on any topic. Papua New Guinea officers were similarly sent to Australia at various times in their career to do professional courses.

It is a model of continuity of engagement that I feel all countries in our region could usefully explore, so as to build strong, sustained long term personal relationships, not just in military matters, but also in other key areas such as banking, education, health, business, policing, the public service and so on. But it should be a two way flow.

Today, I am proud to return for a second time as Governor General and note the remarkable progress and development that has occurred in this country since my first visit more than forty years ago.

I have always believed from my earliest days here in the 1960s, that PNG with its huge mineral potential, its proven agricultural capacity, its abundant fishing, forestry and tourism resources would develop as a strong multi-faceted economy. That is now most certainly happening with gas, oil, gold, copper, oil palm, coffee, copra and so on all flourishing.

I have also believed that PNG would lead the way regionally as a newly developing modern democracy and you are doing so such that unlike many other countries in our troubled world your democracy, your parliament has not suffered from coup, civil war or serious internal civil disruption. A mighty achievement in such a short period of 35 years.

These developments and many other reflect great credit on the people of Papua New Guinea and her leaders over these past four decades.

But no one can deny the difficult challenges that the Government of Papua New Guinea continues to face as it strives to raise the living standards of its people and the delivery of services; particularly health and education.

Tomorrow morning, I will have the pleasure of opening the refurbished Hohola Youth Development Centre here in Port Moresby.

It is a magnificent concept and the great pleasure I invariably find in such events is the lively optimism and energetic enthusiasm of the children in knowing that their future lives will be improved as a result.

It's just one example of Australia's consistent efforts over many years to work cooperatively with your country to achieve sustained economic growth and alleviate poverty.

Worth over 900 million kina this financial year, our aid program encompasses comprehensive support and assistance across democratic governance, infrastructure, education, health, HIV/AIDS, law & justice, and rural development.

The size and comprehensive nature of our aid program reflects the close linkages and enduring support between our nations over many decades, including repelling the Japanese invasion here in 1942. Some 200 000 of our servicemen and women fought in this country for yours and my freedom in those difficult and bloody years.

We are also tied by substantial trade and investment links; with two-way merchandise trade totalling more than A\$4 billion last financial year.

Our people to people links are also strong. Now as Patron of the Kokoda Track Foundation, in Australia, I see the increasing numbers of Australians, including many young people, who in experiencing the history and drama of walking the Track, provide a real opportunity to build further bridges between our nations.

Thank you Papua New Guinea for ensuring that the integrity of the Kokoda Track will remain unimpaired so that future generations of young Australians will have the opportunity to learn of both national sacrifice and of PNG itself.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Australia and Papua New Guinea have an exceptionally close and broad-based relationship which is characterised by a great deal of affection and trust.

This trust was born of the shared vicissitudes of war and developed through the hard work, dedication and love of this country displayed by countless Australian teachers, district administrators, patrol officers, doctors, missionaries, business people, police officers and servicemen and their families who gave in many cases large parts of their lives in helping to bring the people of Papua New Guinea to a peaceful and democratic nationhood.

A true and lasting friend of your country Australia will always be.

As Marlina and I depart this high office shortly, many of our most treasured memories will be of the experiences shared and the wonderful friends we have made in PNG over the past decades.

We wish you all well, confident that the strong and cooperative relationship between our two nations will continue to prosper in the years to come to our mutual benefit.

Tenk you true olgeta; Marlina na mi hamainos true long lukin ya!