

ADDRESS BY  
HIS EXCELLENCY MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL JEFFERY AC CVO MC  
**GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA**  
ON THE OCCASION OF  
**LAUNCH THE MYER FOUNDATION MELANESIA PROGRAM IN CANBERRA**  
LOBBY RESTAURANT, PARKES, ACT  
13 MAY 2008

May I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today; their wisdom, enduring history and culture.

Marlena and I are delighted to be associated with so many people with a keen interest in regional affairs and to launch the Melanesia program in Canberra on behalf of the Lowy Institute and the wonderfully generous Myer Foundation.

Without doubt, Canberra is a recognised centre of excellence in international affairs with its Federal Parliament, Embassies and High Commissions, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the universities and a number of think tanks and other academic groups all resident here.

Today the introduction of the new Melanesia program of the Lowy Institute is going to enhance our expertise in an area of the world of vital importance to Australia's political, social and security interests.

It should also act as a focal point of excellence in fostering good bilateral and multilateral relations with our regional neighbours.

I had the great pleasure of speaking to the inaugural meeting of the Lowy Institute International Advisory Committee three years ago.

At that time, I felt there was a role for the Institute to contribute constructively to understanding and developing the necessary linkages for an integrated agenda for our global future, and especially Australia's role in influencing that future.

And I also commented that if the rest of the world sees us as intelligent, innovative, compassionate and culturally sensitive, not only will we prosper, we may well do so in a potentially more secure environment.

Since then the Lowy Institute has handsomely confirmed its ability to contribute to that debate and I believe the Melanesia program can only enhance our status in the region and our ability to build constructive and positive relationships with our Melanesian neighbours.

This is important for two reasons: first it is in our own geo-strategic interest and second, because of our moral obligation and responsibility as a wealthy, developed country to be a cooperative and supportive friend to our regional neighbours.

Specifically, I have been asked to reflect on some of my experiences in Papua New Guinea and the region.

Might I begin by mentioning that Marlena and I were married in the 'Haus Lotu' or bush church at Taurama Barracks in Port Moresby over forty years ago, so Papua New Guinea has always held a special place in our affections.

I was posted there from 1966-69 with the 1st Battalion, The Pacific Islands Regiment, as a company commander in charge of some 120 native soldiers deliberately and uniquely for those times, recruited from all provinces of the country.

Our role was two fold: to secure the PNG/Irian Jaya border from incursions by Indonesian troops in pursuit of Free Papua Movement guerrillas and to do long 6 week patrols into the PNG hinterland to map the country and establish linkages with villages and tribal groups, many of whom had never seen white men before, some of whom were still practising head-hunting and cannibalism.

An exciting, productive and thought provoking experience.

A few years later and after a stint of operational service in Vietnam I was posted back to PNG where I was privileged to command 700 very fine soldiers of the Second Battalion in Wewak, and further privileged to be there for Independence on 16 September 1975.

One of my fond memories of that time was of the Member for East Sepik Regional throwing small stones at our bedroom window early on numerous Sunday mornings and yelling out, 'Come on Michael, let's play golf'.

These days he is well known as the Prime Minister and father of the nation, Sir Michael Somare.

Independence in 1975 was a very special occasion, with the Australian flag being lowered in Wewak for the last time and the beautiful Papua New Guinea flag being raised in its stead.

Sir John Guise, the PNG Minister for Defence noted at the time that the Australian flag was being lowered, not torn down; a very wise and perceptive statement.

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.

I left a battalion that I would have gladly taken anywhere - of loyal, fun-loving and well disciplined soldiers, whose families we knew very well through daily association in regimental, sporting and cultural life.

The most impressive thing about Independence was the positive and joyful spirit in which it occurred. This was a credit to both the political leaders of Papua New Guinea and Australia at that time. The positive spirit displayed then between our two nations, provided a solid foundation for the multifaceted relationship, based on mutual respect, which remains to this day, not withstanding the periodic political bumps on the radar screen, that pop up from time to time.

Then 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 was a valued friend and fellow EPG member on that study.

The proposed reductions in force structure from some 3500 poorly equipped, trained and accommodated servicemen to a well-equipped, well-trained and properly housed force of 2200, caused an initial uproar in the PNGDF, but eventually most of the reforms were implemented.

I note however, that recently the PNG Government was considering increasing the size of the PNGDF to some 4500; a very expensive proposition.

Then with Marlina, I had the pleasure of representing Australia at the 30th anniversary of Independence and to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Japanese 16th Army Surrender in Wewak in the Second World War.

On our return to that beautiful northern coastal town, we were greeted by around 8,000 people throwing

flowers at us and smiling and cheering.

The Battalion piper who piped Marlina down the aisle of the Army Chapel some 40 years earlier, walked from his jungle village for several days, bringing with him his old pipes and green juniper uniform and played the wedding march at a reception held in our honour evoking many tears of happiness.

And just last year, I was honoured to be invested as a Grand Companion of the Order of the Logohu by Sir Michael Somare.

This honour carries with it the title of 'Chief', and as I have recently bought a small fishing boat I have named it the 'Logohu', just to remind everyone who is the Chief when we are out on the water, and in particular those retired admiral friends of mine who are volunteering as deck hands and who also might think they know something about boats!

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 were very good in that I developed a very close linkage at a fairly young age with my PNG counterparts.

Marlina developed a similar linkage with the wives and families of our PNG soldiers. And we have retained many of these linkages and friendships to the present day.

It has meant that we can speak honestly with one another on virtually any matter, and should in my view be the basis on which we re-think our long term relationships with each of our Melanesian neighbours, and not just in the military sphere. It should include such key areas as banking, education, health, business, policing, the public service and so on. And it should be two way.

As we know, the presence of a positive personal relationship between senior personnel or leaders developed over a number of years can go a long way to avoiding mistrust or misunderstanding in a bilateral relationship.

At the core of Australia's relationship with PNG is of course our close geographic proximity and shared history.

One of the defining events in that shared history was the defence of Papua New Guinea during World War II, in which some 200,000 Australian servicemen and women took part.

The Japanese invasion of PNG in July 1942 initiated one of the bloodiest campaigns of the war.

Japan's march south through the Philippines, Malaya and Singapore, was halted - first at Milne Bay and then along the Kokoda Track.

Soldiers of the Pacific and New Guinea Infantry Battalions, carriers on the Kokoda track and loyal village people, made a splendid contribution in this time of great need for both our nations.

Now as Patron of the Kokoda Track Foundation, I see the increasing numbers of Australians, including many young people, who are walking the Track, as a real opportunity to build further bridges between us.

The resurgent popular interest in these historic campaigns and the soldiers who fought them provides a significant opportunity to also improve the health and education options for the village people on the Kokoda Track, through the work of the Foundation.

Unfortunately, we are all aware that PNG is fast becoming the epicentre of an AIDS/HIV disaster in the Asia-Pacific region, with an estimated 2 percent of adults affected.

The spread of AIDS quite simply represents one of the most significant threats to the country's social

and economic well-being.

But a positive light in the anti AIDS campaign was shown to me, when in 2005 I visited the Tusab Secondary School in Madang and met with teachers and students who have joined the fight against HIV/AIDS.

They are doing this effectively with innovative programs such as integrating prevention messages into the school curriculum, through the use of newsletters and talk-back radio, and by providing counselling for students, along with teacher training. The school has developed into something of a model for HIV prevention in the PNG education sector.

Elsewhere in Melanesia, I think we can be very proud of our leadership roles in the United Nations involvement in East Timor and in the cooperative regional intervention in the Solomon Islands; I have visited both countries.

I was in Timor-Leste in December 2004 and subsequently had the pleasure of welcoming President Xanana Gusmão and his wife to Australia in 2005.

The recent shooting of President Jose Ramos Horta was tragic, but it is good that he has made a strong recovery.

While the path for Timor-Leste has not been easy, there has been reasonable progress.

The 1999 referendum result was the pre-cursor to a new era based on the principles of self determination and independence.

The nation's resolve was amply demonstrated in continuing the path to independence despite the terrible violence that followed the referendum.

Independence and democratic elections followed, marred by further violence in 2006, but as before, followed by peaceful elections early last year which were widely considered to reflect the will of the Timorese people.

Australia has worked principally in support of the UN Integrated Mission and the Australian led International Security Force to provide support in stabilising the security situation and addressing humanitarian issues.

The troops today include members of the Townsville-based Second Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment, ably supported by the valuable contribution of New Zealand.

It was a great pleasure for me to be in Townsville last year as Commander-in-Chief to unveil the plaque marking the 60th anniversary of the RAR.

In so doing, I mentioned the distinction with which the various battalions of the Regiment have served in Timor-Leste and the strong rapport they have developed with the local people.

With stability now greatly improved, the ISF can assist with other critical tasks such as improving medical services and assisting with joint engineering projects.

Pretty good results have already been achieved through the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands.

The ideals we cherish - the rule of law, confidence in democratic institutions and agencies, freedom of movement, and financial responsibility - are gradually being implemented.

But it will take time, patience and resources.

Ultimately, of course, it is up to the Solomon Islanders to take the opportunities afforded them through the various RAMSI initiatives.

So what are the key issues facing RAMSI and the Solomon Islands people. They include:

- . re-building the integrity of the Royal Solomon Islands Police;
- . providing personnel, infrastructure and administrative support to key justice agencies, the courts and the Prison Service;
- . improving the management systems of the public sector;
- . supporting the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission and civic education campaigns; and
- . improving provincial governance through better managed financial systems and the reactivation of key industries.

In doing its bit to implement the processes and reforms needed to deal with these issues, I would suggest that the concept of RAMSI has the potential to be more widely used around the globe under the auspices of the UN.

And now to Fiji.

What is happening there is very sad.

It is a proud and productive country undergoing considerable political difficulties that are causing it great internal upheaval and major economic problems.

I think all of us would support the initiatives to ensure the interim Government holds free and fair elections, with all elements of the population, including the military, agreeing to abide by the result.

I would now like to make a few brief comments on the issue of governance in the Pacific region.

Australia is the beneficiary of a system of governance dating back to the Magna Carta in 1215, so we need to understand that it is not so easy to introduce governance reforms and develop Western democratic institutions in the region in just a few years, or even a few decades.

It takes time to develop the essential governmental support systems of an efficient, loyal and honest public service, a well-trained and disciplined police service, an independent judiciary, a free press and the checks and balance mechanisms in place to hold politicians accountable such that they act both ethically and responsibly.

Australian expertise and goodwill can particularly influence:

- . the development of the notion of integrity as part and parcel of a country's political and business culture;
- . the role of the churches, the Press and NGOs for example in joining forces to encourage accountability;
- . the use of information technology to track discrepancies;
- . the identification of institutional arrangements susceptible to abuse, in for example the tendering process; and
- . the assessment of the performance of bureaucratic processes intended to inhibit corruption.

These are not easy issues, but I am sure that progress will be both faster and more effective because of the Melanesia Program being undertaken at the Lowy Institute.

I commend both the Lowy Institute and the Myer Foundation for recognising the importance of the Melanesian countries to Australia's future and vice versa, and I wish Jenny Hayward-Jones, the Director of the Melanesia Program and her team every success in elucidating and contributing to these important and complex debates.

Thank you.