

**C h r i s t m a s a n d N e w Y e a r ' s M e s s a g e  
to the PNG Community in Australia and our Australian Friends of PNG  
and a Review of Mission Activities in 2006**

***Greetings and Best Wishes for a very Happy Festive Season  
and a Prosperous 2007!!***

2006 has been a very busy year in the work of the Mission due to a changing landscape in our bilateral relations with Australia driven by regional and international events and geopolitical and economic changes. We had a visit by our Treasurer, Hon Bart Philemon, (Mr. Philemon is now no longer the Treasurer), in March to speak at the National Press Club in Canberra. His key message was PNG is now doing all it can to reform and with several successive budget surpluses under his belt, he was confident of continued successful reforms underwritten by successful macro-policy and political stability. The stability has been achieved by the Somare-led Government which is now set to see its full five year term in office through to the 2007 national elections.

At the regional level, PNG chaired the Pacific Islands Forum . PNG 's leadership was tested by the events over the recent months in the "M o t i A f f a i r" and F i j i ' s fourth coup . The Moti Affair has strained our official bilateral relations with Australia, but a meeting in last week, between the two Foreign Ministers of our countries seems to have ironed out the difficulties, and we are now set to continue our cooperation in the friendly manner we have enjoyed in the past, although it is highly likely some fundamental changes may need to be made in key areas of our cooperation.

This year, we welcomed our new Deputy High Commissioner, Mr. Mataio Rabura, his wife Patricia and their children. We are also very sad to farewell our long serving and dedicated First Secretary, Mr. Joseph Nobetau, and his wife, Roswitha and their children at the end of this year, as M r . N o b e t a u ' s four year term has come to an end . W e w i s h them all the best when they return home. As well as his official duties, Mr. Nobetau has spearheaded our community activities at the Mission.

Apart from our official work at government to government level, the High Commission made it its priority in 2006 to promote People to People contact and a better appreciation of our two people's cultures and values. This involved an increased number of visits to states in Australia to meet with our PNG communities, city councils, Rotary Clubs, and Foundations engaged with charity work for PNG, as well hosting various student and other group visits to our Mission, and music and art festivals involving PNG performers. At the outset, the Mission acknowledges and thanks the very important and significant contribution to this work by the Pacific Islands Trade and Investment Commission under the leadership of Lady Aivu Tauvasa, in assisting us with our Independence celebrations and other aspects of promotional work in trade and investment. Our Brisbane Consulate also contributed to our work, particularly in bearing much of the visa workload in Brisbane. The Mission is very appreciative of our community support. It is an important part of our Mission work that PNG community in Australia and Australian Friends of PNG help us to disseminate information and news of PNG to as many Australians as

possible as there are positive aspects of our country that are not being told by Australia's media and even from official level.

In March, the Mission hosted a reception in Melbourne for our very successful Commonwealth Games Team and also to thank the Port Phillip Bay City Council for adopting our Commonwealth Games Team in the duration of the Games. The High Commissioner and his wife hosted an evening's dinner for our Prime Minister, the Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare and Lady Veronica, with some of our athletes and the administrators, including Sir John Dawanicura and Mr. John Kombou, the Mayor of Port Phillip Bay City Council, Ms. Janet Bolitho, Leaders of Victoria's PNG Community, and some of Victoria's members of business community. In May, the PNG Community and the Mission in Canberra, had a Fundraising Dinner to raise \$10,500 and, with our government's contribution of \$100,000 we donated the proceeds to Innisfail Cyclone Larry Fund through the Office of the Premier of Queensland. This is a small token of PNG's appreciation to the longstanding generosity of Australians to Papua New Guineans in our times of need.

The High Commissioner, His Excellency, Mr. Charles W Lepani, paid an official visit to Queensland in February, and the report on our Mission web-page indicates how significant Queensland is in our cooperation for our mutual benefit. In May, the High Commissioner visited Victoria with other Heads of Mission, and their spouses, at the invitation of the Australian Foreign Affairs and Trade Minister, Hon. Mr. Alexander Downer, for the annual diplomatic retreat. At the invitation of Orange City Council, The High Commissioner traveled to the City of Orange, NSW, which has been a Sister City of Mt. Hagen for the last seventeen years. Much good work has been accomplished by Orange City in designing a city plan for Mt. Hagen and donating a garbage truck to Hagen City. He also attended a dinner in Sydney hosted by the Governor General, His Excellency, Mr. Michael Jeffreys, to honor, celebrate and thank Hope International and the Professionals Centre of Australia, for collecting and distributing "2 million books" to primary and secondary schools libraries throughout rural PNG. The driving forces behind this effort are Dr. Ruth Inall and Dr. Graham Ogle. Other visits by the High Commissioner included a visit to Perth, Western Australia, to be part of a Petroleum and Gas Roadshow, as well as to meet a small but very active PNG community in Perth. The High Commissioner was also a Guest Speaker at the Rotary International District 9710 convention at Batemans Bay in October. The Group has been instrumental in organizing its Rotary chapters to donate treated mosquito nets to PNG villages. The speech in power-point form is on the Mission's web-page. The High Commissioner was invited to attend a launch of the Kokoda Foundation in Sydney in November. The foundation seeks to establish a Fund with broad charity aims of helping the people of Kokoda Track in education, health and environment conservation. Blake Dawson Waldron Lawyers hosted the launch but Partners of the Firm are also involved in driving the Foundation. The High Commissioner also attended the Christmas Party of the PNG Association of Australia where he met a number of people born in PNG or are Friends of PNG who continue to have active interests in PNG. Some of these people include Mrs. Robyn Apps whose husband and her are attempting to make a film set in PNG and are looking for PNG actors. They have produced the successful Rural Area Nurse (RAN) the SBS

Television series in the Torres Strait. Another interesting person was Mr. Laurie Le Fevre who wrote a book about successful young Papua New Guineans who come from hardship backgrounds or from remote PNG areas but now are pilots, shop assistants etc; basically good stories to counter the adverse PNG image in Australia.

Throughout the year, the High Commissioner has been actively involved in participating in a series of updates on the Pacific and PNG hosted by AusAID, Institute of Asia Pacific Studies, and the Lowy Institute, to provide input in debates regarding labour mobility, regional integration and cooperation, and the Pacific Plan. From time to time, the High Commissioner is invited to speak on Australia's policy to PNG. Most recently he delivered the dinner speech at the "Addressing Poverty: Pro-Poor Growth and Financial Inclusion in Asia-Pacific Conference", at Australian National University, organised by Development Studies Network. The speech is also on the Mission web-page.

The Mission has decided to take our official independence celebrations out to the community in alternative years. This year the Mission with the help of our friends at PITIC hosted a pleasant independence reception at the Australian Museum in Sydney, where old, new, and young friends of PNG and PNG community leaders were present. Some of the well known friends of PNG included The Grand Chief Hon. Gough Whitlam, The Grand Chief Hon Andrew Peacock, Mr. Fred Kard, Mr. Harry West, and Mr. David Marsh.

We look forward to continuing our cooperation with our PNG community in Australia and also working closely with our Australian friends of PNG during the coming year.

**HE Charles W Lepani**  
**High Commissioner**  
11<sup>th</sup> December 2006