

International Volunteer Day
Remarks by Deputy High Commissioner, Bronte Moules
Tuesday 5 December 2017 @ 9.30-10.30am

Acknowledgements

- Distinguished guests

- Volunteers

- Colleagues

- Ladies and Gentlemen

Introduction

Good morning, and thank you all for joining us at the Australian High Commission to mark International Volunteer Day and to celebrate the magnificent contribution that volunteers make globally, as well as locally in Papua New Guinea.

Today we pause to reflect on the dedication and selfless service of volunteers and the difference they make, every day, to improve the lives and wellbeing of others.

Here in Papua New Guinea, we especially acknowledge the important contributions of volunteers deployed across the country by organisations such as the Papua New Guinea National Volunteer Service, the UK's Voluntary Service Overseas program, Japan's

volunteer program, Australian Business Volunteers and the Australian Volunteers for International Development program.

[Pause]

This year's theme – *'Volunteers Act First. Here. Everywhere'* – recognises the dedication, agility and sacrifice of volunteers, who are often first responders in times of crisis. When it matters most, they help deliver critical services to communities in urban, rural and remote areas.

We pay tribute especially to the vital contributions of everyday Papua New Guineans – those who are driven by the spirit of volunteerism in support of disaster response and local community development efforts.

In particular, I want to acknowledge the role of volunteers in the Papua New Guinea churches' development and humanitarian work. For example, through the Church Partnership Program El Nino response, churches mobilized over 1,000 volunteers to deliver emergency food stocks to communities throughout the highlands and the island communities of Milne Bay. They included volunteers from affected areas who provided critical local knowledge, helping to assess and prioritise need.

Contribution of Australian Volunteers

I also want to specifically acknowledge the Australian volunteers who have given their time to support communities and organisations in Papua New Guinea to help strengthen their skills, resources and knowledge. The level of commitment, professionalism and

resourcefulness the volunteers bring to their assignments is truly inspiring. But the connections they make go far deeper than simply transferring skills and expertise.

The Australian volunteer program allows volunteers to build meaningful and respectful relationships, and share cultural knowledge, with everyday Papua New Guineans. In doing so, our volunteers help to strengthen people-to-people links between Papua New Guinea and Australia. And volunteers take their experiences and understanding of Papua New Guinea back with them when they return home – helping to build awareness and understanding of our nearest neighbour.

[Pause]

There are currently 26 volunteers deployed by the Australian volunteer program in Papua New Guinea, working across all areas of development. In Wewak, Jill Harrison is helping to mentor Callan Services for Disabled Persons in computer literacy and data management. In Kokopo, Gregory Curtis is working with the Cocoa Board of PNG on IT and network development. Tess Keam is a social worker with the Burnett Institute in Daru. And Graham Double is a Chocolate Festival mentor to the Department of Primary Industries and Marine Resources in Buka.

Other volunteers are working in media development, business and finance, monitoring and evaluation, gender equality and social inclusion, town planning and waste management.

Of the total number of volunteers in PNG, 3 are based here in Port Moresby working at the Institute of National Affairs, Buk Bilong Pikinini

and WaterAid – and we are privileged to have Paul and Derarca here today to share their stories with us.

I am delighted too that Henry Ume, Executive Officer from Buk Bilong Pikinini, is with us today to reflect on the value of volunteers from a Host Organisation perspective. And I want to emphasise the pivotal role that host organisations have played, and continue to play, to both maximize the contributions of our volunteers and ensure their experience of volunteering is positive and rewarding.

The Australian volunteer program is a vital component of Australia's partnership with Papua New Guinea and I extend our profound thanks to Australian Volunteers International (AVI) who have helped manage the Australian Government's volunteer program (the AVID program) since 2011.

In January 2018, the Australian volunteer program will enter a new phase. Hallmarks of the new program include flexibility and diversity – to enable a greater diversity of volunteers to deliver a more flexible program, responsive to the needs and aspirations of Papua New Guinean communities and organisations – and to help make a good program even stronger.

[Pause]

In closing, I want to remind you that this event forms part of the 20 days of human rights activism, aimed at ending violence against women in Papua New Guinea.

The theme for this year's 20 days of activism is 'Leave no one behind. Together for justice'. In that spirit, I urge you all to do everything in your power to be part of the momentum for change - to eradicate violence against women and girls and help create a 'new normal'.

Ends//