

**2018 United Church of Papua New Guinea Leaders Mission
Consultation**

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Address by Caitlin Wilson

Deputy Australian High Commissioner to Papua New Guinea

**The Australia–Papua New Guinea Relationship and the Role of the
Churches**

Acknowledgements

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- Assembly Secretary Reverend Wesis Porop
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- Senior Staff of the Assembly Office
- Uniting World Church Partnership Program International Program Manager, Ms Aletia Dundas

- Distinguished guests
- Ladies and gentlemen

Good morning Olgeta, thank you for inviting me to speak to you on this important occasion, as you celebrate 50 years of United Church Ministry.

This milestone provides a valuable opportunity for the Church to reflect on 50 years of service to the people of Papua New Guinea and contemplate your achievements, priorities and challenges, as you plan for the next 50 years.

This morning, I would like to speak briefly about Australia's bilateral relationship with Papua New Guinea. I'll also give an overview of Australia's development cooperation work. And finally, I'll touch on the very significant role that churches play in service delivery and community development in Papua New Guinea.

The bilateral relationship

Australia has a special relationship with Papua New Guinea. We are bound by history and geography. And we have helped each other and worked together in many ways over the past decades.

The recent Highlands earthquake and damaging aftershocks is another instance where Australia has responded quickly to assist the people of Papua New Guinea in a time of need. I note that part of our response is involving work with the United Church, through the CAN DO network, to assist communities and households rebuild their livelihoods after the disaster. More on this later. Let me return to the breadth and depth of the bilateral relationship.

The Australian Government's recently released Foreign Policy White Paper reinforces the close and special relationship we have with Papua New Guinea and the importance we place on the bilateral relationship.

The Australia-Papua New Guinea relationship is so much more than that of aid-donor to aid-recipient. For too long we have allowed some to frame and define our relationship by the issue of foreign aid. This notion is outdated, and does not reflect the reality of our deep and broad bilateral partnership.

Australia and Papua New Guinea have moved beyond a donor and recipient relationship, becoming economic and strategic partners in the 21st century.

This broad economic and strategic partnership is reflected in the fact that Australian business investment in Papua New Guinea stands at a massive 45 billion kina. Two-way trade between our countries amounted to almost 14 billion kina last year, with 60 per cent of this trade going from Papua New Guinea to Australia. In addition, over 5,000 Australian companies do business in Papua New Guinea.

At independence in 1975, Australia's development support represented 40 per cent of Papua New Guinea's budget – it now stands at around 10 per cent.

Given the recent economic transition in Papua New Guinea driven by significant investments in the resources sector, we need to ensure

that our bilateral relationship reflects this modern contemporary partnership.

We are economic and strategic partners, with shared regional interests – and challenges – that we are working together to address. Australia continues to work closely with the Government of Papua New Guinea to reshape the nature of our development cooperation. It still forms a significant part of our bilateral relationship, but is now just one part of our multi-faceted and broad bilateral relationship.

Australia's development cooperation

In line with the evolving and maturing bilateral partnership, Australia is adjusting our development cooperation relationship.

We are shifting our development cooperation focus away from direct engagement in service delivery, which is a core sovereign responsibility, and placing greater emphasis on support for strengthened economic governance and inclusive growth.

Inclusive economic growth focuses on the mid- to long-term challenge of broadening Papua New Guinea's economic base and driving economic growth and job creation. We are supporting Papua New Guinea's priorities to improve the business-enabling environment and promote small to medium enterprises.

For example, Australia is working with Papua New Guinea on activities such as undertaking Public Private Partnership assessments; strengthening financial services and improving financial

literacy; fostering entrepreneurialism and innovation; and improving access to finance. A key focus is providing support in the agriculture, tourism and energy sectors, as well as supporting women's economic empowerment.

While support for strengthened economic governance and inclusive growth is an increasingly important element of Australia's development assistance cooperation with PNG, our program remains broad.

And we work with a broad range of partners too – government, NGOs, the private sector, other donor partners and churches – in recognition of the important role they play in Papua New Guinea's development.

Let me talk in more detail about our development cooperation in Papua New Guinea.

In 2017-2018, the Australian Government will provide an estimated A\$546.3 million (approximately 1.35 billion kina) in total development assistance to Papua New Guinea. Of this, A\$472.9 million (approximately 1.2 billion kina) will be bilateral funding delivered by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

As I mentioned before, we are working in a broad range of sectors: transport and infrastructure, education, health, governance, law and justice, and gender.

In the **transport sector**, Australia's focus is on assisting Papua New Guinea maintain the national priority road network and on improving aviation and maritime safety and security.

Investing in **infrastructure** is key to achieving better economic outcomes. Since 2010, Australia has supported the maintenance of over 10,000 kilometres of the national road network. This has ensured continued economic development in Papua New Guinea through ensuring there is access to markets for Papua New Guinea's commodities.

In the **health sector**, Australia is working with Papua New Guinea to identify and address health security threats, such as tuberculosis, and to improve delivery of maternal, and sexual and reproductive health.

A key achievement in recent years has been Australia working in partnership with Papua New Guinea to improve clinical management of drug-resistant tuberculosis, especially in Western Province.

With Australian support, the number of people remaining on treatment for tuberculosis in Western province has risen from 65 per cent in 2014 to 99 per cent in 2018. This is critical to minimising the development and spread of drug resistant tuberculosis.

In the **education sector**, our focus is on improving quality and access to education, particularly for girls, women and people living with a disability.

Over the last year, more than 1,800 Papua New Guineans have acquired new skills and accreditations through the Australia Awards scholarships program, the Pacific Leadership and Governance Precinct and the Australia Pacific Technical College.

These recipients will be able to apply their newly acquired skills to contribute to the continued development of many sectors in Papua New Guinea, from medical research to law, and towards improvements in the operation of the public service and gender equality.

In the **governance sector**, we are increasing our efforts under the Papua New Guinea-Australia Governance Partnership. This includes supporting the Government of Papua New Guinea's decentralisation agenda, for improved service delivery and economic opportunity at the subnational level.

In 2017, Australia signed a new Partnership Arrangement for Improved Decentralisation and Service Delivery with Papua New Guinea's Ministers for National Planning and Monitoring; Intergovernmental Relations; and Religion, Youth and Community Development.

As part of our governance cooperation with Papua New Guinea, we are working to improve services and economic opportunity in target rural areas. We have developed partnerships with selected districts to pilot better ways for them to work with their communities to improve services and are working with PNG Government to expand this work over time. And we are working to strengthen public financial

management practices at national and sub-national levels to improve accountability and transparency.

Australia's support to the **law and justice sector** focuses on improving community safety and security, improving access to effective law and justice services and assisting with measures to combat corruption.

In the past 12 months Australia has assisted Papua New Guinea with the construction of the new Manus Provincial Police Headquarters, trained more than 1,000 Village Court and Land Mediation officials, and enabled over 68,000 people to participate in community awareness programs outlining their legal rights and obligations.

The Australian Government is committed to advancing the rights of women and girls and to **promoting gender equality**. In 2017-2018, Australia will spend approximately 36 million kina on specific gender programs. In addition to this, over 80 per cent of our development cooperation investments in Papua New Guinea will address gender issues in a variety of ways.

The Australian Government's flagship investment in gender is the *Pacific Women, Shaping Pacific Development* program. This A\$320 million regional investment over 10 years will work to end violence against women, empower women, and improve women's engagement in leadership and decision making.

Finally, Australia is working to assist Papua New Guinea **strengthen resilience** to food and water security and to enhance **disaster risk**

management capacity at national and subnational levels. Australia has been working in close cooperation with the Government of Papua New Guinea and other partners such as the churches and private sector, to respond to the recent earthquakes in the Highlands.

The role of the churches in development

Our work with the Papua New Guinea churches is an important component of Australia's development cooperation efforts.

The churches are a critical partner for the delivery of services to communities across Papua New Guinea. Your long history of community engagement and service delivery in Papua New Guinea means you have a strong presence and legitimacy across the country.

The Church Partnership Program has been a vehicle for Australia's cooperation with the churches since 2004. Since then, the Program has supported churches to strengthen their organisational capacity to deliver crucial services to the most remote and disadvantaged communities, and to have a national voice on governance matters. This has included support for greater women's rights and advocacy on issues including sorcery-related violence, good electoral practices and anti-corruption.

The Church Partnership Program has delivered a broad range of activities in support of health, education, social inclusion, peace and prosperity and disaster risk reduction. And I note in particular the churches' leadership in the development of a joint Theology of Development and Theology of Gender Equality. Together, these

demonstrate the role of the churches in influencing public debate and building a momentum for positive social change.

Under the current phase of the Church Partnership Program, we have committed to working with the churches to help strengthen the capacity of the Papua New Guinea Council of Churches (PNGCC). This support includes targeted leadership training for senior church officials, in cooperation with the Pacific Council of Churches. The training not only aims to strengthen the leadership and management capacity of church-run institutions in Papua New Guinea, but to encourage greater cooperation across all member churches of the PNGCC.

We are also providing secretariat support to the PNGCC. This will build on existing collaboration arrangements between the Office of Religion within the Department for Community Development and Religion and the PNGCC, bringing the Church Partnership Program key church partners and constituencies – including the Evangelical Alliance – closer together.

A strengthened PNGCC, in turn, will enable the transition of the oversight of the Church Partnership Program to the PNGCC, as the constitutionally recognised churches' peak body.

The Church Partnership Program builds on the unparalleled reach of Papua New Guinean churches and their capacity for collective action. This has been illustrated so well during the response to the recent Highlands earthquakes.

Papua New Guinean Church Partners are playing a major role in delivering relief to the most remote villages affected by the

earthquakes. The churches will be a central partner for Papua New Guinea in the recovery and rebuilding efforts over the coming years. Australia is providing A\$3 million to Australian NGOs and their partner Papuan New Guinean churches to support humanitarian and recovery efforts in affected communities. As I mentioned earlier, this includes partnering with the United Church through the CAN DO network.

The Papua New Guinea Government's focus on decentralisation also presents opportunities for civil society, including churches, to work more closely with local government and District Development Authorities (DDAs) on community driven development and help establish the conditions for accountable and participatory governance structures.

The churches are trusted partners in communities at the grassroots level in Papua New Guinea. If transformational change and development is to continue across Papua New Guinea, communities need the support of such partners.

In closing, I want to express my appreciation for the important work you do and the profound impact you have on the lives of Papua New Guinean women, men and children across the country.

Australia looks forward to working with you over the coming years to continue our efforts to work in partnership with the Government of Papua New Guinea to help Papua New Guinea reach its full potential.

I wish you well for the remainder of this week's consultations.

Thank you.