

Opening Address: PNGAAA Annual Dinner

Head of Mission, Bruce Davis from the Australian High Commission

3 November 2016, 6:00pm – 10:00pm

Ballrooms 1 – 4, Crowne Plaza, Port Moresby

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, PNG Australia Awards Alumni members, and the new cohort of Papua New Guineans granted 2017 Australia Awards Scholarships to study in Australia.

Welcome.

I would like to thank the Papua New Guinea Australia Alumni Association – known as the PNG Triple A - for inviting me to speak.

I am honoured to be talking to an association with such wide reach. PNG Triple A now has more than 3,000 members and alumni chapters in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, Enga, Goroka, Kokopo, Lae, Madang and Manus.

The Australian Government has been supporting Papua New Guinea through scholarships for more than forty years. Since PNG Triple A was first established almost 1,500 scholars have gone to Australia through the Australia Awards program. Many of these esteemed alumni are seated in the room tonight.

The Association plays a key role in enabling Papua New Guinea's leaders. PNG Triple A lets alumni build upon their Australian experience through continued leadership activities in Papua New Guinea. I applaud the Association's success in supporting this cohort of exceptional people.

This year marks the Association's 10 year anniversary.

Congratulations on achieving this significant milestone and we look forward to continuing our partnership with your association – you play an important role in the relationship between PNG and Australia, now and into the future.

As the Association continues to grow, you are increasingly a resource that I think is yet to be fully appreciated. You, as alumni to an Australian university contribute to that university's reputation and campus culture. In the same way, as members of the PNG Triple A, you also shape PNG's reputation and community values.

More and more PNG Triple A members are in positions of influence, where you can work together using your Australian experience and your networks to achieve real and lasting change for Papua New Guinea.

Visible and active alumni inspire others like the 2017 cohort here tonight to follow in your footsteps and achieve academic and career success in their chosen fields.

PNG Triple A has chosen the theme '*celebrating 10 years of Inspiring Innovation through Education and Partnerships*' to mark the anniversary. This is a fitting theme.

Innovation relies on dynamic innovators. As Albert Einstein said, we cannot solve a problem using the same kind of thinking we used when we created that problem.

Dynamic innovators are just what the Australia and Papua New Guinea scholarships partnership is aiming to develop through the program. Innovators are disruptive, trailblazing and inspiring, just like many of the newly selected 2017 Australia Award scholars.

It is pleasing to note that 50 per cent are women. There are tremendous social and business advantages of investing in gender equality, and the Australian and Papua New Guinean Governments are proud to promote female leadership by supporting this cohort.

I am also pleased to note that 50 per cent of awards have been allocated to students who live outside of the National Capital District. The Government of Papua New Guinea has prioritised strong governance and effective service delivery at provincial and district

levels. And thanks to the Department of Personnel Management's thoughtful workforce planning and Australian scholarships, these alumni will provide educated skilled people at subnational levels to help this vision come to life.

Some words now to the new scholars about to embark on an Australia Awards scholarship. I understand you have been undertaking pre-departure briefing this week and trust this has been helpful in preparing for your move to Australia.

I hope it has prompted real excitement about your upcoming educational and professional journey. Being granted an Australia Award should fill you with pride. Not just for today, but for the rest of your lives.

Receiving an Australia Award is not an easy feat. There were many applicants and only the most outstanding were selected.

You have been granted an Australia Award because the Governments of Papua New Guinea and Australia believe you are not only leaders, but that you also have demonstrated that you will bring back what you have learned in Australia and adapt that knowledge to Papua New Guinea's social and economic development.

This country's continued growth as a nation depends on committed individuals with the skills and motivation to promote its development.

Margaret Mead famously said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

You are a key tool in ensuring that Papua New Guinea becomes a smart, wise, fair, healthy and happy society by 2050. You are taking on the role of "ambassadors" of Papua New Guinea in Australia, and you join an ever increasing group of people with strong linkages to Australia and Australians.

Your international study experience will allow you to help position Papua New Guinea in the global environment, to maximise its comparative and competitive advantages, and to contribute to its socioeconomic development.

And while I encourage you to prioritise your studies, you should also use your time in Australia to socialise and get to know the Australian and international students you will be sharing classes with.

Take the opportunity to travel around the city you are studying in – visit its tourist spots, see its sights, meet its people. Let me assure

you, just like Papua New Guineans, Australians are also very quick to smile. You will return with many life-long memories.

Use your time to meet other committed people. Establish professional and support networks that you can retain when you return home. Establish people to people links that can help you contribute to Papua New Guinea's global engagement.

Once you have successfully completed your studies in Australia you will be eligible to join PNG Triple A. I encourage you to start engaging with alumni tonight during the dinner and also when you return back from studies. They will assist you during your reintegration back to PNG.

Ladies and gentlemen, tonight is an evening to celebrate both the achievements of the PNG Triple A over a very exciting decade, and to wish the next cohort of alumni-to-be the very best in their studies in Australia. I commend the PNG Triple A for hosting such a significant occasion.

Thank you and good luck.

Please join me in congratulating the scholars in the usual manner.