

**Divine Word University Graduation Ceremony**  
**Address by HE Bruce Davis**  
**Australian High Commissioner to Papua New Guinea**  
**15 March 2020**

Acknowledgements

Thank you for the invitation to be here today. At an occasion like this, seeing all the energy, optimism and potential of the graduating students, it is not hard to understand why Australia is so proud to support Divine Word University.

I am very pleased to be back in beautiful Madang Province. This region is rich, not only in agricultural and marine resources, but also in history and culture. The natural beauty of Papua New Guinea's north coast and its welcoming people mean Madang is renowned throughout the country and in many parts of the world.

Today is an occasion to celebrate the achievements of the graduating students of Divine Word University. To acknowledge the hard work which has brought you to this point. And to recognise the support of your families and lecturers who have helped you along the way.

I also want to take this opportunity to explain a little more about the support Australia is delivering to Divine Word University and how this fits with our work in Papua New Guinea towards a bright future for this country's young people. I want to reflect on how the broader development partnership between Papua New Guinea and Australia operates and the crucial role this relationship will play in our shared future.

Speaking at an outstanding institution such as Divine Word University, to future leaders of Papua New Guinea, is an ideal opportunity to discuss these issues.

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There are many unique elements of the relationship between our two countries. For Australia, Papua New Guinea is our nearest

neighbour, with less than four kilometres separating us in the Torres Strait.

We share common values and a special history. This has produced deep and lasting connections between our people and institutions, for example between schools, churches and sporting teams, which continue to bind us together.

Today, partnership is the defining element of interactions between Papua New Guinea and Australia.

In January this year, the deployment of 100 PNG Defence Force personnel to deliver emergency assistance to communities in Victoria who were impacted by major bushfires was a fantastic example of our partnership in action.

Papua New Guineans from all walks of life contributed to voluntary fundraising efforts to support bushfire relief and we greatly appreciate this generosity.

In return, Australia has always and will always stand with Papua New Guinea during times of hardship and crisis.

I am pleased the Australian and New Zealand governments were able to help evacuate Papua New Guinean students from China following the outbreak of coronavirus. Our officials are now working with Papua New Guinea's National Department of Health and your doctors and nurses to help prepare for the potential impact of this global challenge.

As neighbours, Papua New Guinea and Australia are more than just natural partners. We are partners by choice. We are partners for the future.

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Over many years, the relationship between our two countries has undergone a transition that I believe is still not as widely recognised as it should be.

We share a contemporary strategic and economic partnership that is about much more than aid and development.

Papua New Guinea is a leader in the Pacific and we are cooperating with increasing effectiveness on a whole range of regional issues. From trade and investment, to climate change and marine sustainability, to name a few.

There are also critical security links between our military, police and border agencies which bolster stability and mitigate transnational threats in our region.

We have an important commercial relationship, with over K15.7 billion in two-way trade in 2018-19.

We share countless people-to-people connections, including through tourism, with over 40,000 Australians visiting Papua New Guinea each year. There is great potential to grow this number and in 2020, promoting Papua New Guinea as an

outstanding tourism destination will be an area of focus for the High Commission.

Nonetheless, there is no denying that our development partnership remains a major element of interactions between Papua New Guinea and Australia. It is also an aspect of the relationship that, appropriately, attracts continued public attention and debate. I want to reflect for a moment on how our partnership operates.

The Australian Government invests more than K1.3 billion worth of development assistance into Papua New Guinea each year. Papua New Guinea is Australia's largest development partner by a long way and this is not going to change any time soon.

The most important starting point in managing our partnership is to listen to Papua New Guinea. Understanding local perspectives is critical and we ensure there are mechanisms at every level of our relationship to enable a genuine dialogue.

We are listening to the priorities of Prime Minister James Marape and his government. We are listening to the priorities of governors and provincial, district and community representatives. We are listening to an emerging new generation of Papua New Guinean leaders, both women and men.

In July last year, Prime Minister Marape and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison held annual leaders' talks and committed to develop a new Comprehensive Strategic and Economic Partnership. Importantly, this agreement will elevate our relationship and bring greater coherence to the many diverse areas of cooperation between Papua New Guinea and Australia. We will mutually identify priority areas of work in relation to security, institutional links, development, governance and trade and investment.

In short, it will enable us to more clearly agree the goals we are working towards together and more effectively track progress towards shared objectives.

The Comprehensive Strategic and Economic Partnership is an exciting new development in the history of engagement between Papua New Guinea and Australia. It will ensure our relationship is fit for purpose and responds to both countries' interests in our rapidly evolving region.

In response to this changing environment, our development partnership with Papua New Guinea is adapting. Australia is determined to remain a reliable partner of choice for Papua New Guinea and we are deploying new tools to ensure this remains the case.

Our traditional approach of grant finance is still important, but we must recognise our partnership is about much more than headline numbers. Increasingly, we are looking to alternative ways of doing business, including concessional loans, carefully tailored technical advice and labour mobility. Often, the expertise Australia can offer is just as important as the resources we bring to the table.

But what is most important are the outcomes we achieve together.

Last year, the Australian Government announced a new Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific. It is a key element of Australia's AUD3 billion plan to play a greater role in meeting the urgent need for infrastructure development in the Pacific region.

Under existing grant arrangements, our focus on infrastructure will deliver major outcomes in 2020. Later this year, the redevelopment of ANGAU Hospital in Lae will be completed. This is a K500 million investment. The new Coral Sea Cable will also come on-line in 2020. It will deliver internet speeds up to 800 times faster than currently available and better connect Papua New Guinea with the rest of the world.

Prime Minister Marape has an ambitious economic reform agenda and our two governments are now forging a new and even more cooperative approach in this critical policy area. In 2019,

we finalised a short-term loan of USD300 million to the Papua New Guinean Government, in response to a request to assist with immediate budget repair. As Papua New Guinea looks to partner with international financial institutions on further reforms, including to strengthen the position of its major state-owned enterprises, we are considering further opportunities to offer support.

I note Prime Minister Marape travelled to New Zealand in February and while visiting, he said that he hoped Papua New Guinea could learn from New Zealand's example because it had the best-performing public service in the world. I have to tell you, there is nothing Australians find more motivating than coming off second best to New Zealand!

As someone who has spent most of my career in the Australian public service, I hope that Papua New Guinea and Australia still have many things to learn from each other.

Our partnership is supporting over 30 Australian and Papua New Guinean agencies to form twinning relationships, share knowledge and support best practice technical skills and policy development.

I am pleased to say that perhaps the most exciting new opportunity for a greater exchange of people between Papua New Guinea and Australia is through expanded labour mobility arrangements.

There are two programs for Papua New Guinean workers seeking to come to Australia, the Seasonal Worker Programme and new Pacific Labour Scheme.

Madang is at the forefront of this opportunity and is the first province to send workers under our new approach. Currently, there are over 50 workers from Madang already working at agricultural sites in Queensland, Western Australia and Tasmania. I have received reports they are performing to the highest standards.

We are determined to ramp up Papua New Guinea's participation even further. This offers huge potential for skills and employment benefits in both our economies.

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In addition to our new Comprehensive Strategic and Economic Partnership, a second initiative that will help deliver greater coherence to our development partnership is a renewed focus on select geographic regions. In partnership with Papua New Guinea, we are considering high priority areas where the prospect of economic growth could deliver a wider transformative effect for the entire country.

Prime Minister Marape has spoken of his goal for more of Papua New Guinea's provinces to become self-sustaining economic units. Australia wants to support this ambition by ensuring that where we make investments, for example in health, education or infrastructure, these are aligned to each other for the greatest impact.

We make no apology for remaining responsive to Papua New Guinea. At the High Commission, we must get outside of Port Moresby and into the real Papua New Guinea. A key aspect of our job is to understand local issues and to identify where Australia can add value.

Our development program is characterised by a focus on diversity and inclusion. We are focused on empowering women and girls. We are striving towards a future where all young people in Papua New Guinea, regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability or geography, have the best chance possible to fulfil their potential.

The investments Australia makes in Papua New Guinea through our development partnership are guided by rigorous planning at every stage. The decisions we take are always informed by a sound application of core principles of development. We ensure robust monitoring and evaluation to measure effectiveness. We publish regular performance reporting to guarantee transparency.

Above all, we want to partner with capable organisations in Papua New Guinea so that our investments will produce sustained results.

The Papua New Guinea-Australia Incentive Fund is a great example of how these principles work in practice. Established organisations that can demonstrate they have a clear vision and that their work contributes to service delivery or economic opportunities for Papua New Guineans are eligible to apply to the Fund. If applicants meet key criteria indicating a track record of success, Australia gets behind them.

Over the last 20 years, the Incentive Fund has delivered more than K400 million in funding to over 70 organisations across 21 of Papua New Guinea's 22 provinces.

No one has done a better job of partnering with the Incentive Fund than Divine Word University.

I am proud to say that since 2002, over three successful application rounds, Divine Word has benefited from more than K28 million from the Incentive Fund. These resources have gone towards the construction of multiple student dormitories and ablution blocks, staff accommodation, a new library and lecture theatre and improved IT systems. The hard work of administrators, teachers and students at Divine Word is paying off and we are happy to join in your success.

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Looking ahead, the strength of our partnership will depend in large part on Papua New Guinea's rapidly expanding younger generations. It will depend on future leaders like you.

Australia is continuing to invest in education and leadership opportunities for young Papua New Guineans.

In 2006, we established the Australia Pacific Training Coalition with a campus in Port Moresby. So far, it has delivered employment focused, vocational training to more than 3,100 Papua New Guineans.

Last year, we launched a new Papua New Guinea-Australia Secondary Schools Partnership. As a starting point, it links 24 high schools in our two countries, enabling students to visit each other, learn about shared challenges and hopefully form lasting friendships.

The Australia Awards scholarship program remains a flagship of our partnership. Since the early 1950s, over 11,000 Papua New Guineans have received scholarship opportunities, many to study at Australian universities. I sincerely hope there are some future Australia Award scholarship holders among you today.

These types of connections are the essence of the partnership between Papua New Guinea and Australia.

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Once again, congratulations to all the students graduating today. The results of your hard work and dedication is on display. Thank you to your families. Thank you to the staff and teachers of Divine Word University who have played such a crucial role in this achievement.

I wish each graduate every success in your future goals for study and work – whether in Papua New Guinea or perhaps even overseas.

Education equals opportunity. Please make the most of the opportunity you now have. Not only for yourself and your family. Not only for your district or province. For the future of Papua New Guinea.

Thank you