

IWD 2013 Breakfast

First Lady Lynda Babao, wife of Prime Minister Peter O'Neill
Eastern Highlands Governor the Hon Julie Soso Akeke
Minister for Community Development Loujaya Toni (TBC)
Her Excellency Jackie Barson
Ms Susil Nelson, President of the Business and Professional Women's
Club, and Coalition for Change
Lady Judith Bona, Secretary of the Business and Professional
Women's Club
Rachael Thomson, Business and Professional Women's Club

Other distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

Thank you for inviting me to speak at Business and Professional Women's 2013 International Women's Day Breakfast. I am delighted to be here and to talk about a topic as important as achieving gender equality in Papua New Guinea.

International Women's Day has now become so popular that different countries and organisations have adopted different themes. In Australia, we have adopted the theme of "ending violence against women," and this will be my main topic for today.

But I would like to begin on a more positive note. The global theme for International Women's Day for 2013 is "the gender agenda – gaining momentum". It's a theme that I think applies very well to Papua New Guinea: over the last 12 months momentum has certainly gathered in the quest for gender equality across a number of sectors.

In the political sector, I'm sure I speak for the entire room when I say we were extremely pleased to see that three women were elected to Papua New Guinea's National Parliament in 2012 – two of whom are here today: Minister Toni, and Governor Soso Akeke.

Each of their election victories is a remarkable feat in a country that has traditionally had some of the lowest rates of political representation in the world: Vice Minister Gore, Minister Toni and Governor Soso Akeke are only the fifth, sixth and seventh women elected to Parliament since the first elections were held in PNG.

They join a small, but impressive group of women who have fought tirelessly to improve the status of women in Papua New Guinea. The

patron and a founding member of the Business and Professional Women's Club, Dame Carol Kidu, was also a member of this club, serving for fifteen years as the Member for Moresby South. Throughout her time in Parliament, and as the Minister for Community Development Dame Carol paved the way for women seeking to make a greater contribution to political leadership in PNG, and I pay tribute to her today, and to her successors in this Club. I salute the Coalition for Change, and Business and Professional Women, for all that they do to support positive change, and the empowerment of women, including through scholarships.

I also salute the three women members of Parliament in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville – the Honourable Joan Jerome, the Honourable Elizabeth Burain, and Minister Rose Pihei. These women are working to strengthen Bougainville's political institutions. The importance of this work cannot be underestimated, given the critical role Bougainvillean women played, and continue to play, in the peace process in Bougainville.

We've also come a long way in recognising and rewarding women for their significant contribution to PNG's public service. Phoebe Sangatari has been appointed the Acting Chief Ombudsman, and is leading the Government's efforts to tackle corruption. She has been joined in these efforts by Jubilee Tindiwi, recently appointed Acting Solicitor-General. And, on 1 February, Nerrie Eliakim was sworn in as Papua New Guinea's first female Chief Magistrate. Nerrie, at 39 years of age, is also the youngest person – man or woman – to hold this prestigious post. I also want to mention the work of women such as Sister Lorraine on Bougainville, who addressed this gathering last year, as well as of all the unsung heroines and heroes working in the education and medical fields to achieve equality for women and girls.

And it is the small gains, the ones made by every day Papua New Guineans, that I find the most heartening. I was particularly touched by an article in Wednesday's The National newspaper about a man called Alo Mambo, from Southern Highlands Province. Alo made the papers for deciding to stay at home and care of his children while his wife, Betty Mark, completed her studies in the field of nursing. Alo wanted to support his wife to get a better education. She, in turn, has vowed to support him to get an education in the future. This is a story of partnership between two people committed to love, to respect and to support each other in their personal and professional fulfilment, as well as for their children's future.

Contrast this story with the reports in early February of a 20 year old woman in Western Highlands Province who was brutally murdered for having allegedly practiced sorcery. In 2008, a report from the Melanesian Institute estimated that killings resulting from accusations of sorcery and witchcraft had actually risen in PNG in the period between 2000 and 2008.

But on a positive note, the killing of this 20 year old woman in Mt Hagen in February, has sparked a national conversation about the need to address such heinous acts of violence. Like the awful incident of rape last year in India, this incident has met with outrage - and a groundswell of voices from all sectors of society calling for change in Papua New Guinea; to put a stop to violence against women, and to replace this with respect for human rights for all members of society, and the equal enjoyment of economic and political rights for all.

Along with many Papua New Guinean leaders and ordinary citizens who have been shocked to the core by these acts of violence, the Australian Government condemns all sorcery-related killings and all acts of violence against women.

The Sorcery Act of 1971 criminalises both those who practice sorcery and those who attack them. During her visit to PNG in March 2012, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Ms Rashida Manjoo, found that the Sorcery Act actually encourages violence against women, and called for the Act to be amended.

Australia believes that gender equality is a critical component of development and that the equal participation of women is essential to the economic, social and political success of all communities around the globe.

In order to participate fully, women and girls require access to quality education and health care, they need to be involved in economic and political systems, and they must have the security to move freely within the community. School curriculums and the media need to equip all members of the society with the knowledge and values to celebrate women and girls as the equals of men and boys.

At the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting in August last year, Leaders endorsed the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration. In this declaration, they pledged to act to end violence against women,

and to work towards supporting women's political representation and economic empowerment. Prime Minister Peter O'Neill made this pledge on behalf of Papua New Guinea, and should be commended for doing so.

Australia's Prime Minister, Julie Gillard, was also at the Meeting. There, she announced the Pacific Women Shaping the Pacific Development Initiative. This initiative commits \$320 million to the region over 10 years, and aims to make a practical difference in the lives of Pacific women, their families and their communities. PNG is one of the priority countries for this initiative, and AusAID is in active consultation with PNG on its implementation.

In addition to our focus on education and health, and law and justice, Australia has a strong focus in our development partnership on the prevention of family and sexual violence, and on access to justice for survivors.

Australia provides support to the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary to strengthen its ability to combat all forms of gender based violence. We have worked with PNG to increase the number of family and sexual violence units established in police stations to facilitate improved police and prosecutor support to victims of sexual violence. Over the past three years, 19,600 victims have accessed specialist police support in eight police Family and Sexual Violence Units. Another four units will be opened early this year.

Through our PNG-Australia Policing Partnership, we also support the efforts of the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary to increase the number of women within its own ranks. I am proud to welcome to this breakfast today four of those women: Senior Constable Frieda Woktamol, Senior Constable Josephine Kumai, First Constable Jennifer Wakore and Senior Constable Elizabeth Tabim, who have a combined 60 years of policing experience, have just completed a two year Cadet Officer training course at Bomana Police College. Upon their graduation in just a few short weeks, these women will join the ranks of commissioned RPNGC officers working to make Papua New Guinea a safer place – for women and for men. Prime Minister Gillard and Prime Minister O'Neill are committed to further strengthening our policing partnership in 2013 and beyond.

AusAID is also supporting better access for women to the legal process through village courts, more female public lawyers and training in

sexual assault law for public prosecutors, criminal investigators, the Ombudsman Commission and Police.

There has been a significant increase in the number of new women village court magistrates recruited and trained across the country, up from only 10 in 2004 to over 900 now, and a growing number of officials, clerks and peace officers.

As a leading country in the Pacific region, and as a young nation, Papua New Guinea should be proud of these achievements. I am sure that Papua New Guinea will continue to strive to be at the forefront of and to inspire regional and international efforts to enhance women's equal participation in all levels of society.

And the world is watching.

I welcome the joint statement by the European Union, French Embassy and British High Commission, urging the PNG Government to treat the eradication of violence against women and girls as a top priority. I also welcomed the recent statement by the United States and the United Nations urging an end to sorcery-related violence.

At the 57th United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, currently taking place in New York, 45 member states, including Australia, are discussing ways to eliminate and prevent all forms of violence against women. I encourage Papua New Guineans in Port Moresby and abroad to join that discussion. Let us collectively commit to implementing the CEDAW, to benefit today's and future generations. Having participated in the negotiation of the Convention, I remain convinced that it is an excellent framework for our common efforts, and a bedrock to support demand for positive change.

During his recent visit to Papua New Guinea in December 2012, Australia's Foreign Minister Bob Carr witnessed the efforts of Papua New Guinean women to achieve greater participation in leadership roles in society. He supports your calls for change.

I'd like to conclude by playing to you Minister Carr's International Women's Day message.