



**36<sup>TH</sup> INDEPENDENCE ANNIVERSARY ADDRESS  
BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA  
HONOURABLE PETER O'NEILL, CMG MP**

**MEDIA EMBARGO: UNTIL AFTER DELIVERY  
(16<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER, 2011 @ 7.30 am)**

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**Introduction**

Fellow Citizens ..... mothers, fathers and children of Papua New Guinean --- I warmly greet you all.

On this special day – the 36<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our nation's Independence --- my family and I and my people of Ialibu-Pangia electorate join you in celebrating our national day.

**Tribute to the Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare**

It is fitting that on this occasion, I should first of all pay tribute to my predecessor Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare, the founding father I have replaced as our nation's seventh Prime Minister.

I extend my personal gratitude to Sir Michael for his contribution to our nation's development. He will always remain an iconic figure in the history of our country.

The Grand Chief returned home almost two weeks ago after undergoing a complicated heart surgery in Singapore.

With the change of government we have given Sir Michael the opportunity to recover fully, without, the pressures associated with continuing to govern Papua New Guinea personally or by delegation.

On behalf of my government, and with the grace of God Almighty, I extend to the Grand Chief, our best wishes and prayers for a speedy and full recovery.

## **Change of Government**

In my address to Parliament last month, I set out the reasons why we changed the National Alliance – led government on August 2.

Let me restate here that any Government that loses focus, becomes complacent and reckless, must be replaced, or the nation suffers.

In the last nine years, PNG experienced a period of strong economic growth. There was surplus revenue coming into government from export of our commodities.

But if you look around you, there is very little to show for this enormous wealth.

As a nation, we have come a long way after 36 years. But our record is one we cannot be very proud of.

Regardless of where you are, if you look around you, our infrastructure like roads and bridges, airports and wharves are in a shamble.

Our health and education facilities are in a deplorable state. Our poor social indicators reflect this, and it's a shame that we continue to lag behind many of our small pacific neighbours.

After 36 years, the vast majority of our people are still denied the basic services. They remain powerless, and are made to be mere recipients of government handouts. They are not actively participating in nation-building, and this is a recipe for disaster.

We have recorded rosy economic growth figures annually in recent years, but these are meaningless unless the people contribute directly and become active participants.

We have fallen short of our national goals and principles enshrined in our constitution.

The sum of our budgets in the last three and a half decades shows that we are by no means poor.

We have simply squandered wealth we have been blessed with. This has happened because control of the nation's wealth was concentrated in the hands of a powerful and reckless few.

A government lacking participation by all means the nation was going to suffer.

Change therefore, had to happen, and Parliament voted overwhelmingly for change on August 2.

My Government recognises the tough challenges ahead. With seven months to go before the general elections, time is not on our side.

But we will not deviate from our responsibilities. We came into government to do a job, and we intend to do it diligently.

In the past weeks, I have broadly outlined my government's policies to steer our country away from bankruptcy.

We have also uncovered a mess of scandalous proposition at various departments and institutions like the National Planning and Monitoring Department and Independent Public Business Corporation.

A massive cleanup exercise is underway that will include exposing corrupt practices and prosecuting those involved.

We must restore discipline, accountability, and transparency to institutions of State that serve the people.

The fruits these institutions bear are for all of us to enjoy, not ring-fenced for the benefit of a powerful few.

On behalf of my government, I can assure you that we shall provide assertive and accountable political leadership.

We have a wealth of combined talent, experience and youth in this government to build structures that will position Papua New Guinea for the challenges ahead.

### **Deliverables – Free Education**

Soon after being elected, I announced that this government will introduce free education up to Grade 10 and subsidise school fees from Year 11 to university level under the 2012 National Budget and beyond.

Since then, a number of critics have said publicly that free education is not possible and cannot be funded.

It is my firm belief that education is key to the future growth of our country.

An educated society will be strong, vibrant and healthy. The amount of money we spend on education today will be repaid many times over by a healthy and educated population tomorrow.

When we put money into educating our children, it is an investment for the future, not a waste of money.

The burden of paying school fees up to grade 10 will rest with government starting next year. An amount about K300 million will be earmarked in the Supplementary Budget for this expenditure.

Free education will mean increased enrolment and additional resources like classrooms, teachers' houses, and more teachers for our schools.

The Education Department is working on providing the government with figures to address these challenges, and we will address them.

I have directed the Finance Department to remain open during the Christmas period to ensure funds for each schools' are transferred directly to them, so these schools are prepared when the school year begins in 2012.

We will encounter some difficulties, but we can't sit back on our laurels and be overcome by them.

We are determined, and we are confident that this policy will not fail.

### **Roads and Infrastructure**

In the coming months this government will move to deliver major impact projects that are not only catalysts to boost economic and social welfare, but will also generate new economic opportunities for the nation overall.

We will embark on nationwide restoration and maintenance of run-down education and health institutions, create a centralised national medical supplies base, repair and rehabilitate the Okuk Highway, Buluminski Highway, Lae-Madang Highway and complete the Trans-New Britain Highway and the Gulf-Southern Highlands Highway.

A new alternate national port development will take place in Gulf Province whilst fast-tracking the Lae port development.

The Jacksons and Nadzab aerodromes will be extended and upgraded.

A new initiative will be launched to establish maritime transportation for all Maritime Provinces instead of the corrupt programs in the Border Development and Coastal Vessel program.

### **Supporting Women**

No one can deny the central role mothers and women play in the up-keep and growth of our families as the important fabric upon which our nation exists.

My government recognises these efforts.

Whilst their traditional roles have been confined to the welfare of their families my government recognises that mothers and women can also play active and prominent roles in the leadership and development of our nation.

In this regard my Government moved decisively last week to pass the first reading of the Bill and the first vote to create 22 exclusive parliamentary seats for women in the next parliament.

We have taken the first decisive step to provide the opportunity that has been lacking despite a lot of rhetoric from the previous Government.

I believe the prominent involvement of women in our legislature will add improvements in the quality of decision making at that level.

### **The Business of Government**

I lead a properly constituted government; it has a strong and coherent parliamentary majority.

We have moved swiftly to complete a number of unfinished legislative businesses of Parliament and are functioning assertively and decisively to cleanse the system of corrupt elements.

My government has already established an investigative team to probe various financial abuses including the disappearance of millions Kina of PNG's development budget for 2011 in the first quarter of this year.

In the short term we have appointed an investigator to quickly examine suspicious financial transactions that occurred outside the proper processes during the final months of the last government.

But in the medium term we will do what should have been done years ago - establish a well resourced Independent Commission against Corruption. That was one of the first commitments of my new government.

The best way to wage war against corruption is to significantly increase the prospects of detection, and successful prosecution. That is what the new commission will be charged with doing.

The current system of cleaning out corruption within our national systems has simply not been working. It has not been working for years.

### **Improving Service Delivery**

My government faces enormous challenges in improving basic service delivery, and in rebuilding and expanding vital national infrastructure - such as roads ports and electricity.

This is the infrastructure you and other investors need to effectively develop our vast mineral, oil and gas resources in particular.

Money is not really the problem. The capacity to spend it effectively is.

We have serious public sector capacity and delivering problems.

Devolving delivery to local communities, and using the resources of our churches and NGO's, has been helping to improve service delivery.

I thank them most sincerely on behalf of the government and people of Papua New Guinea.

My Government will step up to the line and take responsibility for national services delivery.

### **The Future**

With the two LNG projects and a number of world class mines coming on stream in the next two years or so, our nation has been promised a lot of wealth.

But this wealth will become a curse if we do not manage it well. If we elect the right leaders in the elections, we will have started the first steps to putting in place a government that is participatory and responsive to the needs of our people.

Since August 2, I have broadly outlined to you what my government intends to do to improve governance, service delivery, and develop infrastructure.

As we celebrate and reflect on our 36 years of independence, we should ask ourselves what we can do as individuals to help the government achieve our common goals.

We cannot achieve our targets in national development unless we all play our part.

On this anniversary, I call every citizens to renew their commitment to contribute meaningfully to the development of the communities, and collectively for the advancement of our nation.

### **Conclusion**

I want to conclude by asking you all to celebrate the occasion of our 36 years of our country's independence in peace and harmony.

May God Bless You All.

Thank you.