

29th Australia-Papua New Guinea Ministerial Forum Joint Communiqué

17 February 2023 Canberra, Australia

1. The 29th Australia–Papua New Guinea Ministerial Forum was held in Canberra, Australia on 17 February 2023. The Forum was co-chaired for Australia by Senator the Hon Penny Wong, Minister for Foreign Affairs and for Papua New Guinea by the Hon Justin Tkatchenko MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs.
2. Participating Ministers for Australia were: the Hon Richard Marles MP, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Defence; Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher, Minister for Finance, Minister for Women and the Public Service; Senator the Hon Don Farrell, Minister for Trade and Tourism, Special Minister of State; the Hon Chris Bowen MP, Minister for Climate Change and Energy; Senator the Hon Murray Watt, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Minister for Emergency Management; the Hon Clare O’Neil MP, Minister for Home Affairs, Minister for Cyber Security; the Hon Pat Conroy MP, Minister for Defence Industry, Minister for International Development and the Pacific; the Hon Andrew Giles MP, Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs; and, Senator the Hon Tim Ayres, Assistant Minister for Trade, Assistant Minister for Manufacturing
3. Participating Ministers for Papua New Guinea were: the Hon John Rosso MP, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Immigration and Labour, and Minister for Lands, Physical Planning and Urbanisation; the Hon Ian Ling Stuckey MP, Minister for Treasury; the Hon Rainbo Paita MP, Minister for Finance and Planning; the Hon William Duma MP, Minister for State Enterprises; the Hon Dr Lino Tom MP, Minister for Health; the Hon Salio Waipo MP, Minister for Forest; the Hon Richard Maru MP, Minister for International Trade and Investment; the Hon Aiye Tambua MP, Minister for Agriculture; the Hon Simo Kilepa MP, Minister for Environment, Conservation and Climate Change; the Hon Jimmy Uguro MP, Minister for Education; the Hon Win Bakri Daki MP, Minister for Defence; the Hon Peter Tsiamalili Jr MP, Minister for Internal Security; the Hon Jason Peter MP, Minister for Community Development, Religion and Youth; the Hon Jelta Wong MP, Minister for Fisheries and Marine Resources; and the Hon Kessy Sawang MP, Vice Minister for International Trade and Investment.
4. This was the first Ministerial Forum following elections in both countries in 2022. It was also the first in-person Forum held since 2019, due to border closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The last Ministerial Forum was held virtually on 2 September 2021.

5. Ministers renewed their commitment to the Comprehensive Strategic and Economic Partnership (CSEP), to guide the modern partnership between PNG and Australia. They undertook to implement this partnership through coordinated, deeper sectoral engagement led by Ministers from each side, and to take forward the outcomes and commitments arising from the 2023 Annual Leaders Dialogue.
6. Ministers reflected on the deep historical and familial connections which have brought the nations together in a unique partnership, and committed to ensuring that this partnership of equal and sovereign neighbours grows to reflect contemporary opportunities and challenges.
7. Ministers undertook to further accelerate the integration of the two economies, including through the Australia-PNG Economic Partnership. They noted the importance of expanding opportunities for Papua New Guineans to enter the Australian labour market, including increasing training and skilled labour under the new Australian Pacific Engagement Visa. They acknowledged that efficient and speedy visa issuing arrangements would help underpin labour, business and broader people-to-people connections and announced separately a range of steps that would be taken to improve their respective systems. Ministers agreed to aim to process at least 75% of completed visitor visas applications within 14 days. Ministers agreed to open in-country visa processing in Papua New Guinea. They agreed to establish a joint ministerial working group to oversee this work, including Deputy Prime Minister Marles, Foreign Minister Wong, Minister for International Development and the Pacific Conroy, with Immigration Minister Giles, and on the PNG side, Deputy Prime Minister Rosso and Foreign Minister Tkatchenko.
8. Reflecting the significant role of business and industry in the relationship, and the importance of Australia's AUD24.8 billion in investment in PNG, Ministers encouraged the two business communities to consider how to invest in the many opportunities such as special economic zones that PNG offered, including in downstream processing of agriculture, fisheries and forestry, and the green economy and in agriculture. They committed to examining recommendations and implementing mutually agreed outcomes of the bilateral trade assessment, as agreed in the CSEP, with particular focus on support for PNG's biosecurity arrangements to enable it to access export opportunities including in Australia. They also welcomed the valuable input of the two business communities, as represented in their respective Business Councils.
9. Ministers welcomed progress made in discussing the scope, purpose and structure of a broad Bilateral Security Treaty, in accordance with the timeline set by Prime Ministers at the Annual Leaders Dialogue in January 2023. They noted the need for consideration of domestic legal and constitutional aspects to enable a treaty to come into effect. They note the importance that PNG placed on

addressing internal security and law and justice issues, and Australia's commitment to assist. Ministers agreed to establish a joint ministerial working group – including Deputy Prime Minister Marles, Foreign Minister Wong, Minister for International Development and the Pacific Conroy, and on the PNG side, Deputy Prime Minister Rosso and Foreign Minister Tkatchenko with Internal Security Minister Tsiamalili – to oversee deepening cooperation in these areas.

10. Ministers noted the two countries' commitment to supporting regional peace, security, economic resilience and Pacific unity as the most populous members of the Pacific family and recommitted to a Pacific-family first approach to regional security needs as endorsed by PIF leaders and as we work together to implement the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific.
11. PNG welcomed Australia's renewed focus on climate change and Ministers agreed that Australia partnering with the Pacific to co-host the 31st UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP31) in 2026 would allow us to combine forces and secure ambitious climate change outcomes and help place Pacific voices at the centre of international climate discussions. Ministers recognised PNG's interest in securing a greater share of international climate finance and welcomed PNG's participation in the Indo-Pacific Carbon Offset Scheme (IPCOS). Ministers committed to sign the IPCOS Joint Action Plan as early as possible this year.
12. Ministers welcomed conclusion in 2022 of the first annual CSEP Action Plan and looked forward to progress under the 2023 CSEP Action Plan, as a tool to help take forward Prime Ministerial and Ministerial priorities. Highlights of Ministerial discussions and decisions under the six CSEP pillars follows.

CSEP Pillar 1 – Strong Democracies for a Stable Future

13. As re-affirmed by Prime Ministers, Ministers acknowledged their commitment to democracy and highlighted the collaborative efforts undertaken in support of PNG's delivery of its national elections in 2022. Ministers welcomed Australia's commitment to support PNG in its implementation of the Parliamentary Election Committee recommendations and electoral reforms.
14. Ministers welcomed the election of two women to PNG's national parliament, and acknowledged the need to prioritise gender equality and address family, sexual and sorcery accusation-related violence. Ministers welcomed Australia's new five-year investment, PNG Women Lead, to support the expansion of women's leadership in PNG and to combat gender-based violence. Ministers also welcomed the appointment of Australia's new Ambassador for Gender Equality, who will prioritise a visit to PNG in 2023.
15. Ministers agreed that a priority for 2023 would be to intensify our cooperation in law and order to build a stronger policing and justice system, including through our PNG-Australia Policing Partnership. They agreed that the Bilateral Security

Treaty under negotiation should aim to further facilitate law and order cooperation and support for PNG law enforcement agencies.

16. Australia reiterated its long-standing position that Bougainville's future political status was a matter for PNG and the Autonomous Bougainville Government to resolve. Australia would continue to support the peace process.

CSEP Pillar 2 – Close Friends, Enduring Ties

17. Ministers welcomed the high level of engagement between Australia and PNG following elections in both countries and looked forward to maintaining the pace of their bilateral dialogue.
18. Ministers welcomed continued cooperation on our shared border, including the resumption of traditional visits within the Torres Strait Protected Zone.
19. To further support economic, business and people-to-people connections, Ministers welcomed Australia's new Pacific Engagement Visa (PEV) initiative for the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) commencing in July 2023. Ministers committed to increasing PNG's participation in the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme and expanding opportunities for Papua New Guinean PALM workers in Australia. Australia was supporting PNG to establish an expanded Labour Mobility Unit, including a fit-for-purpose office that would be open later this year.
20. Ministers also discussed ways to support PNG's technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and nursing colleges to meet Australian Certificate III standards in nursing, aged care and childcare to enable PNG to deploy more PALM care workers.
21. Ministers welcomed ongoing collaboration on joint border agency cooperation initiatives to enhance the security of the two countries' common borders and resilience to regional security challenges more broadly.
22. Ministers noted Australia's commitment to develop a First Nations Foreign Policy Strategy. Ministers welcomed a proposed visit to PNG in 2023 by the Australian Ambassador for First Nations People, once appointed.
23. Ministers noted the Australian Government's support for PNG's leadership of its bid to enter a PNG Rugby League Team in the Australian National Rugby League competition. This recognises that sport brings people together and deepens the enduring bond and friendship between the two countries.

CSEP Pillar 3 – Economic Partnership for Prosperity

24. Ministers welcomed the high level of ambition leaders held to ensure a mutually beneficial bilateral economic partnership going forward, and to explore ways to boost investment, including in PNG's agricultural sector, build resilience in important industries for food security in PNG, and further strengthen business ties. Ministers welcomed progress on a feasibility study examining potential new

trade arrangements and reaffirmed the commitment to have a draft report for both governments in the coming months.

25. PNG welcomed Australia's support for its priorities around budget repair and fiscal sustainability following the pandemic. Ministers noted Australia's cumulative budget loan support in the wake of the pandemic of just under AUD2 billion, linked to Papua New Guinea's economic reform program, and welcomed PNG's intention to finalise an IMF agreement on economic and fiscal reforms under a new multi-year program.
26. Ministers welcomed ongoing cooperation on infrastructure investments and noted around AUD200 million in infrastructure projects would be delivered in 2022/23 through the bilateral development program, in transport, telecommunications, electrification, social infrastructure and State-Owned Enterprise (SOE) reform. Ministers also welcomed the investment by the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific (AIFFP) of approximately AUD790 million in grants and loans to support major capital projects in ports (AUD621 million), roads (AUD76 million) and electrification (AUD92 million) across PNG.
27. Ministers highlighted PNG's renewed focus on agriculture as a key part of its development strategy, and agreement by leaders to deepen cooperation in this sector, including ways to build on Australia's significant investments across infrastructure, development of key commodities, and biosecurity. Ministers recognised the important role of trade in agricultural commodities in supporting livelihoods and contributing to food security. Ministers for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries met in the sidelines of the Ministerial Forum to advance these objectives.
28. Ministers welcomed the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on Forestry Cooperation, providing a basis for continuing the strong cooperation between nations around combatting illegal logging, building sustainable forest industries and facilitating positive forest management practices.
29. Ministers agreed that the bilateral development cooperation program would have regard to PNG's Mid-Term Development Plan 2023-2027.

CSEP Pillar 4 – Strategic Cooperation for Security and Stability

30. Ministers welcomed progress on the development of our Bilateral Security Treaty as a priority under the CSEP. They noted the agreement of Joint Statement of Commitment by leaders and timeline to substantively conclude negotiations by 30 April 2023 with a signing in June 2023.
31. Ministers committed to deepening our defence cooperation across all domains. Ministers reflected on the continued value of military assistance to civil authorities, such as during PNG's 2022 national elections through the ADF's

Operation Kimba. Ministers also noted milestones in our defence cooperation, including the handover of a new landing craft to PNG in 2022, continuing almost 50 years of landing craft cooperation.

32. Ministers noted the important priorities for our defence cooperation in 2023, which continued to focus on building PNG's sovereign, independent capabilities and improving the interoperability, and increased personnel exchanges, of our defence forces. These priorities included: joint exercises with Pacific partners, such as regional Exercise Longreach in PNG this year; further capability and training support to PNG's aviation, maritime, and land capabilities; increased secondments and exchanges between our military and public service personnel; and continued support to PNG's security and defence infrastructure needs.
33. Ministers reaffirmed the ongoing close cooperation to address crime and safety issues impacting Papua New Guinea, Australia and the Blue Pacific, consistent with the 2018 Boe Declaration on Regional Security.
34. Ministers recognised the importance of effective law and order and a strong justice and police system in underpinning Papua New Guinea's security and economic development and undertook to intensify cooperation in these areas, including to address PNG's priority needs. To this end, Ministers agreed to establish a Joint Ministerial Working Group to oversee expansion of cooperation in these areas. They noted the value of the current policing partnership, and the significance of working together in supporting policing operations in the Pacific region.
35. Ministers also welcomed the signing of the renewed Memorandum of Understanding on Cyber Cooperation between Australia and PNG in 2022, paving the way for deepened cooperation to continue building cyber resilience and more broadly supporting a safe, secure, and prosperous PNG, Australia and Indo-Pacific region.

CSEP Pillar 5 – Social and Human Development

36. Ministers welcomed Australia's enduring development partnership with PNG, with an estimated AUD602.2 million in total Official Development Assistance to PNG in 2022-23. Ministers discussed opportunities to align development priorities through PNG's new Medium Term Development Plan and Australia's new development policy. Ministers acknowledged the importance of resolving taxation issues to ensure the efficient and effective use of Australian Official Development Assistance, including through the issuance of Designated Aid Status Certificates.
37. Ministers welcomed PNG's increase to its budget appropriation for health and education, including to support the reintroduction of fee-free education in PNG. Ministers welcomed the strengthening of the education partnership including

through Australia's contribution to PNG's 'Improved Technical, Vocation and Training for Employment Project' with the Asian Development Bank, support to the World Bank and PNG aimed at improving early grades education, and the announcement of a new phase of Australia Awards that will deliver scholarships for study in Australia and PNG for up to 300 Papua New Guinean post-secondary students per year.

38. Ministers committed to progressing the skills development agenda through the Australia Pacific Training Coalition and implementing the 2020 Statement of Intent on TVET.

CSEP Pillar 6 – Near Neighbours, Global Partners

39. Ministers welcomed Australia and PNG's efforts in regional forums to support Pacific unity, which is central to a peaceful, prosperous and resilient region. As reaffirmed by leaders, they discussed the need to implement the Pacific Family first approach to regional security. They also committed to work together to implement the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific.

Declaration

40. This Joint Communiqué reflects discussions at the 29th Papua New Guinea-Australia Ministerial Forum held in Canberra, Australia on 17 February 2023.

Signed at: Parliament House, Canberra, Australia on: 17 February 2023

For the Government of Australia
Senator the Hon Penny Wong
Minister for Foreign Affairs

For the Government of Papua New Guinea
Hon Justin Tkatchenko MP
Minister for Foreign Affairs