



**ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER, HON PETER O'NEILL, CMG MP,
ANTI-CORRUPTION FORUM, PORT MORESBY,
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It is my pleasure to officially open this timely, and important, forum on corruption – and on fighting corruption in particular.

I want to thank the United Kingdom High Commission, and the UK Government, as well as International Governance Risk Group, for the lead you have taken in convening this forum.

I appreciate it, as does Our Government.

I want to speak today about how Our Government is addressing the corruption and abuse of office challenges we face.

But first I want to make some more general observations about corruption - and not just as it relates to Papua New Guinea.

Corruption is not just illegal and immoral. It is, especially in developing nations, a real threat to our very democracy.

If not addressed forcefully and resolutely it erodes public trust and confidence in leaders, in parliaments, and in the whole foundation on which our democracy exists.

When you look at the recent experience in North Africa, and elsewhere, where regimes that were both dictatorial and corrupt, have been overthrown by the sheer power of the people, you can see not just how damaging corruption is – but how determined and brave people become when it is endemic, and poisonous.

The movement towards democracy and freedom is unstoppable. For those regimes that resist it, it is just a matter of time. And that is how it must be.

We are proudly a member of the Commonwealth of Nations. One of the greatest attributes of the Commonwealth is the stand it takes against undemocratic rule and oppression.

Increasingly, the Commonwealth, and other international and regional organisations, will have to include in their agenda fighting corruption.

I don't believe leaders today can afford to be weak and compromising when it comes to fighting corruption. Those who are will come unstuck sooner or later.

So I regard corruption as a "cancer" that threatens the very fabric of democratic and representative government. It is also a real threat to our basic freedoms.

That is the basis on which Our Government is leading the way in our region and beyond – as I will outline in a minute or two.

There is a second aspect of "corruption" that needs more exposure and confronting.

The focus on corruption in Government – among elected and appointed leaders and officials alike – is necessary. But we must not in the process overlook one simple truth – corruption the private sector, including big businesses and multi-national corporations, as well as not so big business is a part of the problem.

Just as governments must make a tough stand against corruption so much the business sector.....and corrupt business people need to be pursued just as vigorously as corrupt public office holders and officials.

Fighting corruption is the challenge the whole of society faces. It is not just a challenge for elected governments.

FIGHTING CORRUPTION – THE PAPUA NEW GUINEA GOVERNMENT AGENDA

Ladies and gentlemen, that brings me to what Our Government is doing to put in place a comprehensive package of measures – laws and processes – to fight corruption in Papua New Guinea.

I hope that by the time I have finished, and by the time you have been briefed by the Chief Secretary and the officials engaged in the development and implementation of our anti-corruption agenda, you will agree with me that we are leading the way, and that we are setting out benchmarks other developing countries might follow.

I am not for one minute saying that what we are doing is perfect – but it makes giants strides I am proud of, and I believe our people will come to support and embrace.

There are many leaders who entered politics after a successful business and public career. These leaders were well off and comfortable in their life. And there are many too in our Parliament today.

These leaders did not enter politics to enrich themselves – They entered politics to “make a difference” in the lives of our fellow citizens, and to contribute to a stronger private sector and a stronger economy.

When I was elected Prime Minister in August 2012 one of my first steps was to establish Task Force Sweep, headed by respected lawyer, Sam Koim, with wide powers, and total independence from political or other interference. It was an interim step until I was able to fulfil my election campaign promise to establish an independent corruption against corruption.

It has made a significant number of arrests – and it has also served as a deterrent.

I then appointed our most senior public servant, the Chief Secretary, Sir Manasupe Zurrenouc, head the group developing a comprehensive package of measures to fight corruption, fraud and abuse. I did that because I wanted this project to receive top level priority and focus.

Last year we significantly increased the penalties for corruption and fraud.

Just last week the National Parliament approved by a vote of 91 to nil the constitutional changes needed to establish and independent anti-corruption commission. Ninety one to nil!

We will now move resolutely to introduce the Organic Laws that are needed to establish and resource it. The measures will also include “whistle blower protection” legislation – unique among Pacific Island nations – and sound Freedom of Information legislation.

The creation of our ICAC will not cause conflict with existing agencies, such as the Ombudsman Commission. It will be the central co-ordinating agency for the fight against corruption. It will build on the excellent work of Task Force Sweep.

It will show I am serious, and Our Government is serious about reducing to the greatest possible extent corruption, abuse and fraud, in public life, public office, and in government owned corporations and agencies.

We will carry out an extensive community education campaign before ICAC is operational. This is a whole of society challenge – not just one for governments alone.

I do not pretend for one minute that these measures along will end corruption. But they will make a real and immediate impact.

I believe that to seriously fight and triumph over corruption the whole attitude leaders, and officials, take must change. And so must the attitude of those in business who might be tempted to offer a bribe to get a business outcome or approval they benefit from.

There are a range of strategies other countries have taken to discourage corruption by politicians and by officials.

In Singapore, The Prime Minister, Ministers and Senior Officials have always been highly paid – to attract the best candidates to public office and to serve as a disincentive to corruption and abuse.

The Prime Minister of Singapore is paid over \$US1.5 million a year. Ministers receive \$US1 million.

Our closest neighbour, Australia, has also increased the salaries of its elected officials. Three years ago, the Prime Minister of Australia received just over \$350,000 a year, today it is just over half a million dollars.

I am not suggesting we need to increase our salaries now – especially when far too many of our people are enduring tough times. But it is an issue that Governments need to have a “dialogue” with their electors and communities about.

In Singapore it has clearly served as a deterrent to corruption. And I am sure our distinguished guests will point to other countries where the outcome has been the same – and probably some where it has not.

What we all need to do as part of the fight to reduce corruption is change our community’s attitude to elected office. The community needs to understand they elect MP’s to contribute to “good government” – and that includes improving the basic services they deserve.

But it must not include improper handouts and benefits for individuals or for companies. The pressure the existing mindset puts on elected representatives is grossly unfair. And it is a real temptation.

Accompanying our ICAC establishment will be a major public education campaign that needs to cover not just how people can report corruption, but also education on what the role of Government and public officials from the highest to the lowest is.

The whole approach of our community to what they should expect from Government has to change. Without it, the fight against corruption will just be a lot harder.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I have sought to outline the package of corruption measures we are implementing – and to raise some of the additional measures that might become necessary.

Our task is not just to prosecute corruption – it must be to deter it.

That is a massive challenge and - I hope this forum will help guide us even further on how we meet this challenge successfully.

I welcome visitors from our region and beyond. I hope you enjoy our hospitality – and that you get to visit other parts of our beautiful country.

It is now my pleasure to declare the Forum officially open.

HON PETER O'NEILL CMG MP

Prime Minister