



MINISTRY
Of
WORKS & HIGHWAYS
OFFICE OF THE MINISTER



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File:

SPEECH BY THE HONOURABLE SOLAN MIRISIM, MINISTER FOR WORKS AND HIGHWAYS OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

DOWH 49TH INDEPENDENCE ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Ladies and gentlemen, Acting Secretary, Deputy Secretaries, First Assistant Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, Regional Works Managers, Provincial Works Managers, All support staffs, Distinguished guests, Fellow citizens of Papua New Guinea,

It is my distinct honor to stand before you today, as we mark the 49th anniversary of our great nation's independence. Today, we celebrate our journey, our achievements, and the tremendous progress we have made since the 16th of September, 1975. As we reflect on these years, I would like to particularly highlight the remarkable progress of the road and building infrastructure sectors in Papua New Guinea—a key driver of national development and growth.

1. Historical Context

Our story begins 49 years ago, when we gained independence from Australia. At that time, our young nation faced immense challenges: limited infrastructure, rugged terrain, and isolated communities scattered across our beautiful but challenging landscape. Our road networks were sparse, and most of our people, especially in rural areas, had little to no access to basic services. However, from those humble beginnings, we embarked on a journey to build not just roads, but a nation united by accessibility, opportunity, and growth.

2. Post-Independence Efforts (1975 - 1980s)

In the early years following independence, our government, with the support of development partners, recognized that building a nation meant building the infrastructure that connects people. The first decade was largely focused on repairing and upgrading the existing road systems inherited from colonial times, which were limited to key urban areas like Port Moresby, Lae, and Rabaul. The Highlands Highway, one of the most significant infrastructure projects of that era, became a lifeline for the Highlands region, connecting it to the coast and facilitating the movement of goods, services, and people.

With the Highlands Highway as a foundation, the government embarked on numerous road projects to reach other isolated parts of the country. Although the progress was slow and met with challenges, including harsh weather conditions and limited financial resources, we persevered.

3. The 1990s: Laying Foundations for National Growth

As we moved into the 1990s, Papua New Guinea's economy began to diversify, and the demand for better road and transport networks grew. The mining and agricultural sectors expanded, putting further pressure on the infrastructure. The government responded with a renewed focus on the Works and Highways sector, increasing investment in road rehabilitation and new road construction. Rural connectivity became a priority, with new roads being built to link remote areas to the main highway systems.

In this period, the first significant efforts to develop the building industry took root. With growing urban centers, the demand for new commercial buildings, schools, hospitals, and housing rose dramatically. The Works Department, along with the private sector, started to build modern facilities that contributed to the betterment of our education, health, and economic infrastructure.

4. The 2000s: A Decade of Expansion

The 2000s marked a period of accelerated development in both the road and building industries. With the introduction of public-private partnerships (PPPs), the government leveraged the expertise and capital of the private sector to drive large-scale infrastructure projects. Roads such as the Sepik Highway, Trans-Island Highway, and several critical links between provinces were constructed during this period.

This decade also witnessed the expansion of our airports, ports, and government buildings, many of which were constructed to accommodate Papua New Guinea's increasing role in regional and global affairs. The rise of the LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas) industry further boosted demand for better roads and infrastructure, as well as the skilled labor force to maintain them. Our cities began to transform with modern buildings, marking a new era in urban development.

5. Recent Years: A New Vision for Connectivity

In the last decade, the Government of Papua New Guinea has made monumental strides in further enhancing our road and infrastructure networks. We have embraced modern technology and innovation to overcome our geographical challenges. Our road networks now connect over 70% of the population, with new roads linking once-remote provinces and districts. The recent completion of significant projects like the Lae-Nadzab 4-Lane Highway and the upgrading of the Highlands, Hiritano, and Magi Highways reflect our commitment to developing world-class road systems.

Moreover, we are seeing unprecedented investment in infrastructure. Through key partnerships with international donors and financiers, including the Asian Development Bank and World Bank, we have launched new projects aimed at ensuring sustainable infrastructure development. The Connect PNG program is perhaps the most ambitious of these projects, aimed at constructing over 16,000 kilometers of new roads, linking every corner of our nation including my remote district of Telefomin, Kaintiba, Oriomo, Maramuni, Pomio, Korobovi, and others.

6. Challenges and the Way Forward

Of course, we acknowledge that there is still much work to be done. The rugged terrain, the effects of climate change, and the need for regular maintenance of our aging infrastructure continue to challenge us. However, we are addressing these head-on. Through capacity building, training

programs, and institutional reforms, we are developing a skilled workforce capable of not just building but maintaining and modernizing our infrastructure.

The government's commitment to the "PNG Vision 2050" is clear: we aim to build an infrastructure network that is resilient, inclusive, and sustainable. Roads are not just physical connections—they are lifelines that bring health services, education, markets, and employment opportunities to our people. Our goal is to ensure that by 2050, every Papua New Guinean, no matter how remote their community, will have access to quality infrastructure.

7. Acknowledgements

On this significant anniversary, I would like to take a moment to recognize and thank our international partners, civil engineers, construction workers, policymakers, and communities who have contributed to building this country, quite literally, brick by brick and road by road. Without your dedication and hard work, we would not have the infrastructure we proudly stand upon today.

Finally, to the people of Papua New Guinea, our journey since 1975 has been one of resilience, strength, and unity. As we look toward the future, let us continue to work together to build a nation that thrives, where every road leads to opportunity, and where our infrastructure serves as a foundation for a prosperous and united Papua New Guinea.

Thank you, and may God bless Papua New Guinea!

HON. SOLAN MIRISIM, MP
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