



**Speech
by**

**Hon. Peter O'Neill CMG MP
Prime Minister**

**Seventy-Second General Debate Session
of the United Nations General Assembly**

23 September 2017

- Your Excellency Mr Miroslav Lajcak, President of the General Assembly;
- Mr Secretary-General of the United Nations;
- Excellences and distinguished delegates.

I am honoured, on behalf of the government and people of Papua New Guinea to address the Assembly today.

Mr President,

I am pleased to convey my country's appreciation to the outgoing General Assembly President, His Excellency, Ambassador Peter Thomson of Fiji for his outstanding Presidency this past year.

Now, as you assume your mandate, Mr President, Papua New Guinea welcomes and congratulates you and the Republic of Slovakia on your election.

I pledge Papua New Guinea's support for your Presidency under the areas of priority you have chosen.

Mr President,

I would like to also welcome and extend our best wishes for every success to His Excellency, Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations in his new, demanding and vital role.

Secretary-General, it is heartening to note your passion and drive to transform the UN.

This body must better serve the international community in an accountable, transparent, inclusive and fair manner.

For this, you have Papua New Guinea's strong support.

Let me also pay tribute to the former Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon for the outstanding work during his tenure.

Mr President,

Our world continues to be confronted by unprecedented and multiple challenges - that are increasingly complex.

We are facing the serious adverse impacts of an uncertain global economy, climate change, the declining health of our marine habitats, and heightened security fears.

The challenges that we face are unlikely to be overcome, or achieved, by individual countries on their own.

I am sure that is our shared view.

We must work together to building a better, more stable and equitable world for all.

We have to do more, we must renew our faith in the promise of the Charter of the United Nations, which remains a beacon of hope for humanity.

Mr President,

Papua New Guinea recently completed our tenth national election.

Our Government would like to place on record, our profound appreciation to our development partners, including the United Nations, for the valued support provided to us for the conduct of the election.

In returning to office, our Government pledges to further increase our focus on our core policies of the past five years.

These are policies that are changing lives of our eight million men, women and children for the better.

We have introduced free education that is available right across our country, leading to a doubling the number of children in school, most of the new students being girls.

We are extending universal healthcare to our people, and this helping people to live longer and is keeping families together.

We have commenced the largest infrastructure program in our Nation's history – building more roads, ports and public buildings, including hospitals and teachers colleges.

There is a particular focus on infrastructure that promotes economic development and greater opportunity for our rural majority.

These policies underpin our commitment to sustainable economic growth and attaining our Sustainable Development Goals.

Mr President,

A nation such as Papua New Guinea can have all the best intentions, and the best plans, to continue to advancing our country – but we live in a rapidly globalising world, where events and influences are beyond national control.

Many of the challenges that confront us today are not of our making – but we bear the consequences of actions by others, and the task of addressing them!

Global economic uncertainty, depressed commodity prices and political instability all undermine growth in developing countries.

Mr President,

Papua New Guinea remains concerned at continuing threats of violence in the world today.

Be this by terrorist groups or the actions of rogue states.

We condemn, in the strongest possible terms, the recent nuclear detonations and missile tests by North Korea.

These are direct threats to the lives of millions of innocent people in the United States, Japan, South Korea.

In particular we are concerned that these activities are taking place in the Pacific region.

This is in direct breach of the will of the international community, as expressed through the numerous resolutions of the Security Council.

Rather than inflamed rhetoric that could have drastic consequences, we call for peaceful resolution through political dialogue.

Mr President,

One of the greatest threats to humanity comes from within our global community of nations.

Climate Change is real, and it is taking lives and destroying communities.

It is putting the future of nations at real risk.

The recent barrage of hurricanes to impact on the Caribbean and the United States is an example of some of the extreme weather that confronts us all.

Papua New Guinea offers our condolences to the countries affected, and we call for this loss of life to be another wake-up call.

Papua New Guinea and other Pacific Island nations remain highly vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change.

This includes extreme tropical storms, severe droughts and seawater flooding in coastal communities.

The seeds of climate change we see today were laid by developed countries over past decades and centuries.

While their development was enhanced – developing countries today continue to suffer because of these actions.

The chances for development in smaller countries have been harmed by the mess created by the now powerful Nations.

In Papua New Guinea, and around the world, our people are dying as a consequence.

And living standards are being eroded and opportunity denied.

The world needs increased action now, to make further commitments to reduce emissions, and to help communities respond effectively to the climate change challenges.

We are committed to the Paris Agreement, and to the implementation of domestic policies to reduce our own emissions.

We welcome and support Fiji's COP 23 Presidency and working together for a successful meeting in Bonn.

Mr President,

Papua New Guinea is an island Nation.

The resources in our oceans and seas are tied to the very well-being, and economic development of our people.

We share growing serious concerns at the declining health of the oceans and seas that sustain so many nations.

Uncontrolled and poorly regulated human activities, including illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing, pollutants and plastics, and marine debris are killing our waterways.

Global fish stocks are being decimated and ecosystems are being destroyed, and people are being forced to abandon their traditional homes because they have no jobs or food.

This is not a local problem, but it is a global problem that needs greater global action.

We do what we can at a local level.

In Papua New Guinea we have established an integrated National Oceans Policy, and supporting office to ensure a more coherent national approach to oceans governance.

Our commitment to SDG 14 is undiminished, and was demonstrated by our support to the Call for Action outcome document, and the voluntary commitments we pledged.

We are pleased with the historic outcome of the first-ever UN Oceans Conference, held four months ago in this Assembly to support the implementation of SDG 14.

We welcome and support the offer from Kenya and Portugal to be the next co-hosts of the UN Oceans Conference.

Mr President,

Another major problem and challenge we face in the world today is the dislocation of people from their homes and communities.

We are facing a refugee crisis in the world today.

People are being pushed out of their homes because of war, natural disasters and the loss of livelihood.

This is the plight of millions of people from developing countries, who face dismal futures – if they survive at all.

The responsibility for accommodating these refugees, people who through no fault of their own, lies with the countries whose actions led to their displacement.

We live in a globalising world, but the privilege of free travel is only held by a lucky few.

They have principally been born in a developed and industrialised country.

We need a more sensible and humane approach to the mobility of people.

We only have one planet, we all share that planet, and people should be free to travel and settle when their homes have been taken away from them.

We talk about greater freedoms for the people of the world.

We talk about freedom of speech, democracy, transparency, good governance and human rights.

But talk is easy.

All too often the concept of human rights is just the theme of convenience.

We need to make the process of migration less complicated and more humane.

UN REFORM

Mr. President,

Papua New Guinea fully supports reform at the UN.

The United Nations must be fit-for-purpose.

It must be contemporary with the environment in a rapidly changing world.

There is broad agreement on the importance of UN reform, but the main challenge that remains is how to go about it, and how to actually deliver it!

We are heartened by the Secretary-General's passion, decisiveness and swift action on this agenda, including the need for ensuring gender parity in the top levels of the UN Secretariat.

He has our undivided support.

In respect of the Security Council reform process, this must advance the core interests of the vast majority of UN Member States.

This is to make it more broadly representative, transparent, accountable, effective and efficient – given its critical mandate.

The Security Council needs to be more effective in its response to present global challenges and circumstances.

In conclusion, Mr President,

The opportunities before the global community are great, but they are also extremely challenging – particularly for developing economies such as Papua New Guinea.

But regardless of where we come from – we must do more.

All nations, large or small, rich or poor, weak or strong, must strengthen our resolve and work together.

I thank all members for the achievements that we continue to make through the United Nations and I pledge Papua New Guinea will work with you to achieve much more.

Thank you Mr President.