

# Welcome to Prime Minister Marape

## Speech Transcript

Thursday 8 February 2024  
Parliament House, Canberra

The Hon Anthony Albanese MP  
Prime Minister of Australia

My friend, Prime Minister Marape, on behalf of the Government and the people of Australia, it is a great pleasure to so warmly welcome you to the heart of our democracy.

You are the first leader of another nation to address us in this chamber since 2020.

And the first leader of a Pacific island nation to address the Australian Parliament, ever.

It is fitting that such an honour belongs to Papua New Guinea.

Australia and Papua New Guinea are close in every sense of the word.

We are the nearest of neighbours.

The most steadfast and trusted of partners.

And the very oldest of friends.

Our connection stretches back thousands of years, to Torres Strait Islanders and Indigenous traders, weaving together their cultures and communities.

And while the modern relationship that we celebrate with your visit today has evolved and expanded to include every field of human endeavour, from agriculture and medicine to education, sport and the frontline of clean energy.

Our bond still holds true to the spirit of those very first exchanges.

We embrace each other as equals.

We learn from each other as neighbours.

We are there for each other as mates, especially when times are hard.

And in everything our people do together, we nourish our common interests, our shared values and our unique connections.

Including, of course, a great and growing passion for that mighty cultural institution, rugby league.

Sport brings our people together.

It's part of our shared bond.

And Prime Minister, like you, I hope the day will come when the people of Papua New Guinea can cheer for a team of their own in the National Rugby League.

Next year, we will commemorate, and celebrate, the 50th anniversary of Papua New Guinea's independence.

A momentous day in the life of both our nations.

Australia will always be proud of the part we played in that time of historic change.

Yet we know that independence was never our gift to give.

Independence was the people of Papua New Guinea's right to assert, it was your country's opportunity to seize.

It was an act of great courage, profound national unity.

And a statement of self-belief as well as self-determination.

It sent a message to our region then, it stands as an example to our region now.

It speaks for a universal truth: every Pacific nation, big and small, has the right to shape its own future and secure its own destiny.

Mr Prime Minister, half a century ago, the Whitlam Labor Government worked with purpose and pride alongside your leaders and your citizens to lay the foundations of a new democracy.

Today, our Government is partnering with yours, to build the architecture of peace and opportunity.

To fulfil your vision of a modern and prosperous future for your people.

A vision that both our peoples are helping to make real, teaching together in PNG schools, studying together at Australian universities and TAFEs.

Working together, including through the expanded and reformed Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme.

Not only bringing essential skills to Australian farms and aged care homes, but also sending good wages back to families in your country.

And working together to build the infrastructure that can transform the words and ambitions of our agreements into concrete realities.

New projects backed by Australia, including through the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific and built by the people of PNG.

Over 1,800 kilometres of roads connecting services and support and supplies to remote villages and giving your farmers and producers access to city markets.

Upgrading six priority ports and building better biosecurity, so PNG can sell more of your world-class cocoa and coffee and seafood to the region and the world.

Investing in new clean energy projects, to bring light and power and economic opportunity to homes and schools, hospitals and health centres.

Building new undersea cables, breaking-down the barriers of isolation to bring jobs and education in reach of boys and girls alike.

Mr Prime Minister, Australia wants to build this future with you and secure it with you, as your primary partner.

Central to this is the new Bilateral Security Agreement that we signed here in Parliament House in December last year.

The beginning of a new era of cooperation between our nations spanning defence, policing and border and maritime security.

And meeting the urgent challenges of cyber security and climate change.

An agreement for the future, anchored in our shared history.

Mr Prime Minister, on the other side of the world, in a quiet French village called Villers-Bretonneux, when the children of the local school play in the yard each day, they look up at a banner that reads:

“Do not forget Australia”.

A sacred command from one generation, to the next.

Given in honour of the memory of more than 3,000 Australians who died defending the town from German attacks during the First World War.

Villers-Bretonneux is a name that lives in Anzac legend, so is Kokoda.

And when Australians reflect on the heroism the people of Papua New Guinea showed in the defence of their homeland.

When we remember those soldiers and coast watchers, serving and sacrificing together.

The families and communities who risked their own lives, to feed and guide and help Australians in desperate need during our darkest hour.

And when we remember the care and kindness your people extended to wounded diggers in their hardest moments of pain and fear.

I say to you: Australia will never forget Papua New Guinea.

And those words do not need to be displayed on a sign, or engraved on a memorial.

Because, they were written by the courage of your people.

And they are recorded in every Australian heart.

When I had the great honour of addressing the PNG Parliament at the beginning of last year.

I said this would be a 'decisive decade' for both our nations and for the Indo-Pacific.

It will be a decisive decade for us and it can be a decisive decade because of us.

Because of what we decide, together, Papua New Guinea and Australia.

The co-operation and stability we can build together.

The peace and security we can uphold together.

The growth and prosperity we can achieve together.

The broader opportunity and deeper equality we can create together.

The democratic values we can champion together.

Two free, proud and independent democracies.

Two countries home to unique environmental treasures.

Two lands rich in natural resources and richer still in human potential.

Two bold, diverse and resilient populations, ready to make this decade our own.

Neighbours and mates. Partners and Equals.

Prime Minister Marape, Australians will never forget what the people of Papua New Guinea did for us in the past.

Let us never doubt what we can achieve together in the future.

You are most welcome in our Parliament today, you are welcome in Australia, always.

We all look forward to your speech.

<https://www.pm.gov.au/media/welcome-prime-minister-marape>