



Papua New Guinea Country Statement

by

**Honourable James Marape, MP,
Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea**

to the

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High-Level General Debate**

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**His Excellency Mr. Philemon Yang, President of the General Assembly;
His Excellency Mr. Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations;
Distinguished fellow Heads of State and Government;
Excellencies;
Ladies and Gentlemen**

It is my honour to address this august Hall again on behalf of the people of Papua New Guinea.

Mr President, I congratulate you, the Government and people of Cameroon, on your successful election to lead the work of the 79th Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

And I thank your predecessor, H.E. Mr Dennis Francis, for his excellent leadership during the 78th UN General Assembly.

I also extend my gratitude to the UN Secretary General for his strong leadership to mobilise the support of the global community on key issues that require our collective efforts, especially in addressing climate change related issues.

Mr President, Your selected theme for this debate, “Leaving No One Behind: Acting Together for the Advancement of Peace, Sustainable Development, and Human Dignity for Present and Future Generations” is most pertinent.

I thank you and commend your foresight in drawing our collective attention to the work we must still do for peace and humanity, considering the vast challenges and continuous threats we face today.

Mr President, I will speak on three threats to humanity that is complementary to this theme. These threats, in my view, are Religious Intolerance, Poverty induced by Climate Change and Geo-political differences and sovereignty contests over territories and people. And I will prefix this statement here with my country as backdrop.

Mr President, Papua New Guinea is the world's most culturally and linguistically diverse nation, with over 830 languages, and a myriad of sub-ethnicities and sub-cultures that are still authentically indigenous. A real-time, modern-day 'Nation of A Thousand Tribes'. We embrace this diversity and do our best to function as "one people and one country", leaving no one behind.

In terms of environment, my country hosts up to seven percent of the world's biodiversity, mostly housed within a tropical rainforest that is the third largest in the world and a vast marine ecosystem. We sustainably manage our forest, land and sea because our livelihood depends on them.

Papua New Guinea, in our own small way, teaches the world on living in balance with nature, tolerating cultural diversities and practicing environmental stewardship. The father of modern PNG, the late Great Grand Chief Sir Michael Thomas Somare, was a champion in this regard. In fact, Sir Michael championed Article 5 of the Paris Agreement into existence in the early 2000 as a reflection of PNG's strong affinity to the forest, land and sea. In this regard, my country has been contributing to the global discourse over the last two decades on environment management and climate change. Unfortunately, this has been met with very little return action. However, we continue to stand ready to assist the UN family in this area.

Mr President, Over the course of our 49-year history as a country, our challenges have been many, compounded by the vast ethnolinguistic diversities and cultural complexities and the small size of our economy. However, we have held on as a united PNG. We have moved from the least developing nation status to a lower middle-income nation and we aim to become a higher-income earning country by 2045, migrating from a primary resource economy to a manufacturing economy within the next 2 decades.

I assure you all that we have aligned our development plans consistent with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. Our aspirations mirror that of this august institution. In fact, our National Constitution's Eight Point Plan of 1975 directs Government to deliver equal development to all citizens in PNG. Our nation's Vision 2050, launched in 2010, compels Government to develop PNG to a Top 50 nation by 2050 in terms of Human Development Index.

Papua New Guinea looks forward to submitting to the United Nations a full progressive report in July 2025 at the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) Second Voluntary National Review (VNR) covering work we have undertaken, the challenges we continue to face and the steps we are taking going forward that will culminate in 2030.

Mr President, If you can indulge me in sharing an insight into managing a diverse, multi-cultural people and what has helped us to blend as one nation. I put to you the role of Christian missionaries and their work that dates back as far as 1845 when the first Catholic missionaries arrived in my country. In 1975 when we gained Independence, Christianity became profound.

Consistent with your theme, Christianity in PNG has been the front runner of unity, bearing messages of peace and sustainable co-existence to embrace diversity of cultures, languages and tribes into one human family, living in the natural habitat as God's creation. Since then, Christian churches have contributed immensely to our country's development through their education and health programs. Real Christianity teaches Love, Peace, Unity, Forgiveness and continues to give meaning to the mission to 'Leave No One Behind'.

Whilst PNG is identified as a Christian nation, I want to assure you all, that Section 45 of PNG's Constitution protects individual's right to choose their practice of faith and religion. We subscribe strongly to Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion. United Nations has been the anchor of this God-given right of humanity, and I offer my country's support to the protection of individual's choice and rights to practice their faith, and urge that, this remains a key duty of the United Nations.

Mr President, Since the dawn of humanity, many wars have been fought and many lives lost as a result of religious intolerance. Earth's history is stained with the blood of innocent people, who have died from State, tribe or church sanctioned killings. The United Nations must condemn laws that encroaches upon individual's choice of religion and worship, this is a God given right!

I see the issue of enforcement of religion upon another as a threat to peace and co-existence of mankind. I ask United Nations to keep watch over religious freedom for all people.

Mr. President, The second threat I see facing humanity is Poverty induced by climate change. The pursuit of wealth has caused man to plunder Earth of its resources beyond the threshold of sustainability, with little consideration for our children's future. The acceleration of climate change, for instance, is a direct result of mankind's insatiable appetite for resources. In an attitude of 'survival of the fittest', nations and corporations jostle and stampede over each other to harvest resources, causing environmental degradation, deforestation, burning of fossil fuel, and pollution, spiraling our planet into climate catastrophes that will further engender poverty.

Ocean nations like mine continue to live with climate change-induced sea level rise and weather pattern changes which have now become an existential threat. That is why we welcome the Chair's summary of the High-Level Meeting on Sea-Level Rise.

Together with other Pacific Island countries, we continue to recognise the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea as the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out. We reaffirm our commitment to the Pacific Islands Forum Declaration on the Continuity of Statehood and the Protection of Persons in the Face of Climate Change-Related Sea-Level Rise.

Last month, the Pacific Island Leaders Forum in Tonga officially recognized these climate change manifestations as existential threats to our Pacific people. We stand united in support of the Vanuatu-led UNGA proposal for the inclusion of sea-level rise as a standalone agenda item in the UN General Assembly and other relevant UN processes.

Mr. President, Despite our economic needs, PNG remains committed to safeguarding both our blue ocean life and our green forest life for Earth's children.

As a rainforest nation, PNG continues to play a proactive role to progress our commitments under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement by undertaking adaptation and mitigation efforts.

However, accessing of climate finance continues to be a challenge for PNG. We call on United Nations to look into this matter with urgency or we will utilise our rights to liquidate our forest and marine resources to achieve our development aspirations, including alleviating poverty.

It is for this reason, I speak in solidarity with all forest nations, especially those in the Congo Basin and Amazon Basin for adequate compensation if we are to preserve our forests which, in fact, are the lungs of Earth.

Mr President, Papua New Guinea's vast rainforests, rich biodiversity, marine life, and indigenous people and cultures are now at the crossroads of great change – either of preservation, or loss and extinction.

The responsibility to save our environment and the planet should bear on all of us in equal measure. It is now up to members of United Nations to work together to save these forests which are global assets.

On this note, I want to thank my good friend HE Emmanuel Macron, President of France, for mobilising European Union funding for a forest conservation area called Managalas in my country. This is the kind of partnership that should be encouraged. Again, I remind the world. The forest of PNG is a global asset, and it must be preserved at a price transferable to improve the lives of my forest people. I call for others out there, especially those who have big carbon footprints, to offset these with preservation of our forests.

Mr President, The third threat facing humanity, in my view is Geo-political differences and sovereignty contests over territories and people.

Increasing geopolitical conflicts and tensions are fueling fragmentation and protectionism around the world. The restrictions on trade, disruptions in supply chains and growing competition are crippling our local economies.

We need to examine peaceful strategies and solutions, and invest in peace-building initiatives for de-escalation, mutual understanding, and co-operation to build trust and foster peaceful relationships. The UN's role in this must be respected by all nations, for it was for these very reasons that the United Nations was born – so the world does not face another world war again.

Mr President, I say violence begets violence, and is evil no matter what the justification there may be. Peace must be achieved by peaceful means, no matter how long or unjust it may seem. We live in a time where, at a press of a button, an atomic or nuclear bomb has the potential to destroy our planet.

All conflicts can be resolved if we allow United Nations one rule book to take prominence over our own parochial interests.

In PNG, we partner United Nations in national and sub-national peace building efforts. One good example is in the de-escalation of our own internal conflict on Bougainville, when the UN supervised the Bougainville Peace Agreement in 2001, and continues to ensure we comply with all requirements of that Agreement, including bringing the 2019 referendum results to our National Parliament. To this day, I am happy to report that no bullets have since been fired on Bougainville.

This is the role and strength of United Nations, and I call on all nations and people to respect the charter of this institution and the reasons for its existence. PNG, therefore, calls on the UN and its systems to begin the process of Security Council reform, including the removal of veto power so all nations can sit equally on the table, in as far as decision-making is concerned.

Mr President, We must do all we can to restore stability to the far reaches of Earth. Global conflicts cause domino-effect and the subsequent impacts are felt throughout the world with inter-generational wounds.

Mr President,

As I conclude, let me remind us again of our collective responsibility to work together to preserve our Planet and our Human Race.

In 1987, space philosopher Frank White wrote of the “overview effect”, a cognitive shift astronauts experience after viewing Earth from space and returning to our planet. He records astronauts experiencing state of self-transcendence, appreciating Earth much more, and feeling very strong connections with all people on the planet.

I am sure Neil Armstrong would have felt this very strongly gazing on Earth from the moon on July 20, 1969. Looking back, he would not have seen only his beloved America, but the Blue Earth, the planet he called Home.

I call upon all esteemed leaders to adopt a bit of this ‘Overview Effect’, to see our world through new eyes each day; to appreciate Earth’s grandeur; to treasure its life-sustaining gifts, and to do everything within our means to protect and preserve it. This starts with all of us leaders to think correctly and act correctly for our children’s collective future.

We have but the one Earth, after all. Let us rise above religious bigotry, fight poverty together, and co-exist in peace, under the charter we ourselves have written into this magnificent institution called the United Nations.

I thank you for this opportunity to speak.

May the peace of my Lord Jesus be upon you, Mr President and all people of Earth, our beautiful life-sustaining planet.

God bless.