

Opening Speech
by
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Minister for Community Development

For us to take ownership from within, a basic requirement is a mature civil society based from an indigenous conceptual framework. I cannot speak on behalf of the other nations represented at this PIANGO Council meeting but certainly for PNG I am confident to say that we have a lot of work to do both from the government and the non-government perspective to build a strong civil society movement that is treated as a genuine partner in the development process for our nation. Extending from the national perspective, it is also imperative that sub-regional and regional civil society links are strengthened on issues of commonality that confront our nations – the unique issues facing small island nations as well as the underlying cultural factors that are often ignored as irrelevant in the face of the bulldozers of socio-economic and cultural globalization.

However I would strongly maintain that those often ignored indigenous factors in the development process are fundamental to the future of any region and especially the Pacific region where our laid-back lifestyle and subtle politeness protocols often allow other societies to dominate our development agenda.

Distinguished guests – friends, I want to emphasize the importance of this PIANGO Council meeting and the forthcoming CSO parallel forum. Undoubtedly it will get limited media coverage compared with the hype of the arrival of the Pacific Prime Ministers for the Pacific Island Forum but the reality is that this meeting and the forum should be recognized as more important than the PIF in the total scheme of things.

Governments come and go – that is the nature of politics – but civil society exists forever – it can be massaged in different directions and for different purposes but it is the final determinant of the nature of any society and any nation.

A weak civil society movement that is not organized and lacks integrity perpetuates weak government systems that civil society itself so often criticizes as being corrupt.

Civil society and government are two sides of the one coin – they present a different face but must always be linked in integrated partnerships that forge relationships for the benefit of the whole society.

For PNG this meeting is particularly important because it brings together the NGOs and CSOs in PNG in a major way for the first time in a decade since the collapse of NANGO. I sincerely thank Margaret, Susan, Lady Los and all those involved in moving forward with the Melanesian Centre for NGO Leadership and encourage other NGOs to help towards re-establishing a focused civil society movement in PNG making co-operation and partnership the driving force rather than competition for donor funds which has always divided civil society movements in the past.

It is a time for all NGOs and CSOs to assess their integrity and define not only their roles as separate organizations but also their status in promoting integrated movements co-operating on issues of importance to national development. This is not easy in societies that are divided by ethnicity, race, language and religion but it is very important to persevere in forging strong indigenous CSO movements in the Pacific region. It is complicated also by the fact that we (both Govt and non-govt) are all competing for limited resources rather than co-operating to maximize those limited resources. Sadly donor agencies also contribute to the competition both between themselves and within societies as they pursue their agendas, their timeframes and their desired outcomes.

It is a very complex situation and thus needs all of us to be co-operative and flexible. The line between co-operation and compromise is sometimes hard to define making underlying codes of conduct very important for both sides of the coin.

As the Minister responsible for community development and relationships with civil society how do I view the role of civil society? I believe a strong civil society that operates within an analytical human rights framework for development must be the foundation for all national development.

Just and lasting change can only be achieved when communities **own** their future.

Mobilisation must start with national leaders but sustainability depends on continued community participation. And community participation must be built on integrated partnership not parallel systems – as nations we must move away from a blaming mentality to a more mature proactive affirmative mentality.

All of us must be willing to walk in the shoes of others – the shoes will not all fit but at least we should try to walk in them. As someone who is a strong advocate of the importance of civil society but during this small segment of my life am walking in the shoes of the political arena I have found it a sobering experience to feel how powerless I actually am and how much I need a strong focused civil society as a partner in development. I am grateful that this meeting will undoubtedly move the civil society agenda forward in PNG.

Civil society has an enormous role to play in all societies – both as a social conscience for their nations and as important advocacy and development agencies. The ideal is for government to actually support proven civil society organizations as partners in development through peak organizations. At present we are no where near that ideal in PNG but it is the basis of the new policy direction of the DFCD. The policy direction promotes integrated community development with government as a facilitator in the process with strategic CSO partners. It will not be easy and will need to develop trusting mutual relationships to re-establish government presence in new ways at community level. At this point I want to acknowledge the Secretary for the Department for Community Development, Mr Joseph Klapat, his deputies and all those present here plus those not here and thank them for their hard work and dedication in steering the new

direction that I have initiated for the department. They work long hours with limited resources and have been willing to take on what some people have described to me as the “too hard” basket of odds and sods and lost causes that make up my Ministry. Their hard work has changed the attitude of many and will change the future for the ordinary people of PNG.

It is the habit of a few NGOs to constantly undermine government and for government to also take a defensive approach to NGO criticisms – it is important to address this tendency from both sides of the coin because it only reinforces concepts of weak and failed states and that is self-defeating for newly emerging nations such as many of the Pacific nations. We must defend our sovereignty without compromising democratic integrity.

I have thrown some of our common challenges before you. I hope that during your meeting you will have the opportunity to venture far beyond the routine administrative and structural issues of such a meeting and really enter into some intellectual and philosophical debate reaching beyond the realms of emotional reactions to events and into the realms of developing an underlying philosophy for Pacific NGOs – a philosophy that respects our diversities but also identifies some of the commonalities that can define a Pacific way to the future based on a groundswell that can help us indigenize our responses to our common regional and international commitments to our people. We talk about the many social and economic agreements that we are part of with the present emphasis on the MDGs but what do they mean for our people? How do we ensure that we change the rhetoric to reality for our people? It is your challenge and it is my challenge and the answer lies within us. We must find it together.

I wish you well with your deliberations and ask you to always keep our DFCD OPEN strategy in mind wherever you are.

- O - Ownership of issues and challenges
- P - Partnership with stakeholders
- E - Empowerment of people and communities
- N - Networking for a co-ordinated effort.

And I invite you all to be members of our MAD CAT TEAM that makes up the Department for Community Development. As Margaret Mead said “small groups of committed people can change the world”. With a team of Pacific mad-cats like this we will change our Pacific world.

**I invite YOU to be members of
the MAD CAT TEAM
Who are the MAD CAT TEAM?**

They are people who believe in possibility
thinking and want to

MAKE A A DIFFERENCE

as **CHANGE A GENT TRAINERS**

by recognising that

TOGETHER EVERYONE ACHIEVES MORE