

University of Papua New Guinea 70th University Graduation

School of Business and Public Policy

30 April 2025

Speech by Bart Philemon

It is indeed a great honour to stand in front of you today and participate in this very important occasion celebrating the 70th graduation of the students of the Public Policy and Business of the University of Papua New Guinea.

To you the graduates of 2025, University of Papua New Guinea has been your intellectual home, as well as your community for a number of years. It has brought you together, it has challenged you and it has also inspired you. It has transformed you the hopeful, the curious the passionate and inspired you into the graduating class of today with fortitude and resilience.

Today we celebrate not just the culmination of your academic journey but we are also looking forward to the dawning of the future, where you are equipped with knowledge in Business and Public Policy and that you are now poised to make a real difference to Papua New Guinea's future.

You are now in charge of MV PNG, to steer it back to the right course and sail it into the next 50 years.

For me, it is an immense privilege standing here before you today on this momentous occasion of your graduation. The day is filled with accomplishment, filled with joy and is filled with a promise of a bright future for you and for Papua New Guinea.

As you look back on the years of your rigorous studies and dedication, you must also look forward to the exciting possibilities and also the challenges that lie ahead. As graduates in Business and Public Policy, you are not just equipped with knowledge, but you are also armed with the potential to share a better future for the betterment of our beautiful country.

Your education has prepared you to navigate the complex landscape, where Business and Public Policy intersect. You understand the importance of the sustainable practices, and the role of the Government in fostering economic growth and the social well-being of our people.

Our country needs inductive thinkers and leaders who can bridge the gap between the private sector and the public service.

You are the individuals that are ready to drive positive changes through realistic, effective policies and responsible business practices.

The world is constantly evolving and so must Papua New Guinea. You must remain curious, you must continue to learn in your workplaces and never stop seeking new knowledge.

Your actions after you enter the workforce, will have a direct impact on our country. So always act with integrity, fairness and a strong sense of social responsibility and not in self-interest.

The challenges which Papua New Guinea is presently facing are complex and require collaborative efforts. You must build a strong network, seek diverse perspective and work together to achieve common goals.

The path to success is rarely easy. Embrace challenges, learn from setbacks and never give up on your dreams.

As you embark on the new chapter of your life, remember the values instilled in you during your years at the University of Papua New Guinea.

Use your knowledge, use your skills and use your passion to make a real difference in the progress of our beautiful country's development progress. The future is yours and I have no doubt that you will share it in a way that is both meaningful and impactful for the betterment of our people and for our beautiful country.

As we celebrate the success of your graduation today, we must also prepare to confront and manage the future of Papua New Guinea under the difficult economic and social development conditions which we are currently confronting with.

Papua New Guinea today is facing an unprecedented challenges of high inflation, high unemployment, fuel shortages, kina devaluation and lack of sufficient level of foreign exchange. Increased challenges of law-and-order management, shortages of medical supplies in hospitals, health centres, clinic and aid posts throughout the country, continuous power blackouts throughout Papua New Guinea over the last decade and the ranking of Papua New Guinea as one of the most corrupt countries in the world, including a listing within the International Corruption Perception Index of 29 out of 100 - one of the most corrupt countries in the world.

Ever since Papua New Guinea gained its Independence fifty years ago, it has slowly descended into a slippery-slope situation where it is dreaming to become the richest black Christian nation in less than five years, by 2030.

The present coverage and the services by the government departments had badly deteriorated progressively over the last 50 years. Poor management of resources including human resources. Slow and inconsistent economic growth which cannot

match the population growth. Lack of investment in developing human skills and capacities in the government workforce.

There is a real need for the public servants to have a real sense of purpose, by following clearly-defined career paths which leads to a professional working atmosphere, where the public servants were capably skilled so that they can positively and effectively contribute to nation-building.

The Post Independence Development discourse in Papua New Guinea has been about the challenges of translating the vast potential of this beautiful country into high standards of living for everyone.

The potential for the future prosperity and the hope for the people of Papua New Guinea are presently under a real threat of inefficient, incompetent and corrupt leadership in both our political leaders and the public servants.

Every government sector within the administrative sector, economic sector and the social sector are currently in the dire need of the serious needs of resuscitation – all these sectors are in the intensive care unit. Competent specialists' hands are required on deck, so to speak, to bring all government sector's out of the intensive care unit and slowly nurse them back into better health for the sake of our future generation.

If these challenges are not given serious attention now, then our only way over the next 50 years is to end up in the morgue.

The Post Independence discourse in Papua New Guinea over the last 50 years has been about the challenges of transiting the vast potential of this beautiful God blessed country into improving the standard of living for everyone.

The potential for the future prosperity and the hope for our people of this country are under a real threat of inefficient, incompetent and corrupt leadership.

Papua New Guinea by comparison with many developing countries in our region and around the world, is exceptionally richly endowed with both renewable and non-renewable resources, however since Independence we have not so far used the proceeds from these rich endowments to lay down strong building blocks for the sustainable future development for our children and the grandchildren.

Government after government over the last 50 years have been making the same mistakes. These governments have been throwing a huge amount of money just will-nilly into various projects and mistakenly hoping that money alone will salvage our entire development challenges.

This of course will not happen, as is the sad case over the last 50 years in which billions of Kina has been squandered, leaving behind no visible tangible building blocks for the

future development of our country, instead leaving a huge liability behind for our children and grandchildren to cope with in the future.

It is not the absence of wealth that we are suffering from in Papua New Guinea but clearly it is the absence of competent effective leadership management of that wealth that we are suffering from.

We must never allow ourselves to underestimate the linkages of good competent, incorruptible leadership and management and the well-being of our people.

Good incorruptible leadership and management are not something we can hold up as some vague notion or distant goal. It is something that is essential, something non-negotiable, something we must doggedly pursue regardless of personal costs, regardless of barriers and regardless of setbacks, difficulties and frustrations for without good incorruptible leadership and management, our people will continue to suffer as they have been over the last 50 years.

It says in the Bible in the book of Proverbs Chapter 29, verse 2 and it is also inscribed at the front entrance into the Parliament House and I quote; “When the wicked rule, people suffer. When the just rule, people rejoice”.

Without good and competent leadership and management, our tax income will forever be used in servicing foreign, unproductive debts as we are presently doing. All our important physical infrastructure will not be properly maintained. Our capacity to provide the much-needed basic services to the bulk of our people will be depleted.

Without good and competent leadership, children will not receive the quality education they are entitled to, fathers cannot find employment and cannot support their families.

Without strong leadership and management opportunities to grow our economy, foreign investment will be limited. Without strong leadership and management we lose support of our development partners and we lose the confidence of our financial lenders.

Without good leadership and management, we waste the very money that should be used to strengthen the infrastructures and programs essential to achieve aspirations of our people. According to United Nations ratings, Papua New Guinea ranks among the lowest or even worse in the Human Development Index. Our child and maternal mortality rates remain very high. The very sad thing is that high mortality rates occur mainly from preventable diseases. Our life expectancy rates are low around the mid-sixties. Our literacy rate is low with many of our children lacking access to good quality education. Close to half of our population are living in poverty.

Basic government services have deteriorated to such a state that they can no longer provide the basic services they are supposed to provide. Schools, aid posts, health centres, roads and bridges, airstrip maintenance, police and prison services, and national and the provincial administration has all broken down.

I see poorly-educated children. I see seriously run-down public buildings. I see news headlines everyday about fraud and corruption within our society.

In urban centres, I see the social effect of poverty expressed in terms of squalid living in squatters' settlements in which crimes and violence readily breeds.

So how can a nation of people so richly blessed with such wealth and natural resources suffer in the way that so many of our people do as we are marking 50 years of our Independence.

Where is the wealth that we are so richly blessed with going to? Clearly much of the people's natural wealth has not filtered through to people in terms of social services. It is not the absence of wealth in Papua New Guinea that we suffer but it is the absence of competent leadership management of the wealth that we suffer.

We must never allow ourselves to underestimate the linkages between good competent leadership and the well-being of our country.

Good incorruptible leadership management is not something we can hold up as some vague notion or distant goal. It is something that is essential, something that we must doggedly pursue regardless of personal costs.

So, to me good incorruptible leadership and management is not an option – it is absolutely a necessary we must ardently pursue.

Our founding fathers 50 years ago searched high and low. They have searched domestically and they have searched Internationally. They have searched in the oracles of our ancestors and they have searched in the chronicles of the established nations to determine the best way forward for Papua New Guinea, so that they can give their all.

Our founding fathers also wanted our people of Papua New Guinea to be holistically strong. To be equal and fully participating in our nation's development. To be proud and patriotic in their national identity. To be self-reliant. To be environmentally conscious. To be respectful. To be appreciative and wherever possible to adopt Papua New Guinea ways and incorporate them into modern ways.

These visions were incorporated into Papua New Guinea's Constitution which then gave the legal framework for a birth of a new nation to be known as Papua New Guinea.

The Constitutional Committees recommendations were incorporated into the National Goals and the Directive Principles which were mostly aspirational.

That was then their vision. This would have practical relevance to the people of this country, only if they are used, and are practically applied to the decision-making process.

These National Goals and the Directive Principles are as follows:

1. Integral human development
2. Quality and participation for all
3. Enhancement of national sovereignty and self-reliance
4. Responsible management and the use of natural resources sustainably, and
5. Sharing resources in Papua New Guinea in ways for the benefit of all clans, all tribes and all communities rather than for the individual benefits.

These sets of goals were to be the key pillars upon which the respective governments over the last 50 years were expected to deliver Papua New Guinea from the subsistence economy to the modern cash economy.

The vehicles to deliver the outcomes of these goals were to be through plans and strategies.

Since Independence in 1975, respective governments have embarked on seven five-year Development Strategic Plans leading up to 2009 covering a period of 35 years. In my entire 20 years in Parliament, I have never seen or heard any reports from any planning ministers to cabinet or the Parliament as to what has been achieved by those plans.

In 2009, the Grand Chief, the late Sir Michael Somare, launched the Development Strategic Plan 2010–2030 leading to Vision 2050. The aim was to facilitate entrepreneur enterprises in both rural and urban Papua New Guinea with the target of creating two million jobs by 2030.

Fifteen years of this plan has already gone past with five years remaining and no one in government have provided any statistics to show us that we will achieve our planned target of creating two million jobs by 2030.

Secondly, the National Strategic Development Plan 2010–2030 was to set up on those foundations to ensure that by 2050, Papua New Guinea will be smart, will be wise, will be fair, and will be a happy society. Also, by 2050 Papua New Guinea will be ranked in the top 50 countries in the world in the United Nations Development Index in creating opportunities for personal and national development.

At present, going by the Human Development Index, Papua New Guinea is ranking 154 out of 193 countries around the world, which is placing Papua New Guinea in the bottom as the 39th least developed country in the world.

Papua New Guinea various development indicators at present are clearly showing that overall, our social and the economic indicators are really miserable and are sitting in the bottom in line with the low-income poverty ridden countries.

Papua New Guinea's development performance indicators over the last 50 years are progressively getting worse:

- Economic growth is insufficient to impact each household;
- Poor performance on social indicators compares to other Pacific Island countries;
- Absence of quality planning data and the monitoring framework to accurately measure planning outcomes;
- Development plans not resourced and not well implemented;
- Lack of disciplines in overspending, unproductive spending and not adhering to plan priorities;
- Relying too much on unrenewable resources; and
- Poor governance and corruption hampering Papua New Guinea's development which is leading to very serious disciplines in basic government services.

The biggest challenge we are facing today is corruption. It is a cancer eating away at the fabric of our society, demands our immediate attention. We must stand together united in combating this insidious disease, ensuring future integrity and the prevailing of accountability.

Corruption in its many forms, from petty bribery to the large-scale embezzlement, undermines our progress, erodes our trusts and steals our future potential. It is the thief in the night, the saboteur of development, the silent oppressor of the poor.

The money meant for our schools, our hospitals, our infrastructures, is diverted into the pockets of a few, leaving our communities struggling to survive.

We see the effects of corruption every day, roads crumble, hospitals, health centres, clinics, aid posts lack resources and our children are denied quality education. The very foundation of our society is weakened, leaving us vulnerable to instability and despair.

But we are not powerless. We have the power to choose a different path of integrity and accountability. We must demand transparency from our leaders, hold them accountable for their actions, and refuse to tolerate corruption in any forms.

You have a unique opportunity to lead by example. You must begin your career by fostering a culture of honesty and ethical behaviour. Report instances of corruption not out of fear, but out of a commitment for a better future for Papua New Guinea.

Let us support organisations that fight corruption and let us educate our children about the importance of integrity.

The fight against corruption is our collective responsibility. It is our duty to stand up, to speak out and demand change. Let us set our target today to make Papua New Guinea a beacon of hope, a place where integrity and accountability are not just words, but a normal way of life. Let us choose to be an agent of change for a better Papua New Guinea.

Once again let me congratulate you on your significant milestone. Your journey of learning, growth and dedication has culminated in this moment.

Embrace the future with the knowledge and the skills you have gained, and remember the importance of ethical leadership and commitment to make positive impact on our beautiful country. You have acquired valuable knowledge and skills in Business and Public Policy. Remember to apply these tools with integrity and a commitment to ethical leadership.

Our communities are very much in need of your talents and your vision. Use your education to make a difference whether it's in driving economic growth, shaping policy or serving your country.

The path ahead will have its challenges but remember the resilience and the determinations that brought you to this moment. Embrace your journey, stay curious and never stop learning.

Your contribution to Business and The Public Policy will help shape the future. Use your skills and knowledge to build a more sustainable, equitable and prosperous country for all.

I wish you all the best in your endeavours, may your future careers be fulfilling and your impact be positive in the future development of our beautiful country.