

## **New Year Wishes and Resolutions**

New year is when many make determined resolutions, like more exercise, stopping smoking, reducing drinking and making a greater contribution to families and community. We also wish each other a happy and perhaps prosperous year, whilst hoping for some good fortune for ourselves. Most know what is right and wrong, and what is beneficial for ourselves and the community and what is destructive. So why go through this ritual of exchanging wishes and making resolutions and then continuing as before, ignoring the wrongs around us?

Some species survive only through cooperation. Humans are social by nature, but also, even in socialist countries, fiercely individualistic, generally putting own gain as highest priority. It is our individualism and capacity to think logically and independently which allows humans to be so creative and, with the desire for material benefits, provide the basis of capitalism and the free market as the most dynamic economic force for generating growth and improvements in human welfare.

On the other hand, it has long been realised that unrestrained pursuit of personal gain can be highly damaging and must be held within limits, in the same way that other behaviour must be subject to agreed bounds or laws, to prevent excesses which invariably impinge upon other people's rights and freedom. Different societies choose slightly different rules according to their own needs and experience, and their rules may seem excessive or too lax to others and sometimes to their own population.

For a society to function it needs resources, skills and energy (all of which PNG has), it also needs rules of behaviour which are sound, and accepted by the whole community. In addition to custom, PNG has an enlightened Constitution and generally sound laws, if in places unduly complex, cumbersome or outdated and with obsolete penalties. Laws are worthless unless receiving wide community support, and enforced by respective authorities, including police and other authorities and the Courts. Executive government must also follow those laws and provide funding for their application.

Investment is essential to achieve future returns, whether by large businesses such as plantations or airlines, or small enterprises like smallholder production or making iceblocks. One requirement for investment, whether by companies or informal sector participants, is sound law and order; knowing your output will not be stolen or destroyed in a tribal fight. Recognition of property rights by police, courts and the wider community is essential for investment. For "common properties", such as marine resources, strict restraint is required through licensing to ensure those resources are not exhausted by some operators, behaving like pirates, extracting all accessible fish or prawns. The rewards for extracting some natural resources are so great, there is a strong incentive to use any means to get them first, whether ignoring resource owners' rights, the environment, or corrupting politicians, licensing authorities and law enforcers. Sadly, in PNG we've seen too often how readily some leaders and officials are ready to sell out to these interests, often for modest gain relative to the impact and resource value. It usually entails small inducements at first; a few beers, golf clubs or brown envelope, and then

those leaders or officials are captives, no longer representing the interests of State or community. We all know who these people are: politicians and officials who have new houses or cars way beyond what's affordable on their salaries, sometimes bought for girlfriends and paid in cash.

It's the new school year; students are returning to classes with high hopes for the future. We know, however, from experience that many have been disappointed, with few prospects, whilst many have faced unacceptable domestic violence. We know also that too few of PNG's children have access to primary let alone higher education, or other basic services.

It can be better in future, but only if the whole community decides that it will be. This year is an election year. Many candidates will be promising the earth for people's votes. Some plan to abuse the electoral system to win: getting false names registered; arranging block or multiple voting; buying votes; even stealing and inserting bogus ballot boxes. All this has been done before, as we all know.

For PNG to have a bright future requires saying "enough is enough", and following up words with actions, not turning a blind eye. Ignoring laws and good practice and failing to honour commitments, such as basic service provision, affects everyone and destroys the prospects for the country's children. PNG must not compromise its future by allowing rampant malpractice to continue, whether in elections or application of other laws or processes, whether abusing ILGs for individual gain; issuing licenses or land titles for reward; appointing wantoks or people with vested interests to boards or responsible positions for which they are unsuited; giving sole discretion over appointments to individual politicians; turning a blind eye to repugnant abuse against women or children; or allowing tribal conflicts to continue destroying lives and prospects of whole communities.

PNG loses when some businesses obtain licences or avoid complying with obligations, whilst others, refusing to pay bribes, are unable to obtain approvals and invest elsewhere. Similarly, if good candidates miss out to people who've cheated to secure victory, PNG suffers. Rules must be applied evenly and fairly, whether to large corporations, small enterprises, grand leaders, junior officials and new contestants; some might say rules should apply particularly to the legislators who make them!

A recent paper by the Jilin Provincial Research Institute of China, undertaken for INA, noting PNG's poor past economic record, highlighted some major prospects for growth, notably tourism and downstream processing of products, currently exported in raw state, such as logs. They observed that PNG's beautiful and clean natural environment should be protected and provide a major basis for development, notably through tourism and producing a wide range of horticultural products (fruits, vegetables, nuts, flowers, fungi). China should know. Whilst containing some of the world's most dramatic scenery and cultural icons, much of China's population inhabits extremely polluted cities. Whilst China is now urgently tackling its environmental problems, caused largely by dependence

upon coal, its citizens and others from crowded cities, appreciate the virtues of a clean environment which PNG enjoys.

But opportunities, including tourism, don't come overnight. We must provide suitable investment conditions, both steady and even-handed, and for tourism particularly, steadily improve our law and order reputation, and become more competitive. Three small but positive steps for the new year are: - finally, a generally-respected police commissioner has been appointed and accepted, if reluctantly; Air Niugini has announced fares which should attract international and domestic travellers and provide a real boost to tourism (the Government must also slash excessive charges); and one café in NCD –at Andersons- has started to sell fruit juices using local produce! Our local produce, highlighted in the Jilin study, has been overlooked, but should provide much more employment, for producers, processors and retailers, including the informal sector.

Let's ensure our resolutions and wishes for ourselves and PNG come true in 2007, through our own perseverance and rejection of malpractices prevalent in the past, starting with Parliament overturning the NCD Act they slipped through last year, which is simply bad law and an invitation for malpractice.