



Christmas New Year Message

From The Immigration and Border Security Minister
Hon. Westly Nukundi Nukundj, MP



of the citizens on matters of border security.

CHALLENGES OF COVID-19

I admit 2020 has been a challenging year for us at PNG Immigration and Citizenship Authority (PNGICA) with the threat of the global Corona virus (Covid-19) pandemic as our officers at the frontline and border posts have been extremely exposed to the threat of Covid-19 and the movement of people in and out of the country has greatly been affected as we implement strict control measures and guidelines of the Controller in protecting our borders.

I have taken up the ministry at a very challenging time at the height of the outbreak of Covid-19 around the world and I must put on record that I was the first minister to invoke my powers under the laws to ensure a complete shutdown of all ports of entry and I was criticized for that. However, that effort has not gone to waste, it has certainly paid off as PNG is one of the few countries with less Covid-19 cases as our people continue their 'new normal' approach in the midst of the Covid-19 challenges.

In executing my directives I admit PNGICA plays a critical role apart from our health officials in protecting our borders and ports of entry from the spread of the Covid-19 both day and night and I give credit to all officers who worked under extreme conditions.

SUPPORT FROM PRIME MINISTER & NEC Hon. Westly Nukundi Nukundj, MP

Based on the premise of confidence and in the new cabinet lineup, the Prime Minister has again bestowed me added responsibility with PNG Customs and National Agriculture Quarantine Inspection Authority (NAQIA) forming part of border security apart from Immigration. This now means the entire Border Security Ministry is now complete and I will ensure border security is encompassed in all wider spectrums from cargo and goods, plants and animals and movement of human beings.

Also during this festive season, I am proud to say that the National Executive Council (NEC) under the chairmanship of Prime Minister James Marape has supported me and have given the approval for the transfer of Foreign Employment Division of the Department of Labour and Industrial Relations to PNG Immigration and Citizenship Authority. It now means that both work permits and visas will be processed by one organization and that responsibility has been mandated to PNG Immigration and Citizenship Authority, in essence there will now be one stop shop and will cease the burden of time consuming and easy convenience for our clients and other stakeholders involved.

TASKFORCE SECRETARIAT

With the achievements of putting all border agencies under me as one Minister (Immigration, Customs, NAQIA, Foreign Employment - Work Permits) this now paves way for easy transition and to put a submission before the NEC for the establishment

and funding of the Task Force Secretariat to respond effectively to gross border issues around the country and I assure the nation this will be achieved next year.

I wish to inform all citizens that I have seen and read in both the mainstream and social media about issues and complaints being raised by citizens on influx of foreigners, foreigners taking over reserve businesses, abuse of our citizens, abuse of visas, etc., and in direct response to that I have taken the drive to set up a special investigation task force team to address and investigate those issues and the team is already in motion as you read about the arrest and prosecutions around the country and it will continue - starting next year. I will put out a hotline number to vet complaints and ensure a national response unit is put in place to respond on short notices and as mentioned above the recent taskforce team will now be converted into a Secretariat to enable it to have wider ranging powers, funding and operate separately from the main agency.

CHALLENGES AT THE BORDER FRONTS

With all these achievements, I share the credit and on behalf of the Marape-Basil Government would like to pay tribute and appreciate all the staff of Papua New Guinea Immigration and Citizenship Authority in headquarters at Waigani, Lae, Mt Hagen, Kokopo, Wutung, Daru, Buin, Manus, Alotau and all overseas

mission function rang-

ing from Australia (Brisbane and Cairns), Manila, Kuala Lumpur, New Delhi and Beijing for all the tireless efforts in protecting our borders and maintaining our sovereignty. At the same time I would like to commend you for facilitating movement of people either it be for business, employment, tourist, meetings, NGO/Religious activities and bringing the organization this far - Congratulation to all of you. Overseas Missions are the last frontiers and guide for any foreigner to be scrutinized and vetted through the issuance of visas before they enter our shores, our strategic land borders from Vanimo in Wutung demarcating the land boundaries from the Republic of Indonesia signifies the importance of national security, trade and people to people relations, whilst the same applies in Daru in Western Province towards Saibai Islands and Torres Strait into far North Queensland, Australia.

Further from the Western Province in Weam station and on to the hinterlands of Bensbach, Bula and Torasi in itself is wide and very challenging when it comes to border security. The same can be said of the border post in Buin, Autonomous Region of Bougainville towards Gizo in the neighboring Solomon Islands. We have managed to secure our borders through mutual respect and understanding based on joint border agreements and regular dialogues every year.

PILLARS OF IMMIGRATION AND BORDER SECURITY

The two cornerstone pillars of any immigration and border security systems around the world firstly is all about State Sovereignty, protection of borders from unscrupulous illegal entry and other cross border transnational crime and secondly the utmost function of any immigration system is to facilitate trade and foreign investment, transfer of skills and knowledge through the issuance of appropriate visas to facilitate and stimulate economic growth.

Under my leadership in the first twelve (12) months from December, 2019 to November, 2020, PNG Immigration and Citizenship Authority has changed from being a stagnant and most criticized entity to a most performing agency.

Thousands of visas have been issued to facilitate trade and encourage foreign investments, at the same time the enforcement component of the migration laws have been tightened up with the setting up of special investigation task force team visiting all the 22 provinces to ensure strict compliance of the rules and regulations governing the use of entry visas - I admit hundreds of foreigners have been arrested and prosecuted and internally corrupt officers have also been arrested and terminated and it will continue into the new year as I will be implementing the recommendations of the special investigation team into malpractices in the organization. I am serious in my ministry as my ministry will play a critical role in achieving the pillars behind the 'Take Back PNG' slogan, as my ministry will be at the forefront to assist in encouraging foreign investment to stimulate economic growth for our country and also ensuring that our borders are protected from illicit activities and I admit it is a mammoth task, unlike other Ministries, my Ministry is confronted with challenges everyday concerning activities happening at the border every 24 hours.

ACHIEVEMENTS

In the New Year, I will have put in place strategic plans; KPI's and have the best team in place to achieve the overall objective of the Marape-Basil Government.

Since being given the Ministry by Prime Minister Marape in November 2019, I set out five (5) priorities

1. Clean up Corruption
2. Regulate visa agents
3. Investigation task force team
4. Effective and fast visa issuance
5. Set up of help Desk

I must admit I have achieved almost all of them in a space of 11 months, almost 15 officers are under spotlight, several of them have been terminated, suspended and more will face the same fate as I implement the recommendation of the Internal Investigation team in the new year. Since I took office I installed a special investigation team headed by a qualified and experienced no nonsense officer, almost hundred foreigners have been arrested and prosecuted around the country through the operations carried out by this team. I have been advised on all the existing visa agents and their activities and know all the visa agents and their conduct of business.

In this festive season I wish to inform you all citizens that I have seen and read in both the mainstream and social media about issues and complaints being raised by citizens on influx of foreigners, foreigners taking over reserve business, abuse of our citizens, abuse of visas etc., and in direct response to that I have taken the drive to set up a special investigation task force team to address and investigate those issues and the team is already in motion as you read about the arrest and prosecutions around the country and it will continue - starting next year I will put out a

hotline number to vet complaints and ensure a national response unit is put in place to re-

sponse on short notices.

Also starting next year, I will also be encouraging prudent approaches in the way visa agents conduct their businesses and this will see visa agents being regulated, monitored and given added responsibilities. Once the right visa agents are in the business this will result in effective and fast processing of visas without delays. Since the setup of help desk lots of genuine complaints have now been registered and unscrupulous activities have been identified and outstanding cases have been sorted out without delays.

Starting next year I wish to assure all our valued clients, foreign community and PNG citizens that I will ensure the five (5) priorities mentioned above will be achieved in no less than six (6) months and I am confident to say that because in the last 11 months of my experience in office, I have already identified a cream of elite officers who will be given higher responsibility to ensure that the organization is responsive to the needs of its clients and also effective response to national issues concerning border security in lesser time.

Apart from regulating visa agents I will put in place a system where all foreigners applying for visa extensions will have to undergo additional medical requirements whilst in the country through selected medical practitioners with outstanding laboratory facilities to screen and ensure foreign workers are fit to work and this will also assist employees and recruiting firms to vet and release unfit workers as it will be a win-win situation for all parties.

REFUGEES AND BOMANA CENTRE

As by now, the nation should be aware that the number of refugees in PNG flown in from Manus Island into Port Moresby has declined steadily as many have already been settled in third countries around the world especially in USA and New Zealand and the remaining refugees will be sent out once all processes and approvals are done by participating countries.

During my time as Minister, I will ensure that the issues of outstanding refugee matters are completed under the Marape-Basil Government. The Bomana Immigration Centre (BIC) will continue to detain any refugees who exercise extreme threat to the well-being of citizens whilst being given opportunity to reside in identified sites, and the BIC facility is now being used as a holding facility for illegal immigrants and other foreigners apart from refugees who breach immigration laws and engaged in disreputable activities. Starting next year more foreigners who engage in disreputable activities around the country will be apprehended and detained at the BIC facility in preparation for deportation and removals as the facility is an important holding center for national security purposes as it will hold people who demonstrate serious threat to our country.

OUTSTANDING MATTERS

I also wish to inform many of our foreign friends and families who have been waiting to join us as citizens that in the first three (3) months of the new year all outstanding citizenship applications and this also includes permanent residents and long delayed visa applications will all be sorted out - this is my assurance. Border security is a complex organization that encompasses both security and diplomacy in negotiations of security issues to protect sovereignty with mutual understanding and with a view to facilitate foreign investment and trade.

Over the last 11 months in office, I admit lessons have been learnt and also at the same time I have identified all the discrepancies, delays and malpractices and all these will be a thing of the past because in the new year, I will put in place a very strong leadership team that knows the 'bolts and nuts' of immigration and border security with a strong diplomatic experience to drive the organization and address these issues of concern.

CONCLUSION

Once again let me assure all citizens, foreign community and our clients/business partners that 2021 will be an exciting year of doing business in a most effective and prudent manner and my office and ministerial staff will also be available to assist apart from the mainline staff should there be any issues underpinning my Christmas and New Year message - amidst the challenges of Covid-19, let's make 2021 and 2022 a memorable year in a win-win scenario for all parties and clients that are engaged in immigration business.

With these I wish all the citizens, our foreign friends and investors a Merry Christmas and a prosperous new year, 2021.

Hon. Westly Nukundi Nukundj, MP
Minister for Immigration & Border Security