



Office of the Minister

STATEMENT

ISSUED BY

HON. RIMBINK PATO, OBE, LLB, MP
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS & IMMIGRATION



ON THE
FIRST READING OF CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS TO ENABLE DUAL CITIZENSHIP
TO NATIONAL PARLIAMENT

I am pleased to present, for first reading by the Parliament, a bill to amend the Constitution to enable Papua New Guineans to hold more than one citizenship, and to clarify the limitations that may be placed on the personal liberty of asylum seekers.

Citizenship is what makes us Papua New Guinean. It is our birth right and we cherish it as proudly as we cherish our Constitution, our flag and all symbols of our Independence and nationhood.

At the time of Independence we were rightly concerned about the threat that foreign influence posed to our self-determination. In those years it made sense to restrict Papua New Guineans from holding any other citizenship – and to require them to demonstrate their love for our great nation by forsaking any other citizenship that they previously held.

Since that time we have grown as a nation. Our economy has begun to prosper, our society and institutions have matured and our stature within the international community has increased.

As we have grown, the world has shrunk. We are now part of a truly interconnected world. More Papua New Guineans now travel in and out of our country than at any other time in history. As our national wealth grows, this trend will accelerate.

International mobility has brought broader opportunities for education, business, technological innovation, cultural and religious dialogue and exchanges of new ideas than our forefathers could have dreamed. It is an exciting new millennium and PNG is poised to take advantage of its possibilities.

In the midst of these twenty first century opportunities Papua New Guineans are disadvantaged, compared to the citizens of more than 60 other modern nations, by our inability to take up a new citizenship without automatically losing our PNG citizenship.

Most of the Honourable Members in this House have friends or family living, working or studying overseas. Although they may have lived in other countries for many years, their access to jobs, services, benefits and educational opportunities are limited by their inability to take up the citizenship of that country.

Those who do make the hard choice to take up a new citizenship have their link to the land of their birth and their ancestors irrevocably severed.

Papua New Guinean children, who have one foreign parent, face the same painful choice when they reach the age of 19. Children from many other countries don't have to choose between the citizenships of their parents – why should ours?

Dual citizenship makes sense.

It will encourage our best and brightest to maintain their link with PNG. It will encourage those who have previously lost their PNG citizenship to reforge their bond with their homeland. It will encourage highly skilled migrants to truly set down roots here and commit to building our nation.

We recognise that the extension of rights to dual citizens must be measured, considered and qualified. For this reason, under the proposed amendments dual citizens will have most of the same rights as other citizens, but will not be permitted to vote, hold public office, own land or have free access to official documents in PNG.

The Government will also limit through Regulation the range of prescribed countries with which dual citizenship will be permitted.

These limitations strike the right balance between on the one hand bridging the gap between PNG and the globalised world, and on the other hand providing adequate safeguards for our people and our institutions.

Our traditional past and our sense of national identity are precious to us and we must continue to value and safeguard them. These are in no way diminished by introducing dual citizenship, but the level of opportunity available to our people is greatly expanded.

The Government committed to this noble objective under the *Alotau Accord* because it recognises that this change will enhance stability, strengthen the economy and weave rich new threads into the social fabric of our nation. Equally as importantly, it will make life easier for thousands of Papua New Guineans.

I urge all Honourable Members to support this important amendment.

Alongside this dual citizenship change the Bill also introduces a Constitutional amendment to put beyond doubt the Government's ability to limit the personal liberty of asylum seekers and other foreign nationals transferred to PNG under regional arrangements.

The Government of PNG is committed to working with Australia and other partners to stop the scourge of people smuggling in our region.

Over the past decade, more than 1,000 vulnerable asylum seekers have tragically lost their lives at sea in our region.

PNG is processing the refugee claims of people who have travelled in this manner, and will provide settlement to those found to be refugees. Those found not to be refugees will be sent home.

Without a doubt, these arrangements are saving lives.

The number of illegal people smuggling boats in our region has dwindled. More than 100 people have voluntarily chosen to return to their home countries. Those who legitimately need protection will receive it.

But these life-saving arrangements are at risk of being undone. Certain Members of this House have initiated frivolous legal challenges aimed at derailing these arrangements.

This must not be permitted to succeed.

For this reason the Government has introduced an amendment to the Constitution clearly specifying that personal liberty may be restricted for the purposes of holding foreign nationals under this kind of regional arrangement.

The Government does not restrict personal liberty lightly. Such restriction is not punitive. It is an administrative measure closely linked with Sections 42f and 42g of the Constitution and enacted within Sections 15A-D of the Migration Act 1979.

Importantly, this amendment supports a major humanitarian initiative that protects refugees.

This is the year of implementation for the Government of PNG. In implementing these two major policy initiatives the Government is clearly demonstrating its growing place in the world:

- both for its increasingly mobile and globalised citizens
- and as a regional leader in humanitarian protection and the prevention of people smuggling.

Authorised by:

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