



**DEPARTMENT OF THE PRESIDENT
AND
BOUGAINVILLE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**
Office of the President

International Women's Day Statement

The International Women's Day that is held on March 8 of every year celebrates the importance and contributions of women to society. As the IWD website implies, "it is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. The day also marks a call to action for accelerating gender parity."

This year's theme, "Be Bold for Change" is a call to all women to rise up and let your voices be heard; to be active agents of change, in your communities and within your families. The World International Day is a day for women to unite, reflect and advocate the cause for women to be on an equal footing in society today. Women must now be leaders who are not afraid to effect change; this does not mean restricting it to changing the societal roles of women but acting as a catalyst for change to effect social change, political change and spiritual change.

Despite living in a modern society in a global community today there is still discrimination of women. It is a fact that no one person can effect change but only through a collaborative effort that unites women will we see a positive change that closes the disparity between gender inequality and other forms of discrimination against women. So it is imperative that women present a united front to address these issues. We must strive to inculcate the values of discipline and Christian principles that encourages respect for gender and most importantly respect for yourselves as creations of God.

This day also presents an opportunity for women to reflect on their roles in society and evaluate the progress they have achieved so far. Since Papua New Guinea attained independence forty years ago, the stereotypical role of the PNG house wife has made an enormous leap into the twenty-first century. No longer are they the meek housewives behind the kitchen maintaining their so called place behind their husbands, the women of PNG today proudly stand tall with

their heads held high and have become, leaders, businesswomen and very highly educated professionals as they share their dual role of motherhood and career woman. This shows the sheer determination of our women and the respect of the men to allow this change to happen.

Bougainville women are proud women and they have also adopted the sweeping changes in gender parity that has revolutionized PNG society. The traditional role of women in most parts of Bougainville has always been, custodians of the land, providing a safety net to society and keepers of the peace. This role has not changed; women still play a vital role in contemporary Bougainville today.

I am also proud to say today that a new role that Bougainville women have assumed is one that has redefined their roles in Bougainville and that is of peace maker. It was through the sheer will and determination of brave Bougainville women who stood up and called for peace during the bloody war on Bougainville. This call echoed throughout the whole island and the response was the ensuing cease fire and eventual peace that followed.

Through the negotiations for the peace on Bougainville to the formative years of the Autonomous Bougainville Government women have played a pivotal role in the progress and development of Bougainville. The ABG recognises women as an important stakeholder and that is why our policies have always encouraged equal participation of women in important decisions that affect Bougainville's future. The most important step that the ABG has made in fostering women's parity in Bougainville was the creation of the three regional women's seats in the Bougainville House of Representatives. Apart from the equal opportunity to contest the constituency seats Bougainville women still have a guaranteed voice and representation in the ABG through these three reserved seats for women in the house.

I congratulate the women of Bougainville for their tireless efforts in Bougainville not just as mothers but also as leaders. Their continued efforts must be lauded as we strive to create a new socio-economic political order that is free from oppression and subjugation of ones creed or gender orientation. I also challenge the women of Bougainville to take heed of this year's International Women's Day theme, "Be Bold for Change" as we embark on this very important journey to our ultimate political future. Women must now be the catalyst that encourages unity, unity that starts from the home and flows out to society as a whole. Bougainville must no longer be a place where men and women are considered separately, there are no longer men nor women but only a people, a united People of Bougainville is what we must now project.

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