



## **Australian High Commissioner**

### **Vanuatu**

#### **Government of Vanuatu Farewell**

**Speech delivered by Australian High Commissioner to Vanuatu, H.E. Heidi Bootle  
23 April 2024**

- Tanggio tumas Hon Praem Minista, Charlot Salwai Tabimasmal blong save hostem feawel risepsen blong mi. Hem I wan honor.
- Mi enjoyem bigwan ova tu yia we mi bin serve olsem Hae Komisina blong Australia blong wok wetem Gavman blong Vanuatu blong prokresem ol praeoriti blong Ostrelia mo Vanuatu.
- Mifala reflect long morning tode long stay blong posting blong mi long peak blo COVID, long tufala wik blong mi long quarantine, mo afta wan win out long public wan wik bakagen long isolation afta mi gat COVID.
- Over the last two years we have faced numerous challenges together, not least the three tropical cyclones last year, Judy, Kevin and Lola.
- Hon PM, yumi agri long mone, Vanuatu save count long Australia.
  - Within hours of TC Lola the Hon Prime Minister and I joined our teams to assess its impact from a Royal Australian Air Force plane.
  - Within days of Judy and Kevin, Australian support, including HMAS Canberra with engineers and helicopters, arrived to assist the most affected areas in Vanuatu.
  - I acknowledge here also Franz partners.
- Olsem Honourable Prime Minister hem I talem me, Vanuatu mo Australia stap olsem clos frens long taem finis, since well before Independence.
- And the ties between First Nations Australians and Melanesian communities stretch back over our shared ocean and over time.



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- The Melanesian Arts and Culture Festival in 2023 stands out as a highlight for me; an invaluable showcase of our respective Melanesian cultures.
  - Australia’s contributions to this milestone event, hosted by Vanuatu in collaboration with the Melanesian Spearhead Group, included supporting Torres Strait Islanders and Australian South Sea islanders to participate.
- We recently invited Hans Ahwang, a Moa Island man from the Torres Strait, to join us in Vanuatu for our national day event.
  - Hans performed custom dances and sung a traditional language hymn with our Australian High Commission Choir.
  - While he was in Vanuatu, Hans also learned he is descended from Tanna; we were honoured to play a small part in his journey of reconnecting with his Tanna family.
- And last week we were pleased to have legendary sportsman Mal Meninga visit us at the Australian High Commission.
  - Mal is an Australian icon and a man Tanna through his South Sea Islander heritage – and has long been an inspiration to young Australians and ni-Vanuatu on and off the field.
- 2023 was a big year, not just for cyclones.
  - Australia’s Governor-General, Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for International Development and the Pacific all visited Vanuatu.
  - These visits followed closely behind our Foreign Minister who came with a bipartisan delegation in late 2022.



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- The momentum has continued into 2024.
  - We have hosted both Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Honourable Matai Seremaiah Nawalu and Minister of Internal Affairs, the Honourable Johnny Koanapo Rasou in Australia recently.
  - Both Ministers discussed Vanuatu’s national priorities with a range of Australian ministers, including DPM Richard Marles.
  - Our government reaffirmed the importance Australia places on its deep and enduring partnership with Vanuatu.
- Minister Koanapo’s visit, and also the visits by Minister Mahe last and this year, gave workers the opportunity to share stories about their experience.
  - We continue to work together to improve the scheme and ensure it works the best it can for both our countries.
- What makes our Vanuatu-Australia partnership grow from strength to strength is our mutual commitment to action and delivering for Vanuatu’s people and communities.
- Our partnership is not only about what we do and deliver together, but how we do it.
- The infrastructure we partner to deliver – roads, water supply facilities health centres, market houses, school buildings, courthouses and police posts – is climate-resilient and built to last.
  - It is also built in true partnership, supporting local communities and economies, and building local capacity and skills.



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- During my time here we delivered a new 3.76km climate resilient road in Sola, connecting the airport, schools, hospitals and the Torba provincial headquarters.
  - Delivered in partnership, constructed by local contractors, and built to last, it is the largest concrete road in Vanuatu.
- Climate-resilient infrastructure investments, like Sola, and like the Isangel Road Loop and Imanaka Bridge, which Prime Minister Salwai and I recently launched on Tanna, connect people to opportunities and boost service delivery throughout Vanuatu.
- Earlier this year, Prime Minister Salwai and I laid the foundation stone for the Port Vila Central Police Station.
- On Santo, we handed over the Tiroas Barracks redevelopment to the VPF – complete with new facilities designed and delivered in partnership to boost the Vanuatu Mobile Force (VMF) capabilities.
  - While on Santo, we also announced a further A\$4 million (approximately VT320 million) partnership for response and early recovery from Tropical Cyclone Lola
  - This will support Vanuatu’s pressing roads and infrastructure, health, education, food security and telecommunications priorities.
- In Port Vila this morning, we did a walkthrough of the Cook Barracks.
  - These are impressive pieces of infrastructure and symbols of our commitment to peace and stability in Vanuatu and in our region.
- We have been working with the Malvatumauri Council of Chiefs to rebuild the iconic Chief’s Nakamal in Port Vila.



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- Through our investment in the Vanuatu Skills Partnership, this rebuilding effort will upskill youth from across all six provinces of Vanuatu.
- These trainees will complete on-the-job trainings and earn a formal qualification in building and construction.
- We have heard Vanuatu's priorities of infrastructure, health, education and skills.
  - And will make sure we deliver through our Vanuatu-Australia partnership, and make changes where we need to evolve.
- We are supporting Vanuatu to fast-track the Hospital Master Plan to ensure infrastructure and facilities for Vanuatu's six hospitals are fit to deliver essential primary healthcare services.
- Our education partnership is providing critical classroom resources and supporting the Curriculum Improvement plan, to provide teachers and principals the necessary skills to improve literacy and numeracy.
- I take this opportunity to thank Vanuatu for its leadership on climate change.
  - Australia recognises that climate change is the number one threat to the livelihood, wellbeing and security of the people of Vanuatu and our shared Pacific region.
  - As members of the Pacific Islands Forum, we have seen the power of our collective voice – and we look forward to partnering to co-host COP31 if our bid is successful.



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- We are working together to secure our shared future; a peaceful and prosperous future for our region, our children and our children's children.
  - We are striving for more economic opportunities, protecting our shared values and standing together in the face of challenges.
  - Through partnership, we are well placed to face these challenges together.
- Our security partnership equips Vanuatu to secure its own future, including when natural disasters strike.
  - Later this year, we look forward to the return of RVS *Takuare* and delivery of Vanuatu's new landing craft.
- Our strong partnership, including our security partnership, allows us to respond quickly to Vanuatu's needs and priorities.
  - Last year this enabled us to deliver over *VT9 billion* in development assistance.
- Through our new economic recovery investment, including direct budget support, the Vanuatu Government will be able to deliver more services to its people
  - and respond to priorities in trade, aviation, the productive sector, cybersecurity and so on.
- Our work together through PACER Plus is yielding results.
  - We expect to see more products and new markets to open for Vanuatu, especially with the noticeable success of 60,000 kilograms of kava exported to Australia already.



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- Another area of immense growth is our immigration and border partnership.
  - Our Immigration Office in Port Vila opened last year, and we have significantly reduced visa processing times.
  - The closer partnership between Vanuatu officials and our Australian Border Force officers is building understanding and trust: when our systems are more familiar with each other, we all benefit.
- Vanuatu's participation in Australia's Pacific Engagement Visa Program will further deepen links between our nations, our people and our economies through a permanent residence pathway for Vanuatu citizens.
- Vanuatu's most valuable resource is its people.
  - More than 500 ni-Vanuatu have studied through Australia Awards and gone on to drive economic and social development in various sectors and fields in Vanuatu.
- As I complete my term as Australian High Commissioner to Vanuatu, I am happy to see a strong partnership that can face challenges together.
- It has been an honour to serve in Vanuatu.
  - I will leave with many beautiful memories of friends, colleagues, people, communities, and the islands I have been fortunate to encounter.
- Bakagen mi wantem talem yufala evriwan wan big tangkyu tumas.