

**Closing Statement by Mr Joseph Kabui, Leader of the Bougainville
Interim Government Delegation to the Bougainville Leaders Meeting,
Burnham, New Zealand
18.7.1997**

Mr dear friends,

It has been a long and tiring road that we have all elected to pursue in order for us to come together here in Burnham. We have, covered the miles and have arrived at the point where we are now in agreement on the principles that our people would want us to ascertain for them. I congratulate each and every one of you on your honest and sincere hard work.

We must extend our undying gratitude to our friends, the people of Act... and the New Zealand Government without whose dedication to helping us find peace for our people, this meeting would not have taken place. In particular we must thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the honourable Don McKinnon and of course, Mr John Hayes who has stuck to the process like glue, in spite of facing early problems which indeed threatened his very existence. We thank you, John.

We must also give due credit to the understanding and support of the Papua New Guinea government in coalescing to this meeting. In particular to our brothers in the Bougainville Transitional Government who have come here to bravely stand with us toe to toe and face to face in recognition of the great need for our people to find justice and peace. Only three months ago who among us would have thought we would be sitting together here. In particular my thanks to my colleague, Premier Sinato. The warmth and friendly relations that have been shared here between the delegates from both sides has made this difficult task so much easier for all of us. I thank all of you. I think it is a great tribute to our spirit.

There are many more trials and tribulations that we all have to confront. Indeed we have all expressed our deep regret at the incident at Sierra, news of which disturbed our meeting here. Such incidents only highlight how much more we need to do before we can all enjoy our basic human rights and freedoms in Bougainville.

We appeal to the people and Government of Papua New Guinea to join us in the spirit of what we have begun here. We all know that we have behind us a history of warfare and mistrust but we must now look into the future. There is currently a watershed in PNG. They have undergone a recent revolution of their own and the people have expressed their right to self determination through a democratic election. In this expression the people have opened the door for our people on Bougainville. They have said to us, and their government, to look at our situation differently from the policies of the past. It is this newly opened door that we have passed through to be together here in Burnham. We must therefore implore the PNG government to recognise this declaration before us for what it is: an expression of the heartbeat of the Bougainville people. It should, therefore, be adopted without reservation by the incoming PNG government as the cornerstone of any policy they might consider regarding Bougainville.

My brothers and sisters, whilst we recognise the need for the assistance and understanding of our friends and neighbours to achieve lasting peace and freedoms in Bougainville, the ultimate responsibility rests with us, the Bougainville leaders. We are about to sign an historic undertaking with each other which we can all be truly proud of; an undertaking to lead our people back to their inalienable right to peace,

freedom, prosperity and justice; an undertaking that we can never shy away from until it bears the product of our efforts and feeds our people the fruits of freedom.
Thank you, Mr Chairperson.