

# Australia should abandon (continued from page 15)

suffering significant disadvantage, thus leading to instability.

History has shown us that such instability will have far reaching ripple effects for not only PNG but also the rest of the region. As business people, you are well aware of the potential for the negative spillover effect of this Australian Government policy throughout the region, given that our Pacific economies are inextricably connected.

### Our Business

It is therefore our business and before this goes any further, we want thorough regional consultation. We want – no, we demand - to have our voices heard.

It is not our concern who wins the coming Australian election. That is a matter for the Australian people. But we are deeply concerned about the impact of

Australian politics on our own affairs. We are deeply concerned about the impact of Australian politics on the welfare of future generations of Pacific People. As Pacific Islanders, we share the horror of many in the international community at the deaths of more than 1000 asylum-seekers trying to reach Australia.

It is a terrible human tragedy and our hearts go out to the families of those involved.

### Highhanded Aussies

But we cannot remain silent when the current Australian Government dumps this problem, which is arguably of its own making, on our doorstep.

Regrettably, from Fiji's perspective, this deal continues a pattern of behaviour on the part of the Australian Government that is inconsiderate, prescriptive, highhanded and arrogant. Instead of treating the Pacific nations as equals, your decision-makers too often ignore our interests and concerns and take it for granted that we will accede to their wishes and demands.

Australia is a vast landmass with vast resources and is thus much better placed than the small and vulnerable nations of the Pacific to address this problem. The question must be asked as to why Australia did not engage with the other Forum members before it embarked on its latest Pacific Solution for unwanted asylum seekers?

From where we sit, we suspect the answer is that the Australian Government does not particularly care what we think. Fiji therefore appeals to the current Australian Government to face up to the responsibilities to your neighbours.

Inoke Kubuabola is Fiji's Minister for Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation. The above is an edited version of a speech that he delivered at the 20th Australia Fiji Forum held at the Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre, Australia on July 29, 2013. Among those present at the Forum were Matt Thistlethwaite, Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs, Julie Bishop, Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, President of the Australia-Fiji Business Council Greg Pawson, Members of the Australia-Fiji and Fiji-Australia Business Councils and others.

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