ROLAND RICH: Honourable members and senators, distinguished members of the Diplomatic Corps, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen:

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the annual address of the Centre for Democratic Institutions.

It was our intention to have the chairman of our consultative group, Sir Daryl Dawson, welcome you on this occasion, but the fog has intervened in that plan and Sir Daryl might walk in at any moment, or he may still be circling above Canberra. But unfortunately he will not able to join us right now.

And it had also been our intention to have Mr Alexander Downer, the Foreign Minister, join us. But he also has been delayed by fog, and we’re delighted that John Dauth, Deputy Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, is stepping in to take his place.

And we’re also delighted to have the High Commissioner of Papua New Guinea, His Excellency Renagi Lohia, join us on this occasion.
And in a moment I will ask John Dauth to introduce our speaker, Sir Anthony Siaguru.

Before I do I thought I would just run through the order of proceedings. We will have Sir Anthony address us on this occasion, and then we’ll have an opportunity to make comments or ask questions from the floor. Please have the courtesy to introduce yourself to Sir Anthony when asking a question.

At around 1.10 or 1.15 you’re very welcome to join us for a light lunch, and that will be in the Mural Hall, which is up the stairs or up the lift at the back of the room. I call it a light lunch. It’s basically finger food. But that gives the idea of Vegemite sandwiches and hopefully the lunch will be a little bit better than that.

Now, I don’t want to steal anybody’s thunder on this occasion, but I do want to make one personal comment about Sir Anthony’s presence here today, and that is that although many people in this room have known Sir Anthony for a lot longer than I have ? I have known him since becoming director of the Centre for Democratic Institutions about three years ago ? he’s been a tremendous help to me and indeed a mentor in the work we do in the centre, and in particular in our work in Papua New Guinea. He’s been able to provide important guidance when we’ve worked together on occasions, and I must say also at times I’ve had the benefit of his gentle chastisement when my enthusiasm was threatening to run away with me in various circumstances. So I am personally delighted that Sir Anthony is able to join us here, and in doing so he will bring a regional perspective that I think we need to bear in mind when we look at the issue of democracy.

But he does follow some very noteworthy speakers we’ve had in this forum. We’ve had the former president of the Philippines, Fidel Ramos,
give the inaugural address, and that was followed by addresses by the
former president of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, and the former
Prime Minister of Thailand, Anand Panyarachun. And I think to have a
Papua New Guinea perspective as our next look at this issue of
democracy is very appropriate indeed.

Well, can I call on John Dauth to come to the microphone and introduce
Sir Anthony.

JOHN DAUTH: Roland, thank you very much indeed.

Can I just say at the beginning how delighted I am at the thought that we
won't be eating Vegemite sandwiches.

I am here, Sir Anthony, today in a curious capacity. Mr Downer is
delayed. I was looking forward very much to being at this lecture and
hearing what you had to say, and so it's an additional privilege for me to
read the Minister’s remarks. They are remarks, which having read them
very quickly once myself, I'd like immediately to associate myself with.

So Mr Downer’s remarks open, Sir Anthony, with the words: ‘Sir
Anthony and I are old friends’.

Now, I don’t want to think of you or Mr Downer or me for that matter
as old, and I can’t add to the words which then follow in this speech
which say ‘the Minister may wish to make some personal reminiscences
here’. We’ll have to wait until Alexander comes along later to hear that.

You, Sir, have had a most distinguished career, as many people here
today know. It’s no exaggeration to say that you’re a renaissance man?
that you’ve achieved great distinction as a public servant, a politician, a lawyer and in both the public and private sectors.

I am delighted personally ? I speak for myself here as well as for Mr Downer ? to note that you’ve achieved great success as a sportsman too, having played rugby union and coached the Papua New Guinea national side. And of course on the list of your many appointments is included one as the chairman of the South Pacific Games Foundation, responsible for the organisation of the ninth South Pacific Games.

As everyone here will know, you were educated initially, Sir Anthony, at the University of Papua New Guinea and at Harvard. You received a Fullbright Scholarship in 1980, and as an Edward Mason fellow, were attached to the Harvard Institute of International Development.

I am delighted (and here it’s Mr Downer’s words) ? I am delighted to say that my own portfolio can claim some part in your formation in your capacity as a foreign service trainee in Australia in 1972 with your subsequent short attachment at the Australian Mission in Geneva.

You became secretary of the Papua New Guinea Department of Foreign Affairs when your country gained independence in 1975.

Among your other achievements of course was to play a significant role in the negotiations between Pacific Island countries and Australia and New Zealand, leading ultimately to the establishment of SPARTECA ? one of the fundamental building blocks I think of the economy of the South Pacific.

You were instrumental in advising Prime Minister Somare in your capacity as Secretary for Foreign Affairs & Trade in the establishment of
diplomatic relations between PNG and the People’s Republic of China, the twenty-fifth anniversary of which is being celebrated this year.

You were elected, Sir Anthony, to parliament in 1982, and from then until 1985 served as a minister in various portfolios including as Minister for the Public Service.

Following your departure from politics after the 1987 election you joined Blake Dawson Waldron for your eighth or ninth career as a senior partner specialising in commercial law.

In 1990 you were elected to a five-year term as Deputy Secretary General of the Commonwealth. After this period of service, based in London, you returned home to Blake Dawson Waldron again before ‘retiring’ (words in this text very much in inverted commas) in 1998.

It’s been an astonishingly active retirement. Sir Anthony was appointed chairman of the Port Moresby Stock Exchange in 1998. He represents PNG on the APEC Business Advisory Council. He’s a member of the Policy Advisory Council of ACIAR. A prolific and respected commentator on national affairs in Papua New Guinea, Sir Anthony is currently a visiting ? a senior visiting fellow at the ANU’s Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies which is preparing to publish a book of his writings later this year.

It’s very hard, Sir, to do proper justice to your achievements in the space of these few minutes. Perhaps I can sum up those achievements best by referring to the title of your address today ? Democracy in the Pacific.

Throughout your entire career you have been one of the great advocates and practitioners of democracy in the region. You continue to maintain a very high profile as an advocate for strong ethical standards in public life.
As foundation chairman of Papua New Guinea’s chapter of Transparency International you launched the Integrity Pact concept in which politicians were encouraged to sign an Integrity Charter at the time of the 1997 election in Papua New Guinea, pledging themselves to institute good and transparent governance.

That important achievement is I think a good reflection of the character of the man who is to address us today.

We know that in Sir Anthony there is a voice for reason, integrity and democracy in the Pacific that is always worth listening to. And it is our very great privilege to have an opportunity to listen to you today, Sir.

Ladies and gentlemen I give you Sir Anthony Siaguru: [Applause]

ANTHONY SIAGURU: Thank you very much Mr Dauth for the kind words. And please convey my gratitude to the minister for those sentiments.

Honourable members and senators, members of the Diplomatic Corps, High Commissioner of Papua New Guinea, ladies and gentlemen of such a distinguished audience:

Let me first say how I feel about the fact that I am here, invited to speak before such an audience as yourselves, and in such a setting.

My invitation was given to me without any great sound of trumpets and I accepted with reasonable aplomb. But I certainly felt very flattered about it all.

I was then given copies of the speeches of some of those who have gone before me. And it was when settling down with these speeches for a
quiet read later that evening that all the trumpets went off? great shrilling fanfares of them that shot me straight up in my chair and had everything on the table on the floor. The cause was the names of my predecessors who have spoken on this occasion? all highly eminent, famous names in the world of government.

Going on the basis that what you don’t know you don’t miss, I would not myself have told you their names. I would hardly want an audience listening to my own rather inadequate endeavours while thinking of what might have been. However the damage has been done and the extra burden has to be borne.

Since my invite to speak came far too early on, I was evidently not a last minute fall-back? a gap filler. So all I can assume is that Roland and his advisers were looking for an ‘everyman’.

Now the problem about being an ‘everyman’ is that you have to work a good deal harder for your lunch? even if they are just sandwiches.

The illustrious and the famous having done all their hard work earlier on in life, can flaunt their plumage and concentrate on the melody of the sounds they are able to produce. But us "Everyman’s", well, we are much more of the common sparrow type. We have to busily scratch around, chipping and chirping away continuously to get our attention.

I asked Roland what I should speak about. ‘Anything you like’, he said. There was a pause. And then he said ‘so long as it has democracy in the title’.

Well, you know as well as I that there are plenty of experts on democracy here in Canberra? some advising government, others in the think tanks of the ANU. And come to that, you have plenty of experts in
Papua New Guinea as well. Certainly far more expert than I am or ever will be.

So all I can hope is that a non-expert Everyman’s views on democracy and on Papua New Guinea will at least be a pleasant change for all of you.

If we are talking about the basic rights of man as our reference for the existence of democracy, then I don’t think there should be any great concern about whether we have democracy in Papua New Guinea.

By all the normal definitions and yardsticks, I think I can comfortably assure you that, with some hiccups? the Bougainville crisis being a very large one? we are overrun with democracy.

Regrettably, however, a surplus of democracy carries no guarantee of even an adequacy of good governance. Our problem is constraining all that lively abundance of the exercise of democracy into some kind of orderly, channelled arrangement for a system of government that operates reasonably dispassionately for the national good.

We name our system of government as the Westminster system. In effect it is only masquerading as that. The essential feature of a Westminster system is political parties offering the electorate broad but distinctive philosophies and programs to chose from, and then operating on a confrontational basis. One lot in government, to a greater or lesser extent, implementing their promised programs; and the other lot in opposition, keeping the first lot honest.

Just last week for instance we heard about fruit bats and chameleons in this city. I will not go into that.
In Papua New Guinea we have political parties, we certainly do, plenty of them! But they are essentially creatures of parliament and not of the people or of the country.

Take for instance our recent big political happening. The ruling government party of Sir Mekere Morauta, the Prime Minister, and if I can slip it in here, also the ex-officio saviour of my country, suddenly boosted its parliamentary numbers to a massive 70, with its major partner in government simply dissolving itself as a party overnight so that it could join the Morauta party en block.

This was followed by the Prime Minister declaring that he thought 70 members out of a total of 109 in the House was quite sufficient, and that his party did not want any more new members thank you very much.

And then ? surprise! surprise! ? all those new government MPs who had earlier been demanding in the name of constitutional propriety that parliament be instantly recalled (so that they could move a vote of no confidence against the government) now saw that the truth was that the interests of the people and the country had in fact been well served after all and a recall of parliament was no longer necessary.

Imagine all of that hitting the front pages of your dailies. And in PNG ? well, yes, the Post Courier and the Nationals screamed away for a day, like any top rate newspapers would (and they are both top rate) but their editorials soon put it all in perspective and were telling all of us what we already knew ? Em i samting nating ia ? all part of the great game they play up there at Waigani, nothing to do with us in the electorate, and similarly, nothing to do with the likely result of the next general elections due next year either.

The nature of our political parties?
Well they form, they grow, they regroup, they fade, and they dissolve, all within the context of the parliament and with no real relevance for what is outside.

Party members follow a dominant political personality as their point of reference, their rallying flag, and allow him to command their personal loyalty, unless of course better prospects appear.

It reflects fairly accurately, or so I have been told by a friend from Oxford, the kind of faction operated politics of eighteenth century Britain. Myself, I suspect more meaningfully, it probably also represents a typical type or stage of political system in the developing world of the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries.

Our MPs are therefore not tied down by any constraints of commitment, either to political philosophies and specified policies on the one hand or the demands of toeing a party line on the other. For the most part they are ephemeral creatures of a five-year lifetime, spending their years in a carefree, abandoned way, searching out for their sustenance, the sweet things here and there, first in one place and then in another, and storing what they can for the MP afterlife, their sad lot when the allotted time span comes to an end.

Long experience of how my country’s political system operates perhaps makes me more cynical, Mr Chairman, than I should be, yet for those of you wishing to grasp its essence, certainly the huge freedom of action of not merely our MPs but also our Ministers should be noted as one of its key characteristics.

Yet I do not want to be over critical. I think it true to say that on the whole our MPs are not all that different from the MPs of any other
parliamentary democracy, that is, if they were straight-jacketed in the same way.

MPs in developed countries are constrained by the disciplinary framework of their parties, and so by their commitment to a party line and so to the national interests, or at least a version of it.

The credibility of the individual MP is thus very tightly bound up with his continuing to identify with and to support his party’s policies, and remaining loyal to its standard, come what may? that is, come government or come opposition.

At the bottom of all this is the major feature of political parties in developed countries. They are underpinned by a national or region-wide grassroots constituency organisation.

It is at this level that a direct link is forged through the medium of political parties between local electorates and policies of national orientation and national import. It effects a very fundamental and practical marriage between the people and the nation state.

It is something we lack in my country.

It is not a matter of governance as such. It is the basic identity of the people with the national interest that we lack, or rather, a political system that affects that identity, and it is its absence which, by my reckoning, makes it difficult to have good governance in Papua New Guinea.

I think it is bound to be in the way things that democracy as an ideal form has to be compromised with democracy as an operable and practical system of government.
A system of democratic representation cannot be so individually tailored for all the diverse make-up and interests of a national electorate if, by doing so, it ceases to provide an effectual system of government.

As I see it, in established Western parliamentary democracies, a whole series of compromises historically occurred resulting in major political parties being broad-based in their electoral support and broad-based in their party philosophy and policies for government. For ‘broad-based’ one can then read ‘of national dimension and national implication’.

Thus a small number of major political parties emerged offering alternative views on what is the national interest. The political views of the national electorate channelled and processed by the political parties’ constituency organisations then crystallise around these alternatives available.

With that effect, the Westminster system and its operatives, mandarins and party workers then go along their happy way.

The electorate grumbles and inconsiderately votes first this way and then the other, but the bounds are drawn and the electorate is held captive.

True, this settled and placid tea party wonderland way of political life at times gets rudely shattered by the arrival of an outsider from the world of realities as opposed to compromises ? an uninvited participant, an Alice, who asks all sorts of awkward and non-sequitur questions, and creates or introduces an ‘issue’ which spoils the mood of the tea party and threatens general disruption.

I say an "Alice", but of course there is no reason for the intruder to have to be female.
The regulars then are obliged to stir themselves to effect some new additional compromises, often in a Mad Hatterish way -- if I can continue my wonderland imagery -- of opposite directions at the same time, in order to safely subsume within the mainstream versions of that broad-based framework ? the national interest.

For sure, all the electorate are not immediately brought back into the fold, but most are, and routine can be resumed, until, that is, the next issue forces itself on the attention of the tea party.

But the important thing is that the system is there to treat with, to blunt, and finally to absorb the threat of such specific, uncompromised issues to the national interest.

Countries, ones they have expanded beyond the shade of the village breadfruit tree and have become nation states, have got to acquire effectual systems of government, and that means, in the case of parliamentary democracies, a system which will: look after the individual’s rights and freedoms; provide him or her with a genuine choice of government; keep a stable and orderly society; and work for the overall interest of people and nation.

Unfortunately in Papua New Guinea, while I and my countrymen can be thankful enough that we have unfettered and in abundance all the rights which the ideology of democracy promises and which so many unfortunates in the developing world lack and cry out for, yet we have not that orderliness and stability in our society and the assurance of national-minded leadership in the majority of our elected leaders which would enable us to enjoy in some contentment the actual practice of those rights which democracy bestows.
Winston Churchill said of parliamentary democracy: ‘It is a lousy system of government’ (or words to that effect) ‘but it is the best we’ve got’.

Now, if by ‘we’ Sir Winston meant ‘we politicians’, then I would have to say he was spot-on in the case of my country. It does indeed serve our politicians well. It does not however provide the same service for the people.

In effect we have desperate need of the cosy tea party. We need to have presented to us at elections the choice of the Mad Hatter and March Hare and perhaps a smaller Dormouse ? that is, nationally based political parties with their generalised but differing philosophies, differing enough to provide a choice anyway, and their generalised but different policies representing what each sees as best for the common good.

And then, should an Alice arrive to intrude on our own Papua New Guinea wonderland with rude awakening questions and comments about things being upside down and needing to be placed right-side up, we should be okay. We shall get reinvigorated, we hope, and there will be a lot of fussing around, a lot of talk, a lot of stuff done the Melanesian way; but the tea party will reassemble and we shall have survived our Alice.

Of course I should have mentioned to you before that in the event you would like the vicarious pleasure of experiencing what PNG politics is like yourself, then this can be easily arranged.

It so happened one Christmas just a few years ago that my editor at the Post Courier, for which I write a regular column, asked me to make some festive contribution to help everyone get into the party spirit.

Taking him at his word literally, I designed a board game on the Waigani whirly-whirly. I called it the Great Game and duly had it brought out as
the Christmas story for my column. When I say "designed", I confess the rules and the board owed a lot to Monopoly with some Diplomacy thrown in. It’s easy to play and a good introduction to the rules of PNG politics. With all due modesty, I can recommend it as a useful read for all beginner students of the political system in my country.

So, how do we arrange for PNG to have its own tea party set up? Well, we have to tackle first and foremost the big villain of the piece. And no, the villain is not the politician, as I have already said, to my mind the PNG politician is no worse, no better than the politician elsewhere. It’s just simply that our politicians are completely untrammelled by any constraints.

No, the villain of the piece is me.

Well, perhaps that is a little melodramatic. What I mean is me and the rest of us in our electorates who persistently vote for our own local interests, which, in the main, run counter to the national needs and national priorities.

This is not entirely our own fault. You see, we in the constituencies are all well aware that what is handed out by the national government comes most definitely from a fixed cake? well, not even that, because all sorts of creatures great and small have nibbles and in some cases great gulping bites out of the funds available at Waigani before they are allocated to alleviating the plight of our country.

So it’s really a case? or at least we see it as such? a case of them or us. Now, since ‘them’, when you break it right down, may well be the greedy lot in the next valley or in the next bay or around the next bend in the river, then to have the best chance of getting at those funds you want to try and get in as your member a person living nearby or related to you
as closely as possible, guaranteed to put you and yours before everyone else? well, apart from himself of course.

The candidate you definitely don’t vote for is the one who, when coming around asking for your vote, offers nothing in return? no money, no beer, no pigs. No point voting for him because he’s clearly a "rubbish man".

Further, we are not really interested in this or that party as such or what they stand for (unless there is a promise of something specifically to be handed out for our neck of the woods).

Once the election has determined who our MP is, then what we want of him is to do his utmost to get into government and preferably to become a minister because that means he has easier access and opportunity to secure more goodies. And that means the greater the chance of more coming our way, and naturally the greater his importance and influence, the greater the patronage he has at his disposal, and again, the greater potential benefit there will be for all of us.

In my time, I have mocked the member sitting on the opposition benches who, given a good offer by government to join its ranks, goes home for the evening to think about it, and emerges the next morning to announce to the world? at least the PNG world? that he has "consulted with his people" and "in their interests" has decided to join government.

Since his electorate probably lies in some isolated area of the country, days away by plane and road from Waigani, one queries whether he is in e-mail contact with everyone, or something perhaps more telepathic than electronic.

In fact I shouldn’t be making fun because that member knows precisely what his electorates want without ever having to consult them at all.
This kind of enforced focus of electorates upon narrow local interests before any other consideration has become an encouragement and reinforcement for more and more candidates to stand and to try their luck at elections.

In the last election, in 1997, one-seventh of all seats were won by candidates with 8 or 9 per cent and less of the votes cast in their electorates. Some had a mere 5 per cent of the vote of their electorate. To produce that kind of result, some constituencies had over 60 candidates. And the prospect is now rapidly becoming real, of a candidate standing purely on the chances of the votes of his Melanesian style extended family getting him home.

Democracy!, As I said, we have it coming out of our ears, or pockets might be a better metaphor.

I am not sure however whether we are justified in saying: "This is Democracy at work", because at the centre the result has been calamitous. Even with the good fortune of having a truly able prime minister such as Sir Mekere at the helm desperately trying to steer us in directions for the national good, the course is not at all certain when so many of the crew, as well as some of the passengers in cabin class, have their own ideas of where to go.

My own advocacy has long been, as you will have gathered from what I have been saying, that the only way in which the PNG nation can set on a course to recover its fortune and establish its stability as a nation state is to give priority to reform ? reform of the political system.

We have to sever the hold of local interests over our politics and try to establish a system that promotes local identity with the priorities of the national interest.
Parliament has recently and rather narrowly succeeded in making a start with the passage of the Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates legislation. This legislation gives a boost to the discipline which parties can exercise over their parliamentary members. Yet the parliamentary orientation remains. This is no "magic fertiliser" for grassroots party organisation. And I have some serious doubts myself about its capacity to marshal our MPs into party straightjackets at the next elections next year.

Fine if a party gets returned with a large number of MPs ? say 35 or 40 ? able to give stability to a government, as in the old days of a large Pangu Party. But there is every chance we might end up with a multiplicity of little parties and independents, endlessly combining and recombining to much the same effect as we have at the present time.

I’m very glad to see you here Sir Daryl.

DARYL DAWSON: I’m very glad to be here. Thank you.

ANTHONY SIAGURU: Thank you for taking the time.

The essential complimentary legislation to the integrity of political parties is a changeover to a compulsory preferential voting system from the current first-past-the-post.

That legislation, which incorporates a system of three preferences, is currently waiting to be introduced by Sir Mekere’s government.

Personally I believe a much stronger endorsement of party in the electoral system is needed to get a Westminster style party system off to a kick-start.
And to that end I have devised what I have termed the party preferential vote (PPV). It is simple and straightforward to use. The voter is obliged to give two votes – one for a listed candidate and one for a listed party. A party qualifies to be ballot listed by having a candidate listed after satisfying criteria which are already enshrined in the new legislation.

The first count is of candidate votes only. If no-one gets, say, 30 per cent of the vote (and currently that accounts for 80 per cent of all of our members of parliament), then the party votes are distributed and the leading party is declared winner, though in the name of its listed candidate.

PPV was seriously considered by the Constitutional Development Commission and the Cabinet, but eventually not adopted as it was considered to be too much weighted in favour of political parties.

But I still think some kind of electoral system such as this with a pronounced party bias, is a necessary, complement to legislation imposing strong disciplinary frameworks on party members within parliament.

I am ready to accept the major criticism made of this kind of artificial engineering of a party system, that there is a possibility of calling up a monster worse than the one we currently have. It is a danger but it is not a certainty. I feel the risk has to be worth it because leaders of the calibre and integrity of Mekere Morauta have got to be given the proper executive power and disciplinary control to be able to put into practice rational policies of economic recovery and social stability to make my country’s path safe and secure as a nation state.

Is it being democratic to create and impose a democratic party system in this way?
Well, whatever your answer to that question, I am not sure that we in Papua New Guinea have much of an option.

Let me offer a short story to end with.

When I was young and newlywed and was a member of the Australian Foreign Service, (I think I must have been the only fourth secretary ever in the history of the Service) I made a visit to Athens. And to make sure we missed none of the sights of the ancient world my wife Mina and I took a bus tour round the City. And being the eager-beaver culture-vultures that we were, we sat right up the front of the bus.

Our guide was a youngish, rather attractive Athenian lady, possessed of an enormous fervour about the place of her city, Athens, in history, and its superiority to anything that had come since, starting with Rome.

Since we were so close to her and because we were rather obviously Third World, we, more than anyone else, were the ones addressed by her passing comments. You know the comments which are not part of the regular prattle you get on a tour. Many of these remarks came back to the fact that we should know and we should never forget that Athens was the cradle (her word) of Western democracy.

When we were coming away from the Parthenon (it was the last call of the tour) I told her of the great impression it had made on Mina and myself. "That edifice", she said, "is the absolute cradle of Western democracy."

I thought for a while as the bus continued its way, really impressed and effected by what we had seen and what we had felt.
‘Tell me Miss’, I asked her a little later, ‘who actually built the Parthenon? Who constructed it?’

Well, she gave me a haughty shake of her lion-mane head of hair. ‘The slaves of course. What do you think.’

Democracy, my friends can be a tyrant.

One final remark, if I may.

Although he is not here, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mr Alexander Downer on behalf of my fellow Papua New Guineans for his great effort which has enabled us now to be on the very verge of a resolution of the Bougainville crisis.

[Inaudible] [Applause]

ROLAND RICH: Well, thank you very much Sir Anthony for a very thoughtful and if I may say at times a rather sobering analysis of the situation in Papua New Guinea.

I see that we have in our audience a number of officers from the Department of Foreign Affairs and also from AusAID. And I think those comments will be helpful to them in Australia’s relations with Papua New Guinea.

I should also mention that the Centre for Democratic Institutions comes under the AusAID portfolio and is funded through AusAID, and our work is intended to support the development efforts of AusAID.
Well, the time has come when you can put your comments and questions to Sir Anthony, who has kindly agreed to respond. And there will be a hand-held microphone coming up and down the aisle to help you. Please introduce yourself to us before you ask your question. And I know it’s always difficult to be the first questioner. But do I have a volunteer who’s prepared to break the ice on this occasion?

Mike Dillon please.

MIKE DILLON: [Inaudible]?

ANTHONY SIAGURU: Very much so. In fact one of the interesting phenomena to have occurred in the last five years or so is the fact that in PNG both civil society and the private sector has become very active, not active just in terms of initiative, but active in terms of demanding a say. As the private sector has become more and more, the word is localised, in the sense that of Papua New Guinea-isation, you find that more and more Papua New Guineans representing the private sector have become local. And similarly so for the civil society. You will find that as far as civil society goes, we have a very healthy number of organisations which have become really, in my view, a third force, a third force for the good.

CRAIG SKEAN: Craig Skean from the Sydney Morning Herald, Sir Anthony.

Good to see you in Australia.

A two-part question, if you don’t mind. Firstly, do you have any lingering concerns or fears that the military in PNG in the longer term could pose a threat to democracy in the country, given the stresses and strains posed by downsizing? And may I add, some of that suggestion came from Australia in relation to rationalisation of the PNG military. Could that unleash stresses and strains which would threaten democracy?
And secondly, how important is it in your view that Australian journalists regularly visit Papua New Guinea? Do you see that as helping relations or do you see that as being an irritant?

ANTHONY SIAGURU: Thank you very much.

Firstly, the Defence Force could be a threat. On two occasions in the past it’s posed a threat, but a threat which I don’t think is fundamentally something that is going to derail government or bring about a radical change of the type you might see in other countries. I think the problem with the Defence Force has been one of total neglect by successive governments. You see, the historical perspective? and I don’t want to go into great detail? is that before independence, in the sixties when times were different and relations between this country and countries to the north were a little different from what they are now, there was a huge build-up of the military establishment in PNG. Our military was given everything it needed. There was a huge expansion program. And then over the last 30 years, especially since independence, when we’ve had to tighten our belt and live within our means, more or less, a lot of the soldiers and the defence force has been cut back regularly. Every year cabinet after cabinet, regardless of who is in power, cut back and made their soldiers lose more and more of their special entitlements and their special privileges. So it’s been building up over decades. And now to have a group of very well-intentioned, eminent outsiders, this EPG (Eminent Person Groups) come in and say ‘Do this. Do that.’ And then I think the final straw which broke the camel’s back was the very bad, very ineffective? ineffectual way in which the Morauta government handled that report. And so we had this situation that occurred some months back? six or eight weeks back? where there was a real danger that the military might have gone on the rampage. Well, it didn’t happen because eventually, and those of you who know the Melanesian way, and that means many things to many people, know that eventually we somehow work things out, even if at first it looks absolutely impossible.
You keep talking, you’ll find a way. So in this case there was a way found.

Coming back to your question ? is the military a threat. I think it can be a threat. I think it’s a matter of the government of the day being very careful in handling its relations, explaining to people, providing information about what policies you have that will effect their livelihood. And that didn’t occur in this instance. And that’s why we had this problem.

With a military I think the threat is always there. I think with proper information and proper consultation with the military it is possible to cut it down to size, to make it a smaller and more effective force than it is at present.

Remember, they were sent off to Bougainville at the height of the crisis totally unprepared, with no logistics. So there’s been a lot of anger built up. So it’s a flashpoint, I agree, and we have to be very careful about it.

As for the second part of your question ? the journalists.

I wish there were more people like, if I may use individual names, Sean Dorney, Rowan Callick, yourself, Rosemary O’Callaghan I think her name is ? people who over a period of years built up a real understanding and a real sympathy of the way in which the little countries to the north of Australia like to run their own lives, to be a little more sensitive, if you like. Yeah, I think a real exchange and regular visits would be of real help.

Sorry I have taken such a long time to answer your two questions.

JOHN HYDE: Thank you.
May I first say how much I enjoyed your speech. I'm an ex-MP. And the discussion of politics as it works always fascinates me. I will date myself by saying that I couldn't help sort of sniggering as you went on, thinking of Malcolm Fraser as the Mad Hatter and Reg Withers as the Dormouse [laughter]. And that dates me!

I wonder though whether you might not have had too much faith in political parties alone. They too are eminently corruptible. The Alice that came into the party room and the Caucus (if my Labor friends advise me correctly? and I’m pretty sure they did) always had institutions to appeal to that could convince the rest of that gathering that what they were doing was somehow shameful.

I wonder whether an Alice going into a party room or Caucus in PNG could appeal to the same standards of behaviour by which to shame their colleagues, and which to think, without being certain of it, were the reasons that our political parties quite often behaved better than was their inclination.

ANTHONY SIAGURU: Well, I don’t think I can really add much to what you say. You made a comment which I don’t think I can really disagree with except to make this observation? yes.

The problem with the Alice in the context of PNG, and to continue with this imagery of the wonderland, is that when a radical, new, unprepared for issue crops up like "secession" or "regional governments", no party already in existence and represented in the House has actually thought it through. So we come up with all sorts of half-baked, ill-considered ideas. The bottom line always is that no-one wants to see the country break up. But no-one has seriously sat down and tried to work it out. You see, for me, democracy is about genuine choice. And if that is the case, then on that criterion, on that one yardstick alone, Papua New
Guinea is absolutely overwhelmed by democracy. We have the governor of one province who beat 63 other candidates to get into parliament. Sixty-four candidates in one electorate.

If choice is the magic word, if choice is the criterion, then we’re absolutely overwhelmed by democracy. But at the same time, that person probably represents 11 per cent of the electorate. Eighty-nine per cent are not represented. And given the way our society has evolved, that means they’re out, we’re in. And we’ve become more and more divided. We’ve become more and more focussed on our own little valleys.

I am saying, even if there is the danger that you clearly refer to, I am saying after 26 years of this system of fragmentation, there must be something better. And even if there are risks, I am saying, let’s take those risks, because there’s got to be something better than this, not in the way of parliamentary democracy, but the way we have evolved.

I am not saying we throw the baby out with the bath water. That’s not the point I’m making. We’ll keep the baby, but feed it another diet.

ROLAND RICH: I think, Sir Anthony, it leaves me to say thank you very much for those words. We very much appreciated those comments.

And Sir Anthony’s speech will be on the CDI web site in the near future, and you’ll be able to consult it at leisure at that time. And we’ll also get a transcript of the questions and answers and put that on our web site as well for your interest.