

Funeral Service of Nauru President Bernard Dowiyogo

Lincoln P. Bloomfield, Jr., Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs
Remarks at Funeral Service of Nauru President Bernard Dowiyogo
Washington, DC
March 13, 2003

Madam Dowiyogo, other members of the President's family, Ministers, Ambassadors, Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of President Bush, Secretary of State Powell, and the American people, I would like to express my condolences to President Dowiyogo's family and the people of the Republic of Nauru for your loss.

I had my first opportunity to meet President Dowiyogo during this visit when he made an important gesture of goodwill towards the United States by signing an agreement to protect the service members of our countries with me on behalf of Nauru. I was deeply impressed by the calm determination he showed in pursuing Nauru's interests despite his weakened condition. President Dowiyogo truly died in the line of duty.

For the past 30 years President Dowiyogo was a central feature of Nauru public life. He was the longest-serving Member of Parliament and elected to the office of President six times. In this, his final term as President, he drew on his extensive public service experience to tackle the serious challenges Nauru currently faces. Nauru's severe financial problems have interrupted the normal operation of the government and threaten the well-being of Nauru's people.

With three months left before the end of the current Parliament when he assumed office in January, President Dowiyogo might have felt satisfied to stay in Nauru working to build alliances among his politicians before the next Parliamentary elections. But, as a statesman, he recognized the growing gravity of the problems Nauru faces and chose to attack them head on. Although he understood the physical cost to himself of flying to the United States, he chose to head a delegation of senior Nauru government representatives traveling to Washington to discuss these issues with U.S. officials.

Despite his precarious health, he insisted on leaving the hospital and leading his delegation during two meetings with U.S. government officials at the State Department to discuss issues of serious concern to the United States and international community regarding Nauru's offshore banking sector and investor passport sales program. President Dowiyogo took careful note of the facts presented and the concerns expressed by U.S. experts and issued an Executive Order instructing his government to begin shutting down the offshore banking sector. He also suspended the investor passport sales program, to enable Nauru government officials to strengthen controls over the program.

These courageous steps mark an important change in direction for Nauru -- one the United States applauds and one that will be welcomed by the international community. They will make Nauru less vulnerable to exploitation by international criminals wishing to launder money or change their identities.

The next weeks and months hold significant challenges for the people of Nauru. By carrying through the changes initiated by President Dowiyogo, the government and people of Nauru will do much to remove the unfortunate clouds from Nauru's international reputation. Surely that is a final act of statesmanship, and a legacy of which the President's family and his country should be very proud.

Our thoughts and prayers are with Madam Dowiyogo and her family, as well as the people of Nauru.

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