

16 March 2021

Senator the Hon. Marise Payne
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Via email: Foreign.minister@dfat.gov.au

The Hon. Greg Hunt MP
Minister for Health and Aged Care
Via email: Minister.Hunt@health.gov.au

Re: COVID-19 crisis in Papua New Guinea

Dear Minister Payne and Minister Hunt,

I write to you on behalf of the Australian Union movement to express our alarm at the rapidly escalating COVID-19 situation in Papua New Guinea (PNG). As our closest neighbour, we must respond swiftly to assist PNG in controlling the COVID-19 crisis – both because it is the right thing to do, and because COVID-19 spread and virus mutation in PNG poses a threat to Australia and other neighbouring countries. We have been successful in preventing and containing the spread of COVID-19 in Australia; we now have a duty to share our success and support vulnerable countries in our region to overcome the COVID-19 crisis.

The initiatives the Australian Government has taken so far to assist PNG to deal with the COVID-19 crisis are welcome, but much more must be done to protect frontline health workers and prevent the collapse of PNG's health system. Australia has expert infection control and public health workers who would be invaluable in supporting PNG's response. We have adequate reserves of personal protective equipment (PPE) and COVID-19 tests in Australia, and local manufacturing capacity for PPE. We have incoming - and soon to be manufactured locally - supplies of vaccines. All these resources are desperately needed in PNG and there is no time to wait.

Resources and support must be deployed to PNG immediately. We support the plan outlined by the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), that includes a target of 1 million vaccines deployed to PNG by the end of the year, and the immediate deployment of 20,000 vaccines and PPE to frontline health workers. To stop the spread of COVID-19, it is vital that every frontline health worker is vaccinated as a matter of priority.

The Australian Union movement stands in solidarity with health workers and the people of PNG, and stands ready to assist the Australian Government in supporting PNG's response to this crisis in whatever capacity we can. I request an urgent meeting with you to discuss this matter further; please have your office contact my Executive Assistant Jenny Holden (jholden@actu.org.au) to confirm a time.

Yours sincerely



Liam O'Brien

Assistant Secretary

CC:

Senator the Hon. Zed Seselja
Minister for International Development and the Pacific
Via email: Senator.seselja@aph.gov.au