

# Opening Address to 'Politics, Development and Security in Oceania' International Colloquium, Noumea

Mr Philippe Gomès,  
President of the Government of New Caledonia, 2009-2011

In my Inaugural Address on August 31, 2009 I spoke on behalf of the whole government which I have the honour to preside, and, among other things, I said this:

The sovereignty that we share with the state includes powers regarding international and regional relationships. The Noumea Agreement has not been fully implemented yet and its potential has not been fully tapped in this area. Today we have to speak in the name of this country in the Pacific area.

This goes to show that you are most welcome here in Noumea, New Caledonia, a land where the word is of the essence. Your word, originating in the Pacific, in our neighbour and friend, Australia, carries knowledge of the whole Pacific, and it matters to us. We will listen to it carefully and we will share your insight.

I am particularly keen on research, a field that I was intent on taking care of personally within my government, for research is a nation's intelligence and future, in other words, the promise of New Caledonia. Research is open-mindedness, and we can be only happy to see that you, famous ANU Professors, have chosen to hold your colloquium here this year. Your field covers the French and Francophone Pacific, and you have come to the right place for your study. Our word is at your disposal.

Your conference is taking place here at the same time as our French-speaking Communities' Week. I do not see any contradiction or conflict in this; on the contrary, I am happy to see these two events happen at the same time.

Your bilingual conference shows that the Pacific is not an Anglophone lake but a mare nostrum, as the Latin phrase has it, 'Our Sea', where various waves mix in a common life, and as a result, we can live together.

As you know, on October 6, just a few days ago, France and Australia signed in Canberra an agreement on higher education degree equivalencies, which allows exchanges between our universities, and, obviously, that is of major interest for New Caledonia.

There are only 370 Australian students in France as opposed to 3,000 French people studying in Australia. Dear Professors, tell your students that we are expecting them, that Australians are always welcome in New Caledonia, and this goes for students, and not only because we have the same academic year!

Dear Professors, I see that the precise topic of your conference is 'Stability, Security and Development'. This area of Pacific Studies fits perfectly with the dynamics of present-day New Caledonia and with the policy of my pluralistic and inclusive government.

Of course, we want our country to develop, but we cannot get development by fiat. Development requires an environment which allows our vibrancy to thrive. These conditions are, of course, stability and security. You have perfectly outlined our common problematics in this region.

Security is external security, and the major powers with which you and we are linked unfailingly are the warranty that we most need.

Stability, which includes internal security, is the ideal that we all reach for, and in this undertaking we succeed in varying degrees. Because I do not enjoy your freedom as researchers, I will refrain from expostulating on such and such a neighbouring nation; I will just acknowledge the example of democratic stability that Australia shows in her peaceful parliamentary majority changes.

This model is not the one we have in New Caledonia, for we have chosen to challenge stability by attempting to disconnect it, at least partly, from majoritarian democracy. Our purpose was to constantly seek consensus, and that is a tough proposition. In our country the rift between the two major political groups is a deep one, and as a result, instability seemed inevitable, just as our troubled years have clearly shown; therefore, we resolved to work together toward a more balanced development for our country, for its security and its peace. I'm proud to tell you on behalf of New Caledonia that, so far, we have been successful! New Caledonia has known stability for 20 years now, and my government will continue on the same path.

Dear Australian academic friends, your being here today is proof that you have comprehended this; your having elected to come to Noumea to discuss stability, security and development in the Pacific shows that you have a sense that New Caledonia is a relevant place, a place where all these notions flourish today: we greatly appreciate your coming here, and I thank you very much for it.

I am in no way seeking to show smug optimism and futile complacency. I am perfectly aware that nothing is final, including in New Caledonia, and maybe especially in New Caledonia, where the fire is still smouldering. I know perfectly well that in my country there are too many people who are left behind as far as development is concerned, and they are too obvious a danger for its stability and security. We probably have not found the way; in any case we have not been able to reduce the scope of this problem, and I do not play down its potential for an outburst of political and social violence. As a result, I will stay informed about your research in this area, about the models that are analysed, and about the solutions that are devised and tested. Your proceedings will be not only scientifically valuable; they will also be of great interest to the group of men and women to whom I belong, the men and women who are in the task of building up Oceania day by day.

Thank you, and may your discussions be fruitful!