

# New 45km highway opens in Western Province

BY: spokiton

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**A** new 45-kilometre highway linking Aiambak Port with Lake Murray in the Middle Fly region of Western Province was officially opened last Monday.

The Ok Tedi Mining Limited managing director and chief executive officer Peter Graham, and the Middle Fly Member of Parliament Roy Biyama, opened the infrastructure on April 18.

This highway rehabilitation project cost a total of K59.9 million. It is one of many infrastructure projects funded by the Community Mine Continuation Agreement (CMCA) portion of the Western Province People's Dividend Trust Fund (WPPDTF), and delivered by the Ok Tedi Development Foundation.

The construction contract was awarded to Starwest Constructions Limited with technical engineering support from Kramer Ausenco. Starwest began works in November 2013 and completed this lower portion of the Barramundi Highway two years later in November 2015.

Graham said the project was a significant investment and a first-class stretch of the highway so it is very important to look after it.

"If we don't maintain the road, keep the drainage right, in no time the road will start to suffer and we'll lose much of the value of the road. So again, we look at community support to look after the road.

"The road itself is a means to an end, it's not an end in itself. What is important is that the community can now take advantage of what the road offers," said the CEO.

"It's a life line, it gets you to improved access to health, education, markets, it's a wonderful opportunity but that opportunity now rests in your hands," Graham told Aiambak and Lake Murray people at the opening.

Meanwhile, Middle Fly MP Biyama, who was the keynote speaker at the opening ceremony, has pledged his support to work closely with OTDF CEO Ian Middleton and the Foundation in delivering more projects for the Middle Fly people.

“Mr Middleton, I never knew you, but looking at such things you are doing, creating job opportunities for my people, I would like to support you all the way with whatever OTDF does,” Biyama said.

Biyama was proud to be able to open the highway on behalf of his people and also pledged to give them a canter truck to support their rubber and food security needs.

Middleton acknowledged and welcomed Biyama’s support toward OTDF.

He said in *Tok Pisin*: “*Memba mi ekseptim toktok blo yu, mi ekseptim hamamas blo yu*, that you stood here and you said you were proud of this development on behalf of your people. *Mi tu mi praud on bihaf of OTML na OTDF, na sapos trutru yu laik wok wantaim mipla, mipla stap. Kam na yumi wokim moa divelopment lo pipol blo Midol Flai.*”

The partnership expressed between the various parties now lays the foundations to further supporting the communities of the Middle Fly; the people themselves must take advantage of this highway.

Lake Murray Local Level Government president Sep Galeva, along with many community leaders, both men and women, expressed their gratitude and asked OTDF to further assist them with rubber, eaglewood, rice and vegetable crops for sale to markets that are now more accessible to them.

“This road will open up a lot of markets for our people. It’s not just rubber; it may open other things like eaglewood. At the moment we are talking about rubber because it’s very important for the Lake Murray community and that is why we have to thank CMCA leaders for at least putting up this money to make it possible to build this road,” Galeva said.

He said rubber was the only cash crop for the people in Western Province and that rubber was very important for his Middle Fly people.

“I would like to encourage OTDF by giving you full support in whatever you want to do to bring cash flow into our people’s pocket. I’m with you all the way. Whatever it takes to build infrastructure for our people, I’m with you.

“Whether I leave politics and be an ordinary man, I am with you, because I understand the government doesn’t come in quickly. If there is a development partner here who can support the community, we need to partner with them to deliver what our people need,” Galeva added.

*(OTDF chief operating officer Lalatue Avosa, left, and Middle Fly MP Roy Biyama escorted by Lake Murray dancers in Western Province during the opening of the highway.)*

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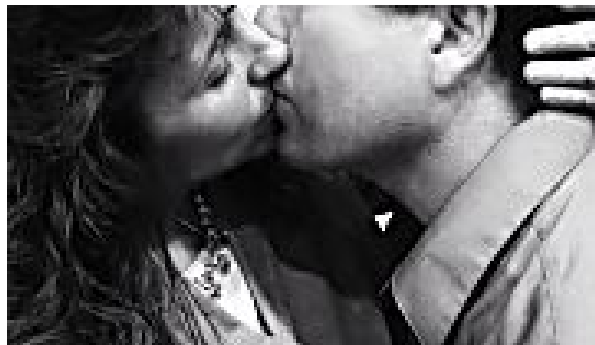




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