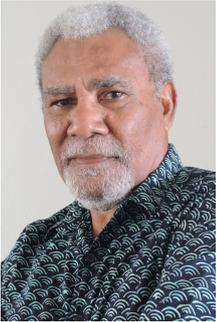


**Public Statement by Rt Hon Sir Mekere Morauta  
Former Prime Minister and Member for Moresby North-West  
Port Moresby, 12 May 2019**

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**O'Neill puts his political survival before the needs of rural people**



The Member for Moresby North-West, Sir Mekere Morauta, today warned of a looming development crisis in most provinces because of the failure of District Development Authorities to function as intended.

“They were meant to bring development decisions and implementation down to the district level,” he said, “but they have done no such thing. In fact they impeding development because of unnecessary duplication of effort, conflicts of interest, a crippling lack of capacity, and rampant political interference.

“Governors and Provincial Governments are the big losers from Prime Minister Peter O’Neill’s introduction of DDAs in 2014. After four years in operation, DDAs in most districts are not working, and development has almost totally ceased.”

Sir Mekere said DDAs had been exposed as nothing more than a deceitful trick by Mr O’Neill to build support from Open MPs at the expense of Governors and Provincial Governments. He called on Governors to increase their efforts to protect their provinces from further failure of service delivery and development.

Some Governors have taken court action concerning the constitutionality of DDAs, but that is unlikely to be enough, Sir Mekere said. Even if they win, Mr O’Neill is just as likely to ignore the decision, as he had done so often in the past. What is required to restore the powers of Governors and Provincial Government – and to resume rural development and rural service delivery - is a united front.

“There is no better time than now to protect the mandate that Governors have and to prevent the destruction of the provincial government system,” he said. “Papua New Guinea cannot afford to have that system undermined.

“The only way forward for Governors and Provincial Governments is to remove the Prime Minister now, while there is still an opportunity.”

Sir Mekere said a three-tier system of decentralisation – national, provincial and local government, is more than adequate. When the Constitution was being drawn up, PNG’s founding fathers regarded three tiers as the appropriate way to decentralise power, finances and decision-making and implementation. That system remains appropriate today, and the failure of DDAs demonstrates that.

There are some flaws in the three-tier system that needs to be rectified, Sir Mekere said. For example Governors need to involve ALL their Open Members in setting priorities for development funding. The present system allows for funding and project imbalances to occur. “The solution is to require Governors and Open Members by law to cooperate on development funding to ensure that it is distributed fairly and effectively,” he said.

But Sir Mekere said the new four-tier system is unworkable. Mr O’Neill has carefully tailored the District Development Authority Act of 2014 to suit his own personal purposes. It lacks any meaningful accountability and transparency measures. It is vague and full of deliberate loopholes.

“What it amounts to is an open invitation to the abuse, waste and mismanagement that characterises Mr O’Neill’s regime,” Sir Mekere said. “The cost over time is likely to be enormous considering the opportunities for an explosion of salaries and entitlements, consultants, advisers, specialists and all the rest of the skills that districts lack.

“The opportunities for political interference are many and varied – through control of funding to both Provincial and District administrations, through control of appointments, and through Ministerial control of virtually every aspect of DDA operations.

“The DDA Act is designed to further consolidate control of the nation’s political and financial powers in the hands of Mr O’Neill, and to bypass or pervert all the inbuilt safeguards in proper process,” Sir Mekere said. “It lacks any semblance of accountability and transparency.

“The only consequence can be further erosion of development and service delivery in rural areas and a further decline in rural living standards. Our founding fathers, in setting up the three-tier system of government, wanted to ensure genuine and cost-effective decentralization so that rural Papua New Guinea remained a satisfying and rewarding home for the bulk of the population.

“Now one man wants to sacrifice rural development and service delivery so he can extend his personal control over power and money. He must be removed.”

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