

**Public Statement**  
**by Rt Hon Sir Mekere Morauta**  
**Port Moresby, 10 June 2017**

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**PM afraid of public debate**



Former Prime Minister Sir Mekere Morauta today challenged Peter O'Neill to reverse his cowardly decision not to participate in televised political debates during the election.

"He should be man enough to debate his opponents," he said. "It is unheard of for a Prime Minister to hide from the people like this.

"I am ready to debate him any time, any place. I am sure the Leader of the Opposition, Don Polye is also ready. It is time for the Prime Minister to put his record and his policies up for public scrutiny and questioning.

"The public has a right to hear his answers without the deceptions, half-truths and distortions pumped out by his spin doctors. People should be able to ask their own questions as well.

"Public debate is an essential part of the transparency and accountability that people expect from a Prime Minister."

Sir Mekere said that Mr O'Neill's refusal to debate would fuel speculation as to why. Is it because he does not want to expose his deception and deceit, his government's waste and mismanagement? The whole country can see the economic and financial ruin Papua New Guinea is facing.

Why is there no medicine in hospitals across the country, why are schools closing and children being sent home, why is the Highlands Highway and other important transport infrastructure in ruins? Why have our oversight and enforcement institutions been politicised, interfered with and starved of resources? Why have government systems and processes been by-passed and manipulated?

Businesses want to know why is there insufficient foreign exchange. They want to know why the Government is not paying their bills. What is the reason the nation is struggling under a mountain of public debt, the size of Mount Wilhelm? Why are PNG-owned businesses facing bankruptcy? Why is unemployment increasing? What has put the non-mining sector into recession?

Mothers want to know why prices are rising and why they are struggling to afford even the most basic necessities. Why their families are being denied reliable power, water and sewerage. Why do most of them have no utilities at all?

"Mr O'Neill has a lot of questions to answer," Sir Mekere said. "But it seems he has no answers. That is the essential problem. Mr O'Neill has got us into this terrible mess and he doesn't know how to get us out of it."

Sir Mekere said people want leaders to debate issues publicly, because their everyday lives and their future are affected by government policies and actions.

"The PM should rethink the matter, and agree to public debate and discussion," Sir Mekere said.