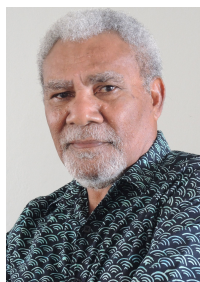


**Public Statement by Rt Hon Sir Mekere Morauta
Former Prime Minister and Member for Moresby North-West
Port Moresby, 13 March 2018**

Fix the hole in the bucket, Prime Minister



The Member for Moresby North-West, Sir Mekere Morauta, said today it is time for Prime Minister Peter O'Neill to stop talking and start acting, to stop blaming others for the mess the nation is in, and to introduce an immediate program of reform and reconstruction.

"I have been warning for many years that Mr O'Neill has squandering opportunities for future national development and prosperity, and now we can see the devastating consequences every day, including the response to the earthquake," Sir Mekere said.

"The inadequacy of the Government's relief effort is obvious. Even Mr O'Neill himself recognised that when he said he was disappointed with the 'slow start'.

"It would not surprise me if the reports about the National Disaster Committee being locked out of its office due to non-payment of rent are true. There's a hole in the bucket, Mr O'Neill, which needs plugging as quickly as possible.

"Stop blaming public servants, stop blaming other people. Take responsibility and most of all take action to plug the holes.

"The important point I am making is that the systems and processes of Government have been incapacitated by Mr O'Neill's corruption, waste and mismanagement.

"if he had listened to my calls for a properly planned and funded program of reform and reconstruction, and similar recommendations from international experts, Papua New Guinea would not be in the dire straits that it is in now.

"His failure to fix the economy and government finances, as I and others have suggested innumerable times, is the major factor in the cause of our current problems, including the slow and inadequate relief efforts."

National emergency systems appear to have completely broken down.

- Why did it take three days for the Prime Minister to declare a state of emergency?
- Why did it take him 10 days to visit the quake zone?
- Why isn't there a full-scale international response led and coordinated by recognised experts?

The Prime Minister has failed the nation and he has failed his own people.

There are still thousands of terrified villagers reportedly sleeping in the open air, without shelter, or with inadequate shelter. They are hungry and thirsty, as their gardens and water sources have been destroyed or are polluted.

"I am informed by reliable domestic and international sources that the medical response is not up to the task," Sir Mekere said.

"Mr O'Neill's corrupt medical supplies contracts have ensured that there are still not enough medical supplies to deal with the demand from medical relief teams and provincial health workers.

"Relief sources say mobile medical centres and operating theatres are needed urgently, and that only international partners can supply them."

Sir Mekere said the national government's inadequate response was in contrast to the effectiveness of efforts by NGOs, the private sector (especially Oil Search) and Australia and New Zealand. They are doing a first-class job but need to be able to coordinate their efforts with the Government.

Non-Government sources have told me that the emergency response would be much better if Mr O'Neill was able to provide proper assessments to them, and make specific requests for assistance.

"I am also concerned at reports that money from Mr O'Neill's relief appeal is already being misused, with contracts going to mystery suppliers with no record of achievement," former Prime Minister Morauta said.

"This was a feature of his drought relief fund, and Mr O'Neill needs to make details of his expenditure public in a timely manner, and reveal the measures he has taken to prevent this type of abuse and profiteering.

"Likewise he should provide factual and detailed daily reports of the Government's relief efforts rather than indulging in sweet talk or attacks on me.

"Mr O'Neill is constantly telling me and others who question his misdeeds, mismanagement and maladministration to shut up. I will not be silenced: it is my right and my duty as a Member of Parliament and citizen to speak out, and I will continue to do so in the national interest.

"As I said before, Parliament needs to meet to discuss this national emergency and appropriate the resources required. Resources are short, because of wastage and leakage, and Mr O'Neill must institute a broad program of reform and reconstruction. The usual ad hoc plugging of holes is not good enough."