

Public Statement by Rt Hon Sir Mekere Morauta

Port Moresby March 30 2016

Former Prime Minister Sir Mekere Morauta today urged Papua New Guineans to speak out on the importance of protecting institutions of state from improper influence, intimidation and harassment and financial and procedural abuse.

“We have a small band of leaders so terrified of the consequences of their actions that they will do anything to save themselves,” he said.

“No institution is safe from meddling, no officeholder is safe from harassment and intimidation, no process is safe from manipulation and perversion, no funds are safe from abuse, misappropriation and misapplication.

“At times like these it is essential that institutions continue to act in the interest of the nation and the people, not the interest of any individual or interest group.

“I know that the task of defending the institutions is not easy and straightforward, but allowing the destroyers to triumph through people’s inaction is regrettable.

“In the current environment, nothing is more important than the independence of institutions and the ability of their management and boards of directors to follow due process.

“A handful of honest and fearless Papua New Guineans doing their jobs properly are being intimidated and prosecuted while those who help leaders attack institutions are rewarded.

“Officeholders and the public alike have a right and a duty to ensure that the national interest is the star that guides their operations and comes before anything else.”

Sir Mekere said there had been a number of dangerous attacks on the integrity and independence of national institutions, all designed to thwart due process and weaken them.

These attacks constituted a very serious threat to the rule of law, to Parliamentary democracy and to human rights.

Most dangerous of all have been attacks on the independence of the judiciary and the authorities responsible for upholding the rule of law such as the Ombudsman Commission, the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary and Task Force Sweep.

“The attempted arrest of the Chief Magistrate, the defiance of the Ombudsman Commission and veiled threats against it, the revolving door of Police Commissioners, the arrest of members of the Fraud Squad and Anti-Corruption Directorate and the arrest of the head of Task Force Sweep are cause for deep public concern.

“So too is the withdrawal of funding for Task Force Sweep and the police Fraud Squad, which has hampered the investigation of many leaders and their accomplices and prevented justice taking its course.

“The withdrawal of funds has intentionally influenced police force decision-making to protect political and corporate suspects.

“These attacks have been coupled with constant challenges to legitimate court decisions and rulings and related actions and activities by the authorities, often on frivolous grounds.”

Sir Mekere said the Government had now turned its attention to the right of all Papua New Guineans to freedom of expression and freedom of association.

The assault on a peaceful protest prior to the last sitting of Parliament included threats against the media, the bashing of innocent people and damage to property and equipment. “This should not be seen as an isolated event. It was part of a plan to muzzle the media and curtail public discussion of matters of national interest.

“It was yet another attempt by the government to shut down criticism and discussion on social media, and to regulate the mainstream media,” Sir Mekere said.

“Papua New Guineans ought to be very concerned about the proposals for a secret police force to spy on people’s private communications and their public comments on social media.

“Subjecting people to imprisonment on the basis of “negative impacts on society”, “lies” and “false information” as defined by secret police is not something that belongs in a democracy. It belongs in a dictatorship.”

The media, and independent public discussion of issues of national importance, are cornerstones of democracy and important elements of national development.