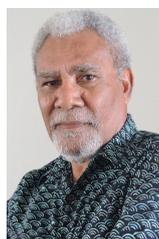


**Public Statement on the 2017 election**  
**by Rt Hon Sir Mekere Morauta**  
Port Moresby, 15 February 2017

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Time for Change – Now or Never



Many people, from all walks of life, are urging me to contest the forthcoming national election.

Why?

Because they are worried about the current state of affairs and they fear for the future.

They see that the character of Papua New Guinea has changed for the worse in the last five years.

**People are saying that corruption is on a scale never witnessed before. They are worried about many things, including:**

- The growing web of corruption, abuse, and poverty the country is trapped in
- Poor management of government finances
- Growing levels of public debt – over 33.5% of GDP, on conservative IMF figures, which exclude billions of kina of hidden debt of state-owned enterprises and export credits from China etc
- Mortgaging of future income to debt repayment, depriving basic services such as health and education of proper funding

**People are struggling with rising costs and lack of jobs. They see:**

- Recession in the non-mining sector, with people losing jobs daily and businesses cutting expenditure to the bone
- Poor job prospects for school-leavers
- Government not paying businesses for services provided, which in turn leaves companies struggling to pay their own bills and staff
- The value of the kina declining and prices rising
- Businesses queuing up for foreign exchange to pay offshore bills – which no-one understands, when the Government and the Central Bank keep saying foreign reserve levels are high
- That the Government does not understand that more borrowing and printing money will deepen our problems
- That there is nothing to show from LNG, oil, gas, gold and copper wealth, apart from glamour projects in Port Moresby. *Where is all the money, people wonder*

**Others comment on:**

- The severe budget cuts to health and education
- Teachers, doctors, health workers and policemen not being paid properly or on time
- Universities – UPNG, Unitech, Goroka, Vudal - being starved of resources, and yet the Government is building a new one - in lalibu - where only the principal building contractors will benefit
- The TFF/school fee subsidy chaos, with schools not receiving monies in full or on time
- Colleges opening late for the academic year because Government has not released the money for airfares and fees
- Lack of drugs and insufficient staff in hospitals and health centres

**Many people point to systemic problems and the style of government:**

- Breakdown of the machinery and system of government, weakening, destruction and politicisation of institutions of state
- Dictatorship-type rule and threats to democratic principles and practice
- Parliament being used as a rubber stamp
- Lack of respect for the rule of law and heavy interference in law and justice agencies
- Threats to media personnel and suppression of media freedom
- Crushing of dissent and violent treatment of student protestors
- Good leaders, with good intentions, being handcuffed and threatened by the top leadership

**The list keeps going on, and growing.**

People see no sign of the root problems being addressed. People are afraid that the situation will get worse if the roots are allowed to rot further.

People keep reminding me that the problems are similar to what we faced in 1999 and that, by and large, I fixed them and rescued the nation.

**They look back to the reforms I introduced which re-laid the foundation for economic growth and political stability that we enjoyed for over a decade, and the reforms that rebuilt important institutions, increased their independence and insulated them from political interference. People see that these gains have been lost.**

People are telling me that they want a new Government after the election, with a new leader.

I chose to retire from politics five years ago. I am enjoying my retirement. I am enjoying spending time with family and friends, boating, fishing, reading, travelling, maintaining a continuing oversight of PNGSDP and contributing to society in other ways.

But I feel the concern of people. I hear what they are saying. I share their fears.

More and more I find it difficult to ignore the growing chorus everywhere I go – in markets, shops, offices, restaurants, from academics, business leaders, public servants, professionals, market sellers, policemen, former MPs, current MPs, intending candidates, men and women I pass in the street.

They all say: “You fixed it before. Please come back and do it again”.

So, I have decided that I am prepared to contest one of the NCD seats provided that by the time for nomination I believe there is sufficient support from all quarters, especially current MPs and intending candidates, for a new Government.

I would stand to help lead a **movement for change and reform**.

**The 2017 election is the time to act. It is the time for ordinary people to use their voting power to send a clear message and make change happen:**

- To rip out the weeds of corruption
- To replant the seeds for future growth and prosperity
- To restore and strengthen our key oversight institutions
- To reconstruct public finances and the economy
- To give all people opportunities for income-earning, for justice and for equity
- To restore democracy
- To rebuild Papua New Guinea

I urge voters throughout the country, political parties, dissatisfied members of PNC and independent candidates to work with me to bring about this change. The nation’s future is at stake.

I will gauge in the coming weeks whether I think I have the support base to stand for a seat in the NCD which would lead me to help form a new Government in July-August.