

**Media Statement by
Rt Hon Sir Mekere Morauta**
Port Moresby 25 October 2015

People need to be aware of increasing threats by the current Government to the right of free speech and to the freedom and independence of the media, former Prime Minister Sir Mekere Morauta said today.

"These precious rights and freedoms are under attack as never before by a Prime Minister demonstrably determined to silence legitimate criticism – including criticism of the official corruption that appears to exist at the heart of government," he said.

"The Prime Minister's use of the NICTA Act to clamp down on freedom of speech and the media is an unparalleled abuse of power. The nation would seem to be moving step by step towards becoming a dictatorship.

"Freedom of speech and a fearless, independent media are the cornerstones of democracy, and must be defended by all sections of society."

The former Prime Minister said it was frightening to think of a body such as NICTA being able to lay charges and conduct hearings under vague headings such as "negative impacts on society", "lies" and "false information".

The Prime Minister's plans, enunciated and implemented by Communications Minister Jimmy Miringtoro, are not laws and powers appropriate for a free, independent democracy such as Papua New Guinea.

They are laws and powers more suited to command-and-control regimes of the former Soviet Bloc. They have no place in Papua New Guinea.

Sir Mekere said the Prime Minister's plans were very dangerous and clearly open to abuse and to secret political manipulation.

"It is also regulation of mainstream media by stealth," he said. "Every mainstream media outlet has social media content, usually a Facebook page or a blog.

"The Prime Minister's plans would capture all mainstream media content in social media and by default would render it subject to these repressive laws and powers and the secret policemen within NICTA and possibly elsewhere."

Sir Mekere said that he was pleased that the Post-Courier had pointed this out in its strong editorial opposing the Prime Minister's proposal, and that he hoped other mainstream media would join Post-Courier and publicly oppose the changes.

"The undoubted benefits of the communications revolution that have been sweeping through Papua New Guinea would be severely reduced by the Prime Minister's plans," Sir Mekere said.

The exchange of ideas, the discussion of new ways of looking at issues affecting the nation, the loss of previously unheard voices contributing to national development, the place of Papua New Guinea in the wider information economy – all would be lost or greatly impaired.

"The nation simply cannot afford to allow these plans to be implemented – they are harmful socially, economically and politically. They do not serve the national interest. They are designed purely to serve political self-interest of the powers that be."