

Public Statement by Rt Hon Sir Mekere Morauta

Port Moresby April 17 2016

Former Prime Minister Sir Mekere Morauta said today that the integrity of the Office of Prime Minister has been undermined by the actions of Prime Minister Peter O'Neill.

"Mr O'Neill knows well that the Office of the Prime Minister is not a personal possession," he said.

"It is a Constitutional office, the highest in the land, and it belongs to the people and the State. It does not belong to Peter O'Neill.

"It is there to serve the people and the nation; it is not there to serve the interests of the incumbent.

"In particular its power should not be used as a weapon to protect the incumbent from due process, or to cause due process to be thwarted.

"A shadow has been cast over the Office of the Prime Minister by the activities of Mr O'Neill in relation to the exercise of the warrant for his arrest, and the police investigation of the Paraka case from which the criminal charges he faces derive."

Sir Mekere said police officers, judges and magistrates, lawyers and other authorities must be free to do their jobs without fear of official retribution or political interference.

No person should be suspended from duty for doing his or her duty, much less when that duty involves an investigation into the Prime Minister himself.

That is political interference of the worst sort. It has added to the cloud of oppression and intimidation that hangs over Papua New Guineans, heightened by physical violence and threats of physical violence.

Papua New Guineans rightly expect the Fraud Squad officers to be reinstated immediately and be allowed to get on with the job.

Judges, magistrates, lawyers and other officials should be able to do their duty without worrying that they might suffer the same fate, or worse.

The same goes for the Prime Minister. Mr O'Neill, if he is innocent, has nothing to be afraid of from officers of the law and the judiciary going about their business in compliance with due process and in accordance with the oaths of office they have sworn.

"Papua New Guineans are not fools, nor should we be treated as fools. They see Mr O'Neill's tactics for what they are: naked attempts to prevent investigation of corruption and illegal acts," Sir Mekere said.

"Papua New Guineans are right to question the sudden suspension of members of the National Fraud and Anti-Corruption Directorate, following on from the attacks on Task Force Sweep, the blocking of funds to both bodies, and other acts designed to shut down investigations such as the Paraka case, the Israeli generators and the UBS loan."

The former Prime Minister said the suspension of the Fraud Squad members has not only scandalized the nation and brought the Office of the Prime Minister into further disrepute, it is damaging Papua New Guinea's international reputation.

The regional media is increasingly focusing on the allegations of corruption now engulfing Papua New Guinea.

"The Prime Minister has lost touch with reality," Sir Mekere said. "He is talking to himself, fooling himself, and believing his own stories. He is listening only to a small clique of advisers and cronies.

"Instead Mr O'Neill should listen instead to what concerned citizens are saying."

For a start he should hand himself in to the Police and tell them what he knows about the Paraka case, and what his involvement was.

Mr O'Neill has stated publicly that he knows "who are the real financial beneficiaries of the Paraka transactions" and that he "looks forward to the facts seeing the light of day on this issue".

Now is the time, Prime Minister. Now is the time. Not through the media, but through the Police and the courts.

Mr O'Neill has the example of Justice Bernard Sakora, who has complied with due process every step of the way, and has rightly and honorably stood himself down while he defends the charges against him.

"If the Prime Minister has any respect for the office he holds and for due process, and any public conscience, he should now follow suit," Sir Mekere said.

"That is the only way by which the dignity, independence and integrity of the Office of Prime Minister can be maintained."