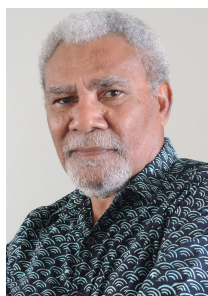


Public Statement
by Rt Hon Sir Mekere Morauta
Port Moresby, 28 June 2017

The Gamato-Lupari-PNC election fiasco



Electoral Commissioner Patilias Gamato's responses and comments at his media conference yesterday raise serious questions and concerns about the election and the mismanagement and irregularities that have been revealed, and confirm he is not in control of the operations.

Papua New Guinea deserves more than the unsatisfactory and contradictory answers from Mr Gamato and the suspicious silence from Election Steering Committee head Isaac Lupari.

"Mr Gamato spent yesterday afternoon smiling away and treating legitimate questions as something to laugh about," former Prime Minister Sir Mekere said today. "Very important questions were brushed aside as if they didn't matter."

For example where is the electoral roll? It is extraordinary that it is still not publicly available so voters and candidates can check its accuracy. "What are Mr Gamato and Mr Lupari hiding," Sir Mekere asked.

Mr Gamato's statement that voting would not be extended in areas where one-day polling was reduced to a handful of hours is totally unacceptable. "One-day polling means exactly that – ten hours, 8am to 6pm; no more, no less," Sir Mekere said. "Mr Gamato seems determined to cheat thousands of people out of their constitutional right to vote."

Sir Mekere said people were concerned to know had happened to the ballot papers that had already been filled and also those that were seized. Where are all the ballot papers and boxes now, legitimate or otherwise?

Sir Mekere described as contradictory and unsatisfactory Mr Gamato's answers in relation to the arrest of NCD polling officials yesterday, allegedly with K184,300 in cash, ballot boxes and ballot papers and incriminating evidence on their phones and in written notes concerning an NCD candidate.

"I understand that the money did NOT come from the Electoral Commission, although Mr Gamato said very clearly at his media conference that it did, and that he was aware that the officer was holding the money," he said.

"I hope the Police are investigating all those implicated, including the provider/s of the money. I also hope that charges will be laid swiftly to give the public some confidence."

Mr Gamato said the cash was to pay poll workers, yet he and Mr Lupari are on the public record as saying that all payments to election workers are being made via direct transfers to bank accounts. They are on the public record as saying that all payments would go through a centralized system and made one week in advance. *'Every payment will be done electronically to their bank accounts,'* Mr Lupari said last year. *'They will be paid one week in advance of their allowances'*.

Where are the withdrawal and payment authorisations for this and other cash transactions already made, Sir Mekere asked. Where are the withdrawal and deposit slips, where are the acquittals for completed payments? Is it true that the Department of Finance has paid millions of kina into the personal bank accounts of election managers to pay officials?

"The answers given yesterday by Mr Gamato are not credible," Sir Mekere said. "He and Mr Lupari should start telling the truth about the many polling failures and irregularities being identified."

"Why is Mr Lupari not by Mr Gamato's side, as he has been at almost every election media conference for the past six months? Why is he campaigning for the Prime Minister in the Highlands today, and not in Port Moresby? Is it more important to fix the election in a few Highlands seats or to solve the nationwide crisis?"

"Mr Gamato and Mr Lupari are treating the media and the public as fools. Their cover-up will not work."

"Public and security force vigilance have been instrumental in uncovering attempts to manipulate the election. The extent of the vote-rigging exposed in the first few days of polling means it is time for Police and Defence Force personnel to redouble their efforts."

"The future of Papua New Guinea's parliamentary democracy is in their hands."

"Please, members of the Police and Defence Force, stand up and protect our democracy and our future," Sir Mekere said.