

**Public Statement
by Rt Hon Sir Mekere Morauta
Port Moresby, 21 June 2017**

Peter O'Neill – the most expensive PNG Prime Minister in history



“Prime Minister Peter O'Neill is costing the people of Papua New Guinea a fortune,” former Prime Minister Sir Mekere Morauta said today.

“The Government has severe cashflow problems. There are no medicines in hospitals and health centres; schools have not received nearly enough money to operate; businesses are owed millions by the Government, but Treasury and Finance seem to have no problem paying the huge expenses the Prime Minister runs up daily.

“On top of the damage he is inflicting on the country and the people through gross mismanagement of public finances, high debt and poor health and education services, he constantly flies around the country and the world in the Falcon jet, hires helicopters, stays in expensive hotels – all on the public purse.

“I am told he has a permanent suite at the Airways Hotel, where he has lived for the last five years, eats and drinks there, when he has a perfectly good house on Touaguba Hill, and of course Mirigini House, at his disposal. How much does that cost the taxpayer?

“Almost every week he flies overseas to Australia, Singapore or Hong Kong. What for? What state business is he conducting? Or is it personal business?

“Recently the Falcon was out of service, so he demanded Air Niugini provide a Fokker for him to fly to Australia. A plane was pulled out of scheduled services – too bad about the poor passengers whose flights were disrupted – and he took the whole plane for himself.

“Why can't he take a commercial flight like the rest of us? Between Air Niugini, Qantas, Virgin and Philippine Airlines, surely he can find a flight going near his destination,” Sir Mekere said.

Mr O'Neill and his hangers-on are currently flying all over the country at taxpayers' expense, attending rallies, openings and other events.

The people of Papua New Guinea are paying for the O'Neill-PNC election campaign, while other party leaders and candidates must meet their own expenses.

“Mr O'Neill has promised to sell the Falcon so many times, yet he continues to use it as if it was his personal aerial PMV”, Sir Mekere said. “Question: When is a promise not a promise? Answer: when it is made by the current Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea.

“This particular promise is costing the people of Papua New Guinea a fortune. The luxury jet is worth K145 million, which should already be in Consolidated Revenue, where it could be applied to health or education or maintenance of infrastructure. Instead, it is being used to prop up the Prime Minister's election campaign.

“On top of that, how much does it cost to operate the Falcon each year, money that should also be going into Consolidated Revenue?”

Sir Mekere said Mr O'Neill should stop treating the Office of the Prime Minister as his own personal piggy bank. There are very specific rules applying to the privileges of that office, and they do not include electioneering.

What other privileges, campaign tools and implements of office is the Prime Minister applying to his election campaign, Sir Mekere asked. What other public funds and assets are being used or misused during the election? Are senior public servants being used as campaign tools? Who is paying for PNC's massive advertising campaign?

“Once the election is over and a new Government formed, these and other issues relating to Prime Ministerial activities will have to be investigated,” Sir Mekere said.

“One of these includes whether the Prime Minister is hiring South West Air for travel. This airline was formerly owned by Mr O'Neill until he sold it – to a friend - late last year. The time frame, frequency and the cost of any hiring by the Prime Minister should be established to remove any suspicion of impropriety.”

On 19 June a Lae resident took a photo of a South West Air plane that carried the Prime Minister and his entourage from Port Moresby to Nadzab, where he was met by a large contingent of heavily armed policemen, before taking a helicopter to Boana for an election rally for the Member for Nawae. Did PNC or Mr O'Neill pay for these charter flights, or did the Government, Sir Mekere asked.

“These are important matters of public interest and should be pursued vigorously to get to the facts of the matter.”