

**Public Statement  
by Rt Hon Sir Mekere Morauta  
Port Moresby, 26 July 2017**

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**Suspicious declaration of Hela Provincial seat**



Former Prime Minister Sir Mekere Morauta said today that the circumstances surrounding the declaration of the Hela Provincial seat to the PNC candidate seemed highly suspicious.

He said that it clearly demonstrated the extent of rigging and manipulation of the election.

“It would seem that Francis Potape was robbed of victory,” he said.

“I have received reports from independent parties present in the counting room that at the end of the count, around 3 pm on Monday afternoon, Mr Potape reached the required majority.

“The figures were posted on the board for all to see. Instead of proceeding to declare the seat, the returning officer sent scrutineers out of the room and unilaterally conducted so-called ‘Quality Checks’.

“The figures were erased from the board and in the early evening he declared the seat in favour of the candidate who actually came second.”

Sir Mekere said that if the account of what he had heard happened was true, it was gross abuse of the process and denial of the right of Hela people to choose their preferred leader.

“If it is true, it also shows how desperate Peter O’Neill has become to grab any number by any means – and also to control the wealth of the Hela Province,” he said.

“If the returning officer did alter the figures fraudulently, he should be prosecuted.”

Sir Mekere called on the Electoral Commissioner and his legal advisers to review the declaration.

“The Electoral Commissioner should use the administrative power conferred on him to review this very serious situation and rescind the declaration on the basis of the evidence before him,” he said.

“That is the only fair and proper thing to do for the people of Hela.”