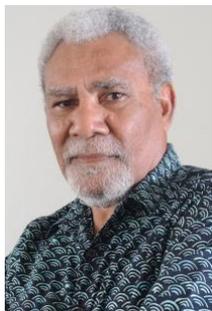


**Public Statement by Rt Hon Sir Mekere Morauta
Former Prime Minister and Member for Moresby North-West
Port Moresby, 20 November 2018**

PM exposes PNG to international ridicule



Prime Minister Peter O'Neill has exposed Papua New Guinea to international ridicule and criticism over the lavish staging of APEC and the failure of the meeting to make the customary Leaders' Declaration for the first time in its history.

"APEC has revealed to the world the corruption, waste and mismanagement within the O'Neill Government, and their devastating effects on the nation and citizens," the Member for Moresby North-West, Sir Mekere Morauta, said today.

"It has shone the international spotlight on Mr O'Neill's crude and cynical attempts to play one nation against another, and his inability to understand the nuances of international relations and the dramatic geopolitical changes occurring in the region.

"What should have been a moment for PNG to shine on the international stage instead descended into chaos, including embarrassing diplomatic incidents, international media allegations of financial and procedural impropriety and organisational disarray.

"Papua New Guinea's international standing has been diminished."

Sir Mekere said the issue for Papua New Guinea is not a failure of the international APEC organisation, the countries involved, or of PNG's professional diplomats – it is an issue of failed leadership.

PNG should not have hosted APEC in the first place. Mr O'Neill should have used the K3 billion he lavished on it to improve the quality of life of ordinary Papua New Guineans.

Instead we have preventable diseases such as polio, leprosy, TB and malaria surging and people dying - 21 children are now known to have contracted polio. Many schools are closing across the nation. Public servants are not being paid properly and other entitlements such as superannuation payments are being withheld. Essential infrastructure outside Port Moresby is crumbling into the dust, and government systems and processes are failing by the day.

There are other consequences of Mr O'Neill's failed leadership. Papua New Guinea has paid a high price for his decision to abandon PNG's traditional 'friend to all, enemy to none' foreign policy developed by Sir Michael Somare at Independence. His decision to play favorites has cast doubt on the nation's position in the world and undermined international trust.

"The key element is Mr O'Neill's insatiable appetite for money, whether it is handouts, or borrowings from China, multilateral agencies, international markets or traditional partners such as Australia, New Zealand, the EU and Japan," Sir Mekere said.

"Mr O'Neill's reckless borrowing has already put the nation in a very dangerous position. It has put the economy, the Budget and Government finances in jeopardy, and has called into question our relationship with multilateral partners such as the World Bank and IMF.

"Now Mr O'Neill's devious debt games and, consequently, his politically unbalanced foreign affairs standpoint, have added to the instability of the region and undermined Papua New Guinea's position in international affairs."

Sir Mekere, who represented Papua New Guinea in two APEC meetings as Prime Minister, said Mr O'Neill's need to borrow to cover up his economic and financial mismanagement had blinded him to sound advice about the changing global and regional environment.

"What is best for one man and his cronies is not necessarily what is best for the nation," he said. "Mr O'Neill has failed to take into account the economic and financial needs of Papua New Guinea, and the potential threat to the nation's sovereignty and independence from reckless political and financial game-playing."