

**Public Statement by Rt Hon Sir Mekere Morauta
Former Prime Minister and Member for Moresby North-West
Port Moresby, 29 March 2019**

Sir Mekere renews call for election commission of inquiry



The Member for Moresby North-West, Sir Mekere Morauta, today renewed his call for a commission of inquiry into the 2017 election, following the release of a damning observer report by the Australian National University.

The report is a comprehensive account of the election, based on observer teams led by Papua New Guinean experts who covered 69 electorates in all four regions with detailed studies of 44 electorates.

“It is very clear from the report that the 2017 election was designed to be chaotic; it was designed to be rigged; it was designed to produce a particular result,” Sir Mekere said.

“Those who must take responsibility are Peter O’Neill and Isaac Lupari, and their Chief Electoral Commissioner. They must share the blame for the organised chaos we had on an unprecedented scale.”

“I agree with the finding of the ANU report, based on my own experience, that this was the worst election ever in terms of official corruption and violence. As the ANU report so amply demonstrates, the election was not free and fair, and therefore the O’Neill Government cannot claim legitimacy, and nor can Papua New Guinea lay claim to being a parliamentary democracy.”

The ANU report, released in Port Moresby this week, shows that fewer than half (47%) of citizens surveyed after the election reported being able to exercise their vote freely.

Another key finding was the extent that money politics influenced the election. “For some years I have been warning people about the growth of money politics and the danger it poses to democracy.” Sir Mekere said. “But not only was it more pervasive in 2017 than before, it was also conducted through the Electoral Commission itself.

“Papua New Guinea cannot afford a repeat of this election debacle, and an independent commission of inquiry should be a first step towards restoring and protecting democracy.”

Sir Mekere said a wide range of activities needed to be undertaken to do this. For example, he said, the powers that are vested in one person, the Chief Electoral Commissioner, need to be examined carefully. “It is clear that too much power rests with one person,” he said. “There needs to be greater oversight of the Electoral Commission and a sharing of the burden of conducting elections. We must find ways to increase the independence and capacity of the Electoral Commission.”

One way would be to formalise the increased involvement of the Electoral Advisory Committee and the expansion of its powers and capacity. Consideration could be given to entrenching highly qualified and experienced observers deeply within the electoral system itself.

The independence of the Electoral Commission needs to be protected, and a whole new system of checks and balances introduced into the commission’s operations to enable it to withstand political influence.

“These can all be matters raised at a commission of inquiry, along with an examination of the widespread corruption and rigging evident in 2017,” Sir Mekere said.

“A priority must be to investigate the extensive political influence throughout the process, from the start of campaigning to the formation of Government. How, for example, did so many official electoral activities seem to favor PNC and its candidates?” Broad topics should include:

- Preparation of the electoral roll
- Obstruction to nomination of certain candidates
- Wantokism and political interference in the appointment of electoral officials
- Violence during the campaign, polling and counting
- The influence of the police and Defence Force on the election outcome and their role in the high level of violence
- Release of Government funds to finance both the preparation for and conduct of the election
- Printing of ballot papers in Indonesia and the distribution of ballot papers
- Voting turnout exceeding numbers registered on the electoral roll
- The security of ballot papers and boxes
- The transparency and independence of electoral processes including on polling days and during counting
- Sunday polling in some seats, including in Ialibu-Pangia, in contravention of the Constitution
- Declaration of seats and the return of writs
- Formation of Government

“Leaving the next election in the hands of Mr O’Neill and his cronies is a recipe for more chaos and corruption, only worse,” Sir Mekere said. “It would spell the end of our Parliamentary democracy.”

A copy of the ANU report is available here:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/y1fiq21gnw2rvk/20190320%20ANU%20PNG%20Election%20Observers%27%20Report.pdf?dl=0>