

Speech to Independent Team dinner – Media Release
by Rt Hon Sir Mekere Morauta
Port Moresby, 12 April 2017

Sir Mekere calls for constructive public debate on issues and policies



Former Prime Minister Sir Mekere Morauta today suggested the development of a national agenda for discussing Papua New Guinea's problems, and for finding solutions.

"The time for whispering, for speculating, for telling stories, and for fear, is over," he said in a speech to more than 500 guests at an Independent Team dinner in Port Moresby tonight.

"My intention tonight is to set an agenda for a national conversation. I ask every concerned Papua New Guinean to think and openly talk about our future."

The audience, of like-minded people who want to form an honest and effective government after the election, came from a broad spectrum of PNG society. It included members of the business community, academics, representatives of non-government organisations, Members of Parliament, intending independent candidates and many ordinary citizens.

The Independent Team is a voice for reform, reconstruction and development of Papua New Guinea, and aims to discuss substantive issues and policy matters as they arise during the election campaign. Funds raised at the dinner will be used by the Independent Team to work with like-minded Members of Parliament to help form government after the election.

Sir Mekere laid out four initial priority areas for debate:

- Weed out corruption and strengthen oversight institutions**
- Spend the money we have differently**
- New revenue and savings**
- Friendly foreign support**

He said he wanted the public to join him in playing an active part in removing "this wayward, corrupt Government and in helping re-build a Papua New Guinea that is fair; a country where everyone has an opportunity for a decent life; a country where people can freely exercise their democratic rights; a country that will provide its children with a sound future.

"I stand to be counted. I want to help form a good, clean and effective Government with moral leadership, a government that is dedicated to the nation, not driven by personal interests.

"I am ready to help any Prime Minister, bar one, to achieve that."

Sir Mekere said every citizen has a critical role to play by participating in discussions on policy options, and joining with like-minded individuals and organizations to press for the reform that is so sorely needed.

"People must exercise their voting power at this election to elect good, capable, honest men and women to Parliament, men and women who will not be induced by money or the offer of position by the very leaders who have brought our country to its knees.

Our future is at stake. As in 1999, we have another Date with Destiny, he said.

Sir Mekere described the Government as an octopus, led by people whose personal commercial interest conflicts with the national interest and their public duty.

"It is an octopus with many tentacles, invading every crevice, every nook and cranny where there is the smell of money," he said.

"The tentacles have already grabbed significant commercial stakes – in construction, security services, property development, real estate, gaming, hospitality, mining and exploration, petroleum, aviation, insurance, financial services, IT and communications. What is left for anyone else? The tentacles of the octopus have even crossed international waters, to hide and deposit the spoils.

"Put simply, the octopus has to be destroyed. It is pointless to just cut the tentacles, because new tentacles will grow."