



PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS

COMMITTEE TRANSCRIPT

MINISTRY OF National Reconciliation and peace Thursday 13 March 2008, 10:50 am

Hon Sogavare (Acting Chairman): Thank you very much Permanent Secretary Ministry of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace. This is a small ministry but you have a very very huge responsibility and you carry out the pillars of the present CNURA governments tasks and that is National Unity part of the Government's name which is national unity and rural advancement. It is a very important ministry as far as this government is concerned. Of course we the Committee fully agree with that commend the government to continue with this ministry because it holds the key to the continued existence of this country as a nation. The ministry was established back in 2000 to address the issue of peace . I guess to get Solomon Islands to tolerate one another to be able to move forward as a nation so you have the very a very huge responsibility on your shoulders. Of course in the rural policy statements, the Committee is fully aware that certain outcome from your ministries strengthen sense of national unity amongst our people, community leaders are able to deal with conflict to prevent outbreaks of violence. You are also required to complete a truth and reconciliation process and establish what happen during the years of conflict and opportunities for reconciliation at all levels of society and the concerns of victims have not been appropriately addressed. Both the functioning networks and partnership between stakeholders identified recognized potential conflict would resolve tensions and violence. These are very very important outcomes that are expected of your ministry and so what you would brief the Committee this morning that you can allocate resources in the recurrent and development budget how you see your know how it can facilitate what is expected of you. So without going on any further I welcome you to brief the committee.

PS (Ms J Kere): Thank you chair of the PAC and thank you members of the committee. You have emphasized the high priority that the government has placed for reconciliation and rehabilitation.

Before going through the line items both recurrent and development budget allow me just to give an overview of the ministry's budget for 2008 in facilitation and implementation of the program activities to help achieve some of key outputs. I had just distributed the summary ministry plan which is still the revised one I think the previous one was drafted in 2007.

Overall the Ministry for National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace total budget, this is including both the recurrent budget and the development budget both

consolidated and the donor funding component put those to \$18,004,300.00 for 2008. So very briefly the summary break down is that the estimate and recurrent budget total of \$6.3million, while under the development budget we have another \$5.9million under consolidated funds and a approximately \$5.7million under an appropriated funds or the UNDP Strengthen capacity for peace building bringing our total development budget to about \$11.6million.

Although it might small for the ministry in terms of its size but given its important mandate it reflects major increases and the total budget if you look back to 2006, 2007 as compared to previous years but not as way back in 2000 when the ministry had that huge amount at that time. So I am talking about 2006, 2007 there are increases in there. So in 2007 as you will note in the recurrent estimates here break down the recurrent budget was \$4.6million so this year we have got an increase of about 37% increase from our last year's budget.

Under the development budget the total in 2000 we had only about \$1million to implement programs under the ministry. In the 2008 development estimate it has shown an increase to \$11million which is quite a substantial increase and which include the UNDP Strengthen capacity for peace building project. So for a relatively small ministry and a young ministry and new to the field as well and of 11 technical staff in terms of the size of the ministry, the ministry is mindful that these are huge increases and these are all also scares finances which is now in trusted on a small ministry but with a huge mandate to facilitate the delivery of services and its mandate. So in terms of our recurrent budget it is more or less the same the reflective of what the Ministry has asked, we have asked for about \$6.7million we have got there about \$6.3million. I think there is room within our recurrent budget. As I said the development budget we have got a major increase, so what our budget key areas of expenditure it will be more or less focusing and further enabling the ministry to implement the functions and key areas of peace and reconciliation, aspects of post conflict we have, truth and reconciliation program and national unity promotional activities.

Chair and members in putting together the budget of course the ministry and translating the government policies has to reflect the government's priority policy statements, which reconciliation and rehabilitation is one of the sixth priority areas.

And furthermore, the government policy implementation document is quite specific on the strategies so we had had to accommodate that in the budget.

Furthermore, the government highlights the need in terms of the reconciliation program for true and meaningful reconciliation. That has a lot of implication in terms of the approach and the problem activities that we need to implement to make it meaningful and also to be mindful that reconciliation must be pursued through affordable means. So those are some of the important thinking that we had to put in the budget provisions. So the other key characteristics of the budget that is in place now is that the focus is on programs and services. 2006, 2007 we had recurrent budgets there were just paying for the operational cost of the headquarter level and very little for actual community services enabling the ministry to engage with communities in the reconciliation program. So that is one of the major emphases in the recurrent budget and also now that it is taken on board in the development budget.

It also emphasises on strengthen partnerships and I think that is key to what is pending for reconciliation which means we have to engage active engagement with our churches, traditional leadership or other important stakeholders as women roles in the

national reconciliation programs. So we have budgeted for that empowering engagement and stronger focus on the reconciliation process as opposed to the actual sort of reconciliation ceremonies at the end of the process. The budget also has to consider post conflict we rehabilitation aspects that fall under the ministry, its mandate. What the budget is not is that it is not just handout payments for compensation it is not budgeted for, and it is not just about just paying hard cash for people to reconcile or just for reconciliation ceremonies. Because usually there's often misinterpretation on what this reconciliation process is about.

The programs that we have put in our development programs which I think it is realistic and reflective of what the community is actually perceive to be meaningful reconciliation as an important foundation for national unity our nation body. So the programs are quite confident with the area respectively.

The recurrent budget also reflects building capacity of the ministry as you have rightly stated the ministry came about in 2000 as a result of that coup. So the budget will try to also incorporate in terms of the establishment and the structure to becoming a normal part of the mission of government. So this is in terms of the institutional strengthening of the ministry itself and the capacity of the ministry to be able to facilitate the programs that is mandated to.

The budget also reflects expansion to other provinces as opposed to focusing just on two provinces that were direct involved so this year's budget we are trying to in terms of our establishment and officers so this includes Western Province and Choiseul. So Chair with that background I quickly refer to the actual estimate itself as I mentioned the total budget is more or less what we asked for as in the recurrent are supposed to be a difference of about 400,000 from what we ask for. As you can see there 1.3million is for the staffing establishment - as I have said we have increased our staffing at the beginning of the year, we got 6 new staff which is a hundred percent increase since last year. So we have got now 12 technical staffs on board so in terms of capacity I think we are ready to be implement what is in the development budget. So that is where the increase is under establishment payroll and charges. Other charges we got about 4.9million - we just highlight here that 4.9million out of that 65% or about 3 million caters for the Truth and Reconciliation commission, it comes under other charges. So the remaining of 1million increases is between some of the other charges here. If I might just highlight other charges where some of the increases small increases of talking about thousands of dollars increase here as compared to may be other budgets. The other increases they are focusing on program activities related budget lines so staff travel and transport there is increases there, 270, others are equipment and another important feature of our recurrent budget which I might wish to highlight is under line item 2196 under special expenditure - because previously the budget for the ministry did not have any separate for that line items for program activities for the two divisions to be able for this other programs they implement.

The funds which is level about 300,000 annually used to come under discretionary funds so this year we have asked for this new line item and to be specific for program activities to ensure that there is guarantee that there is money for program activities of the ministry. So that is where this 2196 is come in and you got about \$500,000 for some of the divisional program activities.

Apart from that as I have said other minor trainings and conference and things like that they are minor increases and the major one is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission which takes up 65% of the other charges under the recurrent budget.

If I may just explain and may be up-date the PAC through the Chair that the Steering Committee of TRC has concluded the public consultations. It now has been drafting instructions for the bill and very recently we have now engaged the Legal Draftsperson to help the government in the drafting of the Bill. This funding has come under commonwealth secretariat and that person is now in the country for two months to help with the drafting through the normal government process of drafting the bills. So it is anticipated at this time that by June or July Parliament Session that the bill hopefully can be tabled. So those are some of the funds allocated for some of the consultation feedback process of the bill and also the actual for the operational aspect of the Commission if it gets through. Otherwise the other concerns are very apart from the normal operation cost of the ministry which I am confident may be which is have to cut down for certain levels on vire to what is necessary to cut down more on those operational office expenses may be or even vehicles issue. So that is with regard with the recurrent budget.

Hon Sogavare: Thank you very much for that briefing as I stated earlier on in my introduction although the Ministry is small they have huge responsibilities in ensuring that this country remains united and that we address the issues that continue to bore the people and have the potential of stirring up conflicts. When it was established it wasn't intended to be isolated from the overall setup of the government, your ministry needs the support of other ministries while its not for me to comment on government policy or advise government on policy I will not allow then to fall into pits by themselves there are other statements that are made by the government that has the potential of derailing good intensions for the key strategy it might taking place and forward budget provisions for allocated to your ministry and I understand that negotiations are continuing for some of the parties. For example, the rehabilitation parties were ex-combatants in Guadalcanal, Malaita and other provinces but that is not reflected in here or in your work plans before us. We don't know what is the kind of time you are looking at in addressed that. It comes to my knowledge that negotiations are continuing with the ex-combatants on the kind of rehabilitation that you will be addressed here. It is in the interest of parliament and of course PAC to at least to know this and we determine the threats to the implementation of the budget. And coming with a very huge package, the figure it was now talk about is 150,000 for one militant and you are talking about 7,000 people. So you really need to be comforted that this thing will not be mishandled and then will just blow the budget. All Solomon Islanders will remember that we did pass a very credible budget in year 2000, one of the best budgets delivered by the Solomon Islands Alliance for Change government and that just fall apart because we fail to address the threats to the budget. Country collapsed in 2000, government was forced to resign and thus begin what we now term as the ethnic crisis, collapsed of economy.

So these are serious concerns while the good intensions in that there is a potential for it to be derailed by other forces that people can easily misinterpret. As PAC we would like know how the government is going to address this so that we are comforted - compensate legitimate owners of firearms confiscated during and after the recent tensions. Figures are also floating around, we understand that people will be or well

asking government to compensate them. What is now clear as an illegal act in the removal of those personal assets of people way back in 2003. We also have lists of issues as thick as this book of issues that we understand are now placed before the government – 24 new demands by people of Malaita, for example, the fitting point so-called bona-fine demands for Guadalcanal people but many of those demands have yet to be adequately addressed. So when we talked about reconciliation and peace we will like to understand reconciliation as an activity at the end of the line. We can only have genuine reconciliation and you address the issues that concerns the people were in conflict then you reconcile them after you sort out these things. With this kind of demands now that are placed before the government. I do not know whether the Ministry is aware of these demands for outstanding compensation issues \$179million compensation for loss properties in China Town and of course the committee on the land dealings on Guadalcanal as mandated by Townsville Peace Agreement and in fact it did not appear anywhere, not even in the Prime Minister's Office, not even in the Ministry of Reconciliation and Peace. That's very important and that would give rise to another \$200million claim by the people who have lost and who have had to abandon their land probably occupied under custom or through the legal way and forced to leave their – that can easily go out. Western, Choiseul people – \$420million and we can go on. So these are issues that are around which I feel that we may need to appreciate them so that we address the peace process. We may also need to get the people to understand how we are going to address these issues

So these are potential threats to the good work that your ministry is assigned to do for administering. You want to make general comments on how you see these things because they are potential threats not only your Ministry but the entire government ministries; it could derail the whole thing so thank you PS.

PS: Thank you chair. I think you are right in that ministry has a sensitive mandate. It is a sensitive area that we do. You have raised some of the underlined causes or grievances, some of the thus structural historical some how have come about as a result of violence at home and that is the context shown. Context in which we are trying to work and to implement that reconciliation programs.

We have a referred specifically to in terms of, and you are also right and I must emphasize here as well and I agree that peace and reconciliation is a very much crosscutting mandate, it cuts across all the other sectors of government it is very important. In terms of the ministry in terms of provision for in the budget in our annual work plan we have incorporated – I have also distributed the annual work plan of the ministry just now some of the key activities that the ministry is doing. In terms of reference to the policy statement on rehabilitation and specific target groups within our communities – the ministry I think on page 5. With the thinking that it is very important to coordinate the issues amongst the ministries of government, so for rehabilitation under the ministry the key activity there that we would be doing is to have this coordinating committee by government to look at specifics of this rehabilitation package and it is quite important. I think that is the first step that the ministry would need to do to highlight some of these issues that are being raised and historically so that in between the ministries and government in terms of implementation and addressing them it is coordinated. So I think that is the first step that the ministry would be doing. And also highlighting a lot of these issues across mainstreaming with government policies and

programs in the other ministries. So while the provision there is very minimum we are looking at activity of establishing the committee with specific terms of reference to pull together and look at issue of like you what have said there's the Commission of Enquiry into land, funding properties those are what we could have more coordinate approach. We have allocated say hundred thousand just for the committee's work and assessment of what this rehabilitation package should entail.

Hon Sogavare: So this

PS: It has not been established yet but it will comprise more or less mainly of the mainly of nine ministries. Technical ministries should be of more or less responsible for implementation and some of the aspects of what is rehabilitation package would be.

Hon Sogavare: It is important that this communications between people affected and the government continue to be maintained because sometimes people do not know what is happening. We are talking from experience here and all of us came to see the situation in the year 2000. That is partly because we just neglect sensitive issues. We look at the wonderful things in the budget here is how it is done under the law. What happen in 2000 especially outside people just take the law into their own hands because they feel that issues that affect them. Thank you very much for that explanation and it is important that your ministry continue to maintain an active dialogue consultation with people who are affected and that is important. And I hope you will also start noticing things submitted straight to the Prime Minister's Office and we only have copies so I think your ministry should be aware of what is submitted to the Prime Minister's Office in order to get that from them.

PS: Chair if I may just highlight the others those relative activity, are you referring to the bona-fine demands as you may recall last year Cabinet has also looked at the report by the Solomon Islands government. Work compromise also the permanent secretaries associated with that and re-looking at the issues of the bona-fine demands and they have come out with the report and the Cabinet conclusion. So we have also included some of the follow up activities as a result of the Cabinet's decision in our program which is on page 6 actually of our annual work plan, which also include the reconciliation framework for Guadalcanal Province and also addressing the rehabilitation aspects for Guadalcanal Province. This is where some of the activities do relate to that policy statement that has been made. But as you have said it is a huge area, it is a crosscutting issue, national issues, it is a very important national issues and part of the role of that ministry as well is to advice those issues and how the potential for creating instability. We are quite mindful of the misinterpretation and people who are ill informed need to be informed on correct information and translation of policy statement that people take it away and interpret it differently and come back with your additional compensation payments so they end up at that ministry. So those issues are taken on board inside the program.

Hon Soalaoi: There is one of your expected outcomes we need to see the engagement of the community leaders in ensuring that conflicts at that level is prevented. Is there any

allocation for this in your recurrent budget or because we did not find that in your budget?

PS: Much of the budget for our program activities I have said the financial allocations are catered for under the development budget, under the SIG component there may I be I will go right to the next part and our presentation should be shift to there. Just to outline some of our program activities there to answer that question in terms of the other explanation I have got. If you look at what we have attach to the summary ministry plan is the explanatory note on the development budget, as I have said there is minimal allocation under the recurrent apart from the Truth and Reconciliation work that under the development budget which we are quite happy that at least there is \$5million allocated there. But let me may be clarify and explain and correct here that although in the development budget given out the type of the national reconciliation payments it is meant to be national reconciliation program. That is the confusion and may be Ministry of Finance would correct that because that is quite important because it can be misconstrued, although we did submit for a total of \$11million for our program activities. We have been allocated \$5million there and it is for the national reconciliation program. Under that \$5million we have more or less distribute it under four major programs of the ministry. our bid was for about \$11million for our four main programs of the ministry, we have come back with 5million so we have more or less revised the budget between the four program activities of the Ministry, which is related to what the Member has said about have we got provisions there for the empowerment of local government and issues on peace and conflict resolution so it is down there with that \$500,000 if you look at the summary of our development estimates in our explanatory notes - Building the capacity of leaders. That is more or less the preventive aspects of building capacities of solving conflicts and non violent approach, promoting dialogue and consultations - that is prevent of aspect. In terms of implementation we included part of the integral part of the reconciliation process. There are also workshops held on helping build capacity of what our traditional ways of reconciliation, our church reconciliation with areas of mediation, conflict resolution that can also enhance our traditional ways of doing things. It is that process, it is not just one of the activities out there. This is the constituency based reconciliation programs.

Hon Soalaoi: With the mandate of the Ministry of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace. I strongly believe that if we address it in a way that fall short of being a holistic approach we will still be in a position to fix up another mess later on. I just wondering if you would be interested in watching allocations for other ministries that are heavily involve in development. It was a process can only be meaningful when we address it through development not only in affected provinces but in order to avoid those who are not involved will be registered giving themselves in and of course your ministry will be very much interested in looking at what the other ministries are doing out in parts our country. I guess there is another comment that might sound as a question, is there anyway where the ministry monitor or any part in that there is a potential threat to the whole reconciliation process. Like I said earlier on not only in Guadalcanal and Malaita it has to be approach in a holistic nature which is a national reconciliation process.

PS: Can I comment on the first point about peace and reconciliation being taking that holistic approach? I think that is very much the underline theme if you look at the whole programs of the ministry, which is to advance and continue the truth and reconciliation process I am referring to the summary of my explanatory notes for the development budget. Promotion of national unity, peace within the capacity of the national framework and promotion peace building partnership and networks. The ministry is very much aware that for example in the rehabilitation component of rehabilitation in terms of livelihood income generating development issues, land issues all cut across all the other ministries as well. So even the reconciliation process and the process of enquiry because it also involves like at the end of it people are not looking for just cash handout to reconcile that it is related to peace and the government kind of issues. So in the commercial activities I think that is message the peace coordination message that is going through reconciliation and then what kind of issue. All these are important for reconciliation that is the message coming out as the foundation for National Unity. That is the promotion message that is coming through the programs. Although we have a limited capacity those are the long term capacities. The other areas of being proactive, being aware of emerging issues that will come up through threat and peace and security in the country being able to have that capacity, we also trying to do that being more proactive and being preventive.

Hon Sogavare: Not by yourself

PS: By the entire government system.

Hon Sogavare: This holistic approach it is important. Because the tension will come up as a result of some sort of dissatisfaction and it come out clearly in the so call Guadalcanal bona-fine demands. Of course some of these demands can be unrealistic. But If you stop there you will not appreciate the reason why these demands are made. Like when they are identified during that time most of them are basically development. That is why I am saying that other ministries should also delivered and that should make your life easy and you address I guess the effects of what is happening at that time. The underline issues that give rise to the tension really should be addressed by other ministries they are all development related.

Hon Soalaoi: It is becoming very obvious where the ministry would like to see is whatever has given out as a package. All of us would want to see translated to the tangible benefits anything that is of a handout in nature would encourage that person to come back again or to think that being involved in an activity that will attract compensation can be a means of any money. I am just making that comments so that at the end of the day we want development so whatever. I guess you be in a position to advise other ministries and be careful of how you will address the development in other parts of the country so they do not lead into new program in your budget for next year. We would want to move away from this reconciliation program. This kind of holding us back from further developing our country to another state so I firmly believe that with your mandate and how we heard that you have the manpower to address or implement your programs for this year I think overall Mr Chairman, I must congratulate the ministry for what you have done so far. Whatever is happening all of us want to live

in peace and we owe a lot to our women and children – we cause the problem and they become victim so in that note I want to thank your ministry for the job well done so far.

Hon Sogavare: Make appropriate note end the deliberation, any last words from you PS?

PS: Thank you for the opportunity to present the budget 2008 for the Ministry and also a lot of these comments that you all contributed are very relevant very important issue. Peace and reconciliation mandate as I have said some important ones that cut across everybody's responsibility. We all want stability and peace and so we are mindful that resources too are limited in the ministries – we are small but determine to ensure that at the end of the day that the budget does actually promote peace and unity. With those few remarks I thank you very much.

Hon Sogavare: Thank you very much.