

THURSDAY 15TH OCTOBER 2015

The Speaker, Mr Ajilon Nasiu took the Chair at 10.00am.

Prayers.

ATTENDANCE

All were present with the exception of the Minister for Foreign Affairs & International Trade and the Members for Small Malaita; Fataleka; Malaita Outer Islands; East Malaita; Rannongga/Simbo; Mbaegu/Asifola; Shortlands and West Honiara.

SPEAKER'S ANNOUNCEMENT

Mr Speaker: Honourable Members, welcome to the 3rd Meeting of this 10th Parliament. I hope you all have recuperated well and ready to tackle the tasks ahead. We go on to our items of business I have a few announcements to make.

First of all, I want to inform all members that we will resume our live TV coverage as from today. I want to thank Mr. Johnny Tran of Switch TV with Our Telekom and the Parliament staff team for enabling Parliament Meetings to be broadcasted live again on TTV.

Members may have noticed some re-arrangement within the Parliament Office. The Parliament Library is currently undergoing refurbishment work. The first stage is completed. This is done to address the issue of space in the library. At this juncture, I would also want to remind members that there is a kiosk set up in the library to assist you in your research and internet needs.

For the information of Members, members of the Police, National Security and Correctional Services Standing Committee are not with us today. They are currently conducting an inquiry in the Western and Choiseul Provinces. They will be arriving over the weekend. They will join us next week.

On house-keeping matters, the Parliament Administration is striving to balance the movement of strangers in and out of the parliamentary precinct, while at the same time provide restricted space for Members, especially when Parliament is in session. As such, the leaf-hut outside is reserved for Members only, especially when Parliament is sitting. As such, members of the public who had made prior arrangements to consult any member during these times are advised to do so at the Paul Tovua Complex.

Finally, Members are reminded to please use the bins provided outside for betel-nut husks and cigarette butts. Thank you and I hope we all adhere to these simple rules.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

- *The Public Accounts Committee Report into the Auditor General's Annual Report 2014; and Audited Financial Statements and Audit Report on the National Transport Fund.* (National Parliament Paper No.11 of 2015)
- *The National Peace Building Policy* (National Parliament Paper No.15 of 2015)

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Statement by the Prime Minister on Current Issues

Hon MANASSEH SOGAVARE (*Prime Minister*): Mr Speaker, thank you very much for giving the floor of Parliament to make the first of a series of statements that ministers responsible for various portfolios will be making during the course of this meeting. This is in keeping with the Government's commitment to adhere to the principles of good governance in the exercise of leadership and governance of the affairs of our country.

As a matter of fact, the early convening of this meeting of Parliament which will climax in the handing down of the 2016 Budget is to allow Parliament to exercise its accountability responsibility through prepared statements by Ministers of the Crown on issues pertaining to their ministries, deliberations on reports, motions and questions put to the government by Members of the Opposition and the Independent Groups. I would therefore encourage all of us to make good use of the Parliament Sitting time to deliberate on these issues and for the Government to be accountable to our people.

Before I go on any further, I would like to join you to warmly welcome all Honourable Members to the last meeting of Parliament for fiscal year 2015, which will run to the end of this year, with a number of breaks to accommodate the Government's international obligations to attend the UNESCO, CHOGM and COP21 Meeting in France.

At this juncture, I would also like to make special mention and thank the Leader of the Official Opposition and the Independent Group for your constructive comments and critical analyses of the performances of the Government during the course of the months following the last meeting of Parliament. They have been very helpful. Of course, I decide not to engage in open debate with the Leaders when they raised the issues concern, except for brief responses because I believe Parliament is the appropriate venue where deeper engagements on such issues can be made. Parliament is now meeting so we can have these debates.

It is our intention to present a number of bills towards the later part of this meeting and this is to allow time for officials to finalise them with the Legal Draftsman and the Attorney General.

So much was said about the delivery of the National Budget by our people. I can understand where they are coming from and I have no quarrel over these calls. As a matter of fact, our people have all the right to question their government on the delivery of budget intentions because it strikes directly at the heart of why governments exist.

During the course of this meeting, ministers responsible for the Budget Heads passed by this Parliament will make specific comments on the progress made and the difficulties encountered. But I would like to briefly comment as follows on that matter. I believe there is a

lot of misunderstanding or a deliberate effort by people with ulterior motives to misrepresent and discredit the genuine efforts of the Government.

After the passage of the National Budget in April this year, the Government wasted no time in trying to get itself organized to deliver on it, amidst barrages of criticisms and highly politicized statements by people, including national and provincial politicians who simply care less about understanding the pressures that the Government had to endure, given the timing of the passage of the Budget and the need to satisfy the statutory requirements under the Financial Management Act to formally spend the Budget. The FSII rightly observed this point when it raised concerns that the Government may not have the capacity to deliver on the \$4.1 billion budget given the time constraint and therefore the Government must be committed to the task. I thank them for that advice which we are taking seriously.

The statutory requirements I made reference to above include the formulation of work programs by ministries, the approval of the work program and delivery plans by the Ministry of Planning, followed by tender and procurement requirements and the release of payments from Treasury, all of which take weeks and even months.

The need to comply with these processes took the Government to around June to really start implementing the Budget. This month is October, and it would take us five full months for the implementation of the Budget. Given the time constraints, the Government through the ministers is performing extremely well in the implementation of the Budget. As intimated earlier, the ministers during the course of this meeting will be making statements about the performance of their ministries and highlighting issues that hinder the smooth implementation of their budgets.

We are confident that by the end of this fiscal year we will deliver more than 80 per cent or even up to 90 per cent of the development budget. This is an achievement that will not be equaled by past budgets that have the benefit of the full fiscal year to be implemented which normally averaged at about 60 percent performance.

The Government supports media freedom and as a matter of fact I had great admiration for the manner in which our media fraternity is keeping the country informed of what is happening. Unfortunately, not all reports are factual and as a matter of fact tainted with bad politics. They are not doing any good for the country. As a matter of fact if we do not place a check on bad reporting, we will be in danger of creating a society that will learn to have no respect for authorities and a tendency to believe anything and everything they read.

I am saying this because no one should underestimate the power of the pen as the saying goes. Now do not get me wrong, I welcome the work of our media when they expose the right and factual information about what the Government is doing. There is no reason why they cannot get that information from me as the head of the Government. Not the kind of information that are supplied by so-called insiders in the Prime Minister's Office as they have other ulterior motives and agendas to pursue. These kinds of people are cowards and do not have a place in the civilized organisations that believe in upholding the rules of confidentiality and respect for authority. Incidentally, my office is now working on identifying these so called insiders and the feedback has been very interesting and shocking.

The Leader of the Opposition is correct in his statement on the floor of this Parliament. He was correct when he commented on the stability of the Government. It is the enemy within

that is more dangerous. If I can remember correctly his comment, he stated that if anything is going to happen to the DCCG, it will be triggered by internal squabbles over petty politics and selfish agendas. I want to call on all of us to put our national interest first and foremost. My last appeal goes to the people who nurture such an agenda to put national interest over our little factional interest and learn to grow up in politics. Otherwise, we should reconsider why we seek employment with the government or be in politics.

The attitude of ganging up on people we believe are hindrances to our personal agendas in government must be removed if we are to move forward in the implementation of the decisions taken by this Parliament through the executive government.

I have great respect for the Forum Solomon Islands International (FSII) for providing a forum where our people both local and overseas can interact in a meaningful way to discuss matters of national interests. However, I have a few complaints. They raised a number of issues of concern to them about the way the government is exercising leadership, statutory powers in implementing policies. It is interesting to note the striking harmony between what the Office of the Leader of Opposition and the FSII are putting out. I was wondering why this is so, until it was brought to my attention that the FSII was literally operating from the Opposition Office at one stage and only left when they were told to get out by the Clerk. Their connection to the office is still intact through a former active member of FSII executive employed in the Opposition Office. I find it interesting that in advancing the watchdog role of the Office of the Opposition, the officer seems to think that he is immune to acts of corruption until it was brought to his attention that he cannot entertain these kinds of actions in public office. I am pleased to hear that the Leader of Opposition is taking this matter very seriously and will not tolerate these kinds of activities in public office.

This also goes for any public office, all of us, where activities like this may have been going on for years. This is a Christian country; we commit this country to God and let us live by these principles. It is any wonder that we are struggling to make sense of our claims of religiousness and more specifically our claims of Christianity when our actions do not match our claims of righteousness. Extra-marital activities like this only goes to demonstrate how debased we can become if we persist on the part of hypocrisy and pretention. It is with this concern in mind that I would like to respond to the allegations and concerns raised against the Government by the FSII in partnership with political factions in this honourable House.

I find it interesting to note that the FSII and the partnership begins its petition by endeavoring to remind the Government of the significance of the preamble of our National Constitution and the fundamental principles of democracy which forms the basis of our government system. I do not see the necessity to read them to you because we are all familiar with it, but only to say the Government has no problem agreeing to the timely reminder and our responsibility to conduct the affairs of the country within these principles.

We share the conviction that all powers in Solomon Islands belongs to its people and is exercised on their behalf by the Legislature, the Executive and Judiciary established by the Constitution. We share the conviction that the natural resources of our country are vested in the people and the government of Solomon Islands. We have no problem accepting the principles that our government shall be based on democratic principles of universal suffrage and the responsibility of executive authorities to elected assembly. We have no problem that

we shall uphold the principles of equality, social justice and equitable distribution of income. No problem. We shall respect and enhance human dignity and strengthen and build on our communal solidarity. We have no problem, we cherish and promote the different cultural traditions within Solomon Islands and we shall ensure the participation of our people in the governance of the affairs and provide within the framework of our national unity and decentralization of power.

We are reminded and I am assuring this nation that we do not have any problem with these principles. We note the concern they raise that the doctrine of separation of powers pursuant to Section 35 of the National Constitution may not be effected properly on behalf of our people by the Democratic Coalition for Change Government. If there are weaknesses there, let us improve it. But it is very interesting. The same Constitution that the FSII is quoting also empowers Parliament to make laws that govern and regulate the way natural and persons in law in the country relate to authorities. For example, the Charitable Act under which the FSII is registered does not allow them to involve in debates that are clearly political. The House will be interested to know that six out of seven objectives of FSII are clearly political in nature.

It is also clear that the leadership of the FSII has lost total control and failed to comply with the Constitution of the organization in the management of articles and statements posted on the website. There is a clear requirement in the constitution that the postings must be approved by the leadership of the organization. That did not happen. This is clearly reflected in the junks and rubbish that are posted in their website. What that means is that if FSII would like to continue to involve in politics and political debates, it must seek registration as a political party under the Political Party Integrity Act and not under the Charitable Act, which only allows for the registration of organizations whose objectives and purpose of existence is charitable. The government in due course will through the Registrar require FSII to explain why they cannot be de-registered.

Having said that however it would be irresponsible of the government not to respond to the issues and allegations raised by FSII in their petition to the government, which they widely publicized in the print-media and circulated to a wide range of organisations including our development partners. For that reason I am obliged to explain a few things. Not everything!

The alleged possible conflict of interest as follows: the appointment of certain ministers to portfolios that have potential to cause conflict of interest. It was alleged that cabinet ministers are now using their powers as rubberstamps for their own personal gain and serving the interest of their cronies. These are serious allegations! Where is your evidence?

The failure to address the ongoing Solomon Islands Airlines saga! The Minister of Finance and Treasury will have the opportunity to explain the ongoing issue of the Solomon Airlines later.

The Red House issue! Why the Prime Minister is renting his private residence instead of residing in the official residence - Red House; why the Speaker is occupying it and not his official residence? The failure to resolve the Rennell and Bellona issue including the decision by Cabinet to allow BT Mega Bingtang Borneo Limited to export minerals without license.

They even question why the Prime Minister is reshuffling ministers. This includes the reshuffling of the Minister of Mines; the sacking of the Permanent Secretary of Mines and the suspension of the Director of Mines. These are serious allegations driven by certain Cabinet

Ministers with personal interest and close connection to BT Mega Bintang Borneo Limited, APID, Samlinsan and other companies - they have listed them. These are serious allegations; give me facts and put it in my hands. And then they even demand me to sack certain people. They have the name of the former Minister of Forestry listed here.

Hon. Bodo Dettke (*interjection*): hear, hear, remove him.

Hon. Manasseh Sogavare: Remove that person. While I agree that FSII has a point in raising some of these concerns, I want to make it clear that the government will not be dragged that low to conduct the affairs of the nation in subjection to the demands of some pressure groups advancing political agendas. If you have issues then come to the Office of the Prime Minister and discuss them with me and my ministers!

I will make it clear that I am not, at this stage going to sack any of my ministers just because some people do not like them. The allegations against my ministers must be proven beyond all shadow of doubt. In this regard, I will rely on the people making these allegations to come forward. Bring me evidence and I will not hesitate to take the appropriate action in consultation with party leaders under the Political Party Integrity Act. I do not act alone when issues like that are raised. The reshuffling that has happened is in strict consultations with political parties under the Political Party Integrity Act and Regulation.

The former Minister of Forestry and any other ministers for that matter are elected by their people to represent them in this honourable House. I have the duty to respect that decision by treating them with respect and dignity. In fact, the former Minister of Forestry in implementing government policy undertook a number of reforms in the forestry sector and would do more had he remained in the ministry. This is admirable given the allegation that he has vested interest in the sector. I find it totally different from what was alleged against the Minister. His understanding of the sector made him very effective in identifying weaknesses and suggesting ways of improving them. The new minister is continuing with the reforms that were initiated by the former minister and I congratulate him.

The Member for North West Guadalcanal is now the new Minister for Culture and Tourism and is performing extremely well in that ministry and I have no intention whatsoever of sacking him, if that is what these people are calling for, and whoever else, FSII and anyone more. Unless the allegations against him are proven in court, he will continue as a member of the Cabinet. I want to make this very clear to those that continue to call for the sacking of this so and so people.

Further they demand the Prime Minister to investigate other Cabinet Ministers and they named the ministers - the former Minister for Police, the former Minister for Civil Aviation and the current Minister for Mines. They want these ministers to be investigated. It is the role of the Police to investigate and not the Prime Minister. The Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet does not wish to interfere with the judicial processes as implied in the demand by those groups. I need to make it clear that Members of Parliament are not immune to police investigation if they are alleged to commit criminal acts. Members of the public who are aggrieved by the actions of Members of Parliament are entitled under the Constitution to petition the judicial

system to pursue their case. Do that instead of shouting in the media. I am tired of hearing these things.

As the leader of the government, I am not aware of any criminal acts committed by ministers concerned apart from the ones that are now before the courts. I am obliged under the Constitution to allow that process to take their course. It will go ahead and we do not hide from it. The Government would be usurping the powers of the judicial system to do that. My advice is instead of crying in the media about alleged criminal acts by Ministers and also Members of Parliament, the public must come forward and report those acts to the Police.

Talking more generally about our responsibility to hold leaders accountable, people of this country must ensure that our political leaders are accountable for their actions. I agree with that. Protecting leaders that we know commit crimes is a criminal act, and members of the public would be directly responsible for allowing corrupt leaders to continue to occupy public office. That is an obligation and duty we need to make it clear to the people of this country. And I call on FSII to be fair about its call to investigate leaders who are alleged to commit criminal acts and are occupying seats in this Parliament or holding public office in the public service – senior public officers. Failing to do that, our actions would be clearly seen as political.

The case of the current Permanent of the Ministry of Rural Development is a case in point. But I must be careful as to how I am talking here. The TSI, FSII and commentators on good governance are glorifying the success of the action by the Ombudsman and project it as a reference case against Members who refuse to be accountable for the way they use constituency funds. Here is my short comment on this. All of these people missed the point and are clearly wrong in their analyses. The case is not about Members refusing to be accountable at all. We are accountable to the ministry. Rather, the contention that the manner in which the documents were demanded and the timing of the demand was clearly political. The generalized call for the documents for no clear purpose raises a lot of question about the conduct of this request. Since this case is now being appealed before the Court, I will stop here but I have a lot to say about this.

I understand the call for the Prime Minister to move to the official residence and ceased rentals to his personal home with immediate effect. (You have to do that immediately or else you will be hanged). I can understand the call for the Prime Minister to move to the official residence but I reject any implications that the Prime Minister is in any way trying willfully to unfairly and unprocedurally benefit from the decision not to move into the Red House.

Let us go back to the background of this issue. As announced in this very parliament, it is the government's intention to construct official residences for the Speaker of Parliament as head of the legislature; the Chief Justice as head of the Judiciary; the Prime Minister as head of the executive and the Leader of the Official Opposition as head of the alternate government under our democratic system of government. That is the intention of the government. The project to provide architectural designs will be put to tender as soon as funding arrangements are sorted out. Because of this, it is our intention to demolish the Red House to start landscaping work on the site. We are unable to do that because we had to house the Speaker due to the fact that the former Speaker had requested to remain in the residence, and that arrangement is requested specifically to be formalized under the Prime Minister's Retirement Pension Act, which by the way he is entitled under the law. It is a question of discretion - he is

also entitled though we wanted him to move out from there. That situation makes it impossible for the Prime Minister to move into the Red House irrespective of how much FSII and any other good governance institutions would want him to. On the allegation that that Prime Minister may be benefiting from the rental allowance, I can refer FSII to the provisions of the Parliamentary Entitlement Regulations. The Prime Minister is entitled to housing allowance as stipulated under the Regulations. He is paid housing allowance and not rental supplementation.

There is further demand that all logging and mining operations on Rennell/Bellona province must cease forthwith pending further investigation including a commission of enquiry appointed by the Prime Minister. We can see eye to eye on this. The government agrees with FSII on this matter and any others more who hold that view. And as you would know, the process that led to the granting of mining licenses to the Asia Pacific Investment Development Limited (APID) and its mining contractor Bintang Mining Solomon Islands Limited and its rival BT Mega Bintang Borneo LTD was tainted with processes that were clearly unprocedural and illegal. It was a real struggle with this issue.

It has not been easy dealing with the issues because of the complications brought about by a series of court cases initiated by all the parties to the issue, including the Government. Bintang's license was eventually cancelled as we all know but not APID who appealed against the show cause letter issued by the Minister. There was nothing really the Government could legally do to stop mining operation then because of these legal complications.

Following the suspension of the company's business license by the Renbel Provincial Government, the opportunity arose for the government to enforce a Stop Mining Order, which we did and is currently in force on the island. The illegal logging by the company was also stopped and the disposal of the logs is now under the supervision of the Commissioner of Forest.

The House is also being informed that the Government has moved in cooperation with the Solomon Islands Forestry Association and revoked all agro-forestry licenses in the country and subject the regime to a comprehensive review which will see the improvement of the current regulation to address the weaknesses of the system, which renders the logging activity under that kind of license illegal. Work has started on that by the former Minister of Forestry and Research and the current Minister is continuing with it. A taskforce has also been appointed to inquire on logging and mining operations, not only on Rennell/Bellona Province, but also on Mono in the Shortlands, Western Province. The work of this taskforce will be replicated to the wider Solomon Islands.

The FSII and its partners raised concern political appointees. The resolution reiterated the peoples' earlier call for the reduction in the number of political appointees within the Office of the Prime Minister and demanded an immediate performance review carried out against political appointees' postings; and they got it wrong here, affecting the National Budget and conflicts created with legal appointments of permanent secretaries under Section 128 of the Constitution. I think what they meant here is that political appointees work may clash with that of permanent secretaries appointed under Section 128 of the Constitution.

The public's concern about the number and performances of political appointees engaged in the Prime Minister's Office is noted, and so is the call to review the number. The

public would be perfectly entitled to raise these concerns because public funds are used to maintain the group in the office.

All I can say at this point in time is that a comprehensive performance review of political appointees will be carried out on the expiry of their one year performance contract, and a decision will be made on the basis of that review. I would like to make it clear that I will not hesitate to terminate political appointees that fail to live up to the expectations of the government and the people of this country.

I also need to clarify that the employment of political appointees falls under Special Temporary Rules 2005 and not Section 128 of the Constitution as maybe implied by the FSII. In other words, political appointees are appointed and terminated at the pleasure of the government of the day, so we can do that.

There is also demand for the removal of the Special Secretary to the Prime Minister and investigate his directorship in the Solomon Islands Development Corporation Limited, a private incorporated enterprise operating as a statutory corporation. On that matter itself, the SSPM has been independently and impartially cleared by the Leadership Code Commission of any breaches of conflict of interest. The letter referenced by the Leadership Code is dated 19th of August 2015. On the other allegations against him, the SSPM is filing cases of defamation of character against those who callously defamed him through unfounded allegations.

I am not trying to be very protective here. The SSPM is a perfect example of a victim of a ganging up strategy through the media by people who want him out of the post. I have fortunately established who they are. The recent allegations by people right within the Office of the Prime Minister is the article that appeared in the Island Sun Newspaper about the Gold Ridge royalties which he has been cleared both by the Police Investigations and internal investigations. The report is with the Government. The recommendation we got is that this matter can be addressed administratively because the money is there. We just need to get down and do it. What had happened is that a certain landowner received more than what he should be receiving and this had victimized the others. That is why that complaint happened. It is not even \$18million too but something very less than that amount, say about \$15million or so. What happens is that the remaining funds that are in the Central Bank will be shared and those who received less need to recover their share from the person who received more. That was the arrangement put in place for that case. But I am surprised that it appeared again in the Island Sun by people that I exactly know.

It was recommended that the underpayment of the royalties can be administratively rectified, as I have said already and so I am very disappointed by the deliberate moves by certain individuals within the government and more specifically in the Prime Minister's Office to be so depraved in their attitude so as to entertain an agenda of backstabbing. I am determined to deal with these people as soon as I establish who they are.

With due respect to the views that these enemies may hold, I find in him an officer that opens his doors to members of the public who would not normally get any audience by other so called public officers and busybodies in the Prime Minister's Office and reflects a caring image of the Prime Minister's office to the public, an attitude I would like to encourage in all government office when we deal with members of the public who come through our office who seek help. Because of the immense pressure inflicted on him by unfounded allegations, Caucus

has agreed to reassign him to other tasks. We will deal with that administratively and put him in some which will not place him on the front line to talk about government policy and so forth.

On development projects, there are a number of issues raised here, and I know ministers will make statements about their ministries. But a specific demand by the FSII here is the bidding period from government departments be extended to allow proper consultations to be made with provincial governments in order for inclusion of development projects for provinces be included in the 2016 national budget and beyond. That is perfectly in order. This falls under; and maybe I am not really qualified to talk about this because it falls under the purview of the Ministry of Finance, under the auspices of the Financial Management Act for which the Ministry of Finance is responsible. However, the concerns are duly noted with due respect.

There is the demand that the Office of the Prime Minister prioritizes and takes immediate and necessary steps to implement national projects on Malaita and Guadalcanal without fail. The DCC Government will not abandon any of its policies pertaining to implementation of development programs on Malaita and Guadalcanal and the rest of the country. On this matter, I will allow ministers responsible for projects on Malaita to make statements, and so I will not delve into this, except to say there has to be a change in attitude by our people. That is what I want to say about that as there will be statements made by ministers.

They also questioned some Cabinet Decisions, and one of them is the Cabinet decision to pay \$3.7million in compensation for damages sustained by Sun Express, which they claimed that an insurance payment of \$1.3 million has already been claimed by the Aggressor Solomon Limited (ASL), the ship owner. They demand that the Government must look into this. There is also the concern of the bills incurred by three cabinet ministers, which they claimed, has the tendency to be used to settle hefty bills of Members of Parliament. They questioned the decisions to divert \$3.3 million in National Disaster fund to the 33 Members of Parliament whose constituencies were allegedly affected by Cyclone Raquel.

There were also some demands made here. The first is they demand that we disclose ASL's written claim to the Solomon Islands Government for compensation of \$3.7million. We do not see any reason why we should disclose the claim submitted by the Company as demanded. I do not see any reason why. The shooting of the boat is public knowledge. It is true the boat is owned by a close relative of a Minister of the Crown, so what? The request was made to the Government by the owner of the boat through the Prime Minister, and I can assure this House that there is nothing suspicious about that claim.

The application just simply request the government to assist him with the cost of repairing the boat which comprised of the cost of getting the boat to Australia, and the repair work to be done on it to bring back that boat to operation. I do not see anything wrong with that. People who expressed the concern also argued that the decision will set a bad precedence. What bad precedence? Is it because the government has picked up a cost that it is not responsible of incurring? Is that the precedence you are talking about? Well, people like that forgot very easily what has happened to this country.

The GNURP, whose leftovers now are the Minister for Finance, the Minister for Planning and the current prime minister, under my leadership in 2000 secured a loan of \$300million from Taiwan to pay compensation to people who lost their properties during the ethnic tension. It was not the Government that destroyed those properties, and so to be

consistent we should ask the people who destroyed those properties to pay those damages. We did not, we stepped in. So what precedence are you talking about? It is the work of criminals on both sides of the conflict but the government stepped in on behalf of those who destroyed the properties. The government then paid \$300million. And there are other many cases where the Solomon Islands Government had to step in to pay compensation in respect of wrong doings inflicted on other political groups or tribal groups. So what precedence are we talking about here?

Seventeen (17) Members of Parliament nearly got killed because some lunatics want to prevent them from coming to vote for their candidate for the Office of the Prime Minister and in the process inflicted heavy damages on an innocent boat that contributes immensely to the development of the tourism industry in this country. Is that not good enough reason for the Solomon Islands Government to assist? Please tell me, who gives anybody the right to shoot anyone in this country? My Cabinet took the liberty to approve the shared payment because an innocent private corporate entity, legally registered in the Solomon Islands has become a victim of criminal actions. By virtue of the fact that on board Sun Express are elected members of the Solomon Islands National Parliament, the government is obliged to act with justice and responsibility.

On the call to ask them to repay that money, if anybody thinks that the decision made by Cabinet is wrong then they have the right to seek legal redress from the court system.

There is also the call for a public disclosure of the recipient of the \$3.3million disaster relief assistance approved by Cabinet and disbursed to certain Members of Parliament following the wake of Cyclone Raquel. Funds which were allocated directly to Members of Parliament following the wake of Cyclone Raquel caters for urgent needs and requirements of the victims that fall outside of the scope of the National Disaster Management office. It is the first line of response.

This is because after a disaster strikes, an assessment has to be carried out first. Sometimes assessment can go on for a few months and assistance not yet given or delayed. That is why Cabinet in its wisdom thinks that it is just proper that the first line of assistance has to be sent first. And this is why food has to be sent first. That money is just to pay for rice.

The Member of Parliament for Vattu and Minister for Women, Youth and Children Affairs even puts her own money on top of the money given by the government. She delivered a good number of bags of rice to her own people. What is so wrong about that which made people to be very concerned about it? No one can deny that in times of needs, Members of Parliament are the first persons of contact by our people in the country; they go to them and ask for assistance. But when MPs use the RCDF, there was also complaint. We provide assistance to help them. When the need arises to help our people and no Members of Parliament in his right mind would dare to deny his people of the basic need for the supply food. Because of this, we will seriously relook at all these arrangements again, especially on how the NDMO responds to disaster - it is pathetic. It is doing a fine job but we need to relook at some of these things. This is because unless those places are declared disaster zones there will be no help given to those places but as a matter of fact people are dying before we even declare those zones, something like three months later.

The government is therefore looking into that seriously so that as soon as a cyclone happens or as soon as a disaster happens, the first line of assistance must be made straightaway. If you do not want assistance to come under Members of Parliament then it will go under the normal system. But there must be a first line of response so that as soon as that issue is addressed then all of us should be happy. But we could not allow our people to suffer when the government is still there.

It was 43 constituencies that eventually received assistance. In terms of Choiseul, there is a bit of delay and about the time food was supplied because of the first cyclone, another new cyclone hit us, but food supply was distributed already at the same. And because of that we think it should be delayed and the other constituencies benefitted from this. I think there is another province as well that thinks other provinces that are seriously affected should be prioritized than itself.

There is a complaint raised here as well about three ministers who have hotel bills at the Heritage Park. The Government is addressing this matter of concern with the respective ministers and parties concerned to ascertain areas of responsibility and accountability in terms of who is responsible for what. We are still discussing this with the ministers concerned. It is very clear that when ministers are appointed and they do not own a house, it is the government's responsibility to house them. Ministers can be booked into a hotel and accommodated there if they do not own a house. And during that time these ministers do not have accommodations and that is why they reside there. Of course, there are some little issues there. But as a responsible government and responsible ministers, we will sit and talk over this to ascertain whether there are some responsibilities that these three ministers have because of what has happened.

So much was said about the Skyline Investment group by people who would care less about the accuracy of their allegations. I need to make it very clear the Government would not engage the group if it is not satisfied about who they are and what they are capable of doing in our country. Through our own sources we establish that they are genuine. There have been a lot of buck passing and shunning away from responsibilities by senior officers on this matter. Contrary to what was claimed by our High Commissioner in Suva, the group was recommended to the Government by our Mission there. We have since expressed our disappointment to our office in Suva for failing to own up to responsibility.

But what has happened then during an Easter break in April of this year is a senior political appointee was invited to meet Skyline Limited in Solomon Islands High Commission in Suva, Fiji. The meeting was hosted by the High Commissioner and focused on potential SKL investments in Solomon Islands. That was what the meeting was about. This meeting led to the visit of Skyline Investment Group Limited in the country. The visit took place in mid-April 2015 and a potential investment opportunity on tourism starting with the facelift of the Honiara International Airport. That was the interest made to the Government. They came back to negotiate the MOU with the Government and a MOU was signed on 7th August 2015 by Mr Jason Liu, Liang Dengguo and Pan Yang Bin on behalf of THE SKL, the Minister of Finance and Treasury and the Minister of Commerce, Industries and Labour on behalf of the Government. The MOU specifies a potential SKL investment in the country to focus on public service housing project and tourism development. The Solomon Islands Government will enter into further

arrangements with the developer on the basis of “build, own, operate and transfer” principles for each of the investments stated in the investment plan.

To kick the ball rolling, we now advertise the job of BOOT consultants. What happens is that when the MOU was signed, it is sitting down there idle. We should move from signing of the MOU to specific BOOT contracts. That is what should really happen now but that seems not to be the case. The capacity in the Prime Minister’s Office is not there and so we have arranged to recruit a BOOT consultant - an expert in that area to be located in the Prime Minister’s Office to help in the drafting of BOOT contracts with the Attorney General’s Chamber.

On the Solomon Islands Development Company Limited, there are some points here that we need to relook at again. If it is a direct BOOT arrangement, then we will see the need for this middle body. The arrangement is that ICSI and SKL are partnered in a company called the Solomon Islands Development Limited. The details are yet to be put in place because we need to enter into further agreements and arrangements with the company, which did not happen. We have to advertise for this position in order for that expert to help us advance these Government projects.

On the NAZAR Grupa Limited; the involvement and interest of the Policy Implementation and Evaluation Unit (PIMEU) in the Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet with NAZAR is solely based on the premise of assisting foreign investors big and small in order to keep their investments secure as well as encourage more to come and invest in Solomon Islands. NAZAR was incorporated during the watch of the NCRA Administration in 2013 after passing through the due process as enshrined in the relevant Company, Immigration, Labour and other laws of Solomon Islands. Over the past few years, NAZAR directors were subjected to various forms of abuse at the hands of unscrupulous Solomon Islanders and foreigners alike. Regrettably, some of these abuses were at the hands and mercy of a couple of our members of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force. Many of NAZAR’s supposedly close Solomon Islands friends were reportedly scheming against NAZAR to make a fast buck out of the company and its directors. It is a sad history.

On the verge of packing up and leaving the country, NAZAR decided to bring its woes to the new Democratic Coalition for Change Administration in the hope that its initial investments can be salvaged by people with some level of decency and trust. In March 2015, the Policy Implementation and Monitoring and Evaluation Unit within the Prime Minister’s Office was requested to assist NAZAR to regain confidence to remain in the country and advance its development plans. Hence, it will only be natural for NAZAR to be grateful for the DCCG lending a helping under the government’s public private partnership policy (PPP). This confidence culminated in the signing of an MOU by the Solomon Islands Government representatives, somewhat different to that of SKL and SIG due to the nature and levels of understanding. And at this point in time, it is merely an understanding which will subsequently be advanced into definitive agreements by the relevant authorities after blessing, if need be, by Caucus or Cabinet. If the Policy Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit has no malicious nor devious intent to short-change anyone, let alone the good people of Solomon Islands. Should anyone have in his or her possession evidence, criminal in nature

against anyone in the Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, please bring them before the courts for proper address and not through irresponsible and political media.

I have said so much and I thank you very much for allowing me to make this statement and I beg to resume my seat.

Mr Speaker: Honourable Members, in accordance with paragraph 2 of Standing Order 24, I will allow questions to the Honourable Prime Minister based on his statement, but with three conditions. Firstly, questions must be concise and brief for the purpose of seeking further clarification only. Secondly, the question must be relevant to the statement made. I will not allow questions that introduce a totally new or different subject matter altogether. Thirdly, questions asked must not be used as a pretext for debate. This means no debate may arise on such statement. You will have that opportunity later where appropriate. Furthermore, no questions will be proposed on the Prime Minister's statement or any questions asked or the responses thereof. Members may now have the floor.

Hon JEREMIAH MANELE (*Leader of Opposition*): First of all, let me thank the honourable Prime Minister for his very important statements and for clarifying a good number of issues that have been raised.

Mr Speaker, I note your advice on paragraph 2 of Standing Order 24. Just a simple question on whether a decision has been made in terms of whether the former Speaker will continue to remain in the Speaker's residence or will he be allocated another house under the Prime Minister's housing pool. We do recognise his entitlement. Can the honourable Prime Minister clarify that?

Hon Manasseh Sogavare: Cabinet is yet to be formally consulted on a view that I have. My view is that while the four plans for the houses are yet to be done, I decided to request the Cabinet to agree that the Speaker still resides in the Red House. When the house is built, it is going to be the official residence of the Speaker. For the other three – the Chief Justice, the Prime Minister and the Leader of Opposition, we are still looking for land to build houses for those three. The Speaker still remains in that house. As soon as things are ready, the Speaker will be moved to a temporary residence while landscaping and construction work takes place.

Yes, the intention, subject to Cabinet's approval, I decided that since the house is closer to Parliament, the Speaker should permanently reside there and we look for new sites for the Prime Minister, the Chief Justice and the Leader of Opposition.

Mr CONNELLY SANDAKABTU (*North West Choiseul*): I also join the Leader of the Opposition in applauding the Prime Minister for the thorough explanations through his statement.

My question is based on the recent disaster that affected our people in Choiseul. It is quite a long while now and still people are waiting. I just want to know if assistance will come sooner or is it going to be next year.

Hon Manasseh Sogavare: My understanding and thus the decision that the three constituencies in Choiseul will still have to wait, the supply of food was for those affected by

Cyclone Pam, but then Raquel happens but nothing is given yet to those affected by Pam. Food supplies were ready to be given to our people but Raquel struck. My understanding is that assistance should have been given already. If that is not yet done, then this would be news to me, my colleague, and probably that would affect all the three constituencies. I will certainly find that out with the relevant authority and I will come back to you because that will affect all the three constituencies. I will certainly find out.

Mr MATTHEW WALE (*Aoke/Langalanga*): My first comment is on the choice of Standing Order 24 for these statements. I know the Prime Minister has made a statement and ministers will also make statements under this Order as well, but it would be very good if the issues raised are debated, rather than us just raising short questions. It would be better for the government side to seek under which orders the ministers could make statements, submit a paper and someone moving a motion so that we can have a good debate on issues.

My question is about the NAZAR Grupa regarding the Kilu'ufi Hospital. I do not understand whether this NAZAR Grupa is a private company or is part of the Turkish Development Agency. If this group is going to help build Kilu'ufi it would have impact in terms of the health services that are going to be provided? How is it going to recoup its money, for instance, is my concern at this time since it is a private entity? This is going to end up in people paying for being admitted at the mental hospital or dispensing of medicines at the hospital. That is my concern because today those services are free of charge. Can the Prime Minister clarify this?

Hon Manasseh Sogavare: That is a very important point raised by the Member for Aoke/Langalanga. I think the listing of Kilu'ufi Hospital under that MOU to come under BOOT arrangements is not really appropriate. But the understanding is they are connecting us to the Government of Turkey. There is this understanding that during the trip to CHOGM, it be extended to Turkey because they want to connect us with them. Maybe their government is using them to build the hospital.

The clauses in the MOU need to be relooked at again by the two parties sitting down together once more because it does not make sense for a public service like that to be used under Boot arrangements because it means they have to recoup their money. That is something that we will relook at. But the understanding is that they will connect us with the Government of Turkey. They are now calling for the plan of the hospital and that will be provided to them soon by the Ministry of Health and Medical Services.

Hon Jeremiah Manele: Thank you Mr Speaker for your indulgence to take the floor for a second time. I note the Honourable Prime Minister said that there are still some more works needed to be done in terms of agreements both on the Skyline Investment and the NAZAR Grupa. Members on this side of the House are going to ask a few questions on those sectors during the course of this meeting. But for now, if the Prime Minister could clarify if there is a specific timeframes when those works or further agreements need to be done. Is it going to be within the next six months or one year? I think we would like to see real developments taking place.

Hon Manasseh Sogavare: A very valid question indeed. I want those more specific agreements to be made before the end of this year. In fact, the SKL has sent its agents to come over and set up its office here. On the part of the Government, we think we need to beef up the capacity of the Prime Minister's Office because we lack a person who knows about Boot arrangements. We need a person to come and that is why that position is being advertised now. If the person is to come, it should be before the end of this year. Work should start to formulate specific Boot contracts for those specific investments that they are talking about. I would like it to happen very soon, preferably before the end of this year.

Mr CULWICK TOGAMANA (*Maringe/Kokota*): Thank you Prime Minister for the very informative statement you have made. I just want to ask a follow up question to my other colleagues in regards to the Disaster Relief Fund.

The fund in my knowledge is not sufficient. In my constituency of Maringe/Kokota, the fund does not cater for all the villages that were affected by the cyclone.

My question to the Prime Minister is whether there will still be additional assistance from the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) to cater for communities whose needs are not met by the relief assistance from the \$100,000 that was given?

Hon Manasseh Sogavare: Thank you for bringing that up. Of course, the government will act according to advice given to us by the NDMO. We certainly need to go back to them to establish what the Honorable Member mentioned. And if people have not been assisted yet, I see no reason why they should not be.

STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

ADJOURNMENT

Hon MANASSEH SOGAVARE (*Prime Minister*): I move that Parliament do now adjourn.

The House adjourned at 11.22 am