



AUTONOMOUS BOUGAINVILLE GOVERNMENT
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
MINISTER RESPONSIBLE FOR MEDIA, COMMUNICATION AND INTER
GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

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STATEMENT TO PARLIAMENT

Mr Speaker, I stand before this house as we embark on the last months of the year. As honorable members of this place will know, it has been a busy and challenging year. We have continued to hold the National Government to account, we have convened a meeting of the Joint Supervisory Body in Arawa and we have greatly enhanced political dialogue. But Mr Speaker, this has not been enough, and it is with a great weight that I inform this house that if we are to achieve the referendum target date of 15 June 2019 then all of us must do more.

Mr Speaker, it is a fact that I was disappointed with the Arawa JSB. Not with the organization of the meeting or the agenda. I commend our Chief Secretary for the organization that went in to preparations. But Mr Speaker, my disappointment was due to the rushed nature of the meeting. We barely had time to cover the basic issues. The Prime Minister was unavoidably delayed but that is no excuse. The fact is the JSB is the most senior body under the Bougainville Peace Agreement for resolving our differences and reaching agreement. And Mr Speaker, this cannot occur if there is not adequate time for debate to take place.

It was on that basis, Mr Speaker that I directed our Honorable Vice President, Raymond Masono, to lead a delegation to Port Moresby to engage with key

ministers. I am pleased that meetings with the Deputy Prime Minister, the Attorney General and the Minister assisting the Prime Minister on Bougainville Affairs were able to take place. The discussions were fruitful, and commitments were made, but yet again Mr Speaker, the National Government has failed to follow through. We were assured that a special JSB would take place on 17 August in Buka. It did not. We were assured we would receive legal advice on constitutional arrangements. We did not. We were promised detailed information on how the National Government would meet funding commitments. Nothing has been received. Mr Speaker, I put it to you, how can a partnership work when only one side is making an effort? I mean no disrespect to the Prime Minister or our National Government counterparts, but it is a fact that actions speak louder than words and the actions to date of the National Government have been lacking and this is in turn impacting negatively on our democratic and constitutionally guaranteed right to determine our own political future.

But Mr Speaker, I will not dwell on such matters. The fact is that parliament and this government is honoring our side of the bargain. We are engaging with our people. We continue to enhance awareness. And with the support of the Chief Secretary who is a BRC transitional commissioner we are actively progressing the full operationalization of the BRC and arrangements of the referendum.

We continue to examine ways we can enhance our revenue capacity and just recently I have engaged in high level discussions with key investors who want to come to Bougainville and help us re-build our economy. I have also issued directions that action be taken to end the appalling tax payer strike that we have faced for so long, and for our Liquor and Cigarettes Wholesalers, to put the interests of Bougainville ahead of their own personal gains.

Mr Speaker, last week we hosted a high level delegation from the UN that visited to talk about how the UN can support continued peace and prosperity in Bougainville. These people came from all corners of the globe, and whilst I was only able to meet them in Port Moresby and had in depth discussions with them on the BPA, referendum and funding, I am proud of the welcome we gave and the insights that our leaders provided. It is only with the support of our international

development partners that we can achieve our goals and I am grateful for the continued support of the UN in PNG and Bougainville, led by His Excellency Gianluca Rampolla, which demonstrates a genuine desire to help us achieve a lasting peace.

On the BRC the Prime Minister announced just last week the names that have been selected for the National Government representatives to the BRC board, and while both are men, the Charter requires a gender balance. I welcome this positive step to finalize representation soon. I am also pleased that His Excellency Bertie Ahern has formally accepted the position of Chair of the BRC, and that he is available to travel to PNG and Bougainville this month. Mr Speaker, these are indeed positive symbolic steps.

Yet Mr Speaker, we must reach a final agreement on the substantive issues to be considered at the referendum. We must agree on a final simple question that all Bougainvilleans can understand, and as the constitution clearly states, this must include independence as an option. We must finalize the voting criteria, and whilst I accept the National Government's desire for legal advice, as one of the architects of the agreement the requirements are clear in my mind. Mr Speaker, let us agree, move forward and finally give our people the voice they have so long desired!

Mr Speaker I would again like to place on record to this House and the people of Bougainville, that the Bougainville Referendum is constitutionally guaranteed in the National Constitution and the Bougainville Peace Agreement. The constitutional amendments providing for the Bougainville referendum were enacted in early 2002. The Prime Minister continues to make misleading statements in National Parliament about the constitutionality of the Bougainville Referendum, stating that the National Constitution does not say that we can separate one part of the country to become independent and that this contradicts the peace agreement.

The National Constitution does not provide for Bougainville to become independent. Rather, it provides for Bougainville to have a referendum in which independence must be one of the choices offered to the people of Bougainville.

The National Constitution then requires the two governments to consult about the results. Mr Speaker, the fact remains that the Bougainville Peace Agreement and the constitutional amendments that give effect to it were joint creations of PNG and the combined Bougainville leadership. At every corner, the National Government continues to fail us and this is a major act of negligence on the part of the National Government to implement its responsibilities under the Bougainville Peace Agreement. Consequently, this is causing anxiety among our people and it is disrespectful to the internationally accepted principles of good governance. Both sides must not sabotage the peace process that we have worked so hard for.

The Bougainville Peace Agreement is a political agreement negotiated between the people of Bougainville and the PNG government to end a war which reduced Bougainvilleans to basic humanity including the loss of lives of 20 000 people.

Even before the Bougainville Crisis the people had been calling for separation from PNG.

At the time of independence of Papua New Guinea, Bougainville declared a UDI when their only hope for a measure of autonomy was dashed from them when the PNG Constituent Assembly, just before independence decided to abolish Chapter 10 on provincial governments, resulting in the resignation of Late Raphael Bele and me from the National Parliament. The Late John Teosin and I were dispatched by the people and leaders of Bougainville to go to New York to present the people's petition for a separate independence for Bougainville at the United Nations. This was before PNG became independent on 16th September 1975.

In 1976 the Bougainville leaders appointed me to lead a high powered delegation to meet with the newly appointed first Prime Minister of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea, Chief Michael Somare to negotiate a mutually acceptable outcome.

During this period of time soon after independence we negotiated a deal between the people of Bougainville and the National Government, known as the

Bougainville Agreement which gave some measure of autonomy to the first provincial government in PNG namely North Solomons Provincial Government with a provision that more autonomy would be transferred if and when capacity was developed.

Unfortunately successive national governments ignored the principle of subsidiarity in a highly diversified country and resorted to highly centralized and bureaucratized government policies which contradicted the Bougainville Agreement and further alienated Bougainville through marginalization and disempowerment.

The Bougainville crisis was the last straw that broke the camel's back when the national government declared war on its own citizens and sided with a foreign company which was not willing to listen to the resource owners of Panguna.

Mr Speaker, I am calling on the people of Bougainville to observe and uphold the important requirements of the Bougainville Peace Agreement because it is these requirements that will be demanded by the international community. The referendum to decide our political aspiration is imminent and therefore we must continue to work hard to create a unified Bougainville and ensure that we sustain lasting peace on Bougainville beyond the referendum.

Before I conclude Mr Speaker, I wanted to mention the Annual National Treasurers Conference that will take place in Buin next week. This will see more than 300 delegates attend, allowing us to showcase Bougainville both within PNG and internationally. It is a wonderful opportunity and will bring substantial economic benefits. It is an honor for the ABG to host this historical event.

And finally Mr Speaker, I want to acknowledge the Independent Review Team that visited Bougainville recently to conduct the second joint review of autonomy arrangements. This is an important and constitutionally mandated process that will provide valuable insight into how we can enhance governance in the future and build on the significant reforms already being advanced by our Chief Secretary Joseph Nobetau.

Mr Speaker, on that note I reaffirm my commitment to the people that I will not waver, I will not stop, and I will ensure our journey to lasting peace is achieved. That is my commitment to you, and that is my commitment to my constituents, the people of Bougainville. Let's look ahead to a bright and prosperous future.

HON. JOHN L MOMIS, GCL MHR
PRESIDENT