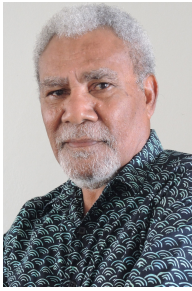


**Public Statement by Rt Hon Sir Mekere Morauta
Former Prime Minister and Member for Moresby North-West
Port Moresby, 23 May 2019**

O'Neill cheating public servants out of their wages



Prime Minister Peter O'Neill continues to cheat public servants out of their pay and entitlements – he has still not paid the workers the wage rises they were awarded in 2017 or the full superannuation amount owing to all those who retired between January 1 2016 and December 31 2017.

“Instead Mr O'Neill uses workers' money to build roads to nowhere and self-glorifying hotels and convention centres in Port Moresby,” the Member for Moresby North-West, Sir Mekere Morauta, said today.

“Public servants are owed hundreds of millions of kina, but you can bet that Mr O'Neill and his cronies are being paid every toea that they claim is owed to them. Under Mr O'Neill, there is one rule for the rich and powerful and another rule for workers.”

Sir Mekere said he had been advised that public servants are owed about K210 million in wage rises that Mr O'Neill keeps promising but never delivers, plus the superannuation and other entitlements that would flow from a pay rise.

Superannuation costs are estimated to be about K10 million per month, or K120 million a year. Also, about K20 million in superannuation payments is owed from 2016-2017. So by the end of this year K140 million will be outstanding for the period to the end of 2018 if, as in former years, no State super contribution payments are made. In total, there is an unfunded superannuation liability of about K2 billion.

Meanwhile, Personal Emoluments in the 2019 Budget have been cut by K215 million, which is likely to lead to more wages theft throughout the year.

“Mr O'Neill is acting like an octopus again,” Sir Mekere said. “He is forever putting his tentacles into other peoples' pockets – in this case public servants - and using the money for other purposes. Like public servants, small businesses which have provided goods and services to the Government are still waiting to be paid, some as far back as the SP Games, others as recent as APEC.”

There is likely to be even more damaging fallout from the combined non-payment of Public Service wages, the superannuation debts, the Budget cuts to Personal Emoluments and official instructions that any department or agency that overspends on its payroll will have to find equivalent savings elsewhere in their budgets.

The likely outcome is more unpaid wages and entitlements, more cuts to the delivery of goods and services and yet another blowout in the Budget deficit that will have to be rectified through yet another supplementary budget.

“Because of Mr O'Neill's waste and mismanagement, the nation continues to stagger from one economic and financial crisis to another,” Sir Mekere said.

“That means more people dying from preventable diseases because hospitals are not functioning properly and there is no money for medicine, more schools closing across the nation, essential infrastructure is continuing to crumble into the dust, and government systems and processes are failing by the day.

“It is not fair that public servants should carry the burden of Mr O'Neill's seven years of mistakes. They should not be punished and cheated of their rightful wages and entitlements.

“Mr O'Neill is responsible, and it is he who should be held to account. It is time for him to go. It is time for the octopus to be put out to sea.”