

TUESDAY 20th OCTOBER 2015

The Speaker, Mr Ajilon Nasiu took the Chair at 9.55 am.

Prayers.

ATTENDANCE

All were present with the exception of the Minister for Provincial Government & Institutional Strengthening; Lands, Housing & Survey; Police, National Security & Justice and the Members for West Honiara and Fataleka.

STATEMENT BY MINISTERS

Statement by the Prime Minister

Explanation of issues raised against the government

Hon MANASSEH SOGAVARE (*Prime Minister*): I stand to briefly explain a few issues as rightly pointed out in the business of today that it is an explanation of issues raised against the government. But before I do that, I acknowledge that today is remembrance day for women who have breast cancer. If you see people wearing this kind of ribbon today, it is because our heart goes to those people who are struggling with that disease. We wish them well, especially the people who are treating these people with medication and the institutions that take care of those who are suffering from this disease.

I am making this statement first and foremost as head of the Solomon Islands Government privileged to be elected as Prime Minister by Members of Parliament on this side of the House, which later got the full support of other Members who later joined the Government, expressing their confidence on the leadership and the policies the Government is advancing. And so I am making this statement on behalf of the Government representing more than 600,000 people residing in more than 5,000 villages throughout this country.

I am also not only head of government but I am also the Member of Parliament for East Choiseul, representing my people, chiefs, church leaders who placed their confidence in me by electing me for five terms now to this Parliament. I am very

privileged to gain the confidence of my people to become their Member of Parliament going 20 years now by the end of this term. And if I still wanted to remain their Member of Parliament, they are certainly going to elect me. But if age is catching up, then retirement is a consideration.

It also has implications on my own family and children. I now have nine grandchildren and the things raised against the Government are also affecting them as well.

It has also affected our own Christian fraternity, in my own church. I am not only Prime Minister but I also played an active part in church. I am an ordained elder of the Seventh Day Adventist Church and an office bearer. Some of the issues raised, although raised against the Government, have made people to have second thoughts about the kind of person I am. But I guess some people are like that.

I feel that being head of government and a person right at the spotlight of the leadership fraternity of this country, I feel obliged to explain issues raised by my own dear former Deputy Prime Minister. In fact, we were sad to learn when he made the decision to resign. It is a decision that is fully respected. I know that he took that decision on behalf of the people of East Honiara. And when a person very close to you did something like that, it is very painful.

My dear friend has taken that decision and has gone frontline in the newspapers of yesterday raising those issues. Our pictures appeared on the two newspapers yesterday; the former Deputy Prime Minister appeared in the Island Sun and my picture in the Solomon Star. The newspaper that carried his picture informed the country that he has resigned and then listed down the things that he is not happy about. And in the Solomon Star newspaper there was this news article about me getting money somewhere to purchase land at the GBR. The issue of ROC funding was also raised.

I am going to start with ROC funding. In regards to ROC funding, and my dear former Deputy Prime Minister actually demanded me to explain how I am going to use the ROC money; that I have to tell the country about it. I find that request by a former insider of Cabinet and Caucus very surprising. Before I left for my overseas engagement with the United Nations, I tasked my former Deputy Prime Minister to sit with the Government Caucus and discuss how that fund is to be used and so to ask me about that question really surprises me. I tasked him and the Caucus to sit down and discuss this so that upon my return they will tell me how we are going to use that money. I probably did what no other prime ministers have done when it comes to the use of ROC funding, although I fully respect the way other former prime ministers have used this funding.

But it is very interesting that this fund has been the cause of the downfall of several governments, and now it comes back again that people want to capitalise on to use it as an issue to take up against my leadership. Well, I did the right thing by placing

that responsibility in the hands of my full Caucus. In case we do not understand the structure of the government system that we adopt, we advance and adhere to a cabinet/government system with collective decisions and collective majority decisions.

Caucus discussed the funding aspects and the report is here with the covering letter signed by none other than the former Deputy Prime Minister. The report fully outlined the decision by Caucus as to how the fund is to be used. Therefore, to ask me to explain to the nation; and if the Opposition and the Independent Groups are interested in this, they should ask him as he is sitting right there with you guys as to how these funds are going to be used.

I note the points raised by the Leader of the Opposition in challenging us to fairly distribute this fund. Those are statements done in good faith within the principles that I believe in - fairness and equity. I fully appreciate that but also acknowledge that we are running a government system that is based on collective majority decision. Regardless of what, I think as an individual leader of this government, it is the collective decision of the Government Caucus, which the former Deputy Prime Minister was actually a part of and actively supervised that decision.

When I arrived at the airport, I was briefed by him personally that they have made the decision on how the fund is going to be used and the report is there. He said they discussed it and everybody agreed as to how and where the funds are going to be used for. Therefore, I will respect the decision by Caucus, which was chaired by none other but my former Deputy Prime Minister.

We acknowledge the concern raised by the other side of the House, and the way we programmed these funds this year is very interesting because the entire \$80million has been programmed where about \$50million always goes to Members of Parliament for their constituencies. We probably would give another \$20million to go directly to all constituencies. The Ministry of Rural Development has made submissions to my office that we will send to the Republic of China so that they can release the funds. That is \$50million plus \$20million; which is \$70million and this will go for all the development programs that will take place in the 50 constituencies throughout the country. It is the \$10million that the former Deputy Prime Minister asked about, and his own report is here with me.

The decision by Caucus, and I am not afraid to mention this on the floor of Parliament is for us to be consistent with the way this funding is being used. Project proposals are coming and there is going to be strict retirement expected from my colleagues on this side of the House on the use of these funds. For the purpose of transparency and accountability I need to inform the nation as to how this fund is to be used and I am receiving project proposals from my colleagues.

We have also decided that enough is enough with this funding that we always politicize every year. Next year we have decided since we bid for the 2023 South Pacific Games, and so it is also the intention of this government that the team that will go to the 2019 to represent this

country will be backed up with some of the best facilities. Beginning next year, this government will start allocating \$10million to improve all the sporting facilities in the country. This is starting off with Lawson Tama for at least a stadium until 2023. But before 2019 we should have better facilities already but we should improve on that by 2023. By 2023 we should have spent about \$80million for improvement of sporting facilities. That is the decision this government has made. We need to announce to our people that we had enough of this money which has destroyed many governments already because of this fund since many people want it.

I think people have started accusing me of this funding beginning of this year. They claimed that this funding had already been given when the boats from Taiwan berth outside there at our port. People were already sending text to each other saying ROC funding is already with the Prime Minister but he is locking it up in some accounts somewhere and will be given only to his cronies and friends. I am not that kind of person because I strongly believe in some very serious principles when it comes to running a government. That is how this fund is going to be used.

There is another serious allegation which people have raised against me and it came back again this time. It haunted me in 2007 and I let it go and now it came back again this year in 2015. And I think this is linked once again to this Taiwan money. There were claims they did not know how the ROC money was used so maybe the Prime Minister got \$1.5million from the Taiwan money to purchase the property at the GBR area. That is a very wrong claim. In fact, they went to get the bank records and since there is no charge on the records, they assumed that I must have bought the properties with cash. Well, the real story is that we have a number of properties and therefore the bank spreads the charge over the properties that we own. The bank spreads the charge over a number of properties we have and therefore it is not listed against here. The ANZ Bank gave us a loan and it was an ANZ Bank cheque that was used to pay the couple.

I am surprised and if we go through all Members of Parliament, how many properties do you have hence you are pointing fingers at this man of East Choiseul? Is it because it is me, it is Sogavare and therefore should not own a house? Are you saying I should not own any property because I am the Prime Minister? What sort of laws in this country stops a prime minister from getting a loan to purchase a property? I just cannot understand how people think. That kind of thinking will not make us to progress. When someone wants to improve another man looks at him and shoots him down; that person must be off because he only wants himself to be enriched and others down there to depend on them. That is not on. Let us change our attitude and help each other. I need to be clear on this that we do not get money from anywhere. I wish I had \$1.5million, which I may not buy a house with but probably a ship. We obtained a loan from the ANZ Bank. Go and check it if you want to. Just like our house at Lungga, which we also loaned for. The Chairman of the Public Accounts is on top and we are down below him. We both get loans from the ANZ to purchase our properties at Lungga. And so I am at a loss to understand the kind of thinking that people have.

Last time some arguments raised was that 'he is prime minister and therefore should not buy a house'. My goodness, if these are the kind of things people want to

raise against my credibility as a leader of this Government, then I am afraid it falls short of any marks.

Reshufflings were also questioned and that consultations must happen and whatever. We are living in the 21st century and so I will be just sending texts. We have been consulting people about this. I thought I have made it very clear in here that I did not go to the extent of actually explaining the reason why people are reshuffled; it will be very shocking. I made a point here on this floor of Parliament that I respect leaders. I respect people who were elected to this House from their constituencies. I said the best move is to please just move so that there is no need to discuss these issues. The colleagues that were reshuffled were happy, except maybe for one or two, I do not know. I do not know who of them are not happy. Those that were reshuffled have now settled down; they have come to see me personally thanking me very much that they have seen the wisdom in what I have done to them.

I am not going to talk at length on this but go straight to the point and answer this way because it raises question about my integrity as a person who steals; it is implied there. For the information of this House, we have engaged a lawyer to take this case up with the editor, the publishers and the people who are responsible of providing information to the newspapers, which tarnishes my image and also my family, my people as I am now seen as a person stealing money to buy a house.

Thank you very much Mr Speaker for giving me the opportunity to explain the Republic of China money and also to make clarifications on allegations levelled against me personally for some serious agendas.

Mr Speaker: Thank you Honourable Prime Minister for making those statements of clarifications. I hope our public also takes note of those statements. Honourable Members I will allow a few short questions on the statement we have just heard. Please be reminded that debate is not permitted on ministerial statements.

Hon JEREMIAH MANELE (*Leader of Opposition*): Let me first of all thank the honourable Prime Minister for his very important statement to clarify some of the issues that have been raised against the Government by those within the Government itself. I thank him for the explanations he has given. My question is on the \$10million. He did make reference that proposals for project applications will be open. Can you clarify what is the timeframe, when will those applications open or if it is already closed, just for the sake of Members information?

Hon Manasseh Sogavare: Thank you very much because I need to further clarify that. And I am not ashamed to talk on behalf of the people sitting on this side of the House who have made the decision. It was the former Deputy Prime Minister who gave me the decision saying he was present with the group when it made the decision. "That the

Prime Minister under his discretion is to share the funds equitably and equally amongst the 35 members of Parliament that make up the DCC Government". The decision was made and the former Deputy Prime Minister gave me that report on what the full government caucus has decided on. We are therefore just waiting for project proposals from the government side of the House for the discretionary fund. The other \$20million will go to everyone, as an additional \$400,000.

Mr DOUGLAS ETE (*East Honiara*): Since the Prime Minister made mention of my name as former Deputy Prime Minister, I would like to make a short statement, mindful of Standing Order 24. One principle of good governance and responsible government requires that any bilateral funds must be appropriated in Parliament. That money is illegal money. The Prime Minister himself also said that to the former Prime Minister. That is my first question.

Second, this is the first time for everyone sitting down here to hear the explanation about the fund by the Prime Minister. I said so because I asked him at his home the previous Sunday to get the ROC Ambassador to come to explain the fund to Cabinet, however, that did not happen. I spoke to his Excellency Victor - the ROC Ambassador, together with the Minister of Rural Development to come and explain it to us but he refused to do so in my capacity as the caretaker. That was like a lot of obscurity on this whole thing, and this is for the first time it happened. About \$50million was appropriated, \$20million.....

Mr. Speaker (*interjecting*): Order, order, just ask your question.

Mr. Douglas Ete: There are three projects the Prime Minister wants for himself; one in Choiseul, another one at Fakaloloma in Funafou for rural water supply. I did not talk in Caucus but I was told that

Mr Speaker: Ask your question please!

Mr Douglas Ete: This \$20million; and this is the first time for everyone to hear this in Parliament; your explanation, and that is being responsible of you. I am glad you have done that. This \$20million, the education fund for \$17million which you talked about, what is it for? Where will it go to for education support, this \$17million? Initially we heard a different story and this is the first time we hear about your story. The \$17million budget support for education, where is that money this time round?

Mr Speaker: Order, order, please.

Mr Douglas Ete: I am asking the question now. The second question is where is the \$20million that was appropriated in the 2015 Budget? How is that money going to be financed, this \$20million from ROC? And where is the \$17million or where is the Education budget support for 2015? I think those are two questions I would like to ask. Thirdly, we should have appropriated all those funds but we have not, and so this \$10million is illegal money.

Hon Manasseh Sogavare: It is very interesting. Suddenly the former Deputy Prime Minister becomes the champion of good governance. Those points are not reflected and raised in the report that he submitted to me. There were no such points raised in the report he submitted to me. If the ROC Ambassador did not come and see him to explain the fund, then that is a matter between him and the Ambassador but I will find out whether a request was put to him and he failed to turn up.

In terms of the breakdown of the funds, my understanding of this is that it is only direct cash assistance to the budget. And every year the Republic of China gives \$80million. My understanding from the Minister of Finance is that the education assistance is not featured in here; it is different. The Minister for Finance needs to further clarify that. But my understanding is that the \$50million plus the \$20million were put inside there and will appear in the Development Budget as sanitation program. If you want a sanitation program you can go ahead; it is open. What will happen is that the Ministry of Rural Development has already submitted a request to me and so I am going to request this funding to come and it is open to Members of Parliament through their constituency committee as to where they may want to put that fund, which may not necessarily be towards sanitation, as it appears there. That is for the \$20million. So 50 plus 20 and 10 makes up to 80, so that is the total fund. For the others, I do not know. My understanding is only this \$80million.

Whether this \$80million is appropriated or not, to me it does not make any difference - okay the funds maybe are illegal but how many years have these funds been paid to Members of Parliament. The issue here is that MPs must be accountable for usage of the funds. You spend it, you have to retire it, so that we know where you have spent the money on so that it can be retired by submitting a report to the Republic of China. That to me is the issue. Whether it is appropriated or not is an argument that we will have forever.

In fact, we raised that when we were on the other side but it fell on deaf ears by those on this side. Those arguments entirely depend on where you are sitting down in this House. If you are sitting down on the government bench, everything we do is okay. When you are on the other side, everything this side of the House is doing is wrong. And so it depends which side you are on. It would be interesting that if you are sitting on this side you will defend it like hell too. But to me, since this is not a new

practice, the people who will be receiving the money must account for it, submit a report so that we know and see where the money is used. Thank you.

Mr CULWICK TOGAMANA (*Maringe/Kokota*): This is in relation to the \$10million that is already agreed upon by the Caucus to be distributed equally to the 35 Members on the Government side. The Prime Minister mentioned that it will be on a project basis. My question is, is it going to be shared equally as agreed to by the Caucus or will it be based on projects as you have mentioned?

Hon Manasseh Sogavare: The decision, if we go strictly by the wording of the decision by Caucus which the former Deputy Prime Minister handed to me, it clearly stated 'equitably and equally shared'. Project proposals would be submitted to us based on the limit.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA (*Small Malaita*): I want to ask a question on this \$20million sanitation and water component. I want to know whether there are any proposals coming from the Ministry of Rural Development already to the Prime Minister's Office, and given the time limitations, whether this funding would be available this year.

Hon Manasseh Sogavare: Yes, I have received submission from the Ministry of Rural Development. That submission will be sent with the project proposals for the amount of \$10million to the Republic of China to request funds to be released. And it will be released any time because it is already in the country.

Mr. MANASSEH MAELANGA (*East Malaita*): I am not very clear on his answer to the question raised by the Member for Maringe/Kokota. Just to mention to the House, whether it is only for the 35 Members of Parliament on the government side alone or is it for every Member of Parliament to submit their proposals.

Hon Manasseh Sogavare: It is for the 35 Members of Parliament that makeup the DCC Government. And right now we do not know where they are sitting.

Mr Douglas Ete: Since it is the decision of Caucus that I am just merely writing down because during Caucus I have never spoken a word, I want the Prime Minister to read the entire recommendations, including the three projects that he requested to be funded under the NDF fund but was thrown out by Caucus because it thinks otherwise.

I think it would be healthy for the Prime Minister to read the whole report from the Caucus. Once it did not end there I will raise a point of order later. I want the Prime Minister to read the whole document including the three projects which the Prime Minister wanted himself but were refused by Caucus.

Hon Manasseh Sogavare: There is no need for me to read the whole report but I will just go straight to the point he raised about the three projects.

Caucus did not throw out those projects. The Government is going to fund those projects that you may be very concerned about them. One of the projects is the Gizo Dive project under the Ministry of Tourism. This is to assist Mr Danny Kennedy in Gizo, and this is because the attraction of tourists to Gizo in the Western Province is diving. There are a lot of tourists going down there to dive. Mr Kennedy has been submitting his requests to several governments already but were all ignored. His diving infrastructures were destroyed by the tsunami. He intends to get a big loan hence wants a bit of government assistance and he will top it up through a loan.

The other project is for the whole of Choiseul Province. The landowners, who have given their land to the government for relocation of the township to the mainland, have established a huge petrol depot to serve the people in Choiseul so that we do not have to come to Honiara to get petrol. This group produced drum sizes which are half the size of 200 litres - they are 100 litre drums. This is to assist them to refill and start off the work.

The other one is the Fakaloloma Funafou Sanitation project. This is a pilot project that will start in Niuleni and Funafou. This is a kind of project that will be established throughout the lagoon. If those two projects are feasible, we will replicate that throughout all the islands in the lagoon.

The Caucus has decided to put them in the budget for funding and so they were not thrown out. In case you might think those projects were thrown out and the money shared. Not so, Caucus did not reject those three projects but will be taken up.

With the Fakaloloma and Funafou Sanitation pilot project, I am actively engaged with further discussions with the Republic of China for this project if it can possibly get funds somewhere from within itself to co fund this project this year, while the other two projects will be factored into the budget next year.

Mr Speaker: Honourable Members, I think that is enough questions for this particular statement so let us now move on to the next item.

STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

MRD Policy Arena and Status of the 2015 Budget Implementation

Hon JIMSON TANANGADA (*Minister for Rural Development*): First of all, thank you for allowing me this opportunity to report to Parliament and to the nation, our people on the work of the Ministry of Rural Development. On a similar note, I would also like

to thank and commend the honourable Prime Minister for seeing it proper that ministers report by way of statement to Parliament on the work of ministries. Indeed, ministers are responsible for the work of Government and Parliament, but most importantly to all Solomon Islanders through the assignment of responsibilities that we are assigned to add our ministry's portfolio.

That said, as the Minister for Rural Development, I wish to report on the work of the Ministry of Rural Development in the following areas. Firstly, I wish to highlight the policy arena that guides the work of the Ministry and its responsibilities. Secondly, is to inform the entire nation on the Ministry's 2015 Budget, the status of its implementation and close my statement emphasising on the ongoing efforts of the Government for the Ministry to improve further in its mandate and responsibilities to deliver quality services to our people throughout the 50 constituencies.

It is no doubt that since the establishment of the Ministry of Rural Development eight years ago, successive governments; three so far, and now the DCCG have discharged substantial resources in the form of goods and services to communities and people throughout the 50 constituencies.

The Ministry of Rural Development is a ministry mandated by the Government to manage constituency development. Having said so, one cannot underestimate the enormous responsibilities of the Ministry to manage 50 constituencies. More so, the importance of the Ministry working alongside key stakeholders that simultaneously carries out small, medium and major socioeconomic development activities at all levels.

Any government for that matter needs to install sound development policies that provide the enabling environment from which development stakeholders can operate through. This challenge to draw on an integrated implementation framework is a way forward to achieve efficient and effective service delivery to our people.

In terms of the DCCG's rural development policy, the Ministry of Rural Development mandate and responsibilities fall under the 'Rural Economic Development Policy No.4.2.5 – "The development of Rural Economic development centres throughout the 50 constituencies"'. Through this policy, the DCCG through the Ministry of Rural Development embarks on a comprehensive economic development program throughout the 50 constituencies with two key policy objectives:

1. To provide an enabling environment to stimulate economic growth, especially in rural areas.
2. To address and meet the basic needs of people in the rural areas.

The key partner line ministries responsible to the policy with the Ministry of Rural Development are the Ministry of Development, Planning and Aid Coordination, Ministry of Infrastructure and Development, the Ministry of Commerce, Industries, Labour and Immigration and the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Survey.

The Ministry of Rural Development is mindful of the fact that there is the need to involve other line ministries and others to work together in implementing the Rural Economic Development Policy throughout the 50 constituencies. I am pleased to inform the House that the Policy Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Unity in the office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet is working alongside my ministry to consult with a number of ministries in its cluster groupings to engage and share information on the different implementation mechanisms used so far and pave a way forward to draw out an integrated implementation framework that can be used for implementing the Rural Economic Development policy of the government. It is important that ministries no longer work in isolation to each other, however, need to embrace a framework that can be better utilised for improved coordination and implementation of government policies and programs.

The Ministry of Rural Development is embarking on final consultation with a number of key line ministries this week and should develop an integrated implementation framework strategy for implementation of the rural Economic Development centre programs next year and onwards.

The Rural Economic Development Centre Policy is a policy that promotes equitable distribution of development throughout the country. Basically, the Rural Development Centre Policy involves initial site identification for potential developments within a constituency. Further, once a site is identified, the next step is to ensure initial site preparatory work can be done, which hopefully can be acquired for development into a centre. The focus will be for the development centres to act as a development hub where all administration, commercial, socioeconomic activities can simultaneously happen at any time in any constituency that involves people.

The development of the development centres in constituencies is in line with the effort to decentralise development to where resources and people are. Contained also in the development centre policy is the promotion of economic livelihood associations of which some are quite active in the constituencies. The mobilisation of people to form or be part of associations is a good approach as people with common interests in certain socio economic development activities can be grouped together, work and support each other in what they are good at. It will also be these livelihood associations that will assist in the development operations of the centres once up and running.

My Ministry is tasked to ensure that development funding is made available to support the promotion of existing associations or development of new livelihood associations or interest groups next year and onwards. Through the Rural Economic Development policy we also acknowledge that whilst we build on the development centre policy, our communities and people still need government development assistance to sustain or improve their livelihood through projects.

Having said so, addressing the basic needs of our communities and people will continue to dominate the mandates of any government until such that people are self-

reliant and the objectives of the global sustainable development goals are met. The DCC Government through the Ministry of Rural Development has allocated constituency development funding to each constituency in this year's development budget.

I have spelt out the policy arena of the ministry, and no doubt addressing the policy requires concerted efforts and strong commitments from all leaders and all citizens of our beloved nation. My Ministry will work hard to make progress gradually into the next years, especially with the resources budget and manpower allocated to support the implementation of the rural economic development policy.

I will now speak on the Ministry's 2015 Budget, which is in line with the Rural Economic Development policy. The Ministry of Rural Development is allocated a total of \$16,876,207 in Recurrent Budget Head 298 and \$335million under its Development Budget Head 498. Whilst the Recurrent budget involves operational costs, there are four development projects earmarked for development purposes. The four development projects are:-

- (1) The Constituency Development Program under Solomon Islands Government with a budget of \$260million.
- (2) The Republic of China Support to Constituency Development with a budget \$70million.
- (3) The Rural Development Centre development with a budget of \$4million; and
- (4) Ministry Information Management System with a budget of \$1million. That makes up the \$335million.

The major sources of development funding administered through the Ministry since its establishment are the Republic of China and the Solomon Islands Government. For this year, 2015, the Government of the Republic of China has contributed 21 percent whilst the Solomon Islands Government contributed 79 percent of the Ministry's total development budget. As part and parcel of the 2015 People's Budget, the Ministry of Rural Development's share of the development budget has a total allocation of \$335million. Out of the \$335million development budget, a total of \$334million was allocated for equal distribution to the 50 constituencies at \$6.68million per constituency, whilst the remaining amount of \$1million is allocated to the ministry headquarters operation to boost the Ministry's information management system.

On the status of implementing the Ministry's 2015 Budget, the Ministry's implementation rate for its recurrent budget is moderate, given the allocation for this year. Apart from meeting administration cost, three key activities that will dominate the remaining expenditure under the Ministry's recurrent budget falls on capacity building in terms of training with constituency development committees and the

ministerial review workshop for all staff at headquarters and constituency level next month.

A key activity currently underway in the first and the second phase of conducting monitoring exercise here in Honiara at the Ministry's Accounts Division and with suppliers of constituency approved projects which will be followed on with tours to constituencies for purposes of ensuring project materials and other development assistance are delivered accordingly. The evaluation part will be an exercise of its own next year after six months of project implementation.

On the implementation of the Ministry's budget of \$335million, according to the 3rd quarter report on actual expenditure summary received by the ministry, I wish to report that close to 60 per cent of the budget has been spent specifically on constituency projects and other development assistance for our people and communities across the 50 constituencies.

The implementation of the 2015 Development Budget that is channelled through constituencies is binded under the tender requirement process as contained in the Public Finance and Management Act 2013. The Ministry has in place a list of preferred suppliers that are endorsed the by the Ministry Tender Board and approved by the Central Tender Board of the Ministry of Finance and Treasury. It is expected that upon full execution of the Ministry's Development Budget of \$334 million to constituencies, around 79 per cent will be spent on socio economic development projects while around 21 per cent is spent as grant to meet costs that are administrative in nature or general assistance to meet our constituency needs over time.

The Ministry is working on a report on all approved constituency projects under the Solomon Islands Government funding for this sitting. Whilst a second report on ROC funding to constituency should be ready in the first quarter of next year due to expected last release of final instalment payment of ROC funds expected in November or around December, acquittal report could be submitted to the Ministry in the first quarter of 2016.

Having said that, there are constituency projects in process either at the Ministry or the Treasury Division awaiting payments. Therefore the commitment level of constituency funding to approved project in process within the Ministry or within the Treasury has reached more than 80 per cent commitment of constituency funds under the Solomon Islands Government. My Ministry is optimistic that by the end of December, the implementation rate of actual fund expenditure under the Solomon Island Government will reach more than 90 per cent implementation as past records have shown

On this note, I would like to highlight some areas that have contributed to slow progress of the Development Budget's implementation which points to the need for proper planning by constituencies to initiate development projects in a timely manner. Obviously, some reasons include late or no submission of proposals to the Ministry

until very lately. Another reason is due to the fact that there are some proposals that require meeting some expectations of the tender process. And also late submission of acquittal reports to the Ministry. These are some very common reasons why there is delay in the progress of our development projects in the constituencies. Having said so, the Ministry will try its best to properly manage these issues as we progress in the years ahead.

The Ministry of Rural Development continues to strive for quality in carrying out its mandate to deliver to the 50 constituencies. However, this can be achieved through government commitment and support. One of the priority areas of the ministry is building up its manpower resources to be able to manage constituency development. The DCC Government supports this endeavour by placing the Ministry as priority one to resource it with increased manpower resources. In doing so, the Ministry has advertised 20 new posts for the Ministry headquarter office, in particular to boost the Rural Development Division which will comprise of five officers allocated to a Project Planning Unit, Procurement Unit, Research & Development Unit, Monitoring & Evaluation Unit and a Data Entry Unit. So far five data entry officers have been appointed and currently at post to support the Ministry's effort to manage information and data at the Ministry and the constituency level as well. In addition to recruitments under the Rural Development Division, the Corporate Service which comprised the Accounts and Administration division is now fully staffed with the addition of new staffs posted to the Ministry to take up important posts to support the work of the Ministry.

At the constituency level, the ongoing recruitment of constituency officers to man constituency offices is continuing. The Ministry, as we speak, has recruited 124 constituency officers out of the 150 at 3 officers per constituencies. I am glad that for the first time this year, there is an increased number of women holding posts in the constituency offices. I hope as leaders we will continue to encourage the participation of women in this very important leadership role to implement development projects in our constituencies. It is expected that the Ministry will see all posts filled and officers posted at the Ministry Headquarter office by the end of this year.

At this juncture, I on behalf of the ministry commend the DCCG for this very important vision with the support of the Ministry of Public Service and the Public Service Commission to see to it that the Ministry Headquarter office is fully staffed simultaneously with constituency officers. I cannot end my statement by highlighting a very important area which points to the call for ongoing support and commitment by all 50 Members of Parliament to the work of the ministry. As leaders who are elected by our people and entrusted with responsibilities to pave way for development for our people and constituencies, we have a very important role of informing our people about the development plans and goals about their budget, the budget that we termed as the 'People's Budget' through our constituency leadership.

Our people and our nation deserve us to do the right thing to be inclusive and more participative in the decisions that we make in terms of development for our people and constituencies. We almost repeatedly read on the newspapers about the concerns of our people about the lack of delivery of development and services. Also we have heard and being informed about that in other media sources.

Today I stand on behalf of the Government through the Ministry of Rural Development to say that out of the Peoples' Development Budget of \$335million, more than \$200million have been delivered to our people through the 50 constituencies. I am confident that at least 90 per cent of that development budget will be delivered this year 2015. Let us not cast stones at each other. All leaders of this Honourable House owe the people of this nation to render our sole duty 'to lead is to serve'. Our citizens through the 50 constituencies must be inclusively informed, involved and actively participate in the development of this country if we are to move forward. If we are not ready for such time, then our nation unfortunately will still be cradled like a child that is now 37 years old.

To the staff of the Ministry of the Rural Development, I urge you to strive for excellence in the way you conduct your work and yourselves. The Ministry has a major role to deliver to the people of this country and everyone is tasked with a role to ensure that this happens. Rural development is everyone's business; we need ourselves and others around us to make it work.

In closing I wish to highlight that the ongoing effort to promote good governance in the management and administration of constituency development funds, the Democratic Coalition for Change Government through the Ministry of Rural Development is working on the CDF Act and its draft regulations and is committed to see that the work of the Ministry guided by legislation and in the end provides the desired outcomes for the betterment of our people and constituencies into the future.

With those statements I thank you for this opportunity to report about the work of the Ministry of Rural Development. I will resume my seat.

Hon JEREMIAH MANELE (*Opposition Leader*): Before I ask a brief question, let me first of all thank the Honourable Minister for his comprehensive report on the work of his Ministry and also on behalf of the Hograno/Kia/Havulei constituency, I would like to congratulate the Minister and also his predecessor, the Permanent Secretary and staffs for the efficient manner in which you have worked closely with the constituency to deliver on the programs for this year. We are certainly on the implementation part of most or if not all the projects or programs that come under the SIG Livelihood Funds and so I would like to register that appreciation on behalf of my constituency.

The question is on the policy arena. You have rendered your statement by saying that rural development is everybody's business and I concur with you on that, and so the question is we have a number of players in the rural areas in terms of rural

development players including donor partners like the Rural Development Program. Does the Ministry have in place mechanisms to dialogue or to consult with such players like the RDP or other donor funded agencies that are delivering or that are operating in our rural areas?

Hon Jimson Tanagada: I believe that the Ministry based on the statement I have given is working in collaboration with other line ministries such as the Ministry of Planning and Aid Coordination that deals directly with donor partners in the country. We are working very closely with them. Remember, the policies are live documents and we would like to ensure that in strengthening the constituency and looking at setting up a framework, the donors that come in through the Ministry of Planning and Aid Coordination have to work in partnership with developments carried out in the constituencies. That is one of the objective we would like to see so that we are partners instead of working in isolation of each other.

Mr Manasseh Maelanga: I would like to ask the Minister that since we are now in October and the second and third tranches are not yet released; I mean for all of us, we on this side of the House would like to know what is wrong. I have been talking with the His Excellency, the Ambassador and he told me that there are no retirements. I would like to know from the Minister whether that is true or what is the reason why funds are not released since we are now in the second and third tranches and we are going towards the end of the year. I would like to ask the Minister to explain to the House.

Hon Jimson Tanagada: I believe that is a matter of concern to all of us. I have emphasised earlier on today on the causes of the slow process and delay in payment, first is retirement or acquittals of the first phase that have been done. There are certainly some people who have not retired their expenditures. For those of you who have submitted your retirements, which is 41 in total, the Ministry has submitted them and just this morning we communicated with the Ambassador and work on the third tranche is on the way and I believe it will be released soon. However, I want to encourage those who are yet to submit their retirements to do so. That is the answer to your question.

Mr Rick HOUENIPWELA (*Small Malaita*): Before I ask my question I would like to join the Leader of the Opposition and the Independent Group to thank the Minister for this very comprehensive update.

My question is related to what the Leader of the Independent has asked and the answer given by the Minister on the acquittal reports. Can the Minister circulate the list of the acquittals? Where are we? Where is everyone because it will help every one of

us? Ministers are used to doing this so perhaps the Minister could be encouraged to do that.

My final question is to do with regulations which the Minister stated he is going to take up. I would just like to know the timeframe the Minister has in mind to take up the regulations.

Hon Jimson Tanangada: I will ensure that my officer will make available copies of those who have submitted their retirements and those that have not so that it reminds us of our duty to submit the retirements.

On your second question in terms of the timeframe of the regulations of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) Act, we are working very closely with the office of the Attorney General. We have been in consultations over the regulations. Probably the Attorney General can shed some light on how soon they will come. Our plan is that if time permits we should be able to put it through this meeting.

Mr CULWICK TOGAMANA (*Maringe/Kokota*): I would also like to join the Leader of Opposition in thanking the Minister for this very comprehensive statement. As I speak now, we are unloading materials at Buala for my good people of Maringe/Kokota.

My question is on the development centres. If we were to have these development centres, do the constituencies have the legal right to own the properties?

Hon Jimson Tanangada: I take note of that very important question and if the Attorney General has something to say about that then I will allow him to do so.

Hon Manasseh Sogavare: That is a very good point. Members of Parliament bought a lot of assets such as ships and so forth. That is a very good point that was raised and we might need to look at the regulations and even the Act so that if there is need to amend it then it needs to be done so that the assets bought by the Government purporting to belong to constituencies, sometimes Members take the assets for themselves after their term in Parliament comes to an end. We need to properly regulate that so that it remains the property of the people of the constituency. That is a very good point which we will take note of.

Mr Speaker: Honourable Members, I think that is enough questions for this particular statement, so let us move on now to our next item of business.

MOTIONS

Motion No.10

That Parliament resolves itself into a Committee of the Whole House to consider the Education White Paper 2015

Debate Commences

Hon JEREMIAH MANELE (*Leader of Opposition*): I will be very brief in contribution to the debate on this important motion on the 2015 Education White Paper. Before I make those comments, let me first of all congratulate the ever hardworking Minister for Education and Human Resources Development for bringing the paper to Parliament.

The Paper and, of course, the proposed new Act that will be based on it has noble intentions, which are captured in the vision and missions statements, which says, 'an education system that aims to accommodate, enhance, strengthen our common traditions, norms, heritage, principles and the underpinning philosophy of our diverse cultures, traditions and way of life.

Let me now make a few comments on a number of reform areas that were highlighted by the Minister in his statement. In terms of the constitutional and legal framework, especially the consistency between the Act and policy, the report highlighted a systematic disconnection in consistency between the current Act and major policies implemented by the Ministry. While it is welcoming to note that the proposed Act will deal with this issue more appropriately, I believe it would be also important to consider establishing a proper coordinative mechanism that acts like a clearing house for policies before they are enforced and implemented. I guess such a mechanism would ensure that policies are subject to some kind of compliance regime before they are implemented or enforced upon our citizens.

On the issue of infrastructure policy, one other important contextual matter that needs to be addressed under this policy is the need to incorporate a compulsory saving arrangement within the Act to ensure that certain percentage of the schools' annual income is set aside for future developments. Such accumulated savings can only be utilised, for example, after 10 years or so. I think this arrangement or such an arrangement will be a very important sustainability tool and should be aimed at addressing issues of future infrastructure development including school deterioration, which I believe is a big issue facing a lot of our schools at the moment.

Moving on to the governance structure, I believe the suggestions that we have in the Paper, whilst good and sound, must be translated such that it addresses the current contextual issues that compounded the delivery of education services in the country. Moreover, meaningful devolution of responsibilities and functions to education authorities should be done in conjunction with the need for education authorities to improve their administration and accountability systems. In this regard, any

meaningful devolution of responsibility also means proper financial support and arrangement from the government through the Ministry to the education authorities.

Moving on to the National Education Board briefly, there may be a need to provide a proper periodical timeline to ensure that the Board meets and deals with issues rather than leaving it to the direction of certain officers or individuals which might result in the non-performance of the Board.

On inspectorate services, there are sound suggestions in the Paper. I want to reiterate however that during the Education and Human Resources Training Committee Inquiry into Teacher Absenteeism, this particular issue of inspectors was identified as one of the contributing factors to teacher absenteeism. This is in relation to the slowness in confirmation of permanent employment for teachers. It was also acknowledged by the Ministry that manpower seems to be an issue that resulted in the division not executing its responsibility in a timely manner. It is important that structures created must be properly resourced, both financially and in terms of human resources.

On school fees, again the issue of compliance and enforcement are recognised as being major factors in school fees. There is again the need to ensure that proper mechanisms are put in place to ensure responsible authorities, be it in the ministry or the education authorities comply with their statutory obligations.

We believe the White Paper that is before us is a step in the right direction for our education system and must be supported. The more interesting stage will be on how the areas that are articulated in the Paper are translated into the proposed Act. I am sure the process will take care of the issues and concerns that have been raised in the Paper.

Finally, I would like to join the Minister in thanking the various stakeholders and the authors of this White Paper for a job well done, which I hope will lead to a new Education Act that will contribute to the development of human resource, education, learning and training in our country. As I have said on many occasions, as a small island developing state, human resources are our most important resource. With these few remarks, I support the motion.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA (*Small Malaita*): I would also like to thank the honourable Minister for bringing the Education White Paper to the floor of Parliament and for moving the motion to consider it through the Committee of the Whole House

This motion is a very important one because it deals with a very important policy area for this country. This is a long awaited paper; one that should advise and provide a roadmap for the Solomon Islands Government on this very important sector of our country. In fact this paper had been in the making for a period of three years already so it has had a lot of activity around it.

I would also like to join the Leader of Opposition and the Minister in thanking and acknowledging the contributions of the various individuals and groups that have provided important contributions in the completion and the bringing of this paper together, more especially the authors of the paper.

My intervention will be very brief and general in nature and will cover three of the many areas which are covered in the paper, namely review of the education legislative framework and the education system in which I will make a few suggestions and comments on a number of general principles and ideals that might be worth considering in such a review. Secondly, the reforms agenda which I will comment on a few areas which the Minister has included in his 15 areas of reforms in the Education Sector. Thirdly, contributing to the way forward, I will briefly outline my views on a number of areas to address in paving the way forward.

The paper discusses very useful and important principles that would underpin our education system and what a good education legislative framework should be. To that end I wish to discuss a number of general principles and ideals that might be worth considering while reviewing the education legislative framework. I think this is now an opportune time to make the education system into one which first; the system should be one that encourages personal working attitude. It should be instilled in a child that achievement comes with personal hard work. While group achievement is important, this comes as a result of personal and individual contributions. It is not in anyone's interest, including one self to rely on others or to be a parasite in a group. This work ethos is good for the family, for the community and for the country. People should be taught the principle of working smarter but also harder.

Secondly, the system should enhance the principle of "giving back" to the community or to one's community. We are a people of communities and our very existence is sustained due to communal contributions. Our new generations must be taught the ideals of voluntarily giving back to their communities, and I emphasise voluntarily. Many people go around with the wrong idea that their communities owe them a debt. They forget that it is really the other way round. We must continue to ensure that our communities' sustainability by ensuring that our people continue to volunteer their time and resources to the betterment and the benefit of their own communities.

Thirdly and finally under this subject, the system should aim to discourage the practice of accumulating knowledge and skills for selfish gain. As noted earlier, it is important that personal achievement is desirable. Education and training should be tailored to train and equip the student to contribute to the well-being of the group. It is not progressive learning if the objective of learning new skills is selfish. I believe that communities and society in general will make more development advancement when people contribute to their skills and knowledge for the wellbeing of others and the community at large.

On the reforms agenda, in proposing the motion, the Minister outlined 15 areas of reforms in the sector. These are indeed very fundamentally important areas of concern which I totally agree with the Minister will require addressing urgently. I will comment only on three of these reforms that strike my attention. First is on the principle of creating parents or community partnerships. In a learning environment there can be no substitute to the need to create partnerships in the management and running of educational institutions. Apart from the management side itself, there is more to be gained even on academic achievements when we have strong partnerships. This is good for the institution, the staff, administration and most importantly the intended beneficiaries; the students.

Secondly, the need to have able and strong school management cannot be overemphasised. It is an understatement to say that good management will always benefit the organisation but it is even more pertinent when the benefits are derived by those that are intended to benefit from it. In an education institution, all stakeholders will benefit from a strong school management. It results in an efficient administration and therefore effective service delivery. And with that, added strong disciplinary processes where the rules are clear and the administration of such rules and regulations are upheld without favour or fear.

Such high standards of discipline are required at the school management and administration, more especially school staff. It is no news to anyone that parents and guardians would want to avoid schools that lack discipline. Parents have a legitimate reason to fear for their children where teachers demonstrate undisciplined conduct and behaviour. All stakeholders will benefit from a school with firm disciplinary processes administered in the institution. I therefore agree whole heartedly with the Minister that we need sweeping reforms on this area in our school system.

Thirdly, under this category, it is critically important to ensure teachers' accreditation and qualifications match some minimum standards. This is an area where it is very evident we have a lot of work to do in terms of both raising teaching staff qualifications and ensuring these are applied country wide. Currently there are huge disparities in these areas between urban-based and rural-based schools. It is heartening to note that the paper has mapped out actions to address this already.

In conclusion, I would like to discuss my views on a number of areas I think should be addressed in paving the way forward in our education system. First, I think the requirements to attend schools are still not compelling enough. It should be compulsory to attend school, classes from an early age, ECE educational learning stage to secondary level, which I think up to form five. In support of this policy objective and to ensure it delivers, the government should implement the school fee free policy action in this bracket (from ECE to Form five). That should not stop another important policy objective of creating partnerships between education authorities, local communities and

respective school managements. This important policy should encourage contributions and participation in the school management.

Secondly, we need to put more emphasis on the TVET system. I think this is a very important area not only for the individual student, but also importantly to the wider community and the nation as a whole. This objective will be achieved through actions in a number of areas, for example, providing more opportunities and access which will be achieved through more facilities and applying the free school fee policy.

Thirdly, I think another important aspect of human development which is missing in our current system is the teaching of traditional cultural values. These are important not only to personal development but also for the maintenance of important cultural values in our Solomon Islands society, for example, simple things like respect for the elderly and traditional chiefs; respect for personal and public property; respect for the environment and issues like dispute resolution and just maintaining community harmony. These are very important practical areas which can only come with practice and over time.

Fourthly, to reinforce the current education institutional makeup where we start with the ECE, primary, secondary and then tertiary which is the higher Education TVET. It appears that at the tertiary level the distinction between higher education and TVET type of learning are not well articulated or sufficiently catered for under the current Education Act. It would be necessary not only to articulate their distinct policy objective and purpose, but it would be important that a new legislative framework should provide for this. Ideally, we should have a separate legislation to cater for both subsectors namely higher education and TVET. This will be important where it is envisaged, as it is the current practice that TVET is provided mostly by private providers and higher education being envisaged to do likewise.

Fifthly and finally, I want to suggest that in terms of the tertiary sub-sector - I mean higher education, a new policy on funding of scholarships should be considered. Here I will be suggesting that the Government should be giving consideration to a scholarship loan scheme for tertiary students to be considered in the future.

These are my comments and I want to again thank the Minister for a very good paper and I would like to support the motion he has put. Thank you very much.

Mr MATTHEW WALE (*Aoke/Langalanga*): Firstly, I would like to also appreciate the Minister for Education, the Ministry and the Government having approved this White Paper to be brought into Parliament. We all know, as was outlined by the Minister, the current legislation has truly passed its usefulness and so is way overdue that we look at all the issues, current and as best as is within our reach to look into the future and see how we want the Solomon Islands society and the Solomon Islands economy should progress into the future. It is therefore timely that this White Paper is here for us to consider.

I would just like to make a few comments and observations on it. When we come to the committee, I do hope then to make detail observations. Firstly I want to say that the Ministry is too big so perhaps it is a matter for the Prime Minister to consider that higher education must become a separate ministry, preferably under its own piece of legislation. We are dealing with the most strategic resource we have in building society, in building a nation state and so it is important that the higher end becomes a totally separate ministry. Right now all these things are just lumped under the Ministry of Education. The Member for North East Guadalcanal is a strong person so he can carry the load around. But a person can easily have stroke working in that ministry because it is quite a heavy one.

Secondly, I think some of the proposals in here are going the wrong direction. They go towards making this sector even bigger and even heavier than it ought to be. It is making the government to play roles that could be far better provided elsewhere by other players. When I looked through the proposals, for example, the Teaching Service Commission on employment of teachers, the Government does not need to employ teachers. Part of the absenteeism problem; when the Minister for Police was the Chairman of Education Committee last time, this Committee looked at teacher absenteeism and one of the core findings is that teachers are not teaching but they are still get paid.

The relationship between the Government, the Ministry and the Ministry Finance going down to the education authorities and then going down to the schools is just too big that the consequence for lack of turning up and doing work is not felt for weeks and weeks, if at all. So governance, teacher management must go where it closest to where the teacher is; the teacher is inside the school. Governance for it must therefore be within the school and within the education authority. Once we take that direction, there will no longer be the need for the Teaching Service Division in the Ministry.

Why should the Teaching Service Commission even perform the role it is doing now? It should only be an accreditation platform. For us the accountants, CPA does not employ me so when I graduate I work, I did the modules and when I passed, I become a CPA. They told me to continue with my work and if I did something wrong they will look into it but they did not employ me. A similar kind of thing is what we need. Allow the teachers to be employed by the education authorities, managed by the schools and the education authorities and they are no longer employees of the Government.

This does not mean they cannot strike anymore. They can still be inside the collective bargaining platforms such as unions and so forth, but they will be far better managed. The suggestion here which runs through a number of recommendations, I think is heading towards the wrong directions. We should reduce this sector a little bit more.

The suggestion for a qualifications authority is a very good one. But I think the same thing should be done with the inspectorate. The inspectorate should not be inside the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education itself ought to be inspected. When the Ministry of Education is flat witted, everything is flat witted with it. Inspectorate is really the spirit and soul of the education system. It is someone that stands outside looking inside to see whether the system is working or not. If it does not work, where does it break down? You are well aware of this, Mr Speaker, because you were once a teacher by profession. If the inspectorates do not go out to visit the schools or they may go but collude with teachers because they want promotion or are facing a disciplinary action and the issue got locked up somewhere here, then the whole system is not going to work. It is important that the inspectorate role is totally outsourced, either a statutory authority - that is probably its best platform, mandated to inspect the whole system; not just inspecting teachers. That is how it should be.

The other observation I want to make is in regards to educational leadership. Take a look at our whole system and you find a good school then there is a good principal or a good headmaster in that school. If you find a department in a school function properly, there is a good leader there who is probably the head of the department.

Educational leadership is the pivot on which the delivery of education can turn. All the other things are to harness and maximise the learning experience between a student and the teacher. Let us create the whole system so that these two maximise the transfer of knowledge. That is the reason why we want to harness all these things. It is important that we fine tune the system.

I have seen the direction with regards to education authorities and I am very happy about it. I am happy because education authorities have basically run, maybe 90 per cent of our schools throughout history; this time, of course, the public sector component of it has greatly increased. But it is the education authorities that are playing a big role in our education system. However, they are being out in "no man's" land, so recent efforts by the Ministry to build up and resource their capacity is a very good thing and much, much more needs to be done.

The primary responsibility of educating all citizens of Solomon Islands is the responsibility of the government. It is not the responsibility of the church, not of the province nor is it of any other person. The central government must take an active interest in it and progress it. That responsibility cannot be farmed out. That is very important.

The right of a child to be educated must now be enshrined in legislation and must be supported adequately with reasonable resourcing. This is important and this White Paper acknowledges these things. We have realised this; we have been playing rugby with it may because the rugby World Cup is on and so we might side step a bit,

zig zag this side and that side, but today we have realised that we really do need to move these issues forward, and so I am happy about this.

With regards to literacy and numeracy, the triple “R;” - arithmetic, writing and reading, in this day and age, in this 21st century where you can run an entire office from a phone but we still have people who are illiterate is not good. In Langalanga we term it as *‘pencil mo’oi* (pencil break). It is a term used to describe someone who is illiterate. Illiteracy is a curse on any society. It does not only stunt the development of a person but it also stunts the development of all of us. We are all dehumanised to an extent to which our neighbour is illiterate. This scourge of illiteracy can be passed on to others too. When someone is illiterate, sometimes he/she does not fully appreciate the literacy skills for his offspring and so it is passed on. And yet we do not really need a lot to totally eliminate illiteracy in our society. All Solomon Islanders should be literate and numerate.

The Minister for Health and Medical Services just returned from London from a meeting on the total elimination of Malaria. We should do the same to illiteracy; total elimination of illiteracy in our country. We must make it as an important goal to deliver both in adult literacy and within the education system.

Mr Speaker, you were once a teacher and you know that in our education system students who come out from Form 3 are barely literate. They can read but they do not understand what they read. Their comprehension skills are really low. It should not be like that. Over the next 10 years there should be no single Solomon Islander that is illiterate. We must make that an important goal or objective. It is a transitional one; let us hope that in 10 years we can totally eradicate illiteracy and no longer have to deal with it, but keep qualities strong.

Those are the views I would like to share on this very positive and progressive White Paper. I would like to congratulate the honourable Minister for bringing it on behalf of the Government and the Ministry and those who have been part of putting it together. Thank you.

Hon PETER SHANEL AGOVAKA (*Minister for Communication and Aviation*): Firstly, I would like to thank the Minister for bringing this Paper to the floor of Parliament.

Education policy is one key flagship of the Democratic Coalition for Change Government. Since 1953, when we were the British Solomon Islands Protectorate, education regulation and the education system in our country has come a long way and the Education White Paper 2015 has come at the right time for us to relook at our education system.

As highlighted by the Minister in his presentation of the White Paper to Parliament, the purpose of the White Paper is to review the 1978 Education Act (Cap.69). I quote from the foreword of the report, “And stake stock of achievements,

trends and patterns in educational provision, policies and practices and to charter future directions for education in Solomon Islands through a reform of the legislation”.

Most of us here assembled in this chamber have been one way or another gone through the education system in our country. Prior to independence, students who have gone through our education have gone through the Cambridge School Syllabus. Some of us are graduates of that. After independence we have the Solomon Islands School Syllabus of which some of you are graduates of that.

Whatever school syllabus one goes through, education is for life. There are some subjects you may enjoy and there are others that you may not be too keen on, and some of the things that you learn in schools stuck with you throughout the rest of your life, while other things you tend to forget easily as soon as you leave school. But such is life, but most importantly education will put you in good standing for the rest of your life. Hence, a review of the Education Act is an important priority of this Government.

This White Paper identifies the issues, crisis and challenges within and without the education system. It is within this scope I wish to briefly comment on three issues on our education system that has been raised here. In my presentation of the Report on Teacher Absenteeism, as the former chairman of the Parliamentary Education Committee, the Committee highlighted the fact that teacher absenteeism is the tip of the iceberg. There are bigger challenges beneath the tip of this ice berg. And so I am pleased to note that this Education White Paper 2015 has identified the challenges that our Committee has also addressed in the Teacher Absenteeism report. I am pleased that this White Paper not only identifies the challenges but also addresses and identifies the deficiencies in the Education Act that needs to be rectified. I am pleased to note that there will be a new Education Act for Parliament to deliberate on and pass.

The three issues I would like to raise are first is infrastructure. Infrastructure alone stands out as a beacon in the teacher absenteeism problem. If we are to implement the strategies set out in this White Paper, I believe that we as parliamentarians should and must support the Minister of Education when he presents his budget, the 2016 budget in December. This is because staff housing, classrooms, water and sanitation, road infrastructures, transport and communications are some of the most important infrastructures that will continue to be challenges in our education system. And in our effort to implement this White Paper, these are challenges we are going to face. I am not suggesting solutions to them but we have to find the solutions collectively.

One of the short falls of the current Education Act is the failure to legislate for early childhood care and education (ECCE or ECE). Nevertheless, our education system recognises the important role of ECCE to provide our children aged three to six years the education they need before entering formal school at the primary level, Year 1 at the age of six. Some of us have never had the opportunity or the experience of going to kindergartens like nurseries, play schools, pre-schools, day care and/or preparatory

classes. Our children are lucky and our grandchildren are also lucky that they will be able to go to kindergarten to prepare them for primary school and then from primary on to secondary schools. May be some of us need to go to the nurseries when we are old, but I will leave that to another day for another discussion. I am pleased to note again that this White Paper has identified the shortfalls in ECCE and will formally recognize and include the shortfalls in the Act.

Another issue I want to raise is the debate on the issue of teaching services. When we as parents send our children to school we put our full trust and confidence in the hands of teachers to educate our children. This statement I am making is to emphasise the very important role that teachers and the teaching service play on our education system.

There is no cadre in the public service that has more labour force than the teaching service. We are talking about 9,000 registered teachers in our entire education system from ECCE, primary, secondary including vocational rural training centres. That is 9,000 registered teachers. One of the problems we realized during consultations on teacher absenteeism is that the Ministry of Education has problems trying to address teacher issues. The quality, morale and the status of teacher and the teaching service are important components in the whole teaching system, because after all they will be the people implementing the curriculum; they will be the people teaching our children. I only hope that we can seriously and realistically pay proper attention to our teachers and the teaching service.

I noted that the Ministry of Education does not have the institutional strength to support teachers and the teaching service. I wish to reiterate here that the Ministry needs to strengthen or put officers in place to look at the quality, the morale and status of teachers and the teaching service. I know the Minister for Education, my good friend is taking note and he will do something about it.

Looking at the 9,000 teachers, it begs the question of whether we should create a separate ministry allocated purposely for the teaching cadre to be called the Ministry of Teaching Service. This is something that can be discussed another day. Whatever good intentions are there through this White Paper, the strategies and the amendments to the Education Act will be in vain if we do not seriously and realistically consider teachers and the teaching service, their quality, morale and status of our teachers.

The three points I raised are important and I noted that they are taken into account in this White Paper. Again my concern still lies on the person where at the end of the day will deliver curriculum to our children who are the future of this country. That is my only concern.

Finally, allow me to acknowledge and thank the people who have committed their time, energy, knowledge and experience in putting together this White Paper and presented by the Minister of Education and Human Resource Development. I salute you all. With these I support this Paper.

Sitting suspended at 12.06 pm

Sitting resumed at 1.51pm

Mr Speaker: May I now call on the Minister for Education & Human Resources Development to deliver his speech in reply.

Hon DEREK SIKUA (*Minister for Education and Human Resources Development*): First of all, I would like to thank the four colleagues who contributed this morning to the motion. Firstly, I thank the Leader of Opposition, the Member for Small Malaita followed by the Member for Aoke/Langalanga and finally the Minister for Aviation and Communications. Thank you for those very important comments. I would like to assure the House that since their comments are in the Hansard, I will make sure my staff do get copies of the Hansard so that we take those comments into account as we continue the consultations on the Bill that is going to be influenced by this Education White Paper 2015. I will try and make a summary of the Education White Paper 2015, particularly the comments made by my colleague MPs who have contributed to the debate and have made constructive suggestions and acknowledgements in the process of developing the White Paper.

The purposes of the White Paper which I highlighted the 15 key issues are policy directions and reforms recommended by the White Paper and their comments will be included, as I have said, in the new proposed Education Bill. Again I would like to acknowledge the suggestions made by the MPs and appreciate the interventions by the Leader of Opposition in which he suggested a number of things. But amongst those, a proper coordination link or proper linkages between policies that MEHRD has developed and the actual practice.

I noted the importance of having proper mechanisms that would ensure the successful implementation of policies and furthermore that would contribute towards the expected education outcomes.

An important point being made, which I also want to highlight, is on the need for an infrastructure policy. This was raised by the Leader of Opposition. I am happy to inform Parliament in response to that, that our school infrastructure policy is being revised with the intention to identify what the government through the Ministry of Education can contribute and what the communities might wish to contribute. There is a need for my Ministry to firm up its existing school infrastructure framework, and this is being done through a number of initiatives. We have included this infrastructure policy in our National Education Action Plan 2016 to 2020, as well as the Provincial Education Action Plans for 2016 to 2020. The point raised by the Leader of Opposition

is well taken care of through our national education action plans and our provincial education action plans in relation to infrastructure policy.

Another point raised is the importance of strengthening governance or governance structures in our school system. This is fundamental, I should say, because if we are to sustain our education system in the future then education authorities, school leaders and teachers must account for their decisions and their actions. Head teachers and education secretaries must provide justification for their school expenditures and be reprimanded should they fail to retire their school grants.

The other issue raised in the debate is in relation to the existing role of the inspectorate division. This has been questioned in terms of its effectiveness to monitor schools and student performance. The proposed Education Bill will make provisions on this issue and my Ministry should be able to strengthen the inspection of schools and students.

For the information of this House, the sort of provisions my Ministry is implementing is a flexi inspection project. This is to address the issue of staff shortage in the inspectorate division within the ministry. The flexi inspection project has increased a number of school inspectors to visit schools and to collect the data required to make informed decisions on teachers and student performances, as well as information on school facilities or existing facilities or what facilities schools should have. Our flexi inspectors are people who have retired either from the Ministry or from being teachers or headmasters in our schools so they are very experienced people. That is the initiative the Ministry has taken to address staff shortage and school inspection.

Of course, in some jurisdictions, school inspectors are truly independent of the Ministry and they called themselves "Her Majesty's Inspectors'. That is something we have explored in the past and we will continue to explore that to see if inspection of schools or school inspectors are truly independent of the ministry.

I would like to appreciate the suggestions made by the Member of Parliament for Small Malaita who suggested that my Ministry under the DCC Government provide a roadmap for education and to review the relevant legislative frameworks to help us build a much better education system that is a response to the needs of our young people in the 21st century. I would like to inform the House that as part of the Ministry's reform program, a new education strategic framework for the period 2016 to 2030 is being drafted and should be completed in early 2016 ready for implementation.

The suggestion made to promote or develop positive attitudes to students while they are still young is indeed an important one. As we all know, students take time to develop not only their skills but also their attitudes. And so I recognise the importance of teaching relevant attitudes to students who may so that they can further develop and demonstrate at their places of work, the kinds of values and attitudes that are mentioned by the Member for Small Malaita. This also means developing students

attitudes that may enable them to contribute towards the social and economic development of their own communities and indeed our country.

I think another suggestion made by the Member for Small Malaita is a point about the need to foster sharing of knowledge and to discourage our traditional practices that do not allow individuals to share what they know and do. The new Education Bill will have provisions that can allow building or strengthening of mutual partnerships that might promote social and economic development in our communities and our nation.

A suggestion was also made about the need to legislate qualifications and accreditation facilities. As I mentioned in my introduction of the Paper, the Solomon Islands Qualifications Authority will ensure credibility and quality assurance at the tertiary education level.

As to the suggestion to make education compulsory from standards one to form five, indeed, that is a good suggestion provided we can finance our schools efficiently. In fact it is an admirable goal we can set for the next 15 years under the Education Strategic Framework 2016-2030. By doing this, we can improve the enrolment figures from standards one to forms five.

On the funding of tertiary scholarships, my Ministry has completed a new scholarship policy and a scholarship manual and these are ready to be implemented once the new Education bill is passed in Parliament. I have actually taken them to Cabinet but I have to withdraw them because they derive the authority from the proposed new legislation. Hopefully we will have a new scholarship policy that includes funding and everything that goes with it as well as a new scholarship manual for people to follow once our new Education Bill is passed hopefully in early 2016.

I am delighted with the contributions and the acknowledgements that have been made by all my colleagues. I think the comment made by the Member for Aoke/Langalanga is something I would go with when he mentioned the fact that the Ministry is getting too big, and as our population grows the responsibilities of the ministry grows even bigger. He was alluding to the need for the ministry to be split into the Ministry of Education that deals primarily with schools and teachers and another ministry for higher education that deals with that subject matter specifically. I want to say that once you look at the framework of the new bill, it is designed in such a way that when the time comes we can easily separate the two and come up with one part of the new bill to be for the schools act and the other one for higher education. That is the way I am looking at this at the moment. As we grow bigger that would be a good suggestion and a good way to go.

I noted the two suggestions that have been made to manage our teachers much better than what we are currently doing. Not only is my Ministry implementing a teacher workforce management reform program, a new program that we are working on at the moment that is aimed primarily at making sure the Ministry is implementing a

nationwide continuous teacher professional development program, especially in the areas of literacy, both adult literacy and literacy in schools.

In the schools we have the Solomon Islands Standardised Test of Achievements (SISTA) that is showing good results. We test students at Standard 4 through the SISTA to make sure they can read and write at that level in standard four and they are tested again in standard six to make sure that when they leave standard six, they can read and write and can comprehend what they are reading. And there are very high levels of improvements.

I think those are comments that I can best summarise that have been made by my colleagues who have contributed to the debate. With those remarks, once again I beg to move.

Question agreed to

(Motion is carried)

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE HOUSE

Committee of the Whole House to Consider the Education White Paper 2015

Mr Speaker: Honourable Members, the paper before this Committee is the National Parliament Paper No. 16 of 2015, the *Education White Paper 2015*.

Before we go through the paper, I wish to remind all Honourable Members that debate may extend over all the details contained in the paper. I will allow discussion on paragraphs of this paper but will not put any question or allow any amendment in relation to the paper. I propose that we go through the paper page by page.

No comments on Page 11

Page 12

Mr Culwick Togamana: Just on the second to the last bullet point on the use of ICT in teachings. This has been advanced particularly in the last institution that I used to work in at USP where it actually uses mobiles to inform students when assignments or tests are due and so forth. The angle at which, not to promote the use of this is the abuse of this device by children to access prohibited materials. In light of this, are we going to

discourage the use of this technology when it could be put to better use to facilitate teaching?

Hon. Derek Sikua: The Ministry currently has an ICT policy. We are looking at different ways to introduce ICT in schools. What we are waiting for and I have been insisting on is the improved connectivity that we need to have before we settle on the most appropriate mode of ICT delivery in our schools. And the improved connectivity we are waiting that will cut the expenses of ICT provision to our schools is the undersea cable that we are hoping will be landed in the not too distant future.

Page 14

Mr Rick Houenipwela: On page 14 I am looking at the goals and aims. The third goal talks about providing values and attitudes that foster societal harmony. I just want to know whether this is where culture and things like that comes in or is it a different thing.

Hon. Derek Sikua: That is correct. That is where the values and the need for respect that the Member for Small Malaita mentioned in his debate comes in. That is exactly what he was saying.

Page 18

Mr. Rick Houenipwela: This is on paragraph 2.1.5 - institutional ethos. I think I read in the last paragraph under that subsection talks about trying to put in teachers at schools according to their religious affiliations. So say if a school belongs to SSEC or SDA or whichever religion then teachers that should teach in those schools must also be of those faiths. Is that the thinking in there?

Hon. Derek Sikua: Not necessarily. That paragraph points to the fact that teachers who espouse and model the values, beliefs, traditions, practices, goals and aspirations of that school. It could mean that but at the same time, not necessarily. Because this is the kind of teachers that we want to produce that espouse those kinds of societal values. It depends on the Education Authority that is recruiting teachers. As you know, all the churches are the Education Authorities and if the SSEC Education Authority wants to recruit a teacher from another denomination, then it does not necessarily mean he/she has to be a follower of the SSEC church. It is up to the education authorities and the church education authority that recruit teachers but it does not limit teachers to their own denomination.

Page 19

Mr Rick Houenipwela: On page 19, there is mention of the apprenticeship scheme. I think this is a good one. I would like to know how we could take this up into the proposed institutional arrangements. I think it is a very important scheme for not only upskilling but especially for those requiring trade skills to go through apprenticeship.

Hon Derek Sikua: That is going to continue, we are not saying we are going to take it out. Certainly, that apprentice scheme will continue under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Page 21

Hon Jeremiah Manele: Just a question of interest. Under 4.2.3 - Senior Secondary Education Policy, the policy objectives state (i) & (ii), if the Minister can inform the House what is the current rate of enrolment of both (i) & (ii) on qualified teachers.

Hon Derek Sikua: This White Paper was only finalized this year and so the numbers have remained much the same.

Mr Rick Houenipwela: Just a point of interest on the mention of junior and senior secondary education. I would like to know whether the community high school system will also be taken up in this new legislation and what is it going to be called.

Hon Derek Sikua: If you go to page 33 is the structure of the current education system. We will have early childhood care and education, we will have primary schools, junior secondary schools and then senior secondary schools. This terminology that we currently have might be referred more commonly to as junior secondary schools from Years 7 to 9.

Pages 31

Mr Culwick Togamana: Just a general question, particularly in relation to those who are given responsibilities. When we look at the Act in itself, will it specify, particularly those who are given positions or responsibilities of being principals or deputy principals that they must undergo some training if they do not have certain skills. Or will there be criteria laid out in the Education Act stating who is eligible to hold positions of leadership in institutions?

Hon Derick Sikua: In reality we would like to have people that are qualified to hold positions of responsibilities in our schools. The Ministry does have a school leadership and management program where we train our young and upcoming principals and head teachers to take up positions of responsibility. We hope that once people are promoted to positions of responsibility, they are trained and qualified to manage the schools and have all the skills and leadership qualities that will put them in good stead to lead our school. And like I said, the Ministry does have a school leadership and management program in place to cater for this.

Page 33

Mr Culwick Togamana: We still have the Form 7 or the USP foundation program. Does the Ministry in the longer term wish to continue offering Form 7 or probably just do away with it as this is mostly a USP requirement only? It is not so much a requirement for entry to universities in Australia or New Zealand.

Hon Derek Sikua: We are seriously thinking of getting rid of Form 7 in our schools. That statement I have just made is still being investigated. I have instructed my Permanent Secretary to investigate this thinking and advise me.

If you look at the structure on page 33, our system will finish at form 6. Form 7 is predominately a USP requirement. I have already mentioned it to the Vice Chancellor of USP and he agreed. However, when the new USP Campus at Panatina is completed, that particular campus will be mainly for undergraduate and postgraduate students and the Lawson Tama Campus will be used by the foundation or Form 7 students. Form 7 will then be removed from our schools so that it gives us space to expand the system from down up to form 6.

Yes, we are seriously considering getting rid of Form 7 in our schools when the USP campus at Panatina is completed to cater for the undergraduate and postgraduate students and the Lawson Tama Campus will be for the foundation students. That is the thinking and then we will abolish it from our system so that our schools only reach Form 6.

Pages 40

Mr Rick Houenipwela: I am a bit concerned about the section which talks about religious education. How are we going to figure out what is meant by religious instructions? When our Constitution was drafted it contains Christian religion and so forth. But now we have Buddhism and Islam and so forth in the country so which one are we going to follow? I am a bit concerned here because it is envisaging something different already there. This statement "encourage interfaith dialogues" means if some

people do not agree with some of the things we want to teach then it means those things will not be taught in schools, I think. That is my concern here.

I just want to know the current thinking on that because it kind of softens the idea of religious instructions in our schools.

Hon Derek Sikua: If you look across the next page on page 41, I think the spirit that the Act will deal with the sensitivity that the Member for Small Malaita is concerned about is in those three bullet points on the next page at the top.

As a Christian country and as a minister I will be cautious here. When we speak strictly on denomination and religion, these are two different things, and I will be very reserved in opening it up. Knowing the influence of some religions around the world right now, I would be a bit reserved in opening up our schools in teaching those kinds of things. I think the way the Act will handle this is on those three bullet points at the top of page 41.

Mr Rick Houenipwela: I am happy with the position taken by the Minister and I am happy that he made it very clear. The only thing concerns me is that in case the Act comes into force but he is no longer a minister. And that is also a concern to me.

This faith thing here can be faith in anything at all. And that is my concern. I think it is something that is under our constitution, I may not be correct but I think the spirit of the Constitution perhaps means a Christian faith and so forth. I do understand that today we allow for all sorts of faith and so I am just worried about all these sorts of faiths.

Hon Manasseh Sogavare: That is a very, very important question raised. We have the Attorney General here to comment on the constitutional point raised by the Member for Small Malaita.

Attorney General: When our constitution was first promulgated, I think the intention is just for Christian beliefs because there are no religions such as Islam in the country then. But the general trend in the world today is for us not to discriminate against any religions, so when it comes to interpreting the word 'religion' in the constitution it would be interpreted to mean all religions including Islam, Bahai and other religions that are coming in at this time. If we want to limit or restrict the term 'religion' to what we understand as the original religion in our country, which is the Christian religion then we have to amend the Constitution and define the word 'religion' so that it is only restricted to the Christian instead of the other religions that we are scared of at this time. I think that is my explanation on this question.

Mr Derrick Manuari: I would like to comment on page 41 regarding the fee-free basic education policy. As stated in the Paper, this policy was approved in 2009 but despite the approval its application by the various authorities and schools varies, and there are schools that are still charging fees on students. Why are schools still charging fees regardless of this policy being in place?

Hon Derek Sikua: Our basic problem is because there are no legislations in place to police that policy. But the proposed Bill is specific on school fees. Section 51 of the proposed bill says, "Schools may not charge fees for students in Years 1 – 9 other than boarding fees" and then it goes on to explain all sorts of provision that schools will be allowed to charge other costs to parents. When we have the new bill, it will specify the sorts of fees that schools can charge fees on and what they cannot. And every amount or range that schools are allowed to charge will have to be approved by the Minister through the advice of the National Education Board.

Going back to the issue queried by the Member for Small Malaita on religious instructions, the proposed Act also specifies it very clearly. When we come to it, I believe we will all agree with it. I cannot tell you more than that because the government is yet to look into it as it is still under consultations.

Mr Rick Houenipwela: Still on the point of school fees, I find it interesting, like the Member for West Makira stated that many schools continue to charge fees. But even with this illegal activity, this report states that fee payers enjoy paying the fees. And it is a good thing.

I am just wondering under this fee-free policy, instead of schools charging fees they are asking parents and guardians to make contributions rather than school fees to the school. Fee paying seems to be an illegal practice but parents do want to contribute. I think that is the motive behind that one. Just make it as a contribution rather than school fees. The new law will address this but I think if we are going to pursue this fee free policy, there has to be some other forms of payments and not school fees but contributions and so forth.

Hon Derek Sikua: Yes, the proposed Bill is going to treat school fees differently from school contributions. In terms of school contributions, schools will have to request the Minister to set the minimum and maximum levels. We are treating those two things differently in the proposed Bill.

Mr Rick Houenipwela: This is on the issue of looking after learners with special needs, and I would assume these to be people that are handicapped, deaf, dumb, lame and so forth. I guess what I am looking for might perhaps be in the legislation, and this is to do with special facilities, not only toilets but access to move to classrooms. I just need some clarifications on that.

Hon Derek Sikua: That is correct. Our current plans include facilities to allow our children with special needs to be accommodated in those kinds of areas.

Mr Chris Laore: With regards to special needs and this includes those with disabilities into the mainstream. Can the Minister clarify what category of disability is allowed to enter into our mainstream schools?

Hon Derek Sikua: I think wherever possible it is supposed to be every category - the deaf, the dumb, the blind and so forth. We would like to think we can cater for all categories of students with special needs in our schools.

Mr Chris Laore: I think I did not make my question clear to the Minister. What I was trying to say is that the deaf people do have their own special school as well as the blind people have their school and use what is called braille to read from so if a curriculum comes out in black and white print, they would not be able to read it.

My question is on the forms of disability. In most schools, teachers do not want to take the responsibility of looking after children with disability and that is a disadvantage to the child for not being part of the activities of the day at the school.

I would like the Minister to inform us as to the selection of disability to go into the mainstream. Mainstreams are the normal schools and not special need schools. How can special needs people fit in or how are you going to categorise the level of disability to go into mainstream?

Hon Derek Sikua: As mentioned on page 43, there is a special taskforce established by the Ministry that is preparing the formulation of a policy for learners with special needs. The Ministry will need to look at how we can successfully implement this policy when it finally comes out. I would hope that any expansion of such services to students with special needs will probably include not all our schools but certain specified or probably our best schools to allow students with special needs to attend. As I am saying, the policy is still being worked on but the Act must recognise this need right now because it is not included in the existing Act.

Mr Derrick Manu'ari: Still on the issue of learners with special needs. I noted here that while we look at providing equal opportunities in terms of infrastructure and access to

education, there is also another very important thing that can also affect learners with special needs, and this is bullying in schools where students with special needs can be mistreated. I think it is important the treatment of people with special needs, especially students must be prescribed in legislation so that they can be provided with a conducive environment that is equal to any other students that do not have special needs.

Hon Derek Sikua: That is a very important point. Certainly, as this White Paper is to inform our new Bill that is still being consulted upon, we will certainly take that point into account.

Page 49

Mr Rick Houenipwela: On higher education in the tertiary sector, I know the proposed Act does not include this, but there have been some suggestions; the Minister would recall that during the debate the idea of separating higher education to be a ministry of its own and there was also a suggestion for a student's loan scheme. I would like to know whether these ideas are in anyone's mind or being dialogued upon or been thinking about. I would like the Minister to clarify to us.

Hon Derek Sikua: Yes, thank you for that question from the Member for Small Malaita. I brought a paper to Cabinet which Cabinet approved to mandate the Ministry of Education to look at the scholarship schemes. Loan scheme is one of the scheme's we are looking at and there are other scholarship schemes as well, one of which is the loan scheme. The ministry is working on those schemes at the moment. One may be a partially funded scheme - partnership between parent and the government and another one is loan. In my mind, Cabinet has already mandated my ministry to explore those schemes and we are doing that at the moment before we will go back to Cabinet. But the Tertiary Education Commission once set up would be the best body to continue exploring those other schemes. Yes, my ministry is doing that right now through a paper that has been approved in Cabinet.

Page 52

Hon Rick Houenipwela: I just want to seek further clarification from the Minister in regards to the issue of providing for industry needs, which the Paper mentioned something to that effect for SINU to work with industries or something like that. I think it is an important area that should not miss out in our system because the industry definitely relies on the system to provide for trained manpower, skills based needed in the industry. Perhaps the Minister might care to comment on this.

Hon Derek Sikua: This is an issue once the staffs that are doing the consultations come back to look more into this area. I want them to look seriously into this because it is an important area because at the end of the day industry is looking for skills that we train and educate our children on. There is a whole range of things we need to ask ourselves here – skills that students go to train for and whilst they are still on training, how sure are they that upon their return they will join the work force. Those things make me to think of another body which would probably be referred to as a productivity commission. It is this commission that must take care of this area properly, rather than it being loosely held in the Ministry of Education, SINU, Ministry of Commerce and Labour and may be Planning to plan for things like the opportunity list. I think is what this commission should look into. I would like to refer to it as a productivity commission to pin this one down so that when you go for training, upon your return you are certain that you have a job available for you or even if it is not available but you know what time it will be available in the industry.

In some countries they have this; if you have a Tertiary Education Commission then you have must a Productivity Commission as well. This is still in my mind but I will be talking with my Permanent Secretary to see how we can hold this one properly before the Bill is brought to the House.

Page 53

Mr Chris Laore: Under the heading 'Resources, facilities and equipment, my question is if this Bill or policy comes into place, would the government be prepared to meet the special equipment needed by the disable people?

Hon Derek Sikua: Yes, I think it is about time we take good care of our students with special needs, rather than neglecting and treating them like second class children because they are not. They are our students and deserve to be treated equally in our education system.

Page 54

Mr Rick Houenipwela: On page 54 under this apprenticeship scheme, as I have stated earlier on and which I am sure the Minister will agree with, this is a very important scheme, especially to the industry because most people that go through this have specialised skills in the various trade.

When I read this paragraph under that heading, it seems to me that it is a bit loose. In fact, it is stated there that there is limited links between the Ministry of Education, Human Resource Development and the Ministry of Labour. It is this limitation that I am concerned about. I think in the action points, there is going to be a commission resurging international practices on apprenticeship schemes which will

then recommend approved management options and systems. It seems like there is going to be another big study done. Can the Minister clarify?

Hon Derek Sikua: Research into international practices on apprenticeship schemes and so forth is part of the work of the Tertiary Education Commission. How best they can train our people on skills required for the industries at this day and age. This would have to be training and researching into best practices so that when our students come out they are equipped with the necessary skills for them to be useful and are actually required by the industries. What I can say about that is that it is all part and parcel of the work of the Tertiary Education Commission.

Hon Danny Philip: Just to add on to the explanations given by the Minister earlier on and just now about inclusive education. The Government sees this as two fundamental aspects of the whole education regime and training. We have the moral obligation as specified in the Constitution for inclusive education to include our young people with special need, disabilities and intellectual impairment. Of course, along with that, there will be necessary equipment and infrastructures that is going to look after those. That goes along with the universal philosophy of universal education that no child regardless of disability, poverty must be left out. The right to education is a moral obligation on each and everyone in the world today, therefore, every child in this country; whatever the particular difficulties both physical and intellectual must be taken care of, even satisfying our obligation as a country to accord our citizens with this particular right. It is a demandable right that this people can hold against leaders or people who are in power to provide.

The second one is training for needs. This is to satisfy given the right kind of skills for the requisites of modern development of the economy, both in country and the community at large in the world. We are trying to provide on these two fronts to certify a moral obligation to include a child's right to education as well as to provide for the advancement and requisites for the modern development of our economy.

If there are people that can be marketed to seek jobs elsewhere, there is also the need to cater for that kind of education and just to support the policy in its broader framework so that we know exactly what we are trying to cater for. The nitty gritty of providing for these policies, budgeting and special infrastructure that this could be established to provide for all these requirements would be made clear in the legislation and the regulations as we approach that particular stage of the paper.

Page 57

Mr Chris Laore: I want the Minister to confirm whether scholarships for our students also include people with disability. I am asking if their trainings cannot happen in-

country whether they can access scholarship through this policy to study abroad on areas that can upskill them. I want the Minister to confirm whether this policy will cater for the scholarship of people with disability.

Hon Derek Sikua: I think the short answer to that is yes.

Mr Culwick Togamana: I would like to thank my colleague MP for Small Malaita who raised the various schemes and one of them is the student loan scheme to allow greater access to tertiary institutions by our citizens.

Just a food for thought, one way of looking at this is, with the National Provident Fund, if the Act can be amended so that members can get funds to assist immediate family members in the form of scholarship, not the full fund. This is just a food for thought whether this is also in the paper the Honourable Minister submitted to Cabinet for discussions. Thank you.

Hon Derek Sikua: Yes, of the four schemes we were looking at, that is certainly one that is possible. My Ministry has had initial discussions with the NPF to include that scheme under the NPF, which would entail an amendment to the NPF Act.

The other one which the Member for Maringe/Kokota might be familiar with is the same one they have in Fiji under student's scholarship scheme where the government puts up a pool of money and people loaned against it and is repaid when the students complete their study and have a job. But if they do not have a job then they will not repay anything.

The other one is the partially funded scholarship between parents or the guardian with the government. The other one is what we have at this time which is fully funded scholarships from the Government.

Those are the types of schemes we are looking at the moment before we can put back to Cabinet. Some of them might not be available for 2016 but by 2017 most of these schemes should be up and running. I think only one is quite possible to come in by 2016.

Mr Derrick Manu'ari: My question is regarding fully funded scholarships by the SIG. I would like to ask the Minister to confirm to the House whether this policy has changed. During our time, after completing your three-years of schooling and you graduated with a degree, even if you score good grades and the university accepts you to continue on to do postgraduate, at that time the policy is that the student must return to your country and do some work experience before you can return and continue on with your studies if you manage to secure another scholarship.

I find that policy to be discouraging students. While they are already at the university doing their studies and when the opportunity comes, it would be good to provide continuity in their studies with the continuation of scholarship. That is one.

Secondly, if the Minister can confirm whether this SIG fully funded scholarship also includes funding of students going to do PhD studies in other institutions?

Hon Derek Sikua: Again, a paper I am bringing to Cabinet will change this rule we have in the past, and it will change your second question too as we are going to continue to fund PhDs. I hope I will make a special statement on this Government policy which has just been approved at this sitting. This is different from the report of the work in my ministry. I would like to make a statement different from that.

What I am saying is because of the policy the Government has just approved, this policy of coming back to work for three or four years, however, long a scholarship might take before you go back for another one will no longer apply if you are one top student. If you are doing undergraduate and would like to continue on to do your masters and your grades are very good, you will continue on to do your masters, you do not have to return. If you are doing masters and you are one top student and you would like to do your PhD, you too will continue on to do PhD.

Yes, because of this new policy, as of next year we will be trying to sponsor between 15 to 20 PhD students a year until the year 2030. Our aim is that in the next 15 years we would like to have 200 new PhD graduates.

Page 58

Hon Rick Houenipwela: Just a point for clarification on paragraph 6.5.9 which talks about international students, it is not very clear to me but I think it is a good policy to encourage international students to come and study at our local universities. I think it is good in two respects. One is it provides some kind of competition and is good economically.

My next point of clarification is section 6.5.10 on quality assurance. I am not sure whether I understand this properly. But I think that the qualifications obtained from the universities should also be recognised in other universities in other countries. Can we provide that quality assurance on accreditations that universities or tertiary students have can be recognised? If we can, then I think the possibility of attracting overseas students is high. I want the Minister to clarify.

Hon Derek Sikua: Under the Tertiary Education Commission is the Solomon Islands Qualifications Authority (SIQA). This authority regulates our national standards, which hangs upon our qualifications authority in the region and, of course, from the region to the world. As a regulator of standards, the SIQA will bridge us from our

national standards to the regional qualifications framework and then the international qualifications framework as well.

The qualifications offered by our own National University might attract students from overseas. The anchor program of the USP Campus here is the School of Public Health, and USP will be much more concerned about the qualifications offered from that school. This section basically deals with protecting the consumer rights of any overseas students that may come to study in any of our local tertiary institutions, which can even be rural training centres. As a futuristic looking piece of legislation, we have to anticipate things like that.

Page 67

Mr Rick Houenipwela: I would like to comment on paragraph 6.6. I believe there is a lot of this kind of activity in this sector that is happening at the informal level and a lot of that is to do with literacy and numeracy skills training but also learning new skills in sewing, dressmaking and floral arts. Last time some people came and stayed with us at our house for two weeks. I did not know what they came for until they graduated. But I am not quite sure about the certificates they got, some on floral arts and some on sewing. How can we put together such certificates? Those programs were really good because I actually saw the florals and the shirts they made. I even wore one of the shirts they made to church on Sunday afternoon.

But I am happy that the new Bill is going to put greater emphasis or recognises qualifications, but perhaps we can put a bit more than just recognising. I think the action point over there says that the Education Act will acknowledge. I just want to know how the Act is going to acknowledge qualifications. They are doing a great work, and that is the point I am making but how are they going to be acknowledged?

Hon Derek Sikua: I think that is the whole point about improving the literacy of our people through adult and community education activities because it might be from there on, point them to their desire to continue to learn more new skills. Like the people you were talking about that came to do sewing, floral arrangement courses and things like that. By attending such courses, it might bring up their interest to continue to go to an education institution that formally teaches a skill they are interested on. We recognise them at that level but the outcome we want is for them to continue learn new skills for their livelihoods or the benefit of the communities.

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Mr Derrick Manu'ari: My observation is on the registration of teachers on page 70 which says 'the provision for the registration of qualified teacher'. Here, I assume it

refers to teachers with certificate in teaching. My question is on the Teachers in Training (TIT) that do not have certificates but maybe are called upon to assist in the schools, especially in the rural areas where this is very common. What measure is the Ministry putting in place for such teachers in regards to ongoing training and registration of teachers, because in the White Paper this is only applicable to qualified teachers?

Hon Derek Sikua: My Ministry has advised all education authorities to no longer recruit untrained teacher; recruitment of untrained teachers has stopped. Those who are in the system now are referred to as teachers in training. You can call them untrained teachers but they are called teachers in training because whilst they are teaching they undergo training with the view to have a qualification in the end. Those teachers are teachers in training because as they are teaching in the various schools, wherever they are posted to, but are undergoing training undertaken through the School of Education and program with the Ministry of Education. Those teachers will become qualified teachers one day and who will be registered under this system we are referring to here.

Committee of the Whole House dissolved

Parliament resumed

Hon Derek Sikua: National Parliament Paper No. 16 of 2015 has passed through the Committee of the Whole House

ADJOURNMENT

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

Question agreed to.

The House adjourned at 3.33pm