

FRIDAY 16TH APRIL 2010

The Speaker, Rt Hon. Sir Peter Kenilorea took the Chair at 2.45pm.

Prayers.

ATTENDANCE

At prayers, all were present with the exception of the Minister for Forests and Timber Utilization; Justice & Legal Affairs; Culture & Tourism; Fisheries & Marine Resources; Health & Medical Services; Infrastructure Development; Communication & Aviation; Mines, Energy & Rural Electrification; Agriculture & Livestock and the Members for Central Makira; West New Georgia/Vona Vona; Mbaegu/Asifola; Ngella; East Honiara; Central Honiara and South New Georgia/Rendova/Tetepare.

ASKING AND ANSWERING OF QUESTIONS

Mr Speaker: Honorable Members, before we proceed with the Questions on today's Order Paper, I wish to advise that as there are no private members motions set down for business for today, the government made a request to the House Committee yesterday to use today for normal government business and the Committee accepted the request pursuant to Standing Order 15(3)(c). As such, today is to be treated as a government sitting day. We will start with the questions deferred yesterday.

Pollution: Gold Ridge

4. Mr. MAGGA to the Minister for Mines, Energy and Rural Electrification: Can the Minister explain to Parliament how his Ministry controls the continuous pollution from the Gold Mine Company at Gold Ridge?

Hon. SIKUA: Since the Minister has gone to his constituency this morning, he has given me the answers to question No. 4, so I can answer on the Minister's behalf. I would like to thank my good colleague, the Member for Temotu Pele for his question.

In answering the question asked by the Hon. Member for Temotu Pele, I would like to say that the pollution in question here is a broad term under the

specification of the context which reference is particularly made to is also not very clear. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Mines, Energy and Rural Electrification has prioritized this national project, the Gold Ridge project by establishing under the Mines Division of the Ministry the Gold Ridge Project Office whereby all efforts to reopen the Mine are coordinated and also inspections and monitoring of the Mine before and during mining operations are coordinated.

Also to take care of that particular already, already in place is a monitoring committee comprising officers from the Gold Ridge Project Office of the Mines Division, the Environment and Conservation Division, Environmental Health Division and the public laboratory where their monitoring program caters not only for monitoring of dewatering of the tailing storage facility but also the assessment of all environmental aspects within the mining lease and surroundings and the downstream communities.

The monitoring program aims to ensure that the following is carried out for the control of any environmental or pollution mishap:

- (i) Analysis of heavy metals and other toxic chemicals in the river systems within the mining lease and water bodies around the mine site, and sediment analysis is done on a fortnightly basis.
- (ii) Ensures that dewatering of the tailing storage facility is safe for the environment and livelihood of communities downstream by ensuring that the water treatment process prior to dewatering is based on international best practices and comply with water quality standards before it is discharged into the river systems. From past results, chemical analyses have shown that all heavy metals analyzed are below levels for water quality objectives, not posing any significant threat to eco-systems downstream.
- (iii) Ensures that the company does comply with relevant acts of Parliament such as the Mines and Minerals Act and the Environment Act for environmental protection.
- (iv) Ensures that the company complies with international standards for safe handling of hazardous and toxic chemicals.
- (v) Ensures that the Gold Ridge Mining Company provides the Ministry of Mines, Energy and Rural Electrification with regular reports on outcomes of water and sediment tests, compliance with water quality objectives and ensures full compliance with environmental monitoring program.

Therefore, with these arrangements in place, it can be clearly seen that the Ministry of Mines, Energy and Rural Electrification is not only interested in the reopening of the mine, but is also concerned about the environment. The

Ministry is doing all within its capabilities despite limited funds and manpower to ensure the Gold Ridge Mine is re-commissioned and operates within international best practices to ensure a safe environment and set precedence for future investors.

Before the Member for Temotu Pele fell ill as well as our dear colleague whom we farewell today at his funeral, the three of us went up one time when he was former Minister for Lands and the late honorable Huniehu was Minister for Mines Energy and Rural Electrification. These two accompanied me when we visited the mine site when they were still ministers to see for themselves the things I have answered to this question. The Member for Temotu Pele is fully aware of what I am saying and I hope he is not going to ask me any supplementary questions.

Mr. AGOVAKA: I do not know whether the Prime Minister can answer supplementary questions. During the ethnic tension the mining company left the country and to date no operation has started yet. The only pollution there is none other than the pollution made by alluvial miners.

My supplementary question is, what is the government's position in regards to alluvial miners, in particular landowners piling downstream hence causing a lot of population down the river. If you travel to Metapona Bridge you would see that the river is permanently colored yellow. This is pollution from sediments coming down the river from the alluvial mining up at Gold Ridge.

Hon. Sikua: I thank the Honorable Member for Central Guadalcanal for that supplementary question. The individual landowners who are doing alluvial panning is a bit difficult for us to stop them from doing that as they are landowners themselves. But in terms of the companies that are doing alluvial mining there, I know that an independent inspection has been done and a report is now with the Ministry, of which a copy was sent to me for government to make a decision following the various recommendations made by an independent assessor for the government to take. That is in relation to the companies. But in regards to individual landowners doing alluvial panning for gold, the government does not have any position on them.

Mr. Magga: I thank the Prime Minister for his answers.

Question No. 5 deferred.

STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MOTIONS

Motion of Sine Die

Mr Speaker: Honorable Members, yesterday the Prime Minister moved that at the adjournment of Parliament on Friday 23rd April 2010, the present meeting shall be concluded and Parliament shall then stand adjourned Sine die and debate was adjourned to today. As Members are aware, by tradition of this House, a sine die motion allows a broad ranging debate, which usually lasts for a few days. The rules relating to relevance will thus be considerably relaxed for this debate, and Members may touch any subject matter that they wish to talk on. Members, however, are reminded to adhere to other rules of debate and to be mindful that most, if not all, Members may wish to speak to this motion and we do not have many days to do so. The floor is now open for debate.

MR NUIASI: Thank you. I would like to thank the honorable Prime Minister for moving this important traditional motion on the floor of Parliament for Members of Parliament to debate this very important and traditional motion.

I would also like to thank your office for the patience you have been showing us throughout this term which I admire very much. I also thank your staff for a work well done in the performance of their duties throughout this term making the work of standing committees much, much easier than what we are supposed to experience. I would also like to thank all public officers for putting their efforts together in giving us all necessary information, especially those relating to budgetary provisions to appropriation bills we have been discussing throughout these four years the government have been operating.

I also will not forget to thank my people of West Are Are constituency for the support shown to me throughout my four-year term in office by not making life very hard for me but have been very understanding and our consultations with each other have been cordial up until today. I thank them for their understanding of my role as a Member of Parliament and for accepting the things I told them. I also would like to acknowledge and thank all Ministers of the crown for a job well done during their term in office. Ministers are responsible for putting in place policies that eventually becomes bills, which my Committee has been deliberating up until today.

All of us are aware that the motion of sine die is a traditional motion at the end of every parliament meetings where we, parliamentarians can speak our minds out on what we need to talk about in terms of our achievements, weaknesses and things we need to voice out to this nation in this motion of sine die.

As a first timer in Parliament, it has been very difficult and not easy for me to cope with the level of debate, the level of expectations expected of us. People have been expecting Members of Parliament to perform according to their expectations. But from day one upon becoming a member of parliament after winning the election, I was hoping that the intention for which I came to Parliament for would be easy. In fact, my dream was not right because it was the other way round. It is quite difficult and even very difficult to achieve the intention for which you come to parliament for and what you will perform in the nation or even in your constituency. This is a very big experience I noticed and learned from.

As a first timer MP, it is also very interesting to note the level of debate going on in this Chamber. It is also very interesting to note the temperament that Members of Parliament have been adhering to in that inside this Chamber we talked very strongly at each other but when we go outside we become friends again. This is an exciting and a surprising thing happening within this Chamber.

As I mentioned, the motion of sine die is a motion that allows Members of Parliament to talk about anything they may want to say at the end of a parliament meeting. This motion of sine die is the last motion of sine die for this term. As a backbencher of the present government, I really applaud the present government for the Rural Development Ministry because we, the backbenchers can see a lot of things being achieved in relation to services provided to our constituencies. We can see a lot of tangible developments happening in our constituencies, and this makes us to compare ourselves with each other to see what each one of us has done in our constituencies. This is a sign of a healthy parliament because we have been competing with each other to achieve developments whether it be economic or social developments in our constituencies with the limited funds given to each of our constituency.

It is also very interesting to note that a lot of people have been expecting too much from their Members of Parliament and a lot of people have been criticizing Members of Parliament for not doing enough their constituency. One can only see the truth for themselves if they wear the same shoes we are wearing now. Unless they are in our shoes they cannot really tell what these funds are like. To me the disbursement of funds by Members to their constituencies is straightforward because all of us are performing and all of us have been discussing these things together and I see no reason why people should blame us as not performing.

The Rural Development Ministry was established in 2007 and actually activated in 2008 and so we only have two years of receiving funds that enabled us to do something in our provinces and constituencies. You would hear me talk very much about rural development because it is the ministry that really touches

the constituencies in my view. We have been allocated \$2million each by that Ministry and a lot of people have suspected us as misusing these funds.

As you are well aware, today under the Audit and Finance Act and Financial Instructions, all Members in this Chamber are expected to retire their acquittals otherwise they will not get anything. This is a sign of transparency and accountability by Members of Parliament who have been disbursing funds that have been allocated to us.

As a first term in this honorable House, I was also surprised to see us make history this term for having three prime ministers in office; this is interesting indeed. However, even with the change in prime ministers, the bottom up approach strategy still remains the most focused policy of the governments that all of us very much appreciate and accept, as it has been working well for us.

We have not been able to achieve many national developments, however, in order for us to achieve those things relevant legislations have been put forward in this parliament. As far as we are concerned, and you might be aware, this is the House that passes the highest number of bills to enable the conducive running of services in Solomon Islands. We have been trying our best to pass bills to enhance relevant developments or achievements the government needs to make during its term. However, because of the short period of time the government is in office, it was not possible for these developments to happen because of the need for legislations to go through certain processes and procedures before they are implemented. But I must say I am proud we have passed in this Honorable House the highest number of bills to be implemented and help our economy grow and put our laws and orders in place. All these achievements are not easy to achieve. Talking about them seems easy to achieve, however, they are achievements the government has in the national sector.

Whilst talking on this motion, I too would like to share some of the problems my constituency is still facing and that I need to voice them out so that they are taken note of and maybe in future they can be addressed. The Waisisi Palm Oil project is of paramount importance if it is implemented in West Are Are. The southern region needs an airport for its people. A health centre for the southern region is also of paramount importance. I talk about these needs because unless these things are put in place the migration of people from the southern region to Honiara would be minimal. At the moment it has been costing people a lot of money to come to Honiara in order to get healthcare services because it is much cheaper for them to come to Honiara than go to Auki.

The Waisisi Oil Palm would have created employment opportunities hence would reduce young people migrating to Honiara and doing nothing here. The airport should enhance economical activities in our constituency maybe in

the tourism sector. These developments once they are in place would enhance economical activities in the southern region so that they come up with developments conducive for our area.

As this is the last motion of sine die we will be debating, it is also difficult to say things that one might think about. This is because all the things we want to achieve are things needed for the nation or even the constituency as a matter of principle. In my situation, the funds I got from the rural development ministry was used to initiate a housing project for my constituency, and so far I have supplied roofing irons for about 150 houses and after that another 100 more houses will be supplied with roofing irons when funds are made available to me again. I have also supplied to my constituency three Lucas mills that would be used to cut timbers for my people to build their own houses. I have also been financing school fees for many students who have not been able to finance themselves. I am saying these things because a lot of people in the constituency or a lot of people have been saying that the Member for West Are Are hemi is eating the funds up. I do not think so because those are the tangible developments I have been putting all these funds into. If those people who criticize me are genuine enough and if they are people of principle they should have come and seen me rather than going to the media.

It is the custom of Are Are that we talk over things rather than writing about and go to another person to solve the problem for us because that would not be right. I would like to ask those who have labeled me as misusing constituency funds to come and see me. Our chiefly system is working and so you can come and we talk about these things, and I can show them the records of how the funds have been spent and they will be fully satisfied with what I have been doing.

I am going to be very brief as this motion is for Members to elaborate on what they would like to say. Since the elections are just around the corner I am going to be brief otherwise I would be accused of campaigning in here. What I would like to ask the intending candidates is for them to come and work with me so that I win the election that is going to be in July or August so that we can further develop our constituency. With these, I support the motion.

Hon MAELANGA: I too rise to contribute to the Sine Die motion moved by the Hon Prime Minister.

A sine die motion is a parliamentary practice that provides opportunity to Members of Parliament to reflect on Parliament business during the current parliament meeting. However, since this is the final parliament meeting of this House, I will also make statements on my general observations not only on

parliamentary issues, but also issues that affect us as a nation and in particular issues that have direct bearing on the provinces.

I want to begin by thanking you and staff of Parliament for the way you have managed the affairs of the National Parliament in ensuring that Members of Parliament comply with the requirements of parliamentary rules and procedures, especially when they are in the Parliament Chambers debating and discussing issues of great importance to our beloved country, Solomon Islands.

Whilst on parliamentary issues, I would like to encourage parliament to continue with the induction of MPs. This, in my view, is very important since it would in turn assist MPs to better understand parliamentary procedures, which should enhance the performance of MPs. This should be done for all MPs regardless of which side of the House they happen to be in. The role of MPs as legislators and representatives of people in their respective constituencies is very important, so it is crucial that such an exercise is maintained and enhanced in the future.

The groundbreaking ceremony of the new office complex funded by our good friends from the Republic of China on Taiwan for Members of Parliament is indeed a welcome gesture, as it is far more dignified to have MPs deal with their constituents in a proper office. For that, I once again thank the Government and people of Taiwan. We play an important role in advancing our beloved country. Legislations that we create and pass in this House will have long lasting effects on the country and its people. Solomon Islands is a diverse nation and the laws that we create and pass in this legislature, must be laws that take into account the diversity we have in this country. Laws must be encompassing, they must be developmental, they must be social and friendly and they must be easy to understand and implement. Laws must take into account and must respect our cultural diversity.

The CNURA Government under the leadership of Hon. Prime Minister, Dr Derek Sikua has passed a good number of important bills since taking power just over two years ago. I believe the bills that have been passed in this House are encompassing, taking into account the developmental needs of Solomon Islands. They also take care of the social needs of our nation, Solomon Islands. The impact of such bills may not be realized overnight. It takes time and therefore what is of great importance is to lay the right foundation for future growth.

During my time as Minister for Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening, I have had the privilege of visiting some of our provinces and have seen myself the potentials that lie in our provinces. I am fully convinced that if we put in place an enabling environment to unlock some of these potentials, our country would be able to grow at rates comparable to other

economic tigers of Asia. I say this because we have what is often referred to by economists as natural endowment. The Almighty God has blessed with abundant natural resources. Yes, I agree with some critics that we have made some mistakes in the past, particularly in how we choose to harvest these resources. Nevertheless, I believe we have learnt hard lessons that come with it, which will only benefit us in the future.

I can say that the CNURA Government has taken some important steps to create what I have referred to above as an enabling environment which has the potential to accelerate growth. Let me give an example: the Telecommunications Bill 2009 is an important foundation for future growth. I say this since one of the core objectives of the Bill is to improve the productivity of the economy by improving the availability, affordability and the quality of telecommunications in the Solomon Islands.

The regulation of the market was an important first step towards achieving the objectives. Research has shown that if we can make communication affordable to the average person, it has the potential to increase economic growth by at least 2%. That figure may sound small but if we take 2% of the project of \$1.99billion for this year, we are looking at figures close to \$22million. Let us not underestimate the power of one phone call to a copra farmer or a vanilla farmer out in the provinces. That is the economic strength that lies on the rural mass. We must continue to unlock the potentials that lie idle in our country or provinces.

The Hon. Member for West Makira has made certain references to another bill, which I feel is of equal importance to a country such as ours where there is a vast and hugely unique biodiversity. There is need to protect geographical areas that may contain plants and herbs that have medicinal properties. That is why I am quite pleased to see the passage of the Protected Areas Bill 2010. One of the key objectives of the Bill is to ensure that certain areas in the country are protected, partly for the reasons already given. I would like to assure the member for West Makira that the Bill does not in any way diminish the importance of our resource owners. In fact the Bill seeks to establish a committee that would ensure engagement with resource owners to conserve our biodiversity in a transparent manner. It is therefore wrong to say that we have failed to consult with provinces with respect to this Bill.

The Bill merely sets up a clear and transparent mechanism to identify and protect our biodiversity. Also, I would like to make it clear here that those Ministries dealing with non devolved functions in the provinces have every right under our current government system to consult with the provinces directly. This is a centralized government system, so again on matters of non devolved functions the responsible ministries can go directly to the provinces. The

Protected Areas Bill 2010 is a good example as it is a non devolved area and therefore, the Ministry of Environment and Conservation has the right to go direct to the provinces for consultation purposes. The Ministry does not have to come through or seek permission from my Ministry. Even if it does, it is out of courtesy only. However, my Ministry was invited to attend a workshop that discussed in great details the protection of wildlife in Solomon Islands. So at the ministerial level we have been consulted.

Any real meaningful development in Solomon Islands will concentrate on provincial development. The provinces need to be empowered to be able to deliver such developments for the benefit of the 85% of the population who live in the rural areas. As part of our long term desire to grow our economy, governance issues will continue to feature as a weakness in our system. In terms of the Ministry of Province Government and Institutional Strengthening, the issue of good governance and accountability at the provincial level has been an important priority. The CNURA Government was very clear in its policy direction for the provinces. I am pleased that this Government understands that the work of provincial governments can only be realized through the strengthening of existing institutional capacity in terms of human resources, financial capacity, general administration, clear devolution of powers from the central government and improved coordination of aid assistance at provincial levels. Provincial governments provide opportunities to establish institutional capacity through which the government and donors can increasingly deliver services to our rural communities efficiently and effectively. This very policy led to the establishment of the Provincial Governance Program implemented in partnership with the EU, the AusAid/RAMSI, UNDP, Government and Provinces.

I am indeed happy to state here that the Provincial Government Strengthening Program is fulfilling its objectives. Under the Provincial Government Strengthening Program, the Program is going from strength to strength. It had a slow start in 2008, but gaining momentum in its implementation process.

I would now like to turn to the background and objectives of the Provincial Governance Strengthening Program. This is very important for rural development as highlighted in the Government's Medium Term Development Strategy 2008 to 2010. Good governance and accountability at the provincial level is a key issue. Provincial governments continue to be marginalized by prevailing aid-supported approaches to development management, which either rely on centralized delivery by line ministries or channel financial and technical assistance directly to the grassroots through CBOs and NGOs. The work of provincial governments can only be realized through strengthening existing

institutional capacity in terms of human resources, financial capacity, general administration, clear devolution of powers from the central government and improving coordination of aid assistance at the national and provincial levels and between government ministries, NGOs, international organizations and provinces. Provincial governments provide opportunities to establish institutional capacity through which government and donors can increasingly deliver services to rural communities more efficiently and effectively.

In relation to the area of capacity building in the provinces and the Ministry of Provincial Government Institutional Strengthening (MPGIS), the PGSP is providing formal training for provincial governments. In 2009, training was conducted at the provincial level in planning and budgeting, and procurement and contract administration.

Training is also addressing the needs of provincial assemblies and provincial executives as well as provincial administrations. Inductions were supported in 2009 for newly elected Provincial Assemblies in the Western and Choiseul Provinces, while attachments for provincial speakers and clerks were organized with the National Parliament for Isabel and Guadalcanal Provinces. As well as formal training, there is strong focus on on-the-job training through the MPGIS based advisors and provincial advisors working with the Provincial Government.

Having said that, I would like to see that the donor community in Solomon Islands shows some flexibility in the way donors assist Solomon Islands in their development needs. I would like to see our donor partners address what we consider to be priority in Solomon Islands. I would like them to see that they assist in a way that is suitable in the Solomon Islands context. I must say that some of the processes of the implementation of programs sometimes take a long time, always time consuming and such could lead to delays in development programs.

I really value the assistance offered by our donors but they must be done and implemented in the Solomon Islands context. Because in a small country like Solomon Islands to manage the requirements of donors or development partners, especially when they are fixed in their systems, may render difficulty in the implementation process. In fact, experience has shown that delays in the implementation process of projects have caused frustrations. I believe that it is in the best interest of development partners, the Solomon Islands Government and people that flexibility is made in the course of implementation of donor programs. Respect and trust between donors and the Government of Solomon Islands is paramount to the success of donor programs.

I will now turn to general comments on matters that I feel should be discussed to draw the attention of relevant authorities to act upon. I wish to

touch on some of the development needs that I feel should benefit the rural people in the provinces. The first thing I wish to touch on is the workers scheme between New Zealand and Solomon Islands. As far as I understand, the scheme is currently done between agencies in Honiara and private employers in New Zealand. I also understand that the scheme benefits only the people in Honiara. The recruiting agents recruit people in Honiara only. Solomon Islanders are recruited to work in farms and other related areas in New Zealand.

What I would like to suggest here is that the Government must formalize the arrangement with the New Zealand Government. Once that is done, I would like to see recruitment to include the provinces. This is very important because if the people in the provinces are made part of the scheme, the money they send home to the villages through remittances will have greater impact than what is sent to Honiara residents. This scheme can go a long way in the provinces because they will use their money to start up small businesses in the rural areas to enhance their livelihoods. It is my strong conviction that we should explore the chance of having more people recruited to work in Australia and New Zealand under such schemes as an alternative to handouts from the two countries to Solomon Islands through bilateral aid.

This brings me to the area of environmental issues. We have seen the effects at our own doorsteps in which islands are being washed away, people are required as a result to be relocated and island nations disappearing under water. These results do not need scientific complicated calculations to prove that the world is being affected by climate change because of the actions of developed world. We become victims of human activities in the developed world.

Having said that, I believe that we, as a developing country, could also gain from this whole "Green Agenda", take, for example, the much talked about carbon trading is a scientific concept. But my understanding is that certain bush areas can be reserved and rich countries buy the right to that conserved area not to be logged. In that way the reserved forest helps to absorb carbon dioxide, thus putting clean oxygen air into the atmosphere for consumption of humans, animals and even plants. It also helps in the reduction of environmental impacts.

I would like to suggest that the future government after the national general elections in June 2010 makes the issue of carbon trading as a government policy so that we welcome countries with money to invest in Solomon Islands, especially in rural areas on this carbon trading. The policy however needs to be worked out to ensure that our people are not taken advantage of.

In conclusion, I would like to say that I have been really privilege to serve under the outgoing government of CNURA led by the capable guidance of Honorable Prime Minister, Dr. Derek Sikua. The Government has only been in power for the last two years, but the amount of achievements we have been able

to achieve in the short term is phenomenal. I do believe that if we are to be given a second chance after the national general elections in June 2010, I am confident that we can do more than we have been able to do in the short term to advance the real development of our nation.

I wish to farewell the current MPs who will be going home for their campaigns for the forthcoming general elections. I wish you every success in your endeavors for the forthcoming national general elections to return to Parliament to continue with what you believe you have initiated for the welfare of our nation, Solomon Islands, and in particular your respective constituencies.

Lastly, I would like to thank my people of East Malaita Constituency for their support during my 18 months in Parliament. I tried my best to serve my people by providing them with all the necessary needs within the constituency. I thank them very much for their support and also for their working together during my 18 months in this House as their leader. I am also looking forward to working with them in the upcoming election. I think there is no need for me to campaign but to continue working with them on their projects and programs until the election time. I wish my good people of East Malaita Constituency the best as they continue to live and work in the constituency and wish them well in the coming election. Finally, I wish to thank you, Mr Speaker, the Clerk, and all staff of Parliament and wish all Members of Parliament in your campaigns. Once again thank you very much.

Hon. Sikua: I move that debate on the Sine Die motion be now adjourned until the next sitting day.

Debate on the Sine Die Motion adjourned until the next sitting day.

Hon Sikua: I beg to move that the House do now adjourn.

The House adjourned at 3.50pm.