

NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS

DAILY HANSARD

THIRD MEETING – EIGHTH SESSION

FRIDAY 2ND FEBRUARY 2007

The Speaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter Kenilorea took the Chair at 9.30 a.m.

Prayers

ATTENDANCE

At prayers all members were present with the exception of the Minister for Department of Mines and Energy, Provincial Government and Development Constituency and the members for West Guadalcanal, East Honiara and Central Honiara.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND OF REPORTS

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Mr SPEAKER: Before we proceed on to asking and answering of questions today, I wish to apologize to Parliament that I should have done this yesterday, in that I should have formally welcome all honorable Members to this very important meeting this year. It is very important honorable Members that the major item for our discussion would be the budget, and I would like to encourage, apart from welcoming you all to the meeting, you to faithfully attend to this important meeting.

Thank you very much indeed.

EXPORT OF LOGS

3. **Mr HAOMAE** to the Honorable Minister for Forestry, Environment and Conservation: What is the basis for the Ministry allowing the export of logs alleged to have been felled illegally on North New Georgia in 2006?

Hon KEMAKEZA: Mr Speaker, I wish to thank the Honorable Member for Small Malaita

for asking this very important question to the Minister responsible.

Sir, the direct answer to this question is no. There was no export of logs alleged to have been felled illegally on North New Georgia in 2006.

Mr Speaker, logging activities currently carried out in North New Georgia is carried out under the North New Georgia Timber Corporation Act 1979. The Act establishes the North New Georgia Timber Corporation for the purpose of utilizing the timber resources in certain customary land areas in North New Georgia known as Dekurana, Gerasi, Koroga, Lupa and Rodana.

Mr Speaker, consistent with the Act, on 8 October 2004, the Corporation granted a licence which was approved by my predecessor to one reputable logging company in Solomon Islands to carry out logging activities in North New Georgia.

Mr Speaker, upon that approval a logging agreement was also signed with another logging company which was endorsed by the North New Georgia Timber Corporation Board of Directors. Upon that approval, Mr Speaker, another sub-contract arrangement was made with another company, especially for the same concerned areas to carry out logging operations on behalf of the license holder.

Therefore, Mr Speaker, the export of these logs as we all know, if we were going to keep them in the forest would become perishable and so it is necessary that we have to export the logs before they deteriorate and nobody would benefit from it.

Mr KWANAIRARA: Mr Speaker, I just want to know the procedure in acquiring the license that you mentioned. Is it the same procedure that is normally applied to any customary land or is it confined restrictedly to the North New Georgia Timber Act?

Hon Kemakeza: Mr Speaker, as I have said the license was approved by my predecessor in 2004.

Mr TOZAKA: Mr Speaker, perishable logs that had to be removed. Is this particular action by the Ministry applicable to any such illegal felling?

Hon Kemakeza: Mr Speaker, if my honorable colleague had listened he would have heard that the logs were not felled illegally but were felled legally.

Mr Haomae: Can the Ministry or the Minister make available information pertaining to those groups of companies that are doing logging operations for purposes of putting in place because the Minister is saying that the felling is legal as there are agreements in place. Can the Ministry make available those to Parliament?

Hon Kemakeza: Mr Speaker, I will take note of that and with the approval of Cabinet that would be circulated.

Mr TAUSINGA: Mr Speaker, is the Minister aware that those who signed the second agreement are not those two who are under the North New Georgia Corporation Act?

Hon Kemakeza: Mr Speaker, I have said that it was signed by the Board of Directors of the North New Georgia Timber Corporation.

Mr Tausinga: Mr Speaker, can the Minister provide documentary evidence on that?

Hon Kemakeza: Mr Speaker, yes, as I have said it has to go through Cabinet and will be given to questioners who are interested in it.

Mr Haomae: Mr Speaker, I would like to thank my friend the Minister for Forests for answering the questions.

GIANT AFRICAN SNAIL

7. **Mr RIUMANA** to the Minister for Agriculture and Livestock: Can the Minister

update Parliament on its latest finding on the Giant African snail and respective quarantine measures being imposed and enforced?

Hon KAUA: Mr Speaker, I wish to thank the honorable Member for asking this very important question. The actions taken so far regarding this particular snail was that an eradication program was launched, and a total ban was put on all Earth Movers' vehicles and boats not to leave the company's premises.

The management of Earth Movers was informed of all these and the neighboring companies. The Earth Movers also helped to purchase snail bites for biting around the company premises. The MAL headquarter staff have over the last three months put out every night searching and collecting snails. A trace back was also taken to Santa Cruz, Marau, Shortlands and West Isabel, where all the Earth Movers log camps are and have been proven negative. Trace also will continue in March until 2007 to ascertain the real situation. It has been decided that from the stages of control, it will be a negative impact on all the agricultural exports.

That is the current situation on this particular exercise that has taken place and certainly the finding so far for the last four weeks was negative.

Mr SITAI: Mr Speaker, whilst measures have been taken to prevent the spread of this snail in the country, can the Minister inform Parliament what measures will be put into place to prevent this African Giant snail from coming into Solomon Islands?

Hon KAUa: Mr Speaker, this is a very important issue and therefore the Quarantine is looking at introducing legislation to ensure that all logging machineries entering Solomon Islands must land in one spot so that they are inspected before they are released for logging operations. Certainly, we are taking very important actions to ensure there are no snails imported into Solomon Islands.

Mr HILLY: Mr Speaker, just for the purposes of some of us who do not know what an African snail is, is it a pest and how dangerous is it? Can

the Minister inform Parliament as to what this giant snail is and what is it that we are trying to guard this country against?

Hon Kaua: Mr Speaker, snails can eat any plant but certainly we will circulate that information to Parliament if you need it.

Mr Riumana: Mr Speaker, can the Minister inform Parliament the life circle of this African Giant snail. At what stage of its life circle is it dangerous to the crops because by knowing this, you can then put your measures.

Hon Kaua: Mr Speaker, if you really want such technical information, as you have already seen, we will circulate them again for you to read.

Mr KEMAKEZA: Mr Speaker, in the light of this very important issue, a review of the Quarantine regulations has been prepared. Has the Minister done this review already or not, in the light of this very, very important issue because a regulation has been prepared? Has this been imposed already or for the last eight months you still have not yet done it?

Hon Kaua: Mr Speaker, it is only two months. The review that has been will be reviewed again before we will come up with a regulation.

Mr KENGAVA: Mr Speaker, with all these checks and control measures taken by the Ministry, is the Minister with the Quarantine Division in a position to declare Solomon Islands African snail free or not?

Hon Kaua: Mr Speaker, this issue is a bit sensitive and that is why we do not want to publish it because if we are to declare that something might happen here later it might affect our agricultural products. At this stage, as I have said all measures taken so far are negative and we can only say at this point in time that Solomon Islands is free from the snail. But as I said the exercise is already in place but we will continue to do it until June or such time we are really sure that we are free before we can publish anything to that effect.

Mr Kemakeza: Mr Speaker, the Quarantine Division is responsible to certify any goods and services dispatched by a country. The goods are inspected and if satisfied to meet quarantine requirements before they leave the country to come here. Similarly here in the country an inspection is carried out on goods to make sure they meet quarantine requirements before going out to the area of operation.

Mr Speaker, does the Quarantine Division have the capacity, capability and equipment to assist officers to detect snails and any other pests? I am just questioning whether the division has qualified manpower or is equipped to address such incidences so that in future we avoid snails and any other pests and diseases?

Hon Kaua: Mr Speaker, that is a very important area the Ministry would take very positive steps to address it. Also a bio chemist is now ready to be engaged and so we are going to use engage him and then find relevant equipments to make sure machineries are tested before going out to logging sites.

Mr Kengava: In collaboration with the Department of Forestry, what action is the government taking to impose disciplinary action on companies that bring in dangerous pests into the country?

Hon Kaua: Mr Speaker, any penalty will be imposed when the bill is in place. At this stage when there is no legislation, it is not possible for us to impose any penalty.

Mr ZAMA: Mr Speaker, I think the Minister has identified one particular logging company that brought in the machines with this pest. My constituency is prone to this situation and so I want to find out from the Minister what kind and type of checks do Quarantine officials carry out to really put the minds of the people at rest in terms of elimination of this African Snail?

Hon Kaua: Mr Speaker, if the honorable Member had listened properly he would have heard the time and measures that the Ministry is taking to ascertain this problem. And so there is no need for me to repeat it. We will continue to

do this until June when we should be able finalize the final report whether we are free or not from this snail. The Ministry is continuing to do the process until the time we put to make sure that this does happen.

Mr Riumana: Mr Speaker, I wish to thank the Minister for Agriculture for his answers.

PROGRESS – VANGUNU OIL PALM PROJECT

8. **Mr RIUMANA** to the Minister for Agriculture and Livestock: Can the Minister inform Parliament on the progress of Vangunu national oil palm project in THE Western Province?

Hon KAUA: Mr Speaker, I would like to thank my good friend and Member for Hograno/Kia/Havulei. This project is his baby and so he knows everything about it when it started.

This project started in the last nine years and its progress is very slow. At the moment we can see the need to reassess this company. But its progress is very small.

Mr Riumana: What could be the cause of the delay?

Hon KAUa: Mr Speaker, some delay is on the terrain of the place which is causing difficulty to the company to do its work. But there is also another thing and that is transfer of the title land. Until that is done the company is hesitant to in more resources to go into real planting. Those are some of the issues that have delayed the progress of this project.

Sir Kemakeza: Mr Speaker, in view of the answer given by the Minister, how many hectares so far have already been planted in the last nine years? Can the Minister inform Parliament on that? Nine years is a long time and so how many hectares has the company planted so far?

Hon KAUA: Mr Speaker, so far they have only planted about 750 hectares of palm oil and new seedlings are ready too.

Mr FONO: Within those nine years have they harvested any oil palm for export?

Hon KAUA: Mr Speaker, commonsense will tell us that if there is no export then there has been no export for the last nine years.

Mr Fono: Mr Speaker, how long does it take an oil palm to grow before it is ready for export?

Hon KAUA: That is a technical question. But for ordinary people like us we know that trees are planted and then they grow and until they bear fruit they are harvested and then can be exported. So far some of the trees have overgrown and we are only starting with seedlings at this time. So can you export with seedlings?

Mr HUNIEHU: Mr Speaker, a memorandum of understanding was signed by the company, the Solomon Islands Government and may be some landowners in this National Parliament.

Can the Minister assure this Parliament that he conducts a public audit on this investment activity and present a report to Parliament? I say this because of the importance of this issue. We have been raising expectation that this particular project, at the end of its 10 years in operation should be harvesting 10,000 hectares of palm oil when in fact what is happening is that the company is harvesting more logs and enjoying more privileges with the import of logging machines than the actual economic input in the country.

Hon KAUA: Mr Speaker, as I have said, at this point in time we are currently reviewing the status of this company. If Members of Parliament would want to have a progress report on this project then certainly we will table it in Parliament so that you know how far this company has gone and what needs to be done. But the current government is taking very important steps to make sure this company works.

The previous government saw this as an important project and if it is important then we need to make it happen. The current government has only been in office for 10

months and myself I have been only in the ministry for about two months. But we will try our best to make sure things are going to happen because it is our wish to make this project take off from the ground so that it helps our economy.

Mr Riumana: Mr Speaker, has the Ministry made any visits over the last 10 months to inspect the actual development on the field?

Hon Kaua: Certainly, Mr Speaker, the Ministry continues to visit this company. It has assigned a Permanent Secretary whose work is to make sure the company is visited and a report produced. That is why I said that the report will be tabled if we want it. But I am glad that the Member has raised this because as I said earlier on, this company is his baby. He started it from the beginning. And I am sure we would be more than willing to hear from him how many things have happened since the time you were in the Ministry up until the year before he joined Parliament.

Sir Kemakeza: Mr Speaker, I will help the Minister because he has not informed Parliament how long it takes for oil palm to be harvested. It only takes three years after planting for oil palm to be harvested. I am saying this just in case the Minister and his officials do not know, and also the Minister of Finance who is whispering the answers to him.

Mr Speaker, the question is like this. The oil palm plantation in Vangunu is two times bigger than SIPL. I wish to thank the MP for East Are Are for saying that the company is harvesting more logs than planting trees. Nine years is too much and the Minister for Finance, who is whispering to the Minister to give answers himself, has not seen that place.

Mr Speaker, the question is, are there any preparations now to start milling. Milling has to follow suit because that should show whether the company is serious in undertaking this project because according to the Minister's answer, seedling is going ahead to prepare for milling.

I know that if there is 3000 hectares you are able to start milling. The SIPL only had 6,000 hectares. They are planting now, which

we are now enjoying in the Guadalcanal Plains. The one at Vangunu is 12,000 to 15,000 hectares.

But according to the Minister's answer only 750 hectares are planted. That is a very poor report. However, Mr Speaker, I thank the Minister for that but the question is, is any preparation by that company to start milling on site. And I can see the Minister of Finance starting to whisper to the Minister for Agriculture.

(laughter)

Hon Kaua: Mr Speaker, as you've heard earlier, one of the obstacles is the transfer of land titles and because of that the company is saying that it cannot give any major financial resource until this is cleared. Because of that, what you are asking if there is any preparation for milling is not yet possible because the company insists on the land title before it can go into putting more financial resources into this project.

At the moment request is now being made to the Ministry of Lands to speed up the process on the transfer of land title to see if the company is really genuine to go to the extent of milling.

Mr Huniehu: Mr Speaker, can the Minister inform this House whether the same company has again developed another cooperate strategy to develop thousands of hectares in North New-Georgia area of jurisdiction which involves the illegal export of logs.

Hon Kaua: Mr Speaker, this does not correspond with that other place you talked about. It is a different entity altogether.

Mr Sitai: Mr Speaker, can the Minister inform Parliament of the government's decision on this land title issue. This is the issue that has been raised by the Minister as probably hampering the development of this project. What is the status of this land and what is the government's position with regards to the transfer of the land title to the company?

Hon Kaua: Mr Speaker, the process is continuing at this time to talk with interested parties, landowners and the company to see who would be the rightful people to transfer the said land to.

Mr Zama: From my understanding there are few parcels of land on this area. The Minister is only raising one parcel of land which the title is yet to be sorted out. With the other parcels that the company had already planted, how many hectares is the total land area already used and how much of the land it has security over has already been planted.

Hon Kaua: Mr Speaker, if you have heard me earlier on, only 750 hectares of the land is being developed. The other areas you referred to is not yet developed.

Mr Zama: Mr Speaker, I think the Minister and the company need to make clarification to Parliament. The areas the company already held title to is more than 700 hectares and the fact that the company is using other titles as an excuse for not developing the area that has already been planted is just not acceptable to Parliament.

What action is the Minister taking to drive or force the company to go ahead planting trees on the areas that it already holds the title?

Hon Kaua: Mr Speaker, as I have said, a review into this company and its activities is happening now. Until this review is done, we will know what action to take on what the company is doing at this time.

Mr Huniehu: Mr Speaker, I want to follow up my question because I am not really satisfied with the answer from the Minister.

Mr Speaker, what I am trying to ask the Minister is whether the same company that is involved in Vangunu has now developed a corporate plan to harvest log and to plant some more palm oil on North New Georgia when it did nothing over the last 10 years to plant 10,000 hectares on Vangunu as agreed to in this Parliament. Can the Minister tell this Parliament whether it is the same company that wants to go

down and do logging and planting of palm oil in North New Georgia or is it a different company?

Hon Kaua: Mr Speaker, I thought I have already answered that question. The one in North New Georgia is a different company with landowners being involved. The company in Vangunu is different from the one in North New Georgia. They are two different companies altogether and their involvements are different.

Mr Riumana: Mr Speaker, one of the reasons for the delay is the terrain according to the Minister's answer. I understand there are machines imported for oil palm development worth more than a million dollars. Where are these machines now? Why are they not used to do contour terracing? Has the Ministry put any mechanisms in place to monitor the use of these machines and spare parts being imported under the name of Vangunu Oil Palm Project?

Hon Kaua: Mr Speaker, those are some of the areas that we would like to assess. We received a lot of speculations and accusations from different types of people. We want to listen to these people and see the real actions that are happening or what is prevented them from doing the things they are supposed to be doing before we can take action. As I said, a review is now taking place and we hope that when the review is finished we will inform every one of us what actions have been done this far to try and address issues that are problematic in not making this project to proceed as we would like it to happen.

Mr Haomae: Mr Speaker, is there any agriculture officer recently attached?

Hon Kaua: Mr Speaker, so far there is no agriculture staff attached with the company. But certainly the agriculture officers are aware and now a Special Permanent Secretary is being assigned to work closely with the company to make sure things are happening.

Mr Fono: Mr Speaker, in view of this project being of national importance, can the Ministry inform the House when the review is expected to start and when it is expected to be completed.

Hon Kaua: Mr Speaker, thank you Leader of Opposition for raising this question. If we consider this project as important then certainly this review should have started during our time when there were no problems happening. But this time certainly we will put all our efforts to make sure it happens. So the question of time factor on when it is going to start depends on the work involved with the review and when it is completed we will inform you.

Mr Fono: If the Minister told the House that the review could have been done during our time, he used to be SPM to four different Prime Ministers in the past. I am surprised at the number of years it has taken.

I was thinking that since this government came into office in May last year, it could have done a thorough review to be done on the project in view of its national importance. The last 10 months is more than enough time for a review to take place, and for you to inform Parliament and the nation the strategies the government is taking to demand this company to act. Otherwise if there is a provision in the agreement on termination then we terminate the agreement of the company and give it to a new investor that has seriousness in developing this project.

Hon Kaua: Mr Speaker, thank you Leader of Opposition for your concerns. I think the review, as I said, needs to be thoroughly done because the company had spent a lot of money on this project. If we are to do a good job on this then certainly it has to take time. We must put efforts to make it happen so that we do not repeat again what happens to Vangunu on any other oil palm projects like in Hauhui and another place. That is the importance of this review.

We must make sure the review addresses all the obstacles because it will be a lesson learnt for any new oil palm project that we would want to undertake in the country. So there needs to be ample time and a thorough review into these things so that we do not repeat the same mistakes that happen in Vangunu.

Mr Tozaka: Mr Speaker, in listening to the explanation and also in general, can the Minister inform the House that this particular project has failed. I just want a yes or no answer.

Hon Kaua: Mr Speaker, I think it is too early to say that the company has failed because the review is still ongoing. We cannot say anything at this stage until the review is completed.

Mr Kemakeza: Mr Speaker, yesterday the Minister informed Parliament the participation of rural people. Is the review going to include the very important policy of the government, which is not a new policy of this new government but a policy for the participation of resource owners, so that it is in line with the new formation of the former SIPL where the indigenous people of Marovo can have the privilege like what is now happening on the Guadalcanal Plains?

Hon Kaua: Mr Speaker, it is part and parcel of the whole process. If rural development is the policy of this government then certainly the review is going on board what the Member has suggested.

Mr TANEKO: Mr Speaker, since this project is located in the Western Province there is a lot of job opportunities. Provincial governments are agents of the central government that has a body for authorities like agriculture and budget is allocated for them. When did you last receive any report from the Western Provincial Government regarding this project?

Hon Kaua: Mr Speaker, as far as I know, my office has not received any report.

Mr Zama: Mr Speaker, I think the concerns raised here are important because of the importance of this particular project, especially when this government really wants to push its bottom up approach.

I would just like to ask the Minister if he is aware of a report and a review into this project done by one local Solomon Islander last year. This is a very comprehensive review report by one of our local expertise, which contains very good recommendations for the future of this

project. Is the Minister aware of this report, and if he is, what steps is he taking to address this situation?

Hon Kaua: Mr Speaker, I am not aware of that report. May be the officials have hands on that report but certainly we will get it if it is really in place.

Mr Kemakeza: Mr Speaker, according to records I have here, review was carried out on Vangunu twice. The first one was done by the former Member of Parliament for Mbaegu/Asifola during SIAC's time and the second one was done by the former Member for East Kwaio during my time. Where are these two reports? Why did the government not take any form of action from these two important reviews?

Hon Kaua: Mr Speaker, it is straightforward that any government that comes into power has its own policies, and therefore it wants to do a review on things according to its policies.

It also happened to you too that when you came in you changed SIAC and so this government is doing the same thing too. Because things have to be done according to government policy and that is why this review is necessary for this government so that it is in line with its own policy. Everything has been happening since before but they are just the same. Why ask questions now when we ourselves did those things before?

Mr Kemakeza: Some fala good policy lelebet. That is not a new policy.

Hon Kaua: It is an important policy. If you want your policies to remain, then you change another one and so we are back to square one. I hope this will not happen this time. We will take on all the necessary information that have already been there and may be improve on them to make it faster, learning from the past for the betterment of the future.

Mr Haomae: Mr Speaker, supplementary comment and question. Review is a tactic for procrastination. It is a tactic for delay. The Ministry should just post an agriculture and

lands officer to the project to be posted to Gizo or on site. Therefore, Mr Speaker, when will the Ministry plus the Minister for Lands post two very important officers to be attached to the project for purposes of land acquisition and also agriculture? They must be inspected otherwise those people go haywire.

Hon Kaua: Mr Speaker, I would like to thank the MP for telling the word 'tactic'. I hope this government will not take it as a tactic because we want to see this project work. The review to be done now will be positive and not tactic so that the Vangunu project can take off the ground because it is a priority project. I hope this review will not be a tactic but positive to make it happen.

Mr Fono: Mr Speaker, my previous supplementary question was not answered by the Minister. When do you expect the review to be completed so that this House is aware of it and we will ask further questions after looking into the review? Can the Minister inform the House as to the time he is anticipating this review to be completed because the Government is already in office for 10 months?

Hon Kaua: Mr Speaker, there are lots of issues that need to be addressed through this review, and therefore a time frame cannot be put on it because it involves people. There are a lot of things that need to be ironed out. It is good to say when it is ready then we will bring it to the House. If I put a time frame on this review and it does not happen you are going to accuse me for not telling the truth. So the best way to put it is that when the review is completed we will then bring it to the House.

Mr Kemakeza: Mr Speaker, I thank the Minister for not putting the time frame because he had already broken the time of the previous government on the Auluta basin when it should be in December last year but he postponed it to July this year.

The Minister is talking about tactics and positive. This Vangunu oil palm project is one of the national projects like the Auluta basin, SIPL, Gold Ridge, RIPEL and many others. I would like the Minister to assure Parliament that there

is allocation purposely for Vangunu spell out in the 2007 budget as Vangunu to prove his words of 'positive'.

Hon Kaua: Mr Speaker, if you look at the development budget, certainly funds are allocated for that purpose. Certainly, you are going to receive a report this year.

Mr Riimana: I have submitted two reports on Vangunu when the current Minister was Secretary to the Prime Minister. In one of my reports, I suggested the duty remission on machines to be re-looked. Now that you are the Minister what is the position of the Ministry on these duty machines being permitted.

Hon Kaua: Those two reports were launched when you were in the Ministry during the time of a past government. When those reports were launched, action should have been done by the government at that time. This is a new government, but we will look into those reports to see where we can take action.

Mr Kengava: Mr Speaker, I think in the phase of the review being carried out, my concern is on the opportunity of the original landowners of the area whoever to fully participate in this national project. My understanding of this is that whilst the land is still under the government, the original landowners have a better chance of being part of this project. If the title is transferred to a company it will be very challenging for them.

Can the Minister assure this House that in the phase of this review the original landowners will fully be a part of this project?

Hon Kaua: Mr Speaker, these are some of the issues that will be addressed during the process of the review. If that is an issue that needs to be addressed then certainly we will make sure that is addressed during the review.

Mr Olavae: Mr Speaker, we know that this project has been there for about nine years now. I want to question the Minister why are supplementary questions being raised by MPs in here after every two minutes and may be for the last nine years. Why?

Hon Kaua: Mr Speaker, that is best left to the other side to answer on why we have been asking supplementary questions for the last nine years, and what has ever happened. Can the other side of the House answer that question? Thank you very much.

Mr Huniehu: Point of order. Mr Speaker, I think we should not be passing the bucks around. The questions that the Opposition side is asking are referring to reports and not review. When a report is conducting by a government ministry it is a government document, and the government must do something about those reports.

It has been alleged in these reports that the purpose of venturing into the Vangunu palm oil project is not necessarily to plant palm oil but to harvest logs. This company is more interested in harvesting logs to raise working capital to develop the palm oil. These are some of the allegations.

Every time the company runs out of logs it asks the government for extension of new land and some of the issues in these reports have to do with duty exemptions that the company continues to rely on for its imported machineries like logging trucks, vehicles and what not.

These reports have amplified the numerous abuses and numerous....

Hon Sogavere: Point of order, Mr Speaker. What is the supplementary question?

Mr Huniehu: I am trying to explain what the reports contain because the Minister talks about review but the Opposition is asking about what is the government

Hon Sogavere: Mr Speaker, point of order he is debating.

Mr Speaker: Are you asking a supplementary question Honorable Member?

Mr Huniehu: What is the Minister doing about these reports? Has he read these reports? And if he has, is he going to action on some of the recommendations made in the reports conducted by officers in the Ministry? The report was carried out on demands by the public, demands

by the landowners, demands by the Opposition Group in Parliament. It is a government report, a ministerial report, and so what are you going to review again. We need to know what the government is doing about the recommendations in these reports. And I also would like to know how many people the Vangunu Palm Oil employs.

Hon Kaua: I thank the Member for debating this issue. To answer your supplementary question, the information that you wanted is part and parcel of the whole review that we are going to look into because they are problems and those problems are not easy to resolve. When you deal with people it would take time to really understand the things that they want before we can address them. Certainly the Ministry will take note of what you said and will take on board to make this review the last so that tangible actions will happen to this project.

Mr Haomae: Point of order. In regards to the question asked by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture to the Opposition, under the Standing Orders only the government is required to answer questions and not the Opposition. Therefore, under the Standing Orders I decline to answer the question.

Hon Kaua: Mr Speaker, I take note of that and I withdraw the statement I made. But why I referred to the other side is because I would have taken it that those who were in the government in the past should know what the problems are.

Mr Riumana: Mr Speaker, I wish to thank the Minister for Agriculture for his answers. But I would like to encourage him to answer the answer the questions rather than taking a defensive position.

STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Mr Speaker: Before the statement of Government Business, I would like to acknowledge the presence of the Speaker and the Clerk of Temotu Provincial Assembly here in the chamber. They are here to observe the 3rd Meeting of this Parliament. Their visit is part of the National Parliament's civic education

component, and so I wish them all the best in their time with us.

(applause)

MOTIONS

“That Parliament resolves itself into a committee of the whole house to consider (National Parliament Paper No.17 of 2007) Report of the Public Accounts Committee on its examination of the Auditor General’s Audit Reports on the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, National Parliament Paper No.0 of 2006 and National Referral Hospital Paper No.16 of 2006

Mr ZAMA: Mr Speaker, with your concurrence, I beg to move that Standing Order 26(1) be suspended under Standing Order 81 to allow me move Motion No. 1 which is down on today’s order paper.

Mr Speaker: Permission granted. You may proceed.

Mr ZAMA: Mr Speaker, I now beg to move that Parliament resolves itself into a committee of the Whole House to consider (National Parliament Paper No. 17 of 2007) - Report of the Public Accounts Committee on its examination of the Auditor General’s Audit Reports on the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, National Parliament Paper No. 9 of 2006 and National Referral Hospital Paper No. 16 of 2006”. Sir both Papers No. 9 and 16 have been tabled last year on the 9th and 16th of June respectively.

Mr Speaker, in moving this motion I would like to take this opportunity as Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee to inform Honorable Members about this important inquiry by the Committee into two of the recent Auditor General’s reports and the Committee’s consequent report to Parliament.

Before I go further, I would firstly like to sincerely thank my colleagues of the Public Accounts Committee for their commitment and significant contribution in ensuring the oversight functions of the Committee are carried out properly.

I would also like to thank the Secretary to the Public Accounts Committee, the Auditor

General and his staff as well as the Parliamentary UNDP secretariat staff for their dedicated work and excellent arrangements that contributed tremendously to the smooth running of the Committee's proceedings.

Mr Speaker, the Public Accounts Committee's function is to review and examine public expenditure as part of the overall oversight function of Parliament, more specifically to examine the accounts prescribed by section 38 of the Public Finance and Audit Act 1978, and such other accounts laid before Parliament as the Committee may think fit, together with the report of the Auditor General with the purpose of reporting the results of such examination to Parliament. Thus, in compliance with Parliament's Standing Order 69(1), it is indeed my pleasure to present the report of the Public Accounts Committee to Parliament.

The report, Mr Speaker, is a very brief document but a very important one as it provides Members with the Committee's findings and recommendations into this penetrating investigation by the Auditor General. Most importantly the Committee's recommendations are precise and practical.

Background to the Report

Mr Speaker, the Public Accounts Committee considered two Reports by the Auditor General into the affairs of the Ministry of Health. The first was the Special Audit Report into the affairs of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services (National Parliament Paper No. 9 of 2006) and the second into the affairs of the National Referral Hospital (Paper No. 16 of 2006).

The Committee held hearings on the 23rd and 24th of November 2006 at which two relevant Permanent Secretaries of the Ministry, Dr Cyril Pitakaka, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Health and Medical Services and Dr George Malefoasi, Permanent Secretary for Review and Restructure of Health Delivery System, appeared before the Committee and answered questions.

The Permanent Secretaries, Mr Speaker, assisted the work of the Committee by providing it with a detailed briefing on progress against an Action Plan, which you may already have copies of this morning, which indicated what actions

the Ministry had taken or proposed to take against each of the recommendations of the Auditor General's Report. This action plan has been copied and placed in each Member's pigeonholes today to assist you in reviewing the recommendations of the Auditor General and the relevant response by the Ministry in today's debate.

The Public Accounts Committee, Mr Speaker, acknowledges and is most impressed by the proactive approach of the Ministry in addressing the issues raised by the Auditor General via the Ministry's action plan.

The Committee also wishes to place on record and acknowledge the positive way the Permanent Secretaries prepared for the hearing and came to it well prepared and ready to address and engage with the Committee on the issues before it. The Committee is hopeful that other ministries will also follow this path when called to appear before it.

Common issues identified in both reports

Mr Speaker, the Committee notes that both reports identified a significant number of serious shortcomings in the Ministry's administration and in particular the following common issues were identified:

- Widespread non compliance with the Public Finance and Audit Act, Financial Instructions and General Orders.
- Serious breakdowns in critical management and accounting systems and procedural controls.
- General lack of adequate and proper records.
- Corrupt officials using positions of influence to assist family and friends to gain from their positions.
- Significant losses through poor management, corruption and fraud.
- Conflicts of interest not declared.
- Uncollected revenue due to poor operating systems and controls with inadequate monitoring.
- Inappropriate action for recovery of over payments.
- Lack of action by authorities to pursue suspected criminal activity; and

- Lack of overall monitoring by senior management to enable issues to be addressed internally.

I will now briefly look into the Ministry of Health and Medical Services. The first Report of the Auditor General considered by the Committee dealt with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services and contains 44 recommendations.

The main issue of medical nature related to the inadequate stock management at the National Medical Store for pharmaceutical supplies. Otherwise the main findings identified a general lack of proper standard controls across all facets of the Ministry's operations including receipting, procurement, trust fund arrangements, asset management and payroll.

On National Referral Hospital

In respect to the second Report into the National Referral Hospital, the Auditor General made 118 recommendations. This audit represented a thorough review of all facets of the hospital's operation in the form of a performance audit. In addition to the significant number of standard control breakdowns and inappropriate processes, other major findings noted included fraudulent practices in the catering and patient travel areas, and inadequate procedure in the control over pharmaceutical supplies.

The Outcomes

Mr Speaker, in terms of the operation of the Public Accounts Committee, it is important to note that, unlike previous hearings of the PAC, the Committee resolved to hold all proceedings in public. As a consequence, there was considerable media interest of issues before the Committee and evidence taken from witnesses. The Committee believes that by doing so, it is promoting good governance, parliamentary oversight and fiscal financial accountability, which are three essential outcomes the Committee strives to achieve.

The Committee also wishes to emphasize that it proposes to monitor and be regularly updated on progress by the Ministry in implementing the action plan. In addition, the Office of the Auditor General will be required to

perform a follow up audit in 2007 and 2008 to appraise the extent and effectiveness of the remedial action.

The Public Accounts Committee believes that the failings that were highlighted by the Auditor and investigated by the Committee have had severe and adverse impact on the Government's capacity to deliver an effective health service to the citizens of Solomon Islands. Real and effective changes must be implemented with utmost urgency so that Solomon Islands people can be assured of having a robust and efficient public health system that they desire.

With these said, Mr Speaker, I beg to move that the report be open for debate.

Mr Speaker: I think for matters of record of parliamentary procedures and to acknowledge the proper procedure in Parliament in relation to this particular motion, I want to clarify to the House that whilst the Member referred to Order 81, in my view, that is not necessary. I gave permission for him to proceed under Order 26(1) because it is a matter of urgency, and therefore since the business already appears on today's Order Paper, it does not need to ask for suspension under Order 81 so that the matter could be debated today. Having listened to him, he went on straight to actually move the substantive motion. If the House understands what I am talking about, we will continue with the substantive motion rather than asking for suspension of Standing Orders, which is unnecessary because the business is already on today's Order Paper.

(The motion is open for debate)

Mr HILLY: Mr Speaker, I stand to contribute very briefly to the motion moved by the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee.

At the outset, Mr Speaker, I like to record my support of the motion. The motion not only tries to ask Parliament to look at these reports closely and to adopt it at the end of the proceedings, but the motion itself tries to strengthen the parliamentary oversight role in the works of executive. For this, I would like to thank the mover of the motion..

I would also like to thank the Auditor General's Office who through its hard work they are able to produce this report for the committee to look at. I also would like to thank the government again for providing support in strengthening the Auditor General's Office for it to carry out its function.

Mr Speaker, secondly I would like to say that we are here in Parliament at this Meeting to consider the 2007 budget of the government. In other words, the Government is asking the Parliament to authorize a certain amount of money to be spent on the goods and services of our people.

I think it is also right and proper that the parliamentary system must be strengthened so that we do not only authorized government spending in the carrying out of its function, but Parliament should also be able to monitor the money that we authorize the government to spend to see that it is properly spent.

That can only be done if the government continues to strengthen the Auditor General's Office and continues to strengthen the various arms of Parliament so that the oversight role of Parliament can be felt and the oversight role is strengthened.

Mr Speaker, it is very pleasing to note that there are reports of various kinds in all the pigeonholes of Members of Parliament that are being tabled in the House. This is a great improvement because what is a report that is four, five, six years old. It will be more or less useless for the Parliament to look at such reports and make any opinions about. Quite a lot of the reports that I have seen are recent Mr Speaker, and this must continue for purposes of parliamentary oversight.

Mr Speaker, my support of this motion is basically to say that the report before the honorable House would certainly be considered by the whole House.

But my final point, Mr Speaker, is that if there are discrepancies in the reports, does the Parliament or the parliamentary committees have any power to bring people to answer for the shortcomings in the reports.

Mr Speaker, with those few remarks, I support this motion.

Mr HAOMAE: Mr Speaker, thank you for giving me the floor to contribute very briefly to the motion moved by my friend, the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee.

At the outset, Mr Speaker, I wish to also join my colleague MP for Ranogga/Simbo to record my thank you and appreciation to the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee and members of this Committee for the good work they have been doing and are expected to do during the life of this Parliament.

In doing so, Mr Speaker, in the same vein, I also wish to take this opportunity to thank the Auditor General and staff of the Audit Department for their work in producing the three reports that are before Parliament today.

At the outset, Mr Speaker, I wish also to record my gratitude to the staff of Ministry of Health and Medical Services, the National Referral Hospital and all the health workers throughout the length and breathe of this nation. Despite of problems identified in the reports, they have to be given credit where credit is due and under trying circumstances our health workers need also to be mentioned with gratitude.

Appropriately, Mr Speaker, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services is being allocated a substantial part of the budget. If I am correct, it is one of the ministries that is receiving a sizeable portion of the budget because health services throughout the country is for the whole country.

If I read the budget correctly, I think only education and health services reach Small Malaita. These two services permeate through the structural system of the government to reach my constituency. The other services that people used to talk about do not reach my constituency no more. Apart from the RCDF, Mr Speaker, I think the allocation made on health services and the Ministry of Education actually affects the rural people of this nation, and that is the reason why I am on the floor of Parliament to speak on these important reports.

The reports have cited certain problems in the Ministry of Health in terms of expenditure and the administrative mechanisms in place. I am heartened by the fact that the Ministry is taking steps in the right direction by way of action plans to correct some of those defects.

Human as we are, we are subject to error, we are not angels so that everything is perfect. Therefore, once mistakes have been made it is important that they are rectified or take action to rectify the mistakes.

I thank the Chairman of Public Accounts Committee for providing parliamentary oversight for this purpose.

I would like to cite two items here. The first one is in the report and the other one is not in the report. The one in the report is the trust fund. I think I was involved in this trust fund project of the Ministry of Health. I think it was \$100million at that time.

I would like to impress on the Ministry of Health and the administration that this trust fund must be used only for the purposes for which it is established. It should not be used for other purposes.

Last time I heard it was used for rental of houses and all sorts. There must be a safety net for the health sector in the country, and that is the reason why this trust fund was established. Because when a person is sick he is sick and you cannot wait for next week or next day.

Health is not like carpentry that when you get angry you hammer the nails the way you want it and when you cool down you straighten the nail again. With health it is different because when a person dies it is hard to bring that person back to life. Only God can revive a man from death. That is the fundamental understanding of this trust fund.

Whilst the administrative mechanisms are there, I would like to impress upon the Minister for Health and Medical Services and his administrators, my friend the honorable Minister that this trust fund must be only used for the purposes for which it is established and not divert the funds for other purposes.

The other thing I did not see in the report, it could be subsumed in the store but I would like to point out is the printing of materials used by the Ministry of Health.

The Ministry of Health being a health ministry and a technical ministry uses a lot of printing. A sizeable allocation of its budget goes towards the cost of printing too. I do not see in the report the mechanisms on how to control this. Otherwise all sorts of syndicate of people who have been behind the bar go to the Treasury

and were allocated - they take the shortcut like some of the things cited in the report. When we come to the committee of the whole house I will try to point this out once again.

At any rate, Mr Speaker, I wish to thank the Minister for Health for his hard work at this time. I hope and hope is not pessimistic, it is half optimistic and half pessimistic but I hope that he and his staff will ensure that the action plan that were distributed are not just for show or just for air but appropriate action will be taken on that.

With that, Speaker, I thank you for giving me the opportunity to contribute on the debate of this motion.

Hon SOALAOI: Mr Speaker, I wish to register some remarks. Firstly, I would like to thank the Auditor General's Office and the Public Accounts Committee for these reports. I think this is the first time the Ministry has gone through the process of auditing, and I would like to thank them for taking the initiative after being requested.

I regard the Ministry as being fortunate to be audited since we are ready to embark on our new program of action. I also wish at this juncture commend the Public Accounts Committee, the hardworking Chairman for providing us with a report that is before us, which I believe all Members have a copy of the PAC report and the two audit reports into the Ministry of Health and the National Referral hospital.

Mr Speaker, I also wish to thank my officials for their prompt action in putting in place the two action plans to address or putting sound procedures to address the recommendations put forward by the Auditor's General report.

With regards to some of the recommendations in the reports, Mr Speaker, I would like to report that as stipulated in our action plans, work has started last year and is going on. After the report of the Auditor General by now they are almost complete with our work on the two action plans.

Mr Speaker, this exercise has helped us especially with our Health Institutional program. This has come just at the right time for our program managers to learn how to properly

carry out their work especially in the Ministry of Health Management and Administration.

Mr Speaker, all the details of our action plans are available to Members. I am not stopping any questions but I am saying that the plan is available and is open for discussion.

I wish to say here that the Ministry welcomes this exercise and it is going to be a continuous exercise and process to be carried out, may be not only the Ministry of Health but also other ministries that are using public funds.

With regards to the special funds in the Ministry of Health, I would like to report that some of the comments, if not allegations, made earlier on need to be corrected. The funds have been used according to guideline given by donors. I think it is also clear in the Auditor's report that there has not been any misuse of the special funds. They have been used only according to guidelines.

Mr Speaker, as Minister responsible I will continue to put pressure on my officials to ensure that proper guidelines are put in place especially the Ministry of Health working together with our aid donors. The new direction we are taking at the moment is that most of the structures and guidelines will be provided by the Ministry according to its corporate plans and donors provide the funds. I think that will ensure a sustainable and proper management system.

Also with regards to our action plans, I believe we have put in place a system or a corrective measure has started and we will continue to report back to responsible authorities as indicated in the recommendations in the reports.

Mr Speaker, we are determined to ensure that health services reach all citizens of this country, and so it is not in our interest to see this alleged misuse of funds continue. There have been officials implicated and I would like to report that action has been taken. There are investigations going on, and there are new systems put in place.

With regards to our stock management there have been new computerized systems put in place to correct the stock management system, especially in the National Medical store.

Mr Speaker, on the recommendations in the Audit report, we cannot say that we will

address all of them at one time. We are taking steps and I would like to inform the House this morning that we are starting to work on it as we want to see the Ministry provide health services to the people of this country.

The Ministry has started the National Head Conferences that brings together our program managers from our provinces. This has become part of our action plan in order to update the skills of our program managers based in different departments and in the provinces.

With these few remarks, I would like to reiterate and emphasize once again that we treat ourselves as being fortunate to be the first ministry to be audited and we are keen to ensure that the Ministry performs as expected by this government in order to provide for people of Solomon Islands. Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

Mr MAGGA: Mr Speaker, I too would like to contribute briefly to the motion moved by the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. First of all, I would like to thank the Chairman and his Committee for a well done job.

One thing I would like to raise here in this honorable House is that I fail to see one area that I have noted that has gone through a lot of financial malpractices is the hospital morgue. I would like to raise a case that last year I authorized the embalming of a close relative and after a few days later, I received an invoice of \$5,000. So I raised a cheque payable to the government for \$5,000 and when the cheque was received the officer responsible for the morgue came back and asked me to make the cheque payable in cash because it was claimed the money will not be paid to the government but it will be paid to the doctor and those running the morgue. So I raised another cheque of \$5,000 in cash.

I believe this is another misappropriation of funds by the Ministry. I am raising this concern for the Minister and his officials to take note and to ensure that this practice must not happen again.

I believe this is a very serious matter because to pay somebody \$5,000 for a few hours job is not right. I am raising this so that the Ministry can appropriately investigate as to

where the monies that are paid for embalming of bodies have gone to.

Nevertheless I would like to thank the Chairman for this well done report, and I believe the Minister will take note of what I have raised. Thank you Mr Speaker.

Mr KEMAKEZA: Mr Speaker, I too would like to contribute very, very briefly to this report. In doing so, I would like to thank the Chairman, the hardworking Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee and members. In fact this Parliament owes them so much for the excellent job they are doing, especially this report on this very important subject or this important issue.

As you know, Mr Speaker, health is the right of everybody. Every one of us must be healthy because without health forget it. In that respect I would also like to thank all health workers throughout the country for the great job they have been doing in our country in taking care of the health of our people as well as continue to educate us on the theme, 'prevention is better than cure'.

This particular report talks about things that are already there that some people do not follow. That is what this report talks about. The law is there but some people bend the law to suit their own interest. That is what this report is all about.

I must thank the Auditor General's Office for auditing the accounts of departments as well as statutory bodies of the government to ensure that those of us in authority follow procedures, rules, regulations, and laws governing the systems so that everything works for the benefit of everyone including the 50 Members of Parliament and yourself too, Mr Speaker. This is very important to our people.

Health services is one thing our people always tell us to ensure that we provide it to them. Not like some political clinics that we build because we want people to vote us. No, that is not right. This is quite important. Financial Instructions are there, procedures are there. And I am happy too with the corporate plan of the Department of Health and Medical Services. I thank the Minister for carrying out this plan. This plan is not only for this government but it will be there for successive

governments. This is going to be the compass of the hospital.

The Ministry should not only concentrate on the National Referral Hospital. It must also do a similar process for other hospitals and clinics throughout the country. This applies to all health facilities throughout the country.

One thing also that I did not find in the recommendation is a stock verification unit in every department. This is very important because government facilities, and in this case the Ministry of Health are properly kept and followed strictly in accordance with the stock verification register. This is to avoid a doctor or a nurse upon completing his/her day's job does not go out with any property that belongs to the hospital. Before a doctor or nurse comes into take over he/she checks that the property or equipment is there.

This is what this report is all about. It is all about tightening up of the belt or the bolt is loosed and the timber is shaking and so some parts are bending and some timbers go out altogether. So I am happy with this report and the recommendations contained in it by this Committee.

I also thank and congratulate the Permanent Secretary. In fact the Ministry now has two Permanent Secretaries and so I want the Minister to utilize them. Do not just sit down and let them do the work let them follow the government's policy. The Minister is very young and talented and so you utilize these two important Permanent Secretaries because they are also doctors by profession, not like before when administrators are Permanent Secretary to the Ministry. The Member for North Vella is once upon time a Permanent Secretary in that Ministry. He has done a great job too, Mr Speaker. You know it very well during your time.

But it seems that people bend the rules and we are trying to tell our own people to do the right thing. If a man bend the rules altogether so that he falls down with it just let him fall with it.

I have nothing much to say but to thank the Minister, the officials and the Committee for the great job, especially the Auditor General in putting these measures in the proper and correct manner in the discharging of their

responsibilities for the betterment of all citizens and our friends who come to live with us in this country. For without proper health services, Mr Speaker, this country will get sick and if a human being is sick he will not be able to work and if there is no work, there is no development and if there is no development the country will collapse and if the county collapses then forget about Solomon Islands.

Health is similar to security. So do not touch these two sectors – health and security. When you play around with security and health then that will be the end of the country. In this case it is health and in the next debate I will talk about security.

With this, Mr Speaker, I support the motion.

Mr SITAI: Mr Speaker, allow me to contribute very briefly to the debate of this motion. In so doing, I wish, in fact my other colleagues have done this for me, I thank the hardworking Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee for the good work and the report that they have produced for presentation to Parliament this morning through this motion.

I wish to reiterate all the points raised by colleagues who have already spoken, in particular my good friend and colleague, the MP for Savo/Russells, in saying that the issues raised by the Auditor General as highlighted in the report, what action will appropriate authorities take on those matters to put them right so that we do not continue to go out or bend the rules of the Financial Instructions and so forth.

I believe this is the concern of this Parliament. If we do that very function of oversight of Parliament in supporting the executive, such work like this will become real. I would like this Parliament to be known as the Parliament during the 28 years of independence or so that has us now come out very clearly in the exercise function of the oversight role of Parliament on what it is going to do in helping to strengthen our government.

Apart from that, Mr Speaker, it is good to hear the Minister reassure us on health issues, some relating to the matters raised in this report. He has mentioned the Ministry's corporate plan, and so I would like to raise this point in regards

to that for the Ministry to take into consideration.

I do not think this issue has been raised in the report but this is a related and important matter, and so Mr Speaker, allow me to say this. The issue here relates to accompanying relatives of referral patients who normally end up in our Referral Hospital here in Honiara. Yes, their respective Members of Parliament can do something to help them but this is not sustainable. People will keep coming with their relatives for referrals at the hospitals. Someone has to look after them.

The question is – whether the government will just ignore such problems relating to cases that I have mentioned, which I believe would keep building in numbers as we go on and as more of our people become unhealthy requiring medical treatment here.

My view is like this – can we cater for some kind of accommodation for our people who normally end up here looking for accommodation everywhere and sometimes ending up in houses that are already overcrowded which is also not a healthy thing.

This is the issue I want to raise in the debate of this motion in relation to what has been presented, although it does not come out but I think it is related to the corporate plan of the Ministry. I would like to ask the government, my good Minister of Health who is listening to this debate and has already participated, is there a possibility of taking this consideration within the Ministry's corporate plan.

For example why not ask ROC for additional funding to build accommodation for people who bring in their relatives to the Referral Hospital here in Honiara. That is just one of those issues I would like to raise in this debate, otherwise I congratulate the Chairman and members of the PAC for their hard work. I support the motion.

Mr TORA: Mr Speaker, I would also like to join other colleagues who had spoken on the motion, which my good friend, the Chairman of the PAC and his members of the Committee see as very urgent and fitting to bring this very important document for us to debate in Parliament this morning. I would also like to

thank the Auditor General's Office for its very quick response in auditing the accounts of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services. I would like to raise a few points in contributing to the debate of this motion. I look at the whole structure of the Public Service and I begin to wonder why is that superior officers, responsible officers not only within the Ministry of Health but other ministries and departments overlooked their duties. I am asking because all the regulations are there like the General Orders, the Financial Instructions and so on. They know what their duties are.

It is only when the Auditor General produced this report that we come to know that there is misappropriation of funds in the ministries of the government. Why are responsible officers not doing their job of monitoring? The immediate responsible officer should have found out and tell his/her officer that they have done something out of the system.

Mr Speaker, that is why I thank the Auditor General and the Public Accounts Committee for seeing it fit in bringing this very important document to be debated in Parliament this morning. Not only is misappropriation done by the Ministry of Health and Medical Services – we cannot just pinpoint one Ministry, but I believe the whole government ministries are doing the same thing.

I would like to thank the Permanent Secretaries and the Minister responsible for Health and Medical Services for providing all necessary information to put together this Auditor General's report.

There were points here under executive summary reflecting that responsible officers have not been doing their work and that is why this is happening. I would like to see across the board those assigned to do monitoring in the various departments and ministries to perform their job properly.

May be some will say it is not their work, it is the PS's job but where is the structure. What are you responsible for? And who are you responsible to? You should know your positions.

My colleague has just mentioned in his short debate this morning that he signed a closed cheque thinking the cheque is payable to the government only to realize later that something

happened. They want to get the cash quickly because of the job they have done. It must be made clear here, Mr Speaker, where is the money that was paid to them and who are they? Was the money paid to the government or is it to an individual? That must be made clear here so that we do not question it in this chamber.

Mr Speaker, also some hospitals in the provinces are charging beds. Now that I see this report I begin to wonder where the money goes to. Does it go into the government's account or to the Ministry or just to individuals?

During one of my constituency visits I went across to Kira Kira and some sick patients from my constituency approached me asking money to pay for hospital beds and so I have to pay for them. I told them to collect the receipts because I have to go.

Mr Speaker, concerns like this are very important like my colleague had said. Now that we know what is happening from this audit of accounts we cannot wait because prevention is better than cure. Those who are responsible for monitoring must do it properly. The chief accountants are people who are responsible and answerable to accounts in the ministries, and are answerable to their PS's. If they are not doing their job then this is what is going to happen.

Mr Speaker, I for one would like to see that before any misappropriation of any fund happens the structure is there. If we go outside of the structure and we do not know our responsibilities and our job descriptions then that is very wrong. We have to work within our line of duties so that we know it is our job.

Don't you have time to just go and sit down with your revenue collector and find out how much is collected that day? If you check on that officer regularly he is going to be concerned and thinks that his boss checks him all the time and so he will be very careful otherwise he is caught red-handed.

Mr Speaker, I do not want to see this only in the Ministry of Health but across the board. I want to see those who are responsible to carry out their duties effectively and efficiently. Thank you Mr Speaker.

Mr ULUFA'ALU: Mr Speaker, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on this important motion before Parliament.

Mr Speaker, having listened to the mover of the motion, I can observe two important functions that are misinterpreted. These two functions are systems versus resources.

The audit report is talking about people not complying with the system. The system means the agreement we agreed on to live by - the rules we set ourselves to live by. That is the system. The other one is the resources we allocate to the system.

In here we see people giving resources but they do not know the system and so what happens. Abuse of the resources takes place because of lack of knowledge or refusal to comply with the system. System means standardization. It means everyone accepts the same rule to play by and comply with the same rule. That is the problem in this country at the moment.

The rules are disappearing. People are creating their own rules for convenience sake, making their own way, their own thing. There is no standardized agreement that we comply by with the rules that we set ourselves to live by. That is the problem of today, which is the exact problem now and is getting worse. Non compliance to the system is getting worse. There is non compliance to these problems.

The Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee will increase in magnitude on complaints about people not complying with the system. That will increase because there is no one to ensure that people comply with the system and to the agreement we gave ourselves to live by.

People are creating their own rules and own ways of doing things. As a result there are thousands of different ways of doing the same thing. That is non compliance. The system is not in place. The system is not working. The system is not functioning. Why? If the system is functioning we will not find room for our own bits of things ourselves and so we make sure the system collapses then we start creating our own rules and we start making homes for ourselves. That is what is happening in this country now and it is increasing.

Mr Speaker, the oversight role of Parliament must therefore concentrate on compliance. Compliance is important,

compliance to the rules that we set ourselves to live by and not creating new rules out of convenience. Non compliance is the problem.

Standardization rules, Mr Speaker, made at the constituency level, made at the provincial level, made at the national level must be the same rules. There is no point in different rules at the constituency, different rules in the province and different rules in the national. There is no such thing as that. It is important to standardize, it is important to make things standardize because compliance will take place and compliance means agreeing to live by the rules.

Only then Mr Speaker, the problem we are facing and is increasing every day now and every month and every year will disappear. To do that it has to start from ourselves as politicians. We must comply with the rules and get ourselves to live by the rules. After the politicians comply, the public servants will comply and then the people of this country. So it must start with us the politicians.

If politicians do not comply with the rules or if we make excuses for ourselves for non compliance then who are we trying to govern? That is the problem of this country. I do hope we will see this so that the Chairman of Public Accounts Committee will have a better job to do next time, otherwise his job is going to get worse every day onwards because we ourselves, Members of Parliament are not complying to the rules, are not living by the rules we set ourselves to live by. And when we do not live it, we do not enforce it and therefore the Public Service does not and therefore everybody does not.

Mr Speaker, how do you see that happening? It is very easy. Just look at your own family and you can see it in your own family. That is what is happening. Everywhere nothing seems to work.

What we should be running after now is compliance from top to bottom, from bottom to top - compliance. So that our new roadmap, bottom-up will make sense otherwise it will not make sense. Compliance is the name of the game that we should commit ourselves to do now. Compliance to the rules we set ourselves.

Mr Speaker, there is no point in saying a level playing field for you but not for me. If

you make excuses for yourself then it is not going to be for everybody too. So why are you complaining after that? That is what is happening now.

Mr Speaker, with those few comments, I support the motion.

Mr TOZAKA: Mr Speaker, thank you for allowing me to contribute to this motion moved by the Honorable Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee.

I join honorable colleagues in thanking the Chairman and his committee for the work they have produced, a result of which we are now debating in this report.

Mr Speaker, like other honorable Members who have spoken, this particular product is a product that comes from one of the checks and balances of the government system. Accordingly I would like to thank the Auditor General for the work he has done.

Mr Speaker, this particular report is very important as it deals with a very important function in the Ministry of Health which is the hospital, in this case it is the National Referral Hospital.

Successive governments always talk about social services to be given priority, especially in the area of education and health. As my colleague from Aoke/Langa Langa who has spoken emphasizes compliance, I too quite agree with him that sometimes we say things but we do the opposite especially on areas that we don't have much interest in except when we come to the point that we see it is important to us. My point is that the area of health and education are very important in our country. This area is quite wide and is quite expensive too, very costly especially to fund hospitals and clinics.

If you go into these areas you will find that it involves manpower requirements, technical manpower requirements that need support, that need special attention by the budget of the government to make sure that they receive adequate support.

Looking at this report Mr Speaker, I break it down and it comes down to basic things that ministries normally ask for help, and that is manpower and finance. What is highlighted in

here is management. It is not on political level but management level.

In other words, Mr Speaker, I agree completely with what the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee highlighted. But if place leadership face to these things, we will see the seriousness of whether we are fair in saying this particular officer or this particular institution has a problem. If we actually go and sit down with these people we will find there is great need for more staff. They do not have any supporting staff to run the areas they are working in. They have no manpower. They have no facilities. They have no finance. These are the very things when compiling we ask for their budgetary requirements. These are the things that they normally ask the government.

I have not looked at their budgetary estimates and the development estimates yet but I am sure that they are going to come up again with their requirements. I just wonder whether their requirements, their needs will be given to them. They are going to be taken precedence over other things that we wanted. This is why when you look at the accountants you will find that they cannot do most of these things. There are so many things the ministry is committed to do. When you go down to hospitals in the provinces and go down to the clinics you will find that they are completely bare. You will find shelves in the clinics empty. They do not have facilities. The question you are going to ask there is, why is this happening? It is because they do not have money.

Mr Speaker, we have to be very serious now, and I am happy the Minister said that he is looking into these things. I am looking forward to the budget when we debate it next week whether the needs of the Ministries are reflected in the budget. Because the same thing is going to happen and is going to perpetuate this problem if what a ministry wants especially in the area of education and health is not reflected.

Continuity, Mr Speaker, talking about technical manpower like doctors, nurses. How do we keep these people so that they continue to work in the health sector? Where are our priorities in terms of manpower in the Public Service or in the Government as a whole? This is where the thing happens.

To monitor a report of this nature, a very important report that comes up with the weaknesses of the ministry requires manpower to monitor. And I am very pleased Mr Speaker, this is the first time too, having worked in the government for a couple of years that I am seeing reports coming up to the attention of honorable Members in this manner, which is very good.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the capacity, the various capacity building mechanisms in the government, especially those that came through the Regional Mission of Solomon Islands. This is very good. It shows us what is happening. I think we should thank them because they are helping us bring these things into light, putting them into attention so that we address them responsibly. Putting leadership face on these things is what is required. These are the things small as they are to us but are important because they have multiple effects on the system as it will affect services and the development of our people and country.

Mr Speaker, I look at the report and I am seeing some actions that have been taken by the Ministry concern and there are some actions yet to be taken by the Ministry concerned, but they have been noted. I urge the Ministry that it is not just a matter of bringing this report for the purpose of debating them here and then thereafter we just forget them but it is part and parcel of the functions of the government that when we debate these things, go back to the Ministry and continue to do monitoring to make sure the things highlighted in the respective audit reports are addressed.

With that Mr Speaker, I support the motion.

(applause)

Mr Zama: Mr Speaker, I will now wind up the debate on this motion. Before I do so I wish to take this opportunity to thank all Members who have contributed to the motion.

To bring into perspective, this report is on the operations of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services and also the National Referral Hospital.

Throughout the course of debate, Mr Speaker, those who have contributed have spoken outside of the motion in terms of how the Ministry of Health and Medical Services has extended its services into the rural areas.

Mr Speaker, what they raised are issues of importance in the delivery mechanisms of the Department. I wish to register that throughout the deliberations of the Committee, the officials and the Permanent Secretaries of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services and the National Referral Hospital have done their best.

Mr Speaker, unfortunately the Minister was not able to be given a second opportunity or privilege to be able to respond to some of the issues that were raised by Members who have contributed. But I am pretty sure that he has taken note of the concerns raised especially on the issue of the trust fund, this has been well covered in the report and I am pretty sure that the Department has taken appropriate steps and actions to address the issue of the trust fund.

On the issue of morgue management, I am confident that the Minister and his Permanent Secretary who is present have taken note of the issue and the seriousness of the concerns raised.

Mr Speaker, I wish to raise an issue which one of the speakers raised, which has been the subject of this review is on system, resources and compliance. Mr Speaker, as has been raised by some of the speakers this may be the first time that such report appears on the floor of Parliament so that Members are given the opportunity to raise issues of concern. That is exactly what this motion intends to raise.

It is through these organs that Parliament is able to exercise its oversight responsibility ensuring that the executive government exercises and delivers services to the people of this country.

Mr Speaker, on that note I would like to thank those who have spoken in support of this motion and those who raised issues of concerns which have been taken note of.

Mr Speaker, in conclusion, I would like to thank the Prime Minister and the executive and the will that they have taken in strengthening parliamentary processes for which our Parliament is able to oversee and exercise that role.

In closing, I would like to thank all those members that have spoken on this motion, and with that I beg to move.

The Motion agreed to

Committee of Supply

Report on the Ministry of Health

Page 7 – action plan

no comments

Page 8

no comments

Page 9

Mr Kwanairara: Coming back to the recommendations by the Committee. Is this the same plan here on recommendation two?

Mr Chairman: That is correct. It is the same plan.

Mr Zama: Yes, that is the plan.

National Referral Hospital

Page 10

Mr Kwanairara: Patient's Travel. We have been affected very badly at times when the constituency people come to the hospital and on their return they usually give a very big burden on MPs to meet their sea fares to go back home.

I would like to clarify here that if there is anything that you want the constituency to meet then it must come from doctors and responsible people and not the patient themselves coming to ask.

Mr Zama: Mr Chairman, I think there is provision under hospital. For one patient there is a provision for a relative that the hospital caters for but anything outside of that will have to be shouldered by respective relatives.

Hon Soalau: I just want to confirm what has been said by the Chairman. There is allowance for only one family member to accompany any

sick patient on referral cases. The other problem we have been having is when patients refer themselves to Honiara and they come to us asking to pay for their tickets or for reimbursement of expenses they incurred. This is a very expensive exercise.

Last year we recorded about \$1.8 million that was spent on referrals. If any one comes to Honiara and asks their Member of Parliament to assist him then you should know that he is not qualified under the Ministry to look after him.

A sick patient can only be looked after by the appropriate authority when referred by the doctors from the provinces to Honiara. Self referrals will not be assisted and we want to put a stop to this.

Hon Agovaka: Just a comment here. You are referring to the National Referral Hospital. Are there any audited reports for hospitals like Lata, Gizo and other provincial hospitals?

Mr Fono: Mr Chairman, point of order. Can Ministers ask questions during a committee of supply?

Mr Chairman: I think Ministers want information as well. They may ask questions. Of course, normally information should be available at Cabinet level but he wants to get information as well and so he may.

I think what the Honourable Minister is asking for is you clarify to him that you do have obligations to those who come to the referral hospital in Honiara, do you have the same system for people going to provincial hospitals.

Hon Soalaoi: I think the system practiced in the National Referral Hospital simply reflects the system practiced in the provinces. In order for anyone to go to provincial hospitals they have to be referred by a nurse. So clinics refer you to provincial hospitals and then provincial hospitals refer patients to the National Referral Hospital.

Mr Zama: Mr Chairman, the scope of this report only looks at the National Referral Hospital in Honiara. It does not look at the other provincial hospitals and so that is why it is not here.

Mr Tora: Under patient's travel and catering. Apart from sick patients how many people are entitled to have meals or to be fed by the National Referral Hospital and how many apart from sick patients are entitled to travel?

Hon Soalaoi: I think I have said earlier on that apart from sick patient the Hospital is responsible for an additional one family member to be provided with three meals per day. If there is another person on top of these two then the other person will come to complain. We are only responsible for one additional family member.

Mr Haomae: I would like to ask a question on page 11 on pharmaceutical supplies. There are reports that some chemicals like the SPR in pharmacies especially in the National Referral Hospital have been used for drinking like beer.

Can the Ministry take action to tighten up the release and security of SPR supplies in the National Referral Hospital Pharmacy? There are credible reports that some of these chemicals especially the SPR has been used for alcohol consumption. Can the Ministry take active action on that?

Hon Soalaoi: Mr Chairman, I think that is an important issue. Fortunately what is available in our pharmacies are only spirits. It is not that what is referred to as alcohol but we know that people always misuse it for alcohol purposes. What is available in our stores is harmful. Sometimes scientists say good alcohol is not good for alcohol, it is only used for medical purposes. But we will certainly look into the misuse of those chemicals.

Mr Kwanairara: Mr Chairman, I want to know about expired drugs. If you go around the villages or in town you can find a lot of drugs being kept in the houses. What sort of drugs are we talking about here as expired drugs? Is it anything not utilized within one year or what sort of time period are we looking at as being expired?

As I said if you go around houses in the villages you will find a lot of medicines inside the home. Are they advisable for use or if they

are more than a couple of years should they not be used.

Also another thing is some people saying do not use this tablet but this one. Like now they are saying do not use septrin or amoxillin or tetracycline. But if you go to the houses there are plenty of such drugs inside the homes. What is your advice on that?

Mr Chairman: What do you do with expired drugs sir?

Hon Soalaoi: Mr Chairman, that has been a problem for quite sometime now. That is the reason why doctors have to make prescriptions, and so what they give you is only for a period of time. If people request medicines or they want to keep medicines in their homes then that is what is creating the problem because people end up taking expired drugs.

Starting from the Medical Store we have a system that new stocks are ordered one and a half month. That basically gives you an idea of when the previous stock becomes expired.

I think what we can say is take only drugs that have been prescribed. It is not safe for you to store drugs at homes to be taken whenever you feel sick. If you listen to some of the health programs we have been running we are advising you to see a nurse or a doctor first before the drugs are taken. Do not ask for drugs straightaway or buy them from the shops. If you are prescribed say panadol and it is not available in the clinics then there are licensed people who sell drugs especially the pharmacies we have in Honiara.

Mr Haomae: Mr Chairman, page 11 – the Ministry's Action Plan. It is one thing to have an action plan and the other thing is actual implementation of the plan and to stick to it or comply to it, as the Member for Aoke/Langa Langa has alluded to in his debate today.

I want to impress on the Minister and his staff and those at the National Referral Hospital to ensure that the action plan is carried out. That is just a comment.

Conclusion of the consideration of the report at the committee stage

Parliament resumes

Hon Zama: Mr Speaker, I beg to report that the (National Parliament Paper No.17 of 2007) Report of the Public Accounts Committee on its examination of the Auditor General's Audit Reports on the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, National Parliament Paper No.9 of 2006 and National Referral Hospital Paper No.16 of 2006 has passed through the committee of the whole House and beg to move that Parliament agrees to the proposals contained in that Paper.

The Motion is passed

Hon SOGAVARE: Mr Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn.

The House adjourned at 12.30 p.m.