

MONDAY 1ST SEPTEMBER 2008

The Deputy Speaker, Hon. Kengava took the Chair at 10.05 a.m.

Prayers.

ATTENDANCE

At prayers, all were present with the exception of the Ministers for Mines and Minerals and rural Electrification, Women, Youths and Children's affairs, National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace, Police, National Security and Correctional Services, Infrastructure Development, Development Planning and Aid Coordination and Members for Shortlands, Temotu Vattu, North-West Choiseul, East Makira, West Honiara, West Guadalcanal, North Guadalcanal, Central Honiara, Malaita Outer Islands, West New Georgia/Vona Vona, South Choiseul, West Are'Are, and North-West Guadalcanal.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Status of the Vangunu Oil Palm

41. **Mr SOGAVARE** to Minister for Agriculture & Livestock Development: In relation to the Vangunu Oil Palm Project can the Minister inform Parliament as follows:

- (a) What is the status of the project?
- (b) What specific aspect of the project is funded by the \$1million budget allocation?
- (c) How much of this allocation has been expended, and on what?

Hon. RIUMANA: Mr Speaker, I wish to thank the hardworking Leader of Opposition and MP for East Choiseul for this question. I also thank him for guiding and directing the government to implementing of this project successfully.

Mr Speaker, on the over view, the Environment Impact Study and the Independent Impact Assessment study to verify the environment impact assessment and all other assessments, report a slope of more than 30° in most of Vangunu alienated land.

For easy management and husbandry practices only slopes less than 12° are ideal for oil palm plantations, therefore, Mr Speaker, this project requires review and that has been the policy of the CNURA Government.

On the status of this project, Mr Speaker, the logging component of the project, which is supposed to be the pre-requisite for oil palm plantation has been completed and a total oil palm plantation of 1,000 hectares have been planted.

The Ministry continues to monitor this project from 2002 until 2005 and highlighted issues of concern but the government was unable to act because of the social unrest. In 2006 and 2007, Mr Speaker, there was no monitoring in place. In early 2008, Mr Speaker, a team was sent to the project site to reassess and recommend to the Ministry possible options to be undertaken. However, it was indicated that the total remaining oil palm planted area was estimated to be around 300 to 400 hectares only and the whole plantation covered with creepers and weeds. This could be due to lack of monitoring by the government in 2006 and 2007.

Mr Speaker, the review to be undertaken by the government through this Ministry is based on the followings: On areas greater than 30° slope, which is estimated to be around 200 meters above sea level would be left alone for reforestation and on areas less than 12° slope, which is estimated to be less than 200 meters above sea level will be reinforced to be planted with oil palm plantation as nuclei estate. The nuclear estate will be backed up by the out growers scheme or smallholder undertaking from surrounding customary lands in Vangunu.

Mr Speaker, on the specific aspect of project funded, the allocation of \$1million from the Development Budget is for the out growers scheme component of the project, Mr Speaker. The Ministry is working closely with Landowners Association of Vangunu to device a mechanism for channeling the assistance where staff from the Ministry will draw up the work program with the Landowners Association. The Ministry has come to undertake whether the developer will provide machinery and the Ministry will provide physical development fieldwork, Mr Speaker.

On the allocation expended, Mr Speaker, we have allocated for East Vangunu, Merusu area a total of \$228,225, and that is basically for farm equipment, transport and fuel for clear felling. On North Vangunu around Subolo area, Mr Speaker, we have committed \$131,085, which comes to a total of \$361,810 committed to this project. Thank you.

Mr Sogavare: I want to thank the Minister for answering the question. I just want to ask a supplementary question. Can the Minister confirm that the government is still committed to work with the present investor on this project?

Hon. Riumana: Mr Speaker, I have stated that the policy of the government is to review the whole project, which includes the investor. Thank you.

Mr OTI: Mr Speaker, supplementary question. We have an existing oil palm project which is CDC initially SIPL and because problems have happened over the years the takeover by GPPOL. This project is really private sector driven, if any, perhaps, not so much input by government compared to Vangunu. What kind of model are we trying to follow in Vangunu compared to the present private sector driven model on GPPOL? What sort of model are we envisaging that so much input has to be given by government Mr Speaker? Is this a different kind of arrangement? Is it a government project? Is it a government oil palm project compared to the other one that is now in existence, and for that matter what kind of model would the others take on? Would it be the same as Vangunu or the same as GPPOL?

Hon. Riumana: Mr Speaker, I thank the Member for his supplementary question. In the case of GPPOL, Mr Speaker, there are already existing oil palm plantations, but in the case of Vangunu there are no oil palm plantations and this is why the government comes in to assist the out growers scheme and we are looking at establishing a nuclei estate and the village out growers scheme, Mr Speaker. That is the model we are working on. Thank you.

Mr ZAMA: Mr Speaker, the answer given by the Minister is not correct. Mr Speaker, there is an existing oil palm plantation in Vangunu. The status of this plantation, I just want to know if the Minister can truly and honestly inform Parliament and people of Solomon Islands how many hectares of land has already been planted? On its status, whether the palms that have been already planted have fruits or not yet, and what time are they looking at building a mill?

Hon. Riumana: Mr Speaker, when I say there is no existing oil palm plantation it is very early stage of the development, and this is why the government has to establish the out growers scheme. There is no oil palm in the out growers scheme in Vangunu but the developer has a new nuclei estate which the government is currently reviewing. The total area of oil palm plantation so far, as I have said, originally was 1,000 hectares but that includes all the slopes greater than 30°. If we are to reduce this, and given the fact that there are

creepers and weeds due to lack of monitoring and maintenance, the total area by now is around 300 to 400 hectares only.

In the case of the out growers scheme, Mr Speaker, we are still working with the landowners to actually plant oil palm.

Mr Zama: Supplementary question, Mr Speaker. This particular investor is going around the country using oil palm as a rider to access customary land belonging to people. He was established at Vangunu and we are yet to see the result of that oil palm plantation. Now he is venturing to Isabel for the same cause using oil palm development as a rider to access customary land from people and people with the good intentions of getting into oil palm.

I am raising this question, Mr Speaker, because words are now on the streets that other provinces must not engage with this particular investor. You might not be aware of this but those of us from constituencies that have already engaged this investor, words had it on the streets that landowners are suffering. The landowners suffer, not because of the oil palm also on logging because they were not receiving their payments. Words also have it that this man is a conman, this particular investor is a con-investor, he is going broke.

Mr Speaker: Point order.

Mr Zama: Okay, Mr Speaker, I withdraw that statement but this is a normal phrase we always use. This phrase is a normal phrase we use but I withdraw it but it is used everywhere, outside the Chambers of Parliament, on the streets and is generally accepted by all of us.

But anyway, Mr Speaker, I want the Minister to really tell our people on Vangunu and on Isabel the true status of this particular investor. I say this because even before the GPPOL was established this Vangunu Oil Palm was already there and it is now more than 10 years and yet we still do not see any real result from this particular project.

Hon. Riumana: Mr Speaker, I thank the Member for Rendova/Tetepare for his supplementary question. The Member himself was a Minister of Finance at at time and he knew very well the status of this project and that is why he used the word 'rider'.

Mr Speaker, for Isabel Province there is no request in the Ministry requesting for oil palm plantation. The only project my Ministry is working on is the Vangunu Oil Palm Project and we are trying to make sure and to ensure that the out growers component takes off the ground. Thank you.

Mr Oti: Mr Speaker, the Minister has a lot of programs and efforts in financing the out growers scheme for Vangunu. Sir, let us leave aside the out growers. The main oil palm project has to be up and running before the out growers scheme can make sense.

The issue I raised today was that in terms of budgetary reflections on assistance to Vangunu, as the Minister explained, is to assist out growers. What we are interested in is before the out growers scheme becomes successful the main investment has to take off the ground. That is the issue.

Can the Minister perhaps confirm to Parliament again, apart from the ups and downs, previous governments not taking serious and appropriate actions early in the stage of the project, this should not be an excuse for us to follow suit. We should take it on. We make sure that the main investment takes place. That is why my earlier supplementary question today was to do with a model. What kind of model? Is it a private sector driven like the other one we have on Guadalcanal, otherwise we should not confuse it with that element of out grower arrangement, which is only supplementing the main investment.

The issue here is, can the Minister do what his other counterparts in past governments did not do, and that is to drive this private investor to do the right thing before you talk about the out growers scheme. Perform better than your previous counterparts and do not blame them. Thank you.

Hon. Riumana: Mr Speaker, I thank the Member for his very valid point, which I take note. Mr Speaker, we are working very closely with the investor to produce a mill of 5 to 10 tons per hour. This mill would be very practical for smallholder undertakings and this is why we are encouraging the out growers scheme. Even if there is no nucleus, with a small mill capacity we can still process oil from the out growers scheme. Thank you.

Mr Zama: Supplementary question to my honorable Minister, and this for the information of Parliament and for those people who are engaging this particular investor.

Can the Minister confidently tell Parliament and the people of Solomon Islands whether this particular investor has any other oil palm plantations outside Solomon Islands and what are his experiences?

When I was Minister of Finance in the Kemakeza Government I handpicked GPPOL because of the experience it has. It has existing plantations overseas, and so it is a credible company. I want to know more about this particular investor. Can the Minister please, confidently tell Parliament and people of Solomon Islands whether this investor has oil palm plantations overseas and what are his experiences?

Hon. Riumana: Mr Speaker, I am not aware of any oil palm plantation the current investor is engaged in, in any other parts of the country. So far in my office we have not received any oil palm development after logging, except of that of Vangunu, which is a national project in 2000.

Regarding the background of this investor, Mr Speaker, I too have no idea but I do understand that he has planted oil palm plantations in Papua New Guinea. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr WALE: Mr Speaker, supplementary question. Since you said that the gradient for oil palm plantations should not be greater than 12° and therefore the amount of land will be reduced to form the nuclei estate, what is the minimum acreage for nucleus estate that is 12° and under for it to be economically viable?

Hon. Riumana: Mr Speaker, 6,000 hectares is the area required for economics of scale. However, due to slope difficulties, it will reduce to one thousand (1000) hectares and this is where the out-grower scheme is encouraged to back up the nuclei estate.

Mr. Sogavare: Mr Speaker, just a supplementary question. We are talking about the credibility of the existing investor. One of the difficulties and an issue that was discussed back and forth with the investor is the issue of how land is to be dealt with and the actual issue at that time was that he wants the land to be firstly transferred to him, the investor, before he is comfortable to pour in invested money. Can the government inform the House on the status of that or its plan on land holdings of Vangunu Oil Palm Project Mr Speaker?

Hon. Riumana: Mr Speaker, can the Member repeat the question?

Mr Sogavare: One of the issues that was discussed back and forth with the investor by the last government and that attributed to the delay in getting this project forward or some serious commitment by the investor was that he feels that the land has to be formally transferred to him first of all before he is comfortable to release funds for development of the palm oil project, and we were grappling with that issue before we were ousted. The question is, what is the current status of land holdings or what is the government's decision on that particular issue?

Hon Riumana: Mr Speaker, as far as I know Lot 16 of Vangunu alienated land has never been transferred to the investor until around last year and that has contributed to the delay of this project. Thank you.

Mr. Sogavare: Mr Speaker I rise to thank the Hon. Minister for informing Parliament of the progress of this particular development.

Tourism Potential

51. **Mr SOGAVARE** to the Minister for Culture and Tourism: Considering the potential in this sector, what strategy is the Ministry putting in place to fully develop it?

Hon. GUKUNA: Mr Speaker, let me first of all thank the Hon Leader of Opposition and the MP for East Choiseul for asking this question. I would like to thank him for also recognizing the importance of tourism in our country.

Mr Speaker, the strategy that the government has adopted is based entirely on the recognition that tourism has a real potential to become an important part of the local economy, and this in turn is based on the fact that this country is a beautiful country and has so much to offer to world travelers in return for real money.

But, Mr Speaker, as you would know, success of tourism lies in convincing overseas people to come here. Our resorts and hotels will do us no good unless we can convince people to fill them, come here and stay in them. That is of paramount importance. This, we hope, to do by figuring how to make them accept that coming here to this country is worth the money they spent. That is the bottom line of tourism.

Three months ago my Ministry has launched a Visitor's Survey Report conducted over a 12 months period. This report contained a lot of information about the activities tourists are involved in when they come to this country; what they have been doing; what they wanted to do but could not do because of the absence of services; and what they think we should do. Based on the findings of this report, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism redirected its efforts in the Ministry to try and develop tourism products. I think a very important part of the strategy is to come up with products or things like tours, bush walks, home staying, bush tracking, bird watching, dolphin swimming, and so on to try and capture the interests that are reflected in this report. If you are interested in tourism try and get this report because this will give you the guide on how you will come up with activities that are inline with the strategy that my Ministry is now taking.

These products are important, Mr Speaker, because when they are properly developed better down the line, our operators will be able to develop tourist packages that we can sell overseas. One example that is going on in the country is the diving packages. We want to be able to move to other packages and enable operators to sell products as part of what they have to offer to tourists. Of course this will mean a move towards getting the private sector involved in tourism.

The role of the government as I see it and the government sees it is to try and become facilitator and allow operators in the private sector to spearhead our tourism efforts.

While all these are going on we are also very mindful that getting to Solomon Islands is very expensive. Traveling in-country is very expensive too and chronically unreliable, with cases of tourists coming here and change planes to travel to the provinces and travel to areas outside of Honiara and having to spend three to four days and ended up getting the next plane out of Solomon Islands, which is very disappointed. For this, we have been very closely working with aviation operators to try and improve aviation access to this country and between Honiara and our many islands. I am pleased to say here that I believe we are on track on improving things in this regard.

As I have said earlier, Mr Speaker, the success in tourism is all about convincing people to come here. This must involve how we behave and how we interact with them when they are here. The trick here is to impress them that the people of this country are good and that they provide good services so that it is worth their money.

Mr Speaker, we are also working on improving our contact services in our hotels, restaurants and bars by providing skills and hospitality training to our tourism operators. Already we have conducted these trainings here in Honiara and in fact there is one training session going on right now at the King Solomon Hotel. Two weeks ago we completed a very successful training session in the Central Province. And from next week we will be conducting training in the Western Province. Next month we will complete hospitality trainings in Malaita and Rennell and Bellona Provinces.

All these are part of trying to trade infrastructure that we need to get tourism moving. As part of this gradient infrastructure, we are on course on constructing the Tourism and Hospitality School at the SICHE, and I am pleased to further advise that you will soon see construction starting at SICHE. I am also very pleased to let you know that I have been given \$3.2 million to build this project. Hopefully we will start this project in October. We are on track and I am very pleased.

As I have said all these form the important infrastructures that we need to develop tourism. Still these will fail if the message does not go out. This brings me to another thing that we are positioning ourselves to embark on, and that is the vigorous promotion of this country. For the start we are assisting few entities to help our Visitors' Bureau promote this country. The ultimate objective in my Ministry is to set up a promotion unit in the Ministry and this will be responsible for coordinating national tourism promotional activities abroad.

In addition to all these, we are also working on the tourism legislation, which I hope we will be able to bring before this Parliament for endorsement in the November – December Sitting. There is no law in this country on tourism and I believe we need a law to guide the development of tourism. This law will protect and empower the development of tourism in this country and will enable the Ministry to have direct liaison with Civil Aviation, the City Council, Home Affairs, the Police and other entities, which are relevant to the development of tourism in this country so that we can be able to work together, a social environment that is conducive to tourism, to create a safe environment that is worth the money that tourists will come and spend.

The trick here, Mr Speaker, is to be able to bring people here and when they leave they will have an impression that they can share with their friends upon their return. This is what we are hoping to do; this strategy that my Ministry is looking at developing, but we cannot do this unless we have proper training, easy access and able to bring them to Honiara and they can go to any provinces at ease and at less cost. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr Sogavare: Just a supplementary question. The issue of dealing with the cost of people coming into our country is an ongoing issue, and I just want to find out where we are in trying to address getting tourists coming here at a cheaper cost.

Hon. Gukuna: Mr Speaker, as you are well aware, the cost of traveling to Solomon Islands is one of the most expensive in the region. Coming from Brisbane to Honiara is very costly and we have been talking to a few airlines. As I said the Ministry is under legal obligations to talk to them but we are doing that on the understanding that this is an important part of our Ministry. We cannot go into their operation as they are private operators but for the sake of tourism but they have allowed us to communicate to them and very soon a few airlines.

We are so grateful that Sky Air World has entered the market and there are some talks of two more airlines coming into the country. I must admit that we have some resistance from people who are a bit traditional who would like to stick to the status quo.

I believe that if we are going to go on with tourism we must address the issue of access to this country and that access can only come through allowing aviation operators to compete and be able to offer cheap airfares to tourists. You will notice in the media that there some people who are very interested not only in flying are here but they are also interested in setting up resorts in this country and I believe they would make a good partnership with the government considering that they will be involved in providing hospitality here in this country and also being able to bring them. If we can bring them in they will be able to come up with attractive packages.

I thank the Leader of Opposition because I am very pleased with what is happening in the tourism sector and I believe some of the things we have been working on unfortunately takes too long because we have been involved with other entities. However, I am very pleased with our progress and I believe that in the next two or three months we will be able to see some physical demonstration of what we have been on, laid out in the provinces and here in Honiara.

Mr. WALE: Mr Speaker, just a supplementary question. It seems that land is a serious issue for tourism development and availability of land can attract sizeable investors to be able to put structuring pegs on the ground.

With regards to land, Anuha is owned by the government in terms of the lease, and so the amount of time that has taken to get Anuha into the hands of a credible investor, what is the progress of that particular development, Mr Speaker?

Hon Gukuna: Mr Speaker. I would like to thank the Hon MP for Aoke/Langa Langa for his good question.

Of, course Mr Speaker, you are aware that land issue is always a concern for any development in this country and tourism development is no exception. That is why at the moment we tend to try and get private operators who own land and assets to be involved. That is one of the reasons why we are trying to get the government move away from directly involving in tourism operations.

On the case of Anuha, yes, the Minister has properly stated that the fixed term title belongs to the government but the perpetual title is still with the landowners. But we are working very with them. In fact we have had two meetings with them and things worked out very well, including the Province and we hope to be able to strike a deal very shortly. In fact, I am hoping that we will be able to do that at the end of this month or early October.

According to the investors, particularly the investor we are dealing with, we have done some background work on that investor and we are confident that we

have picked the right one. Indications from the investor are that they will move on to developing Anuha very quickly. They have assured us that they have the money and again with things falling in place and things turn out the way we talked and assessed matters, we are hoping that will also come into effect for that project and that project will start something on the ground around October. Thank you, Mr. Speaker

Mr. OTI: Mr. Speaker, supplementary question. In the promotion of Solomon Islands as a tourist destination whether or not the Ministry knows the approach it is taking for the different tourist interests? There is a diverse, and a multitude of specific interest from abroad; those who want to visit Solomon Islands and then you cover the whole country and look at what activities can be developed in certain parts of the country so that Solomon Islands can be marketed, not just to visit Solomon Islands as a country but to visit specific areas or provinces in Solomon Islands because of its uniqueness and what it has, which cannot be found anywhere else in the country. That is the first part.

Secondly, and in relation to what assistance has the Ministry given to date on our operators, cruises, for example, and particularly because of high cost of air travel to Solomon Islands, there are other ways of bringing tourists to Solomon Islands, one of which is the cruises. And for that matter while airfare is expensive from Brisbane to here and then here to Temotu Province, day cruises have actually been happening in Temotu for the last six or so months whereby ships come and stopover at Tikopia, Utupua, Santa Cruz on the basis that they still tourists.

What sort of assistance do you render to develop those kinds of areas where tourists come and stopover and then move on because those are the only places that they can visit at this point in time?

I want to know, Mr. Speaker, the strategies the Ministry is employing? What sort of assistance does the Ministry or the government renders to this kind of tourism development? Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Hon. Gukuna: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the honorable Member for Temotu Nende for asking a very good question.

In terms of promotion, as I said, one of the objectives of the Ministry is to establish a unit within the Ministry to coordinate promotion. At the moment there are a few entities which are doing promotions for us; the Visitors Bureau is primary to do that and we are trying to encourage them. We have assisted them in terms of funds. We are trying to encourage the Bureau to get more aggressive in promoting this country. Few entities are being informed. We are also

encouraging them not so much in terms of funding but we are trying our best to ensure that they are involved in promotion.

We want to promote Solomon Islands as a package. Solomon Islands' tourism is still very under-developed and maybe little bit down the line we will be able to say "come to Western Province", "come to Temotu", "come to Malaita". But right now we want the world to know Solomon Islands; that is our objective and with the limited funding we have allocated for promotion, we don't want to thin out that money.

Whilst we recognize tourism in this country, the funding that we are getting is still insufficient. I believe that the government with the recognition that this House is now having, I believe that this will increase as we go on. And that is the only way. After all the return of tourism is the return of investment and we must invest in tourism. We want more from tourism. And as I said the difficulties we have now is to go out into extensive programme of promotion when we don't really have the resources to do that.

In terms of cruise ships and all that, again the cruise ships that are coming into the country have been organized by a private operator. When I moved into the Ministry I realized this need to be brought in to our attention and possibly to our assistance. We are still working on this but we are also mindful that cruise ships, while they bring in the number- that will be good for me because that will enable me to double tourist numbers, but in terms of spending, they do not spend much in here, I have to say that. They just come in one day and gone most of the time. We don't see much. We want to be able to come up with something that will bring them here, stay here for three or four days and spend the money. That is what we want. Tourism is all about money and we want to be able to bring them here, let them stay here for two to three days and spend money other than coming here just for three to four hours. Mr. Speaker, they have been to Rennell about three or four cruises but they did not leave much in there. They just went and did some bird watching and after that they left; people there were left dry as they did not receive anything. I mean, we got to be realistic; we do not want that kind of tourism- people come here and we get nothing for our sweat. That is why while cruise ships is good for increasing the number and probably help out in bottom up promotion, we still believe and we should be insisting on taking a rule that we should be able to get them here; get them to sleep, spend some money. That gives us the challenge on making sure that we behave properly, we show them that we are nice people and then we should be able to give them the freedom to move around our country, visiting the sites they want to visit cheaper and through reliable transportations. Mr Speaker I do not know whether that answers my colleague's question.

Mr. Oti: Thank you Mr. Speaker and I thank the Minister for his response. Perhaps just as a side comment, cruise ships is one cheap way of promoting the country as you do not really count the costs in terms of how much they are investing but in terms of publicity that they can do for you, they are actually helping you with the money that you do not have. That is promotion, a very expensive exercise and that is why I have asked that question. So it is not really looking at the immediate returns of it because you cannot tell a tourist how and how much to spend. You can only offer the opportunity where he has to spend. So that was why I brought up the day cruises as a means of promoting this country cheaply through these visits, hence a specific strategy to engage and support day cruises, particularly those cruises, not those that come to Honiara but those that come to the rural areas where those that come to Honiara would not even arrive in those places in those numbers, Mr Speaker. And whatever little income that the rural populace get from that one day or one hour visit, makes a lot of difference to the person out there. So I thank the Minister for his comments I hope he will look at this seriously and look at it from that perspective that I tried to explain. Thank you Mr. Speaker

Mr. Zama: Supplementary question to the hardworking Minister. Your policies are very sweet to the ears and they remain to be very good policies but looking through the allocation of this year, you were given a very large allocation of \$2 million to promote tourism. In the 2008 Supplementary Appropriation, you have no allocation.

With all these good intentions and tourism being one of the key industries that Solomon Islands needs to promote now, not in the next five to ten years, you would have no allocation, only a very small allocation. And it shows the lack of commitment of your government to put more money into this industry and it is an industry waiting to be exploited. You do not need to work hard on it at all—peoples' cultures and for people apart from those that are coming in with bikinis this industry needs to be fully exploited. But when you do not have money how do you think you will be able to implement your good policies?

Hon. Gukuna: Mr. Speaker, I like to thank the honorable Member for the question. In some ways, may be what he is saying is correct but I am very satisfied with what I have been given. Also the things that we will need some time to put into action. Let me give the example of the Anuha project; I came in and I was hoping that it would be completed very easily. Unfortunately that is not the case. The same as the Tourism School. I thought it was going to be an easy one. Unfortunately it is going to involve some legislative activities and some other things that require time. But whilst there are some truths in the

comment made by the honorable MP colleague of the other side of the House, I would like to say that the commitment by the government in terms of supporting our activities towards achieving or completing this project, I am satisfied with them.

I am also happy with the funding and I have been assured that I will get more money in the next Budget. So maybe the MP is correct but I can assure him that I will get some more money next year. What we need now is to establish the infrastructure and the funding that we are getting right now is sufficient and is enough to do the job. But I will get very rowdy in the next budget, I can assure my colleague. Thank you.

Mr. Sogavare: Mr Speaker, I rise to thank the Minister for answering the questions and a word of commendation. We have heard from the staff of this Ministry saying that at last they have a Minister who is working. That is a word of commendation to this Minister and keep up the good work

Questions No. 92 and 93 deferred.

Mr. Sogavare: Mr. Speaker I seek leave of the House that notwithstanding Standing Order 21(3), I am permitted to move up to four questions, maybe on Wednesday or if the Member for West Makira comes and asks these two questions again, if it is acceptable to Parliament that I ask four questions tomorrow and also on Wednesday during question time, Mr Speaker.

Sir, I seek this leave because the only questions that are left to be asked are those standing in my name and Parliament will adjourn Sine Die some time this week.

Leave Granted to allow the Hon Leader of Opposition to ask up to four questions

BILLS

Bills – First Reading

The Civil Aviation Bill 2008

Mr Speaker: Adjournment sine die however does not have its effect. All it does is to adjourn the House to any specified date in the future. It is not prorogation or dissolution of the House. As such unfinished business of a meeting that has been adjourned sine die does not lapse but remains alive at a stage it was at when the meeting adjourns sine die until it is disposed of in the next meeting.

On the basis of the explanation I have just given, I am satisfied that the Civil Aviation Bill 2008 having been read the first time would be disposed of in the next meeting, notwithstanding the adjournment sine die that will occur sometime this week.

I trust that Members and the public will welcome this, given that the Bills and Legislation Committee will then have ample time to consider this Bill thoroughly and hear from stakeholders while Parliament is in recess. Further to that, the Committee will be dealing with a bill that has already been read the first time instead of a draft that is subject to change in the next two months. That said, Honorable Members we will now proceed to our next item of business.

MOTIONS

Sine Die Motion

Hon. SIKUA: Mr Speaker, I rise to move that at the adjournment of Parliament on Wednesday 3rd September, the present meeting shall be concluded and Parliament shall then stand adjourned sine die.

Mr. Speaker; I have much to cover and I will do so briefly. On specific matters dealt with by other Ministries and arms of government, my Ministers will provide more details. First, it is to the credit of the majority of Members of Parliament that there is stability in government. Likewise, it is to the credit of community leaders that there is stability and calm in our communities.

Mr. Speaker, it is to the credit of our donors and development partners as well as to the business community that the economy is beginning to grow again. It is to the credit of our police and justice system, ably assisted by RAMSI, that people feel safe again in their homes, towns and villages. It is to the credit of our donor partners that the rebuilding of our transport and communication infrastructure is beginning to be seen.

Mr. Speaker, the CNURA Government wants to thank all these and our long suffering people for their patience and for their contribution to the good things that are beginning to happen again. There is now a feeling of calm and growing confidence that pervades the nation in a way that has not been possible in the past 20 years.

Mr. Speaker, in 1989, we began suffering from 'cubic disease', the effect of big money suddenly available to us as a result of the massive extraction of virgin forests from our islands for export overseas. Despite the millions and millions and millions of dollars worth of logs we sold overseas, within 10 years our country was technically bankrupt. Very few countries and organizations wanted to help us.

The Opposition Leader, Mr. Speaker, will recall how we got into that problem. He was Permanent Secretary Finance in 1995 and Minister of Finance shortly afterwards.

Mr. Speaker, how did we get to that pitiful state? Briefly I think the leadership of the times saw a lot of money moving around from the export of logs. Discipline broke down in governance. No one wanted to listen to good advice. Money from logs was like manna from heaven except that we found the manna was a disguise for mammon.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to have at my side as one of my Ministers, a Prime Minister at the time, the Hon. Member for Ranongga and Simbo who tried valiantly to stop the madness and ensure government did the right thing. He was unsuccessful because Judas and Machiavelli were working for the other side.

Our esteemed Speaker presiding over our meeting was, of course our first Prime Minister and he must have watched with horror as standards of governance and leadership declined since his time. He did not only watch. Over the years he made his views forcefully known via the media and we thank him for continually reminding leaders of important aspects of government, trust and leadership.

Mr. Speaker, most political leaders did not want to fix the determined price for the export of logs to give rightful benefits to our landowners and government. They left it to loggers to determine how much export duty they should pay. This year, we begin a new and more serious phase in the life of our country because CNURA is serious about doing the right thing and doing things right for our people and our country.

Mr. Speaker, so it is against the backdrop of this new-found confidence in each other that I wish to highlight some important matters as we look forward to the months and years ahead.

Mr. Speaker, we started this Parliament Meeting with some uncertainty - old habits of threatening, accusing and trying to unsettle the government, we end now on a high and stable note. It is, of course, the right of any Member to raise issues of confidence and usually such a motion enables MPs to publicly discuss issues of concern to them. It is healthy, Mr. Speaker.

When confidence motions are presented and argued with civility, the debate should present good examples to our people, particularly young aspiring leaders. Uncivil or incivil discussions create heated, unfriendly and threatening environments which do not help in good decision making for our citizens. Mr. Speaker, this is why I referred - in the confidence motion debate - to the social fabric as being like the traditional mat that our women weave. We, the MPs represent the many strands of our communities - the social fabric - and our people expect us to bind together to work together on their behalf.

Mr. Speaker, when we are straightforward but polite and civil to each other, there is mutual respect and understanding, even if we do not necessarily agree. This is what democracy is all about. And incidentally that is what is meant by 'civil society' -people being respectful of each other, even when we disagree or when our agendas clash. So let us keep questioning, asking and answering and challenging each other to do good and better things for our people. This is what Members of Parliament are elected to do, Mr. Speaker. It is our job. We are paid to raise standards, not to lower them. We are paid to inspire people, not to cause them despair.

Mr. Speaker; I believe Parliament has done very well indeed in this sitting. We have approved five bills, three of which are now brand new laws. One – the Correctional Services Amendment Bill improves an old law. Then, of course, there was the 2008 Supplementary Appropriation Bill that authorized supply of more government funds to be used in the services of our people.

Sir, the CNURA Government has an ambitious legislative reform program. We expect to set the record as a government that brings the most bills to Parliament in a short period of time in office. This is not just to set the record, but to quickly attend to neglected aspects of old legislation and introduce very necessary new ones. To this end, I thank my Ministers and officials concerned.

Mr. Speaker, my Ministers were accused by the Opposition of non performance. Yet they have brought five bills to Parliament and Parliament has approved these. I thank them most sincerely.

We already know the importance of these bills and I need not repeat them, suffice to say that they are important policy initiatives in redirecting our destiny as a nation.

At this juncture Mr. Speaker; let me briefly mention a few other important things. At this meeting we have agreed to a calendar for Parliament business, which is very important for purposes of advance planning.

Mr. Speaker, during this Meeting we took the right approach in deciding to commission the Parliamentary Foreign Relations Committee to conduct a review of RAMSI. While we hope this will be ready in time for the November Meeting, we could still be a little late.

Mr. Speaker, CNURA is a team, and we work well together as you and many people have noticed. Recently I had to be away from Parliament for more than a week and the Deputy Prime Minister, our Ministers and backbenchers did not blink at all. They knew what to do, how to do things and they got business done. How much more confident can a Prime Minister be when his team works so well as that? In fact, Mr. Speaker, all MPs remained committed to our core responsibility as legislators through passage of bills.

At this Meeting we also passed a very good private member's motion to improve on RCDF management and accountability.

Mr Speaker, I am sure this motion will give opportunity for MPs to have their say on the conduct of this parliament meeting and even to speak on issues which require further clarification through Government Policy.

I will respond to some of the issues raised in Parliament: Mr. Speaker, the issue of credible leadership has also been raised in Parliament. I do not want to defend myself but only wish to say that there are avenues for redress if leaders abuse their trust and responsibility. No one is above the law.

CNURA was formed as a result of much prayer by the initiators and many others who want to see a nation rebuilt by peace loving people. We have a plan and vision to redirect this nation, though for reasons beyond our control we know we cannot achieve all of them within the time span available. As a government we have good plans and are working hard at them.

Mr. Speaker, Solomon Islands has for some time been at the crossroads and some people even believe we had traveled down the path of a failed state. I think they have spoken too early. We have taken the right path and we have many friends and supporters in the international community helping us.

Mr. Speaker, still, our country is faced with many challenges that are well known: Among these are:

- the need to reform our constitutional so we can have some ownership of the constitutional system and make it work for us at all levels of government.
- we need to upgrade the machinery of government and introduce new best practices so that we can look after each other better than before and not let bad habits re-appear to haunt our people.
- we need to restore and improve the systems that can sustain policing, law and order that were so easily corrupted and broken down during the social tensions and the coup of June 2000.
- we need to repair the massive damage to the national economy that followed the breakdown of law and order. Our economy is now very much smaller than it was in 1998 and we need to restore and ensure sustainable economic growth.
- we cannot continue to be so dependent on overseas aid. We need to be able to finance our own future.

- we need to ensure full employment and livelihood opportunities for our growing number of young people.
- we need to protect our young people and ourselves from diseases such as malaria, TB and HIV/AIDS.
- we need to adjust our budgets to the influences of the global economy that result from extraordinarily high fuel prices impacting on all our imports and our own internal prices, and
- we need to restore strength to the Solomon dollar which has been badly eroded over the years due to the problems we have had.

Mr. Speaker, on the other hand the opportunities are easy to see:

- We have wonderful communities of people living in some of the most beautiful island communities in the world. People who are by and large happy and generous and law abiding.
- Our country is situated very close to some of the powerhouse economies of the region, Australia, New Zealand and the Asian tigers.
- Our people are owners of natural resources. We are not resource-poor even though we have few virgin forests left.
- We have one mine already re-starting, others about to start and prospecting still being carried out for which we are very hopeful.
- We have very good friends and neighbours who are very helpful and generous.
- We are part of several networks of mutual interest groups; the Melanesian Spearhead Group, the Community of Regional Organizations in the Pacific and the United Nations and its many agencies, and
- we have a healthy spiritual life for which we thank our Church leaders.

Mr. Speaker, the CNURA Government has the right combination of policies to advance this nation in its post conflict reconstruction phase in terms of social, economic and political aspects to nation building. Social cohesiveness, Social stability, Peace and Unity are our points of reference in a dynamic and diverse nation. To this end peace and reconciliation remains our number one priority.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot force peace and reconciliation on people but government can create the conducive environment and play the facilitator's role. The key players will be community leaders. One important step among others in this direction is the passage of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission bill.

Mr. Speaker, our economic and investment environment has been enhanced with the restoration of trust and confidence in the Government, with improvement of law and order, with reforms in the economic sector and encouragement for locals to participate in economic activities – with the passage of the Secured Transaction bill. Foreign investors who have the potential and vision to help turn around our economy in the energy and agriculture sectors are now taking steps to invest in the country.

Mr. Speaker, tourism is a very broad sector industry yet to be fully tapped into. Coordinated effort has been pursued between relevant Government and private sector stakeholders – for instance the re-opening of the Anuha resort, the upgrade of Munda airport to international status and simple things like the repair and improvement of airport terminals.

Mr. Speaker I am sure you will agree we are on the right track to ensuring stability in politics and good governance, with our plans to introduce ways and means to promote integrity in Political Parties and among Members of Parliament.

To achieve our aspirations we have put in place three (3) important framework documents since taking up office – the CNURA Policy Statement; the CNURA Policy Implementation Framework and Government's Medium Term Development Strategy (MTDS).

Mr. Speaker, since CNURA came into power in late December 2007, we have been working around the clock. In the first quarter of this year we worked on the budget and managed to get it passed in Parliament in April. Mr. Speaker, from April 2008 to August 2008 is only four (4) months in which we have actually started working to deliver outcomes after all the planning and preparatory work were completed in the first quarter.

Some people asked why we had to put a supplementary appropriation bill to Parliament so soon after April? The answer was that the fast-tracked bill in April was really a mini-budget to get the government started. Mobilizing the

government machinery takes time. National government is not easily paddled and re-directed like a small canoe.

Mr. Speaker, the MV Solomon Islands Government is like a big ship and the new captain and crews have to make sure it has enough fuel (money), good engine (machinery of government) to reach the destinations that the passengers (people) want to reach. If the captain and crew and those who influence them are crooked or crazy – we could end up on the reef again! No Sir, MV Solomon Islands must never end up on the reef again!

Mr. Speaker, it is not very, very hard to find out what our people want, what their visions are, and how they want to get there. So when we set out, CNURA knew what needed to be done for people when, by whom and where. But we also needed a new navigation plan: something for all sectors of government and community to steer by because we need a different kind of voyage from the one we have been trying to travel in the past 30 years. So in June 2008, we launched our Medium Term Development Strategy - MTDS - which followed the previous National Economic Reform and Reconstruction Plan which expired in 2006.

Mr. Speaker, one other important aspect of planning was to ensure RAMSI policies and operational plans were harmonized with government policies and strategies. Because of our much improved partnership relationship, by July we had agreed to work on a partnership framework with RAMSI, which should be concluded by the end of this year. This framework, Mr. Speaker, will provide the new direction and basis for the partnership between SIG and RAMSI. I also understand that Australia's future funding support for RAMSI will be based on this framework.

Mr. Speaker, previous to this, RAMSI as you know, had its own priorities, and SIG had its own. These will now be harmonized when the Partnership Framework is refined and concluded. The 'helpem fren' partnership is coming to fruition.

Mr. Speaker: I want to give Parliament some foreshadowing of what is ahead of us as we lead the way in reconstructing governance, our public institutions and our economy.

Mr. Speaker, by the end of the year members of the public will be able to see more of this Parliament in action working out ways to eliminate political instability and corruption that have plagued our systems for many years. I am fairly certain that our government over the years has lost thousands of millions of dollars because successive elected governments have not tried to stop corruption.

As many Hon. Members will know, we have started work to draft a Political Parties integrity bill. How can the country be stable and moving

forward when MPs jump around like grasshoppers as we have seen over the years? Mr. Speaker, how can we expect people to be confident and risk their capital and collateral to grow the economy if their elected leaders are unpredictable? Stability of the country begins with stability in parliament and government.

There are ways to ensure this, and we are working very hard to bring draft plans forward that will benefit the nation, not just for now, but for the long term. CNURA does not want to go down in history as just another government that neglected crime against the people and owners of the government.

Mr. Speaker; we are also working on a National Audit Bill to make the office of the Auditor General independent of the Ministry of Finance and responsible direct to Parliament. Currently, it is easy to cripple the Auditor General's department: just give them orders or just cut their budget down so they cannot do the work needed. This is what happened over the years. This will not happen again when Parliament approves the bill we are working on.

Mr. Speaker, we are also starting work on a bill to set up the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC). The title speaks of the intention of CNURA and all right thinking people in the country. It will be independent. It will have powers. This will root out the corruption that is like a disease in our systems – both private and public.

Mr. Speaker, when government Ministries, agencies and even MPs make purchases without using a public tendering process, there is almost certainly corruption involved. It is easy to say to the maker of water tanks "I will use these project or RCDF moneys to buy only from you. You invoice me your price and supply me say 1000 water tanks but afterwards you pay me \$100 cash for every tank I buy". Corruption! That is only an example!

Mr. Speaker; CNURA aims to ensure Solomon Islands regains the respect it once had in the eyes of the region and the world. We plan to tighten the procedures, rules, regulations and laws to make it very difficult for the corrupt and crooked.

We want our children and their children to be proud of our stewardship in these times. We want to reclaim a place of honour for our country in the international community. Mr. Speaker, and we want to do these things most especially because they will make government more relevant to the majority of our citizens, because they can make people be proud to be co-owners of all the instruments and machinery of government.

For too long we have seen government as an external: 'samting blong olketa!' We want all people to think of government as belonging to me, to us all together. In the next few weeks you will see signs of our seriousness in dealing with corruption.

Mr. Speaker, on Friday last weel we enjoyed the debate on the RCDF brought to us by the distinguished member for Temotu Nende. We supported the motion as we are already working on ways and means to handle funding for rural areas and provinces. The current arrangements whereby MPs are involved in the disbursement of funds within provinces is blurring the traditional separation of powers principle. Our neighbors, our donors and our community leaders are very conscious of this. So too are we.

Mr. Speaker, there has been some excellent analysis of governance issues including financing by staff of the Constitutional Reform Unit and some of their findings must be cause for concern. For example, if you add together the government grants given to provinces each year with the province's own revenue income, the total does not reach the amount being spent in provinces by Members of Parliament using RCDF and other funds available to us.

At this juncture, Mr Speaker, I wish to thank the successive Governments of Taiwan, as well as their People for their generous support and assistance through the provision of the RCDF. The onus is on us to properly utilize these funds for the benefit and development of our constituencies.

You see the problem surely: that MPs seem to form another layer of government in our system. Or maybe replace the Area Councils. Maybe this was done deliberately by the Member for West Makira when in 1995 as Minister for Provincial Government he discontinued the Area Councils.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to pay tribute to our hard working Provincial Premiers who – every now and then – also face confidence motions. Please bear with us as we find ways to strengthen the provincial governments before we embark on constitutional reform. It is timely to remember that Provincial Governments are referred to in our constitution as just that - “Governments”, not agencies of central government as some people believe.

Mr. Speaker, we in the national government need to respect the local government of our regions, our provinces. We need to ensure they are well served and resourced. They have their level of responsibilities to attend to.

National government has let them down once already: after 1981 when nearly all responsibilities for service of delivery were transferred to Provincial government without any prior capacity building. Not long after these were returned to central government control.

Mr. Speaker, under constitutional reforms and with more devolution of powers, we must expect to transfer more responsibilities to Provincial governments so people can see and feel government ‘up close’. We must help our Provincial Leaders successfully achieve that transition.

Mr. Speaker, since the provincial governments are ‘governments’, it follows that provincial members are also legislators and they should be attending

to laws that improve the way their people look after each other. One example is the need for provincial governments to empower communities by enacting by-laws that serve Marine Protected Areas.

All MPs are legislators. The Cabinet is the executive arm of government. The justice system is the third arm of democratic government. All should be separate; thus the separation of powers principle of democracy. But if all legislators are also functioning as executives, something is amiss.

Mr. Speaker, legislators have much to do. The executive has much to do. We have to:

- Reorganize the machinery of government
- Reorganize and strengthen provincial government systems
- Inject funds into rural areas via the multi-million rural development project
- Reconstruct the national transport infrastructure
- Reconstruct and strengthen our law and order systems
- Reform our constitution
- Strengthen parliamentary processes

There is much to do and all this is going to need close and serious attention of elected leaders at provincial and national levels.

Mr. Speaker, at this juncture, I wish to reflect on our relations with our neighbours and development partners. As I have said on a number of occasions, Mr. Speaker, no man is an island. Some of the challenges or issues we face cannot be addressed by individual states alone. Hence we need to maintain and strengthen our relations with our friends in the region and at the international level for that matter. Moreover our foreign policies are basically an extension of our domestic policies. We also need the support of our friends to address and achieve some of the tasks and goals we set ourselves.

Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of attending the recent 39th Pacific Islands Forum Leaders. It was an opportunity to join other regional leaders or heads of government in deliberating on global and regional issues that do have an impact at the national level, such as increasing food and fuel prices and climate change. I also took the opportunity to brief leaders on the positive relations and developments (eg. Foreign Relations Committee Review of RAMSI as mandated by Parliament) that have taken place between the Government and RAMSI, since the beginning of this year. Forum leaders, Mr. Speaker noted and welcomed the positive relations and progress my Government and RAMSI has made so far.

Mr. Speaker, our development partners have also welcomed the efforts the Government has made so far in taking this country forward. They are now

demonstrating their confidence in our efforts and in the manner in which my Government is leading. In this regard, the United Nations early this year, launched its expanded UN presence in SI, an arrangement that will help the UN agencies to better and efficiently coordinate their activities in the country. The World Bank is also in the process of establishing an Office here in Honiara, and I hope that this Office marks a new beginning in our interactions with the Bank. The European Union, our biggest multilateral donor partner, continues to make huge contributions towards our infrastructure sector.

At the bilateral level, Mr. Speaker, Taiwan continues to deliver on its annual funding commitments including the RCDF. I am grateful for the continuing funding support from ROC, and as I have said earlier, the onus is on us MPS to ensure that the funds are utilized for the maximum benefit of our people.

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, Solomon Islands inclusion in the New Zealand Government formal recognized seasonal employment scheme is a welcome development, and in this regard I wish to sincerely thank the Government of New Zealand for including Solomon Islands in the scheme. It means we can send more workers to New Zealand, thus increasing remittances to the country or our returning workers can use their earnings to start small businesses. The Government will be liaising closely with the appropriate New Zealand Government authorities to put in place the necessary mechanisms to ensure a smooth implementation of the scheme for our workers.

Mr. Speaker, the Australian Pacific Seasonal Workers Pilot Scheme has also been announced. Although Solomon Islands is not included in the Australian Pilot Scheme, I am confident that we will be included at a later stage, hopefully when the scheme is reviewed after 12 to 18 months.

Mr. Speaker, the Government will continue to explore similar employment opportunities for our people with other countries such as Taiwan and Canada. Our participation in such seasonal employment schemes is important, Mr. Speaker, as it helps us to address the issue of unemployment, one of the major issues facing us today. We need to find and create employment opportunities for our people, especially for our youth.

Finally, Mr. Speaker; before I resume my seat I would like to thank your office and staff for managing parliament business in the usual efficient manner during this sitting. The same is extended to our Members of Parliament for their attendance to Parliament business. Ministers, PS and staff - thank you for assisting Parliament during this Sitting and for delivering services to our people.

I also extend sincere appreciation to our donor friends for their role in building this nation partnering with the Government. To all our good people thank you too for your sweat in building this country.

To the business houses and other groups in our society, including the churches thank you too for the role you continue to play in our nation building. I pray that God will bless and support all our plans to advance and prosper this nation. We pray for peace, for progress and for prosperity for all our peoples wherever they live. We pray that we remain one united Solomon Islands.

With these remarks Mr Speaker, I beg to move.

Sitting suspended for lunch break

(Parliament resumes)

(Debate on the Sine Motion commences)

Mr Speaker: Honorable Members the floor is open for debate on the Sine Die motion moved by the Prime Minister this morning.

Mr SOGAVARE: Thank you, Mr Speaker, in fact, I am overwhelmed by the fact that the room is really filled up now. Mr Speaker, it is very good to talk to an empty room, but we have also other listeners outside of the Parliament, which are the real objective of statements and concerns we raise on the floor of this Parliament, and so I am not at all deterred by the empty room.

Mr Speaker, I want to contribute to the motion of Sine Die moved by the Prime Minister that at the adjournment of Parliament on Wednesday this week, Parliament will stand adjourned sine die. Mr Speaker, I want to speak in support of that motion so that we can quickly finish the meeting.

Sir, I will try to be brief and confine myself on issues raised by the Honorable Prime Minister, and of course also raise some observations on the conduct of this Meeting and the businesses that come before Parliament for which decisions have been made by Members of Parliament, and in doing so I join the Prime Minister in expressing words of appreciation and thank you to the people that the Prime Minister made words of appreciation to them. I want to acknowledge their contributions that despite of whatever we do in this Parliament, whatever we say, whatever policies we come with up, they remain constant and I think that factor, some elements inside the economy remain constant on what they do despite of the ups and down on politics whatever we do in this House, whatever decision makers decide on, they still keep the economy going, and so I join the Prime Minister in acknowledging their contribution and to continue with that contribution. We encourage them to continue to do that.

Sir, as I said I will confine myself with the issues that are raised in the motion and also to raise some observations on how we conduct ourselves at this meeting. The Prime Minister raised the Government's determination to sort out the forestry issue, Mr Speaker, and I think that is an ongoing problem that this country has. Forestry being a very important resource in the country, and I think governments after governments have played double standards in the way they address the forestry sector. And it does not make the work of Parliament any easier when we have loggers in Parliament, Mr Speaker. That is the real difficulty when it comes to addressing the issue and questions surrounding how to reform the logging sector. I think we should start by disciplining ourselves in this Parliament so that we stick to the policy; we are genuine about what we say as a collective group.

Sir, this side of the House has no problem with protecting the remaining stock of loggable resources that we have in the forests. No problem whatsoever. We only raise concern when it affects the revenue that we need to collect to finance government policies. If you look at the figures put out by the CBSI it accounts for a very, very, large portion of the country's GDP. So whatever we do in the Forestry Sector, unless we have alternatives ready in place to replace whatever we do in the Forestry Sector, we really need to address that sector very carefully in the interest of revenue to finance government services and also in the interest of getting the country to be able to cope and trade with other countries. Because a country just like anyone earns, and the way a country earns is not through revenue collected locally. That is basically distribution of money. The country really earns when it earns foreign reserves, foreign currency. It exports it earns. That is when the country really earns. Just a word of caution when we address this sector, we really need to be careful how we handle it. That is the only concern this side of the House has when it comes to handling this sector. And I am pleased to see, and I need to acknowledge that the Ministry has come up with some programs. I think we need to acknowledge that on the floor of this Parliament. I think what is left now is for the Ministry responsible for that sector, that resource must stick to the plans and programs they put to us. It has distributed the report on that to every Member of Parliament and so we have no quarrel over that. But just that we will watch very closely the government implementing the things that it says it will do in that particular sector.

Sir, the Prime Minister also raised some statements on vote of no confidence and the concern about stability. This side of the House also share that concern when it comes to, I guess, irresponsible moving of vote of no confidence in Parliament. The way we see it depends on which side of the House we are in raising concerns like that. We have said enough on this particular issue when the vote of no confidence was taken, Mr Speaker, that the Grand Coalition for

Change Government (GCCG) faced a motion of no confidence in almost every sitting or a notice of one on every sitting. I think I would rather listen to people outside of this Parliament to advise this Parliament on that if they tell us to stop moving votes of no confidence against each other. I think we are less qualified, all of us in this House, Mr Speaker, to advise one another on that particular issue because we really have to show some seriousness and genuineness, Mr Speaker, on the particular issue. I am saying this because a lot was raised about that during the vote of no confidence. I am disappointed that all the issues, and very important issues they are, that are raised on that when that motion was moved, we have not received adequate response and answers to them. Those are serious issues, especially when it comes to; in fact I only raised and commented on the peace process aspect of the issues that was raised by the honorable mover. Not all issues that were raised were given our due attention in terms of responding to them on how the government is handling the situation. Our position on that particular business that came before the House is a wake-up call, and it is good that the government consolidates itself with the numbers that it needs, to continue run the affairs of this country. We can only stay on this side and lend our support and watch the genuineness and seriousness of Members of Parliament, especially government ministers and backbenchers to get the government's program moving.

Sir, the Prime Minister also talked about the ambitious legislative program that the government has in place, and we are assured that more bills will be coming to this Parliament; if what we are seeing in these nearly five weeks of meeting is a demonstration of that, and I think it is a long, long shot that we will see many more bills coming into this Parliament. I guess the ball really is with the Ministries and Ministers. Portfolio subjects have been assigned to Ministers and they are supposed to be working with their Permanent Secretaries to look at government programs where legislative change is needed, bring them to Cabinet and then on to the floor of the Parliament. We are looking forward to that commitment by the government that we will be seeing more bills coming into this House for us to discuss and make decisions on in changing the laws.

Credible leadership is also another point the Prime Minister talked on. This side of the House has no problem supporting any moves to make leaders credible. It is something that all of us support. The famous phrase that "no one is above the law", and when the law catches up on us is something that we need to be genuine about. If the law catches us, let the law take its own course, and there is no need to run around trying to mitigate the cases or the sentences. I am sick and tired of hearing that phrase on this floor of Parliament - "no one is above the law". If no one is above the law, let it be. But if the issue is that we have a duty to protect Members of Parliament then let us do it. I have made

some suggestions to the government and probably the letter has found its way to the Prime Minister already. If we have an obligation to do that, let us do it because not all cases taken against Members of Parliament are genuine cases. They could be tainted by politics. I think this House has the duty to protect elected Members of people. It is not right when people sweat it out electing these people into Parliament, only for the law to pull the rags under their legs, and they collapsed depriving the people. I do not intend to go through the cases because I might be in contempt of court. I respect the other arm of the government but only to express that if we are concern about credible leadership, the adherence to law and enforcement of law, then it must apply in equal terms to all of us.

But as I have said if we need to move to protect Members of this House, let us move forward and do it. We have the power in our hands and so let us protect Members of this honorable House because we are not ourselves. We do not own ourselves but we belong to the people who elected us. If the other arm of the government is depriving people of their leader for reasons, may be suspicious then we have a duty to do that if we have to. But if no one is above the law as it has to take its own course then let it be, and apply it equally.

Sir, I am pleased to hear the Prime Minister coming around on aid dependency. I am glad to hear that statement. The issue here that the Opposition has been talking about when we raised the concern about aid is not that we hate or we do not want the aid donors. That is not the point, and I think we have been misrepresented to the world and to people of Solomon Islands that we hate aid donors. We are not Mr. Speaker.

The issue, as rightly raised by the Prime Minister this morning when he moved this motion is that aid dependency is what we do not want. Sometimes we are carried away thinking that aid is coming and so it can drive us to be careless about the little resources that we have too. We put them everywhere we want because aid will come and will make up for our carelessness. I think that and other concerns are what we have, and I am pleased to hear the Prime Minister endorsing the kind of thinking that this side of the House has, and to put any misunderstanding out.

The Prime Minister also talked about corruption and said that the government will come up with some kind of mechanisms to address corruption. This side of the House does not have one problem whatsoever when it comes to us coming up with mechanisms to address corruption. It is a sickness that has been around for years, and for ages, and unfortunately may be sometimes wrongly or rightly, I do not know, but we attribute corruption to leadership or elected leaders when this issue is very broad in its application.

Our concern is that we must be genuine about that concern. I do not need to remind the Prime Minister nor do I need to call names on the floor of this Parliament to get us or the Prime Minister to wake up out of his negligence. Only to say, and I do not need to go on, that it must start within the government camp. May be I will leave it there, and I do not need to go any further on that because if I have to go through I have a long list here that I can come up with. May be the appropriate thing to do is to write personally to the Prime Minister and to tell him to please address this and this so that we can be assured that the government or especially the leader of the government is serious about addressing corruption. If we are serious about addressing corruption, start in Jerusalem before you move to Judea and the uttermost parts of the earth. I think that is a biblical principle of addressing, not necessarily corruption but I think how we should work in addressing things. Otherwise, Mr. Speaker, we will end up being hypocrites; all of us, in this House.

This side of the House welcomes the National Audit Bill and we are looking forward to that Bill to come to Parliament so that we can improve the work of the Auditor General's Office. We also welcome the whole idea of moving, I do not know what the plans of the government are, but to move the Good Governance Institutions to come under the umbrella of National Parliament. I think that is where they should really be. Institutions such as the Ombudsman's Office, the Leadership Code Commission, the Auditor General's Office - those institutions really should be part of Parliament, of course independent but really should be under the umbrella of the National Parliament, and we welcome any move towards that. The indication this morning is a welcome indication and we will support that bill if it ever comes to Parliament.

I think the program to strengthen the provincial governments is probably overdue, and the Minister responsible for Provincial Government take note that this side of the House fully supports any move to do that now, especially in anticipation of the new structure that we are trying to adopt for this country under the state government system based on federalism. We think it has been left too late now.

With the work that is going on now by aid donors to look at institutional strengthening, I think it should be more than that. It should not only be institutional strengthening but also look at infrastructure building. I do not see any reason why we should not move now to build their parliaments - the parliaments of the eight provinces to show that we are moving toward state government. On this state government, I feel sorry for some provinces because they meet in bad houses or huts. May be let us look at that. And we welcome any move to strengthen the provincial government system both in terms of institutional strengthening and also physical infrastructures. Any budget

allocation next year that will do that, this side of the House does not have any problem to support it.

Relationship with neighbors, this side of the House does not have any problem with that. I think it has been taken overboard a little bit. Sometimes when that issue is discussed and we are seen as people hating some countries, and so we need to make it very clear. I think we are leaders and leadership position is that we should draw a line between people of that country and the policies they advance. There is a big difference between that. We address those without touching, tainting or generalizing the concerns that we raise, and it makes it as if some groups in this country hate other ethnic groups or some countries in the Pacific. I do not need to go through these issues again because I think we have canvassed it, we have debated it, we have explained it and I would like to leave it at that. I would advise anyone else who wants to raise these issues that unless we want to make it a formal issue of debate on this floor of Parliament, we welcome it. You put in a motion and let us debate the issue of our relationship. But to make statements implying that some of us hate some other countries is not right. It is an over-generalization of a position that is taken genuinely as a leader.

Sir, we welcome the extended presence of the United Nations Agencies here in Solomon Islands. In fact work on that has started already with the establishing of their offices in here. That only demonstrates we are part of the world community of nations and it is just appropriate that agencies of the United Nations are here with us so that we can, I guess, quickly discuss the issues that we have with them without going to the United States to do that at the United Nations Headquarters. So we welcome that.

Sir, the working scheme in Australia – I do not know how to say this but I see the decision by the Australian Government not to include Solomon Islands is a slap on our genuine efforts (may be in the view and opinion of the CNURA Government and its leadership) to restore what we see as a deteriorating state of relationship that we have. If the exclusion of Solomon Islands was over the issue of a strained relationship, then all common sense suggest that with the effort by our Prime Minister to go to Australia and mend that relationship, at least the best that Australia should do is to include Solomon Islands now. They might say that they are giving a lot of aids to Solomon Islands and so you should be content with that. Well, we have a view on that, we always expressed that view on the floor of this Parliament. It is not something that we say ourselves, but Australian Aid Policy is very clear on how it disbursed its aid to this country. I do not need to go through that because I have spent a good time telling this floor of Parliament about the Australian Government aid policy because not all the

money that they gave as aid to Solomon Islands is spent here. Most of it is spent back in Australia.

When it comes to the workers scheme, about 95 percent of that is remitted back to Solomon Islands, and so it helps us more. And for Australia to exclude us is something that this Parliament needs to express its disappointment. We say that acknowledging the effort made by the Prime Minister of this country to mend our relationship with Australia. And if they still cannot do it then they need to come out very clear on why. The reasons given are still not acceptable. They said it is trial run first with those people going over. That is not right. Trial run has already been going on. There are people from other regions working there under the working schemes; they participated in it. And so I do not know what else. Maybe they want to look at how particular ethnic groups perform or the issue is how that scheme works? If it is how the scheme is working then they have seen enough of it to learn any lessons.

Sir, and Solomon Islanders are not over-stayers, and we must praise our people on that. You would find this. Solomon Islanders are only in overseas countries on specific duties. They go there to work and they come back. But other people from our neighboring countries are good at overstaying there. The Asian people, when they go to Australia they overstayed, not Solomon Islanders. We have so far behaved ourselves. Reports coming back from our people who went to New Zealand has it that they behaved themselves and are hard working people. Their report is very, very good. I think there is enough lessons for us to learn on that, and I am disappointed that Solomon Islands is not included this time round. I would hope that the government must continue to impress upon the Australian Government on this. But in the long run, as I have said and the point raised by the former Prime Minister of Australia, is that in reality, what you should do in Solomon Islands is to create employment in Solomon Islands. I think that is the long term challenge for all of us leaders, and we need to put our heads together to accomplish that, Mr Speaker.

I want to make some observations on this Parliament Meeting and then I will finish, Mr Speaker, because people do not like the Leader of Opposition talking too long because whenever the Leader of Opposition talks too long people start to be concerned.

First, Mr Speaker, I want to say that this is one of the poorly attended meetings. In every meeting so far I have been sitting here and have never missed any meeting since Parliament started, and I have been observing. We only barely crossed the quorum. The quorum is 24 and we made it a point on this side of the House to be a responsible group, not to call quorum every time that we have no quorum and right now, Mr Speaker, this is the business of government that we are debating, and more so it is not an ordinary government business but it is the

business of the Prime Minister. It is the Prime Minister of Solomon Islands that moved this motion, Mr Speaker, and he raised very important issues on the floor of this Parliament and we expect government Ministers and Backbenchers to sit down here.

On this side of the House there are only seven of us, as one has been put in prison, Mr Speaker. We expect Ministers and Backbenchers to fill the seats allocated to them so that they listen to this side of the House or to anyone debating and respond to the concerns and issues raised by the Prime Minister of this country. At least, that is your respect to the Prime Minister and what we are seeing now is not right, Mr Speaker. When we have empty seats in this Parliament, Mr Speaker, it is disrespect to the Prime Minister of this country and we should pull up our socks. That is one observation, Mr Speaker, that this Parliament is poorly attended by Members of Parliament.

We are paid, Mr Speaker, to come and attend meetings to discuss issues, raise concerns, and respond to issues raised by this side of the House. I am disappointed and I have been disappointed more in the sense that Ministers and Backbenchers show lack of respect to the Prime Minister of this country when his motion is the one currently being debated on the floor of Parliament.

One thing I also observed, Mr Speaker, is that the Prime Minister has said that a lot of businesses have been brought before the House - I want to differ to that. There is lack of government business and government is totally unprepared. Now, maybe in saying that the Prime Minister is not the only man as he depends on his Ministers to bring in businesses on the floor of Parliament, take business to Cabinet, so that they are approved to come before Parliament to be deliberated on. This is an opportunity, in fact, all Parliament Meetings is an opportunity for government Ministers to tell the nation what they have achieved so far; what their Ministries are doing and we are actually expecting them. In fact, only three Ministers make statements about what their Ministries are doing, and I want to applaud them for that; for their Permanent Secretaries and for themselves in taking the initiative to come before the people of this country and tell them what their Ministries are doing, Mr Speaker.

It is an opportunity as well for bills, a time for passing of bills, Mr Speaker, and we have made some comments on that as we are expecting that maybe in the remaining sitting days of Parliament we would be seeing more bills coming before this House. But if this is a demonstration of what will happen in the next sittings of Parliament then it does not speak well of the government's performance, Mr Speaker.

In fact, both the GCCG and the CNURA; the directions we are taking on the reforms, on how we want to deliver services really need major reforms and acts of Parliament to advance them. I would expect now for Ministers and their

Permanent Secretaries to sit down and think hard on how we will amend laws and bring them to Parliament to advance government programs.

The same with reports too; in fact, we only debated and discussed two reports, Mr Speaker. There are other reports that Ministers might want to bring on the floor of Parliament and they should use the opportunity when Parliament sits to do that.

The other thing is that we have one very expensive meeting compared with the outputs, if you look at it, Mr Speaker. I just sit down and quickly weep up some figures here but it really needs to be done, and in fact a very good exercise for some accounting students at the College of Higher Education to come and do some studies on the cost of running a sitting of Parliament and the outputs that we achieve, Mr Speaker.

Sitting or meeting allowances, Mr Speaker, is \$9,600 a day, and that is \$200 per day for each Member. I do not know what we call it: sitting allowance or meeting allowance? I do not know what it is called because now Ministers too receive these allowances at the same rate as us ordinary Members of Parliament. I am the Leader of Opposition and may be a little bit remunerated better, but sitting allowance alone is \$9,600 per day, and that if is extended to the entire sitting of Parliament it will cost \$36,000 paid on sitting allowances. Standing Committees, rough guess is \$50,000 that is \$400 per sitting for each Member and if you average that it is about \$1,600 a day. Electricity maybe \$400, \$12,000 if it is extended to the entire sitting, Mr Speaker; water that we use costs may be another \$100 that goes up to about \$3,500; stationeries that Parliament needs to duplicate papers every day- the order paper, the notice paper, the provisional order paper, motions, bills, maybe a reasonable estimate will be \$100 a day, and that goes to about \$303, 500; live broadcast of the sittings is about \$2,500 a day, Mr Speaker, may be more than that, and so it costs about \$80,000.

Members' salary minus the allowances that we used to receive, Mr Speaker, is probably estimated to be about \$9,589 per day. If you try to cost out the elements of the portion of salaries that has to do with this particular meeting of Parliament - it goes up to about \$335,615. Parliament staff maybe is another \$200,000. If you just do some rough calculations on this, it comes to about \$1m, \$1.02m to run this sitting of Parliament.

The businesses that this Parliament deals with, Mr Speaker- about 40 questions, about three reports, about five bills, about three motions, about three government statements, and one resolution, Mr Speaker. That comes to about 55. Now, if you divide that \$1million by 55 you will come to about \$20,000 to deal with one business.

For the government to answer one question on the floor of Parliament costs \$20,000. Now, supposing those 40 questions are not included because it is

Opposition's business, Mr Speaker, then we will come out to about 10 over businesses only, or 13. Now that is even worse, Mr Speaker, because one business is exposed of at a cost of \$100,000. Sir, that is not good enough and I think the message is loud and clear that if we are to call Parliament to come and sit down and discuss, we must be prepared. The Government must be prepared with businesses that it wants Parliament to discuss.

Sir, I listened attentively to what the Prime Minister said that the government is working around the clock to get government programs implemented. As I say, if this is the reflection of working around the clock, it does not speak well of that claim "that we are working around the clock".

What we see instead, Mr Speaker, is lack of commitment. That is the message that is put across here, loud and clear. You do not have to be whatever to appreciate that. Lack of cohesiveness too, on government's position is observed on the floor of Parliament by Ministers and Backbenchers.

Sir, participation on debates, for example, on government sponsored business; we have observed on this side, is very, very poor. There are only 7 of us on this side and if you expect every one of us to stand up and talk- if that is what you want- then give us three hours each to speak, Mr Speaker. But when we talk longer people do not like it. Now, if that is what they want because debate is a two way thing, Mr Speaker. We talk; somebody stands up and tries to kill the points - that is what debate is. Most of the debates on this floor of Parliament have miss-fired. When we fire the bullet to you, instead of you re-firing that same bullet back to us, you fire another one, and so all the issues are still alive and are not answered. That is what we observe as very, very poor on the side of the government.

In fact, poor, if you look at government as a collective body, you come on the floor of Parliament to advance government's position on issues, Mr Speaker. In fact constructive debate – this side of the House sees that if Ministers and Backbenchers come up with constructive debates we will say, oh, yes, these guys demonstrate understanding of what they are talking about as a collective body, Mr Speaker.

Now, I think we need to observe some small protocols when it comes to- like I observed on the debate on the motion by the Member for Temotu Nende on establishing a mechanism for us to see the regulating of RCDF, Mr Speaker, the first person to take the floor of Parliament was the Deputy Prime Minister and rule of protocol demands that when either the Prime Minister or the Deputy stands up and makes a position, Mr Speaker, that is the government's position and every Minister and Backbencher are obliged to debate within the spirit of the Prime Minister's comment and the Deputy Prime Minister's. They are of no difference; the Deputy, if the Prime Minister is away stands up as the Acting

Prime Minister of the country. He made the position very clear. I am giving the benefit of doubt that we do not know what was discussed in Caucus. We do not know. May be that is an independent view of the Deputy Prime Minister but he has nonetheless made a position on the floor of this Parliament, Mr Speaker, and no Ministers or Backbenchers have the right to come and criticize or to disagree with the Deputy Prime Minister on the floor of Parliament. It is not right. But we have heard on the floor of Parliament one of the Ministers standing up and disagreeing with the Deputy Prime Minister on the floor of this Parliament. Where is discipline? That is not right.

We are just putting that across so that we see some seriousness in the way government comes as a collective body to defend government's position on the floor of Parliament on issues presented for Parliament, Mr Speaker.

Now, it follows to the lack of constructive debates on issues too, Mr Speaker. And with due respect, I feel that may be we need to grow up a bit by the way we respond to issues raised by this side of the House. I know it is something that is ongoing and it is very tempting to stand up and blame each other saying: "It is the same with you, why haven't you done it".

Sir, we forget very easily that there is a big difference between the Solomon Islands Government as a legal entity that lives for ever and the ruling government. There is a big difference. Any governments that have the responsibility or custody of the government systems have the duty to take on any outstanding issues probably left undone by other governments before us. It does not speak well of leadership and responsibility for us to stand up on this Parliament that when we run out of argument we blame each other. You are there now; the government is in your hands, Mr Speaker, so do it!

Mr Speaker, the government too has obviously allowed politics to influence its decisions on a number of important policies. Take the Shipping Policy as an example. You must read your government policy statement, read it and that is why the Prime Minister rightly pointed out three documents that were put up by the government. Those are very important documents as far as we are concerned, and as far as any non-government Members of Parliament or any outsiders are concerned. When reading the documents we see them as the thinking of the government produced after series of discussions whereby there is headache and at the end of the day you bind it and say, that is it! That is what we are going to do; we will do that and any changes to that - there are serious procedures as to how we change policies that are black and white on what papers we may write.

The Ministry responsible should bring in a particular paper to Cabinet indicating areas that require change from the original policy document. Once the Cabinet changes policy it should be announced to the public so that everybody

who is not part of Cabinet is aware of the changes. We will know that government has changed a particular policy so that we do not waste our time on the floor of Parliament debating non-issues, Mr Speaker. The Shipping Policy of the government, in the absence of any change in government policy is clear, and they came out very clear on priorities that they will look at ships for outlying constituencies. That is in black and white and clear. We feel what is really urgent is the acquisition of a government vessel to serve the outlying constituencies. That is urgent to be consistent with government policy, Mr Speaker. So is the sudden need to increase the RCDF. We have exhausted debate on that and no matter how much we thought back and forth on that, it you will not remove doubts from the minds of right thinking people.

Sir, we take the Prime Minister's assurance very, very seriously that the government will come up with a shipping policy to rationalize what is now a very confusing state of affair. That is given two times by the Prime Minister and his Deputy. In fact the Deputy firstly did so and when the Prime Minister came over that issue was raised again, and raised again for very – very good reasons that this is a serious issue. Let us be consistent with our policy statements. When we say it, we must do it, Mr Speaker. I guess the statement “whoever says it, does it” is very - very relevant on this issue, Mr Speaker.

Sir, we appreciate what the Prime Minister has said that people are working around the clock to get government programs going. I hope that is said without really knowing what is really happening and reading from statistics that we are also reading, Mr Speaker.

In fact the government is really struggling to explain why it is obvious that the government is under performing on the delivery of the 2008 Budget. It struggled so much because different answers come on the floor of this Parliament. Let us take the rural livelihood for example; \$15million- in this report, some amount on that has already been paid, about \$68,610 has already been paid and paid to whom, we do not know. That leaves us with \$49.9million; I hope it is not my \$68,000 for East Choiseul that has been paid to somebody.

Sir, the reason that you give is that you are prioritizing the 30th Anniversary costs. If you look at the 2008 Supplementary Appropriation Bill, Mr Speaker, \$2million for National Trade Fair, another \$463,467 grants to churches, and I think that is to do with the 30th Anniversary; we need to give out Bibles to everyone or government's assistance to get Bible into the hands of people marking the 30th Anniversary; and the anniversary preparation of \$3.4million.

Sir, that would not say \$3 and \$4, another \$2million and that is about \$7million. The reason why the Rural Livelihood was not paid is because we concentrated on the 30th Anniversary. Now any common sense will tell you that \$7million against \$50million does not make any sense. If you say that you have

prioritized \$7million for this project and that is why you cannot pay the \$50million then it will make sense. But when you say that by prioritizing the \$7million you cannot pay the \$50million simply does not make sense.

Now the reasons are clear and you do not have to blind this side of the House. It is like this Mr Speaker; this has come about because of wrong use of reserves. That is wrong. If you look at the Rural Livelihood where should funding come from? The answer is from the funds of the Solomon Islands Government; from our own sources and the right place for the government to get money to pay the Rural Livelihood is from our reserves. And \$162million is the amount the government has said, under the statistics that they put out, \$162.7million is from our reserves which form part of the revenue that we should use to pay services or start to implement the 2008 Budget.

The reason now, Mr Speaker, is just because of mismanagement. What they did is that they used part of the reserves to pay the RCDF which should have come from funds given by the Republic of China. The money for that should come from the Republic of China, and should be paid quarterly. That is the reason why the Rural Livelihood fund is not paid. It is not because we have prioritized the 30th Anniversary. It does not make any sense, and so it boils down to proper management of the budget.

Sir, we are looking at the statistics, the reports, and this is talking about commitment; working around the clock to deliver government services to implement the 2008 budget. If you add up the last column that talks about 'available', this is talking about government's funded projects - funds available as at 11 August 2008 for Development Budget, do you know what. This figure is alarming. This figure shows a total of \$270million - \$270,401,274 for project funding yet to be expended, suggesting that the government is under performing on the Solomon Islands Government funded projects. It basically contradicts the claims of working around the clock to deliver.

May be now after this Parliament, go and tell your Ministries and the Ministers: "Work around the clock to deliver these things," because it does not speak well of this \$270million. And talking about empty promises, this is what we are talking about. This is what we are talking about, and so it is starting to poke them, and I am pleased that I am telling you.

This is a government that says it is action-oriented and that if they come into power everything will move forward. Where are all the things that are in progress at this time?

Sir, \$270million for projects is not moving, and I am pleased to here the Prime Minister saying, and may be he has said this previously and that was not right - you are referring to now after this Parliament to go and tell your Ministers; tell your Permanent Secretaries and tell those people that are

responsible in implementing those projects to work around the clock to deliver these projects. That is a valid advice and we are not arguing.

Sir, the 2008 Supplementary Appropriation Bill could suffer the same fate. You see, it is very interesting and we will be watching with all intent care. The Minister of Mines is very, very itchy now Mr Speaker- it could suffer the same fate.

You see, Mr Speaker, we have no problem when it comes to government coming to this floor of Parliament to ask for additional finances to support its programs and priorities. But as we have raised on the floor of this Parliament, Mr Speaker, you must address the right issues.

Sir, \$132million of that, we have no problem. Why not just come and tell us that you need \$132million to keep the public service going; just say it like that. But to say that this money is to advance rural development is a total lie on the floor of this Parliament.

The only thing that we should be concerned about is the \$25million rice project. That is a welcomed allocation. In fact you should have increased it even more. The concern of this side of the House is implementing that \$25million project and the Minister of Agriculture tells us that: "Oh yes, we will implement it and we will do everything to implement it". Mr Speaker, we will take his word and we will watch him. You must implement it as it is something that is dear to the hearts of our people in this country.

Sir, we will watch very closely any government moves to address the price increase on essential items in the shops. Not only the essential items that we use in our homes, domestic use but also input on the important work like manufactures that we bring in from abroad because they continue to increase the price of whatever we produce locally as well. We will watch that very closely and the government policies that have been formulated are still not convincing. But we will watch closely the progress of that.

If the world price at the end of the day goes down because of show of some discipline by the people who influence prices around the world then that is good for us. As rightly said around, Mr Speaker, that we are price takers and there is nothing really we can do about if we need to address the products that we bring in from abroad. Therefore, what we can only address are policies that are right within our powers to do it. But I think we have not moved enough to address that area. We leave that to the wisdom of the government and we will watch the process very carefully.

Sir, I will raise again the issue on compensation for guns. We have raised our views on this and basically reminding the government of its decision as confirmed by the Minister responsible on the floor of this Parliament. This has

raised a lot of concerns when Government Ministers are telling us that you should not say that. I feel that is not right.

Sir, if we want to compensate the people for their guns, their firearms that were confiscated and destroyed, albeit illegally, then I think the appropriate level of compensation must be paid. We have expressed our views on this, and I do not need to repeat on the floor of this Parliament but simply to remind the government that it is still an issue. At least the best you can do is to live up to the commitment of the Cabinet. If you want to pay it at the replacement value of the gun then do it at the replacement value.

What you were saying you will do is very well below the replacement value at the market price of any guns. If you buy one in a shop - we do not have guns in here but the figures that the Minister told us were figures they said to be the cost of one gun in Australia, and that is for a .22 rifle and a shotgun rifle.

Sir, there are one or two more issues before I take my seat. The Correctional Services Bill has been brought before Parliament. Sir I just want to express my disappointment as a member of the Bills and Legislation Committee. The Committee was actually misled by the Attorney-General's Chamber, Mr Speaker and in turn the Committee misled the Parliament in its report.

Sir, the reason why the amendment finds its way back to Parliament was because of a court case between His Excellency and the Government challenging the constitutionality of a number of words, phrases and terms used in that particular legislation. The question that was put direct to the Office of the Attorney General when its representatives appear before the Bills Committee is that is the background of this Bill because you have you entered into some kind of understanding with His Excellency, and the response we had was in the positive. That position was directly contradicted by the Attorney General's standing on the floor of this Parliament saying that it is not right that His Excellency continues to maintain the stand that he will want to challenge this issue in the court, Mr Speaker.

Sir, that does not speak well of consultations between the Executive Government and the Head of State. I think this issue really should be ironed out before the decision by His Excellency or the Head of State becomes an issue on the floor of Parliament. I will just leave it at that but acknowledging the fact that the government will still want to take this issue up to court and defend its decision.

Mr Speaker, I think we are doing something that is really not necessary because all it needs to be done is to make the amendments consistent with the Constitution, and the explanation and assurance we had from the representatives of the Attorney-General, Mr Speaker, was that he said: "Oh yes, we will do it at a

later time. We will bring all amendments to the floor of Parliament to rectify the words”.

Now if that can save a contention between the Head of State and the Executive Government, it is better to do it now. The government may say it as well, jumping up and down asking us why we did not do it, Mr Speaker. Well, we brought the Bill into Parliament but did not bring it into force. It was our intention to bring it into force in April on the understanding that some amendments will be brought to Parliament on the Constitution to align the wordings in that particular Bill with the concerns raised by His Excellency.

On the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Bill, Mr Speaker, we will continue to maintain our position and look with keen interest on how this process will work. Mr Speaker, when there is no guarantee of any immunity against prosecution for witnesses it will remain a cloud over the smooth work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I do not think I need to say anything more than that because that is the only issue that is sticking on this side of the House. And there is nothing stopping us, Mr Speaker, that if we see that this Commission is established and it went on to meet hiccups and does not work, and probably that is one of the reasons why it did not work- there is nothing stopping us to bring the bill back to Parliament and straighten it up.

Sir, if the intention of the government or all of us in this country is to see true reconciliation, true forgiveness then let us provide an environment that provides maximum comfort to people who will come forward and speak nothing but the truth about their involvement in the troubles that we have gone through in this country.

Lastly, Mr Speaker, before I sit down there is something that probably is in the interest of this House. By September or by November when we come back to meet again, we will have two Members of Parliament joining us as soon as the outcomes of the elections are announced. Sir, I think we have right as Members to protect the integrity of this House by giving sound advice to voters. Be responsible in choosing people who will come. Already few are happening now, everybody is going everywhere now.

In one particular village Mr Speaker, people dished out \$1,000 to each house and I just want to warn every one of us that if we start to do that before we even come to Parliament, we are showing a bad sign already. This is a sound advice to every voter who will go to the polls. Be responsible in choosing two leaders who will come to Parliament to replace the two Members of Parliament. Do take this seriously. If people are now desperate in going around using money and starting to pay something, Mr Speaker, you know that person is not genuine. I think we have a responsibility to advise our people so that we do the right thing when it comes to electing our representatives.

Sir that is all about what I want to say on this floor of Parliament. It has been a very, very, interesting sitting of Parliament. As I said it is almost five weeks, and we have enjoyed every moment of it. And as expressed by some of us who have spoken in this House, Mr Speaker, despite what we say about this Parliament, this is a very responsible Parliament, a very, very, civilized Parliament too.

I remember the point raised by the Minister for Mines and Energy which basically reiterates what is being said around this floor of Parliament, Mr Speaker, that in some other parliaments people pull out their shoes and shoot each other with it and even grab each other's necks in fights. This is a very responsible and sensible Parliament, despite what people say about this House and about each Member. We are a very responsible group and I share the observation raised by the Minister for Mines and Energy, which is not new to him by the way. This is an observation that is already made around this floor of Parliament and also an observation made by the Deputy Prime Minister that we do not see two rooms in here.

In some very advanced democracy, there are two rooms. After Parliament meets they would go into separate rooms; the government to one room and the Opposition to another one - and when talking about this Parliament are you irresponsible? This is a responsible Parliament, it is truly civilized. You go to some parliaments in other countries that I know of, and I joined a CPA group to tour some Parliaments, Mr Speaker, and question time is a mad house situation. People are not answering questions but are just swearing at each other. In here, sir, no! Ministers, okay, they try their best to answer the questions and I appreciate that, and being fully responsible to answer almost all questions that are being raised on this floor of Parliament because we are not many. Do not be surprised, and that is why only the Leader of Opposition is raising questions. It is because you have taken all Members to your side, Mr Speaker. So I have to take the responsibility to place the government under check all the time, Mr Speaker. It has been a very interesting Meeting. Questions are asked and if I can pick Ministers that I feel - I need to name them; those Ministers who have responded well, Mr Speaker, come prepared, I can do that. But I do not think I need to do that otherwise those people stand up on their toes. But I really, really, appreciate debates. As Leader of the Opposition, there are responsible Ministers, very, very responsible in the way they stand up and talk, it makes you feel comfortable. He addresses issues, not addressing me as Leader of the Opposition and the Minister that just spoke, in fact, when he debated on the Supplementary Appropriation was accusing the Leader of the Opposition as the only Prime Minister of this country that advances expansionary fiscal policy. He is wrong.

Well, if you are serious about that, Mr Speaker, you abolish the Ministry of Rural Development. Why did you create the Ministry of Environment, and Conservation? You have used the full allowance. Reduce the salaries of Members of Parliament that the Prime Minister is responsible for raising, Mr Speaker? You remove all the conditions of services that we give to backbenchers that are chairmen's of committees or chairmen's of statutory boards. You do that. Once you do that, Mr Speaker, then I can take you seriously that, yes, we will make a difference; that the Prime Minister has advanced expansionary fiscal policy. We are reversing this, once you do that I will believe you, Mr Speaker. But if you do nothing like that then stop being hypocrites in this House.

Sir, that is just the heat of the moment. I have responded to a Minister that is very, very responsible, Mr Speaker. But I want to pick some of the Ministers; I might need to do it so that we receive very good commendation from the Minister of Public Service. He works very well with his officers by providing leadership through guidance. We receive them and the Minister for Culture and Tourism, as I said this morning. I need to do that. We on this side of the House not only criticize you but we also commend you if you do a good work. His officers say that at last we have a Minister that has a vision, who thinks and knows what he is doing, Mr Speaker. The Minister of Fisheries - interestingly these three Ministers are sitting in line over there. This is I mean, he knows. Now being, probably a person that has worked in the fishing industry, I think that is probably his background, he understands the fishing sector very well and he involves in policies and makes it part of it. You can see by the way, Mr Speaker, he stood up on the floor of this Parliament explaining his Ministry's position on issues straight out from himself. And despite what they say about the Minister of Mines - you get it from me, that person used to be my personal advisor. Yes, we receive good reports, as a Minister that has a good vision and he is interested in seeing that that sector is developed. We are receiving those feedbacks from people who are directly related. And so is Agriculture, he receives good reports from him and that probably is manifested by the way he stood up like all the others and explain things. I can go on, Mr Speaker, the Minister of Finance - I have known him for a very long time with the Minister of Forestry. I think these two will go down in the history of this country. Despite what the world says about what we were doing during that time when we were in the same group, Mr Speaker, it is a slap on their faces at that time when the Minister of Finance gave exemptions and remissions. That was the only way we could do at that time to enable liquidity in the economy, and we did it. The response was great, Mr Speaker. Despite of all the trouble we had people were still buying; people were still moving around. I also think it will go down in the history of this country as well as the current Minister of Finance and the Minister

of Forestry, Mr Speaker, for well, it looks like a directive from the Prime Minister then, when the situation that we had to pay about \$12million on the warning of 7th July 2000 before the parties came to see each other eye to eye. I was really troubled in my mind, Mr Speaker, about what action to take, and I called the current Minister of Finance, who was also my Minister of Finance and the Minister of Justice was the faithful Secretary to the Prime Minister. Thank you very much for responding appropriately despite of criticisms that people have leveled against the government then for paying out millions of dollars.

Well, sir, they came up with exactly that amount 7 o'clock in the morning. I told them: "You bring that amount by 7 o'clock tomorrow morning as our future hangs on the balance", and they did. Thank you, thank you Minister of Finance. We can go on but I need to stop here, Mr Speaker. I have expressed enough and my advice is that we have made statements, we have made assurances. Our advice from this side of the House is to live up to those statements, live up to those assurances because if not those statements and commitments you make, will only add to a lot of empty promises that have been said so far. Now, that you have until December, prove it and deliver the \$270million projects that we put in the 2008 Budget and the additional amount that you have asked for in the Supplementary Appropriation.

With that Mr Speaker, I fully support the intention of this motion.

Hon. Sikua: Mr Speaker, I move that the debate be now adjourned until the next sitting day.

Mr Speaker: The Debate therefore stands adjourned until the next sitting day. Honorable Members, that concludes our business for today.

Debate on the motion adjourned for the next day

Hon. Sikua: Mr Speaker, I move that Parliament do now adjourn.

The House adjourned at 3.28 pm.