

MONDAY 28TH NOVEMBER 2011

The Speaker, Sir Allan Kemakeza took the Chair at 9:30am.

Prayers.

ATTENDANCE

At prayers, all were present with the exception of the Prime Minister and Ministers for Foreign Affairs & External Trade; Commerce, Industry & Employment; National Unity, Reconciliation & Peace; Environment, Conservation & Meteorology & Disaster Management; Culture & Tourism; Rural Development & Indigenous Affairs; Police, National Security and Correctional Services; Agriculture & Livestock Development; and the Members for North Guadalcanal; West New Georgia, VonaVona; Temotu Pele; Fataleka; North New Georgia; West Honiara; Malaita Outer Islands.

MESSAGES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mr Speaker: Honourable Members, the Prime Minister has kindly given up Thursday 1st December 2011, which according to Standing Order 15 (2) should be Government Business Day. But he has granted approval for Parliament to use the day as Parliamentary Open Day. The open day on Thursday will be the fourth one, since its inception in 2007.

This year's Open Day will be co-hosted with the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs. I understand that Honourable Members may have already received written communication on the Open Day, As such I wish to encourage Members to participate and take this opportunity to put on display development projects in your different constituencies. If you are interested, please indicate your interest to the Clerk by close of business today.

I also wish to inform honourable Members that the Parliamentary House Committee has granted approval for the use of the Parliament Chamber by the Young Women's Parliamentary Group to hold a debate on the topic of 'Violence Against Women' which is related to this year's Open Day Theme: '*A Responsible Parliament: Eliminating Violence Against Women*'. Consequently, I would like to invite honourable members and your spouses to come and witness our young aspiring women leaders as they take the floor of the parliamentary debating chamber to discuss one of the pressing issues affecting our country today. The approval by the Parliamentary House Committee also has my full support.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND OF REPORTS

- Solomon Islands National Provident Fund 2009 Annual Report *National Parliament Paper No. 26 of 2011*).
- Solomon Islands National Provident Fund 2010 Annual Report''
(*National Parliament Paper No. 27 of 2011*).

MOTIONS

Mr Speaker: The Buala Communiqué of the fourth Premiers 'conference was tabled on the 20th March 2011, and today the Minister is moving the motion according to Standing Orders 17 and 18. I will now call upon the Minister for Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening to move the motion standing in his name in today's Order Paper.

Hon WALTER FOLOTALU (*Minister for Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening*): Mr Speaker Sir I move, that Parliament resolves itself into a Committee of the Whole House to consider (National Parliament Paper No.1 of 2011), 'Buala Communiqué of the 4th Premiers' Conference.

Sir, it is a great pleasure to present to this House a communiqué that was agreed and signed by the nine provincial premiers and the Mayor of the Honiara City Council at the end of the Premiers conference in Buala in October 2010. Traditionally, the Premiers come up with resolutions in the form of communiqués

at the end of its conference with the anticipation that the resolutions shall be acted upon by the national government.

The Buala Communiqué being laid before this honourable House today consists of 25 resolutions. This Buala Communiqué was tabled before the Cabinet in March this year and endorsed by the Cabinet before it was gazetted. I am now tabling it to Parliament for debate with the objective that the national government would exert its influence on the various line ministries to implement the resolutions that are still outstanding in the Buala Communiqué.

My ministry has very limited jurisdictional powers to implement all the resolutions agreed by the Premiers. However, the following have been satisfactorily being dealt with and the premiers were duly informed at the Taro Conference of the progress made so far. In this presentation, I have also indicated the resolutions that are yet to be acted upon and which the provincial premiers still feel need the urgent attention of the national government as they impact on the ability of the provincial governments to deliver services effectively.

Resolution 1 – a premiers council be established by law. The Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening has done a cabinet paper which has been submitted to the Cabinet for consideration and upon cabinet approval a bill shall be drafted to recognise this council by law. A premiers' council taskforce has also been formed as per Resolution 1 to assist the Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening in establishing the premiers' council so as to assist in the analysis and responses to the communiqué and planning the conference.

Resolution 2 – revise section 25 of the Provincial Government Act 1977, to enable salaries and allowances of the speaker and clerk of each provincial assembly to be paid out of the consolidated fund. A Cabinet paper on this resolution has been submitted and approved by the cabinet. Salaries of speakers and clerks will be taken care of by my ministry in the 2012 national budget.

Resolution 3 – review of section 19 of the Provincial Government Act on voting patterns in provincial executives. My ministry has made a submission to the Attorney General's Chamber and we are now waiting advice from the chamber before I can pursue it further.

Resolution 9 – provincial investment initiatives. The proposal by the ministry for allocation of annual development budget of SBD\$24million for provincial governments,

which has been approved by the Cabinet in August this year, was endorsed by the parliamentary caucus in October this year.

Resolution 10 – proper consultations with provincial governments before national development projects are initiated in the provincial governments. In the Permanent Secretaries meeting, all ministries have been advised to ensure application for all development projects for provincial governments are channelled through the Ministry of Provincial Government and institutional strengthening.

Resolution 14 - ward development profiles. This shall be done by the Provincial Governance Strengthening Program (PGSP) before the start of the strategic planning process early next year. Reference shall be made to existing ones and those covered by RDP.

Resolution 15 - negotiations with the National Government at least three months prior to the formulation of the National Budget. The Ministry has started talks with the Ministry of Development Planning and Aid Coordination on how to synchronise the development planning processes with the National Government in a way that provincial government plans could inform the National Planning and budgeting process.

Resolution 19 - premiers and provincial secretaries to be included in the National Government delegation to the annual meetings of the Melanesian Spearhead Group and Pacific Forum. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has agreed to this suggestion. The Ministry would try to incorporate this into its recurrent budget for future years.

Resolution 20 - the premiers and their provincial secretaries to be included in the multi-agency group working on climate change issues. This has been implemented. There was a premiers' round table meeting in Gizo on environmental governance and climate change which was attended by all premiers with the support of the Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening and PGSP. The Honourable Premiers of Western, Choiseul and Central attended the CTI mayors Roundtable from the 16th to 20th May 2011 in Wakatobi, Indonesia.

Resolution 21 - the provinces to be included in the annual donors talk. The PGSP funded three premiers to this year's talks. Resolution 24 - invite donors to future premiers' conferences. This has been implemented by the Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening.

Resolution 25 - preparation for future premiers' conferences to be handled by a special committee and trips to be made to the host province to assess the level of preparations.

A premiers' task force has been formed and two meetings have been held to facilitate preparations for the Taro conference in terms of logistics and contents of the presentation.

Honourable colleagues, about 44 percent of the Buala resolutions have not been implemented and these are by all indications very important resolutions in the Buala Communiqué. I have hereunder listed the resolutions in the Buala Communiqué that have not been acted despite being followed up by the Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening.

Resolution 4 - revision of the Lands and Titles acts. Resolution 5 - amendment to the Mines and Minerals Act. Resolution 6 - quick implementation of the federal constitution. Resolution 7 - economic growth centres. Resolution 8 - NCRA Government policy. Resolution 11 - basic rate collections from state owned enterprises and national government staff. Resolution 12 - national government to facilitate discussions on the resources generated in Honiara or Honiara City Council and the Guadalcanal province. Resolution 13 - devise new strategies to charge resource fees. Resolution 16 - increasing provincial government direct employees salaries. Resolution 17 - salaries, entitlements and travel of teachers. Resolution 18 - the Ministry of Education to review the status of agriculture in education syllabus. Resolution 22 - transfer of perpetual estate title to provinces for major developments. Resolution 23 - commission of inquiry to abandoned lands report to be made available as soon as possible.

The only way we improve service delivery in the provinces is to give full support to the provincial authorities so that the main objective of establishing the provincial governance system can be attained. There are so many outstanding issues that are retarding the development and service delivery at the provincial level and this is something that we need to seriously look at and make informed decisions as a parliament. We cannot develop this country by isolating the provincial governments and I wish to indicate very strongly that all reforms that we might have in mind should be geared towards strengthening the provincial governments. Solomon Islands cannot be developed with weak provincial government institutions.

The Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening with its Provincial Government Strengthening Program is doing its best to improve the human infrastructural capacities of the provincial governments but we cannot move further as desired by the provincial population without genuine and practical support from the

Cabinet and a commitment from the National Parliament. On this note, honourable colleagues, I present the Buala Communiqué for your deliberations. I beg to move.

Mr Speaker: Honourable Members, it is proposed that Parliament resolves itself into a Committee of the Whole House to consider National Parliament Paper No.1 of 2011, the Buala Communiqué of the 4th Premiers' Conference."

Members may now speak on the general principles of the report under discussion. In so doing, I kindly remind members to comply with the rules of debate as set out in our Standing Orders and the ruling I have just made. The floor is now open for debate.

Mr MILNER TOZAKA (*MP North Vella La Vella*): Thank you for according me the privilege to speak very briefly on the motion moved by the Minister for Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening.

Firstly, I wish to congratulate the Minister for Provincial Government & Institutional Strengthening for his reappointment as minister. I wish him well in his endeavours in taking up responsibilities and tasks. I wish also to thank the Minister for his action in bringing this motion for the consideration and disposal of this honourable House.

My initial comment to this motion is on the very obvious fact that it has taken his ministry almost one and half year to have this communiqué tabled in this honourable House as requested by the Premiers. This speaks volume to us on how little priority is given to provincial governments by the led NCRA Government under its previous leadership. I hope this is going to change under the present leadership.

During the first introduction of the provincial government system in 1981, the government then led by the late Solomon Mamaloni gave very high priority or top priority on administration of the provinces to such an extent that he even set up five ministries to administer the work of the provincial governments because they represent 80 percent of our people in the rural area. In comparison, today sadly the Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening only has three administrative officers. Each of these administrative officers is responsible to administer three provinces each. This is one of the difficulties that my good Minister when moving the motion this morning has difficulty carrying out his functions effectively and, of course,

his inability to implement most of the previous premiers' resolutions in the communiqué.

If the Government is now going to be serious with our provincial government system, then it needs realignment on its application of portfolios, allocation of portfolios and manpower and resources in certain de facto units set up under the pledged leadership of NCRA. For example, one that keeps coming up in my mind is the Bureau, which in my considered opinion should be dismantled and manpower and resources redeployed to the Ministry of Provincial Government. Talking about the Bureau, it is a total waste of government funding and is a silly idea coming out of the blue in the absence of proper research. I see it is a subject to interfering in the work of ministries that have statutory powers of their own to carry them out under their functions.

Turning to the Communiqué itself per se, I noticed that some of the things therein are basic administrative operational matters, for example, personal emolument of public officers and direct employees. The request for the provincial governments to include themselves as representatives in meetings with donor partners and other forums when discussing issues of provincial government are basic administrative matters, and I hope the Ministry is taking care of them through the normal administration system. But listening to his introduction of the motion I heard that he has been able to able to do some of them, and some are not.

On other issues in the premiers' resolutions on political stability and administrative capacity building, devolution of powers or functions on land and boundary issues, my reaction to those is that those are being addressed by the constitutional review committee and therefore, the Minister just has to wait patiently with the provinces for their long outstanding task to be completed. In other words, what I am saying to you is that all that is in the communiqué is in the federal constitution of Solomon Islands. Here it is I got the copy of it (*shows a copy*). If you read this communiqué it is all in here in this draft. What the premiers are saying is "but what time"? That is what they are asking, "what time, bring it on". That is what the premiers are crying for, what the premiers are saying in this communiqué.

But having said that, does the Minister have to wait for the federal system of government to address the problem in the system which includes those suggested by the premiers? Does the good Minister have to wait for this system to come into place before he moves it? I do not think so, and I could recognize the Minister that deep down inside him as he stood there speaking, what he wants to be done in the reforming

of the provincial government system. I can recognize that deep down inside him he wants to move on.

I could read his mind correctly that the Minister here is seeking the honourable House's support for him to move on and forward with the immediate task of reviewing the provincial government system together with this current legislation independent from the constitutional review of the federal system of government. In other words, the Minister here is complaining to the honourable House that his provincial government system is sandwiched in the constitutional review and causing unnecessary delays in fixing the system to making it work efficiently and effectively as wanted by our people.

My people in North Vella are not complaining about the national constitution. They are happy and proud with the constitution, sets the unitary system of government that we are enjoying today. They are happy with it, they are not complaining about the constitution. What they are complaining about is the provincial government system and not the national constitutional. They find the provincial government system a stumbling block towards progressive development. They find that the provincial government miserably fails to deliver goods and services to them. This is the problem.

My people also understand that the natural resources ownership such as land, mineral, seas within their customary jurisdiction belongs to them and not the government, more so not the provincial government too but it belongs to them; already they own the resources. And this could be further strengthened only if it is recognised through the reform legislations, and we have these things already.

What is generally favoured by the people is further devolution of powers and functions from provinces and centres such as Gizo, Auki, Kira Kira, Honiara, Buala, Tulagi, Temotu, Taro and Renbel to the villages. That is what they want, devolution of services to the villages, creating 50 constituencies as administrative and economic development centres, not nine but 50 should be our target, targeting the constituencies because that is the centre of activities. That is what the people want because that is where our resources are. That is what they want. And you do not need to change the constitution for that, it is already intact, it is there already.

I am happy to hear the Prime Minister said in the media last night that he compares the idea of economic centres to the colonial model of setting up local government centres and walls in the rural areas. Is the Prime Minister changing his mind now?

If this is the same and new feelings being shared by others, which I believe it is, then the Government ought to come clear on the point of reviewing the whole constitution. Is it just for achieving the federal system of government? May I ask the Minister to respond to us in his response on this motion?

I am not against the federal system of government. Far from it, I am not against it. But I am, just like the premiers in this communiqué and perhaps the Prime Minister this time (who is not here), but I am starting to be frustrated too like the premiers. I am starting to be frustrated, I am starting to be impatient by the long delay and cost of changing this system as we are still waiting for the report to come to Parliament. I am beginning to be frustrated just like the premiers. Where is it? And my good Minister would never be able as his hands are tight; he would not be able to address what is in this communiqué until this is dealt with. The Minister is in a dilemma, right now he is in a dilemma of which way would he go.

The question here is, is there any other way of achieving the same goal without having to go through the most expensive, most time consuming exercise of changing the current system that we are experiencing this time. I am not debating a constitution but I am commenting on it because I have found that the provincial government system, and again I repeat is sandwiched inside this thing and cannot move but come to a standstill.

Having said that, again may I remind all of us that the current system of provincial government, already under the Provincial Government Act 1981, improved by the 1997 Act is already in the shadow and the spirit of the federal government system. The federal system of government is already there in the provincial government legislation. The legislation is already there, it is ready, and all the provincial governments can do is to continue negotiation with the government through devolution of powers and taking over the powers and functions and eventually they will become states or federal, eventually, not tomorrow. It might not be my children, but it might not be my great, great grand children, our great, great grand children who will see the statehood. And this is exactly what has been recommended in the federal system of government as well, the same process, it is not going to be immediate. As soon as it is passed, it is not going to be a press button where 100 houses stand up in the Western province at Gizo town, no, it is not going to be like that. We are going to have doctors and lawyers manning the set ups. No, it is not going to be like that. It is going to be a slow process that goes on until we get it in the end.

What I am saying here is if we have the constitution there, and the constitution is only saying that there is to be a provincial government, that is what it is saying there. The new one is saying, let us spill it out; let us include it to be part and parcel of the constitution. That is the only difference I see in this federal system of government.

I am saying this not because I want to pre-empt debate on the work of the constitutional review committee. In fact, I have very high regard and respect for the good work the committee and its officials are doing. But I am rather responding here to the call of the premiers as moved by the honourable Minister, their communiqué to review the provincial government. Here they are recommending a piece meal, an incremental review of the provincial government. See, they are changing their course - you review it bit by bit to address their problems without waiting for the constitution. I think that is what they are saying, and that is a good star. We should buy this and look at it.

Therefore, my good advice to my good friend the Minister responsible for provincial governments is that if the review of the constitution is going to take some more years to complete, then perhaps he needs to review the situation by going back to the original idea of reviewing just the provincial government only using the pending review reports he already has in his ministry without waiting for the work of the constitutional review committee, which is another matter altogether.

Sir, if the people are happy with the constitution and if the provinces can achieve federal system of government, using the current constitution and legislations through incremental amendments as the premiers are recommending in the Communiqué, then what is the point of us spending thousands of dollars trying to change the whole system.

I wish to acknowledge and commend the good work of the UNDP – the Provincial Government Strengthening Unit in the Ministry. I too understand their dilemma, they too are in dilemma just like all of us that the good work they are doing in the ministry is subject to review if the federal system of Government kicks in. So they too are half half, they are double minded at the moment, and we have to get this two minded business out. Therefore, it is imperative that the Government clears the air this time as to what exactly is the policy of the Government, if there is any at all to improve the work of the provincial government, as the honourable Minister would want us to help him on.

Finally, I challenge NCRA under its new leadership, not to further delay the review of the constitution because it is very important because our people have suffered enough from lack of services - the goods and services to go down to them through the present system that we have. Not to delay the review of the constitution but to quickly see that this job is done. It is now six and going towards seven years, since we are waiting for review of this system — to bring it on so that we make decision on it, one way or another for the good of our people and the good of our country.

With those few general remarks, I support the motion.

Mr MANASEH SOGAVARE (*MP East Choiseul*): Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to contribute to this motion moved by the Minister of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening that this Parliament resolves into a committee of the whole house to consider the 2010 Premiers conference communiqué. The presentation by the member for North Vella La Vella brought up what very insightful presentation on some of the issues we need to consider, and I want to pick on some of the themes that he also presented to Parliament which are very relevant.

The motion itself is straightforward and it should not have any difficulty because all that the Minister is asking is for the approval of the House for this report to be submitted to the committee of the whole house for consideration.

But I think one of the issues for debate in response to the Minister's request, in my opinion, is the reason behind, I guess the importance of engaging the premiers of the nine provinces on issues of national governance, which the provincial government is an integral part of, and is an important player in the process, as the next level of government in the system of government in this country, in other words, the significance of the premiers' conference. And in order to appreciate that I think we need to go back a bit in time, and I want to pick on some of the themes that the member for North Vela La Vela has already mentioned.

The current premiers' conference began as annual budget talks, annual budget talk meetings between the provincial premiers and the national government with the minister of finance taking the leading role. This started during the reign of the NCP Government in 1994. I was permanent secretary of the Ministry of Finance then and we had a series of meetings with the premiers.

The issues of discussions were concentrated mainly on budgetary matters and provincial projects. The meetings were appropriately scheduled to take place in good

times before the handing down of the national budget by the national government. It is interesting to note that the spirit of the original reasons for the premiers conference was taken up again by the premiers in Resolution No. 15, where the conference resolved to get the government agree to an annual negotiations on the content of the development budget three months before the formulation of the national budget. Therefore, what the premiers are asking for is not a new thing.

The original idea is to get a consensus on the emphasis and structure of the national budget, mainly on two areas - assistance to provincial government's development initiative in the devolved functions, and assistance towards effectiveness of the nine provincial governments in their roles as agents of the national government for the delivery of non-devolved functions. It is those two areas that we have serious discussions on during annual budget talk.

Since then and especially after year 2000, it developed into something more serious, and I think for obvious reasons - taking onboard other political issues. This is understandable because since 1994, the country has gone through some very, very interesting developments, which culminated in the collapse of the economy in year 2000. It is disappointing to note that the topics of discussion, I think, should be to continue to develop and improve the subject that was continued to be discussed. These are leaders, we are talking about leaders of provincial governments discussing issues with the national government. But the topics of discussions have slowly shifted more to the ordinary, maintaining the status matters, as rightly pointed out by the member for North Vella, as opposed to issues that are forward looking aiming at improving the purpose of the establishment of the provincial government system into the structure of our government system.

I would have thought that issues like that should be featured more in the conference because if one looks very closely at the issues driving this country down the path of ethnic tension, the ineffectiveness of the provincial government system as a catalyst of decentralisation stands out above all.

At the heart of the Guadalcanal demand is decentralisation. You can analyse it like what but it all boils back to the issue of more, more decentralisation. This probably explains why the chairmanship of the conference was taken up by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of the Provincial Government instead of the Minister or better still the Prime Minister himself. I may have been forward looking a bit and I would like to see this conference develop into an annual forum between the Prime Minister himself

and the development ministers in the national government with the provincial premiers and their developing ministers.

I am saying this because, in my view, this conference should rank very high in the annual calendar of the government, the same as the Pacific Islands Forum, the UNGA meeting and CHOGM. I say this because it must require the personal attendance and chairmanship of the Prime Minister himself. I say this because the annual premiers conference, if properly structured can become a powerful and effective political meeting that discusses the effectiveness of the national development strategies in the nine provinces and the way forward to consolidate what still appears to be a very fragile peace process. .

It can be used also to iron out sensitive political issues and their impacts on the development strategies. In that regard, the annual premiers' conference would be more important than PIF, UNGA meeting and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). Why? Because those meetings are nothing more than very structured international political meetings that only rubberstamps the decisions of the more dominant world powers. We are insignificant when we go to attend those meetings.

Some aspects of this idea are captured in Resolution No. 25 on preparation for future conferences. Ideally the conference proper should be preceded by a meeting of the officials to formalize the agenda and expected outcomes of the meeting, which should be attended by aid donors, NGOs as requested under Resolution No.24. I guess what I am saying is that as it is, the premiers conference is the highest political conference between the leadership of the nine provinces and the National Government. It would appear, however, that the national government is yet to accord this conference the recognition it rightly deserves.

Be that as it may, Resolution No.1 carries amongst other concerns a very important thinking that is reflective of the general concern of the provincial governments all these years about the importance to which successive leadership at the national level attaches to the existence and the role of provincial government system and whether government is being transparent about those views. And I would like to dwell on this point for a little while because it strikes directly at the heart of the observed ineffectiveness of the provincial government as an important catalyst of growth in rural Solomon Islands.

Any Solomon Islanders, I believe, will be forced to drop similar lines of thinking because since the 1980s as rightly pointed out by the Member for North Vella when that layer of government was established under our government system, the momentum to have it functional as it was designed abruptly stopped – it was disturbed, it was frustrated. The full potential of the provincial government system to deliver public goods and services under the agency agreement was not fully utilized. As a matter of fact, the National Government by its very actions effectively ceased to recognize the provincial government as an agent of service delivery - by its very action. The devolution process no longer progresses, it just came to a grinding halt, the government does not continue to develop it.

Do you know what the excuse given was? The excuse was ‘the provincial government system did not have the capacity to cope with the demand of more devolution of powers to deliver public goods and services. This is the most defeating and contradictory statement made by successive national governments, and we paid dearly for that blunder. I am saying that because the very nature of principal agency agreement, as in the case of between the provincial government system and the National Government is that it is the responsibility of the principal to equip the agent with all the necessary skills, infrastructures and budgetary resources to get the agent to deliver on behalf of the principal. So it is the National Government that failed the provincial government system. This has not happened, clearly did not happen. It is an intentional move to consolidate the power base of the central government, and so what we ended up having is a government system that exists as an institution but failed miserably to function as a government.

There were instances where even devolved functions were repossessed. Since then we have a situation where the central government continues to consolidate its position as the all-powerful authority in the land. Interestingly or maybe sadly, it takes a revolution by the people of this country for the national government to come to its senses. Interestingly, and I share some of the sentiments that the MP North Vella mentioned today that the people had enough of half-baked principle agency arrangement. Do you know what they are calling for? They are calling for a system that gives them more autonomy and power to make decisions on national development. We can criticize that kind of thinking but we are the ones forcing them to make such a decision.

This is the reality and any sensible Solomon Islander will have to accommodate with great caution because depending on how the new system is structured, and which

will still come to Parliament, we could be jumping from a frying pan right into the fire over the issue of service delivery and hosts of other reasons that I need not touch on at this point in time. We will wait debate on that particular issue when it comes.

I am saying that because the provincial government system is a workable system if only it is allowed to function the way it was designed to function in the first place. The way I see it is that we established it and we are not concerned about making it to work. The provincial government system could have become the catalyst of growth in the nine provinces in its normal process of growth, and why not after 31 years of existence if only we allow that system to function the way it should be designed. It took the same number of years for Singapore to graduate from a least developing country to a now industrialized country; 30 years, and we are still struggling, the same period of time and we are still struggling.

Unfortunately, we did not get that result, but instead what we got was a growing distrust between the provincial government system, those who run it and the national government. I am saying this because the call for the establishment of a checking institution between the national government and the provincial government as carried in Resolution No.1 can only be justified under a system where the two government system claim a degree of autonomy and therefore there is a need to check each other as in the case of the proposed state government system. You read the new constitution and you will see it incorporated. Why, because two entities at arms length is what we are suggesting. That is one way of looking at it with what is driving the call for the institutionalization of the premiers council, and there is enough reason to justify that line of thinking, as I will try to elaborate a bit in this debate.

The moves to legalize the establishment of the conference or something similar as resolved under Resolution No.1 is something I suggested at the premiers conference when this conference met at Lake Tegano. That was the first time it was suggested. Now this was repeated again by the conference in Tulagi and Lata and since then it was not taken up until it was brought up again at the Buala conference. Now whatever the reasons are, there is clearly a tendency complacency and maybe disinterestedness by the national government to improve the effectiveness of the provincial government system to become an effective agent of development in rural Solomon Islands. This only goes to demonstrate the very low, I guess, level of importance placed on the role of the provincial government system by the national government since the establishment of the provincial government system in the early 1980s which is, of course, marked by a systematic consolidation of the dominant position of the central government system since we gained independence.

This, as observed above, led to open revolt as I have already mentioned. I am saying this because the political development since 1978 has taken a totally different turn from developments that started way back in 1921 in terms of the physical structure

of our government system, which is clearly aimed at making the national government more transparent and accountable in the system of government that concentrated political and development power centrally. One thing comes out very forcefully in the structural development that started in 1921, and that is Solomon Islands, this country struggles to graduate from a situation whereby the government is considered as the domain of an exclusive club to involve greater participation of people through their representatives and to ensure greater transparency and accountability in the conduct of government.

It is sad that we have shifted from this intention. As we grow the people's voice is drowned in the growing and complicated bureaucracy and the structure of the government which is designed to protect the political interest of the people who are in custody of the government system. The changes that are happening have more of that in their objective. There are many changes that are happening than the structure that is conducive to greater involvement of the people and the effective delivery of services. It is any wonder that Solomon Islanders in the rural areas are becoming very suspicious of the way the government is handling national issues that is affecting their lives and the way the national wealth is distributed through the mechanism of the national budget.

We can go back to history and this is an issue that the people of the western district can directly related to when people at that time questioned the wisdom of a centralized system of government that we adopted at independence. And you might remember that our people from that side did not want to take part in the celebrations for independence in July 1978. It was in response to this position that we saw the birth of the provincial government system in the early 1980s. This system of government was designed to move the government closer to our people both in terms of governance and the delivery of services. The government failed to achieve the purpose of establishing the provincial government system.

I am making this point and I made this point before that there is a clear unwritten intention that the level of government in the country that must grow the way it is designed, the way we intended to be is the provincial government system, not the national government. This is understandable because more than 80 percent of the country's population are living in the jurisdiction of the provincial government system. Unfortunately, successive Solomon Islands Governments since the establishment of the provincial government system have never allowed the provincial government system to function the way it was intended. Instead, we continue to increase the size of the

central government by creating more portfolios and departments that have very little impact on the lives of our people. In other words, politics and power took the best of us and we forget what governments are established to do. This power struggle is manifested in the long history of votes of no-confidence in government and leadership over issues that have nothing to do with the welfare of our people. I am surprised that we are breaking our heads here on issues that have nothing to do with the people.

The way we are going now is that we are in danger of taking this country down the path of some developing countries in Africa and may be Asia where the polarization of power centrally through corruption and greed becomes more important for leaders than the welfare of their people, and they hide behind complicated structures of the government to advance their narrowly political agendas.

You may ask the question, why am I going on about this? I am saying this because that is the way our people are thinking right now as manifested in the draft constitution, which one copy is being held somewhere in here. The people are demanding under Chapter 11 that a number of institutions be established to keep the federal government accountable for a number of issues and including this communiqué: advise on matters affecting national interest; review and advice on any legislations affecting the affairs of the federation, taking into particular account the views of state government, etc, etc.

The proposed section 149(a) really makes the provision for the institutionalization of the state premiers' conference by the operation of a federal law. As rightly pointed out by the member for North Vella, this is already an issue taken up by the taskforce that we must come up with a federal law to institutionalize the premiers' conference. The first issue is that it is something agreed to by the people of this country. What I am saying is that the premiers are therefore not requesting something that is outside of the trend of the peoples thinking right now. People's suspicion on what the national government is on about must be appeased.

My only resentment is we may not need to go down that path if we had allowed the provincial government system to function the way it was design. I leave that issue there.

The call by the premiers for the proper formation of the provincial executive under Resolution 3, is also a result of a legacy of a dysfunctional provincial government system that was caused to be confused by the actions of none other than the central government over 31 years - it was never. When it was structured it was never the

intention of the designers of the provincial government system for it to have a structure similar to that of the national government - that was never the intention. Our system of government was designed to have one centralized policy making body at the national level and that is the national parliament.

The provincial governments' role under the present principal/agent agreement is to deliver on behalf of the national government. The provinces limited legislative role is only in the areas where they have financial capability to deliver on or in the areas that the national government is prepared to devolve the functions, and with the devolvement of functions it goes with financial resources to deliver. That is how it should work. The national government has a lot to do with political devolution that was happening to the provincial government system over the years.

The various amendments to the Provincial Government Act were not aimed at improving the system, no, to be effective in service delivery, as a service delivery outlet because that is the reason why the provincial government system was established. It is to deliver, to be an effective outfit to deliver on behalf of the national government. But the amendments we are doing are not aimed in doing that but rather to strengthen its structure as an entity in law. That is all that it is doing, those various amendments that we have been doing. The point here is that you can be an entity in law and be ineffective. That is exactly what we have here.

The provinces systematically transformed themselves into a structure resembling the National Government with all the weaknesses of a half baked democracy. It is any wonder that the provincial governments are plagued by political instability and all the corruptions that go with it, clearly resembling the National Government. We have passed on this disease to them too. The formation of a provincial government is followed by days of lobbying and all the weaknesses that go with it. The national Parliament established the constituency development - the provincial governments established the ward grants, and with it all the weaknesses observed in the administration of the constituency development funds by national parliamentarians.

I guess with regards to the resolutions we have to face the reality, and that is the provincial government system is evolving into a structure consented by the central government for it to be developed into a government in preparation of the state government system. That is quite a challenge and considering the fact that it may take years, as rightly pointed out by the member for North Vella. Before we have a

workable state government system in the country we may have to live with all the weaknesses for a long, long time yet.

On the premiers call for amendment of the Lands and Titles Act, under Resolution 4, to facilitate a workable process for the acquisition of customary land for development, I believe the Government needs to be clear about where it is taking us on land reform. Since this is a fundamental reform, I would advise the Government to nurture it through the National Parliament; you do not do it on your own. I think a white paper is overdue now. It has to be brought here and it has to be debated by Parliament and then taken back to the people, bring it back for debate and so forth. It needs to be nurtured through the parliamentary system.

The fundamental question that we as a country have to come to terms with now, in the case of land reform is, how many land owners do we want to recognize under our land tenure system. Should we also recognize the Solomon Islands Government and its various agencies as land owners too? I think that is a very fundamental question that we need to address because it is one of the issues that is in the bona fide demands of the people of Guadalcanal.

Our land tenure system only recognizes one landowner in Solomon Islands - only one, and that is the tribes and no one else. The Government is usurping that right - titles to land. If this line of thinking is taken up then we will have to decide on the ownership of the alienated currently vested on the commissioner of lands and, of course, the process of acquiring customary lands by the commissioner of lands for development. All these things need to be reviewed.

The fundamental issue therefore is titles to land. That is the issue we really need to grapple with. We need to get the basis of the decision clear right from the very beginning before moving onto land reform. What are we trying to address? I leave that issue for land reform.

The call for amendment to the Mines and Minerals Act in Resolution 5 - to vest ownership of mineral wealth of customary land solely in tribes or clans, that resolution strikes directly at the heart of one of the fundamental reforms of the NCRA Government. And that is to return the ownership of all land and resources of the country to the people. It is, therefore, I guess in line with the Government's intention. It is interesting to hear the Minister said that the government is yet to address this issue.

This amendment is concerned with the fundamental rights of Solomon Islanders, and I have some uneasy feelings about it. You see, the argument, and I think the

member for North Vella La Vella has picked it up—the argument that we do not beneficially own Solomon Islands or the resources, is one very powerful argument and can be seen in many, many angles. The Government seems to believe that the people of this country own Solomon Islands. What do we really mean by that? That really needs to be defined.

But, in my view, it would be wrong to say that we must amend the constitution in order to benefit from our land and resources. There are powerful, powerful reasons for us to vest the national resources of the country jointly on the people and the government of Solomon Islands. There is a powerful reason why, unless we want to go communist. This has to do with democracy. The way the constitution is structured is structured under the belief that this country believes in the principles of democracy. The reasons are cross cutting. They are concerned with the effective administration of law and order and national security; economic development; fair distribution of national wealth; national unity; international obligations; recognition of government, a collective institution as sovereign and so forth. In other words, how it is structured that the government jointly owns land and resources in this country under the present constitution, it is a minimum guarantee that the government as a collective entity has to ensure that the Solomon Islands remains a country, one country.

Time does not allow us to elaborate on each of these points, except that I want to say that the government may be going down the wrong path on this matter. The term ownership and what it entails may need to be further analysed and explained to this Parliament. Be that as it may, this concern boils down to understanding who the government is - who is the Government?

Gone are the days of colonialism when the fear of being deprived of customary land and resources is very real. They come and say “we will declare this piece of land as alienated land”. The fear was real at that time. The state, as we know it today, is the Solomon Islands government. It is vested with full legal, constitutional and administrative powers to govern the country within the principles of democracy, taking full cognizant of our people’s customary rights. This is embedded right in the constitution. No one can deprive you of your land.

Moreover, our government system is based on democracy, as I have already stated, which literally means ‘rule by the people’. Which people? Of course, those who own the land and resources in this country. It would be wrong to think, in my view, that the entity called the Solomon Islands government has absolute power to do

whatever it wants with the resources of this country without having regard to customary rights that people have over land and resources. Moreover, it would be wrong to say that our land and resources are not safe because the government has a stake in its ownership.

Parliament, as the people's voice has enacted laws regulating the way our people and the government should conduct themselves in the way they relate to land and resources in this country. That is why we have the minister of land, minister of agriculture, minister of fisheries, minister of forests, minister of finance, minister of planning, minister of education and human resources development, and we can go on. Why, because they represent the government, and that is the people of this country. In other words, there are enough laws in this country that protect our resources from abuse by other people.

The reform the government wanted to do is challenging the very reason for the existence of Solomon Islands as a collective Solomon Islands government as a collective entity. The Government, therefore, will have to clarify how it will handle this resolution and all other intentions to remove the Solomon Islands Government as a co-custodian of land and resources in Solomon Islands.

I note that the premiers have resolved under Resolution 6 for the quick implementation of the federal system government. This resolution strikes directly at the preparedness of the present provinces and provincial government to transit smoothly into statehood on the establishment of that system. As rightly observed by premiers, the provinces right now are sitting duck as far as their preparedness is concerned. Given the fact that the people of this country are determined to adopt the federal system of government, we should now recognise that the area of growth, as I have stated, in the structure of our government system should be provincial government, and not the central government. We have over the years created big monsters in the central government that contribute very little to empowering our people. And I agree with the premiers that the government must not wait, and I agree with what the member for North Vella said that the government must not wait for the adoption of the new federal constitution to begin the process of empowering the provinces. They must be empowered now. There is no need to wait for the passage of the law.

The 2012 budget must start to address the infrastructure needs of provincial headquarters including the construction of staff houses in preparation for the process of

decentralisation of government functions in terms of effective control, management of service delivery and growth in commerce and business in the provincial headquarters. This should prepare the provinces, may be in 2013, 2014 if we are serious about empowering provincial governments now to begin to take control of the delivery of basic essential services and other functions of the government under the present agents principal agreement. We need to be proactive.

I believe there are certain components of the state government package that can be delivered now in the interest of improving the effectiveness of the provincial government system instead of waiting for the passage of the new constitution to introduce the state government system because we could be waiting forever, as rightly observed by the member for North Vella. It is for this reason that I believe the handing down of the 2012 budget should be delayed to take onboard this important call by our provinces.

I fully support the call by the premiers for the decentralisation of development - Resolution 7. And I note that the premiers acknowledge the government strategy to achieve this by the growth centre policy and pegged their hope on that policy. I have a slightly different view on how this call should be addressed. The way the Government is handling this matter, it would not be until 2013, maybe before we will begin to see some things delivered on the government's growth centre policy. I believe that policy can be delivered now in a slightly different approach. Instead of establishing growth centres as defined by the Government we should really be concentrating on improving existing catalysts of growth. I think that is where our focus should really be, not on growth centres but catalysts of growth. And I quite agree with the views expressed by the member for North Vella.

This includes areas like this, and we have done it already, these are existing, and so there is no need to battle our minds in trying to establish institutions to get this policy through. The first one is improving the capacity of the provinces to effectively deliver goods and services and preparing the present provincial government system now in terms of infrastructure and resources to smoothly transit to and cope with the demands of the state government system. We really need to do it right now. We need an institution that is strong right there on ground level to cushion or to carry the demands of the state government system.

Secondly, we must address the capacity of the rural populace to be actively involved in economic activities in a big way as a way of creating economic

opportunities in locations outside of Honiara. Thirdly, we must adopt an aggressive strategy, FTI strategy to attract high quality investments to areas outside of Honiara. I am saying this because the law that governs our foreign investment strategy is very, very poor and it will not even attract very high quality investments. What we will continue to attract into this country are people who come and rape our forests and our resources. That is the kind of investors that we will continue to attract under the present regime. We really need to look at our laws again so that we attract high quality investors, and push them to the rural areas.

Fourthly, we adopt a strategy to assist existing investors, those who are already here and know the ground to diversify their activities to the rural areas supported by the national government. I do not have time to elaborate on those strategies. I believe strategy two can probably address the call by the provinces in Resolution No.8.

A strategic approach to addressing this matter is to build it into a comprehensive broad based decentralization strategy involving the participation of high quality foreign and domestic investments in strategic sectors. This will, of course, need the incorporation of appropriate maybe legal framework to do it, as I have stated already.

Let me move on, and I only have a few resolutions here to discuss since the others are yet to be addressed by the Ministry as stated by the Minister. The call for the National Government to support provincial investment in Resolution 9 is a very sensible call. We note what the Minister said that \$24million has been put by the Government in the budget to address this issue. I am a bit worried and I believe this call must be strategically approached so that the investments are not treated purely as revenue earning measures to support provincial budgets. Politicians tend to think that way when they have a lucrative revenue generating or income generating activity that comes under their control. Now it would be a very narrow and erroneous objective for provinces to participate in profit motive development of basic infrastructures development strategies. We would do well to note that the profit motive as a strategy to encourage business entities to develop infrastructures and related services have only been successful in areas where the provincial government has none controlling interest in the business entity. And I think the Government must be really clear about this when giving this \$24million to them. This is a very important point to note in light of what the premiers are asking the national government. An example of this at the national level are successful entities where the Government has a free hand on is the Solomon Telekom, GPPOL, the Solomon Islands Philatelic Bureau, the Solomon

Airlines, the Solomon Islands Printers, which maybe is going down the drain now; the former National Bank of Solomon Islands and the Solomon Islands Broadcasting corporation, just to mention a few. These are successful, why because politics stayed out from them.

At the provincial level, there are a number of provincial shipping services that are surviving today are those that operate independent of provincial politics and politicians - these survive today. That point needs to be made very clear today. The thinking that goes behind the arrangement is not necessarily the ownership of the entity, no, but the services or goods that that particular entity delivers. The provincial politicians must be made to understand that point because many times they want to get so much million dollars from an investment to support their budget. It is not to support their budget. The primary reason why infrastructures like that are established in the rural areas is for services to be delivered. Shipping is one case in point. This is an important point to note in relation to the planned restructure.

In the case of shipping infrastructure, the provincial government's interest is shipping service as opposed to revenue generated by the shipping service. The issue is provision of effective and reliable services, not ownership and not necessarily dividends too. There is no need to get dividends out of it. Leave it alone, plough it back into the shipping company so that it buys more ships and services are improved. That should be the objective of government's assistance to provincial government business entities.

History has really spoken loud and clear on what happens to profit motivated delivery strategy when politics is directly involved in the control and effective management of that strategy. It collapsed and with it the entire sector that depends on that strategy. Examples of this at the national level are the Development Bank of Solomon Islands - it collapsed and with it all those that took loans from that bank. The others are the Livestock Development Authority, the Commodities Export and Marketing Authority and the SASAPE Marina limited, just to mention a few. Politics does not have any place in business, I think, is the slogan.

Political governments, especially in Solomon Islands have never been effective agents of development and growth. The reason is simple - government by nature is a major consumer of resources, and where that is readily available, it will have no second thought about consuming it fully. So do not mix the two.

Lastly, I note that the premiers are also calling for the devise of a new strategy to charge resource fees under Resolution 13. My only advice to that is we must be careful,

care must be taken not to have a general scheme for all because the process that gave rise to the realization of those tax bases varies between the different resource bases. You cannot have a system that addresses everyone the same.

If the premiers are thinking about logs, I still believe they are not paying enough taxes for the right to extract our logs. The area that should be reviewed if we are concerned about what is happening to our people, is the standing technology arrangement where landowners coup with own export duties on the full consignment. They are the ones who coup it. The technology agreement provides that 60 percent goes to loggers and 40 percent to landowners. Where is that tax from? It comes from the 40 percent share of landowners. That is not right. The technology agreement, in my view, must be reviewed right now to require all parties to that agreement to pay tax. It should not only be put on landowners. It does not make any logical sense in my view for the land and resource owners to coup all the taxes from their 40 percent share of the export earning, allowing the foreign loggers to laugh all the way to the bank. This is broad daylight robbery.

The Premiers as well are calling for assistance to develop ward profiles under Resolution 14. There is the tendency here to believe that having a development profile in the wards will automatically attract funding of ward projects by the government or aid donors. This can be wishful thinking because a number of conditions need to be satisfied.

Firstly, there must exist a provincial development plan and such plan to be incorporated into the national development plan. May be this calls into question the coverage of the national development plan that the government is going on now to complete. Does it also incorporate ward, constituency and provincial development plans? If not then any development profile formulated whether at the ward, constituency and provincial level may not be seriously taken up.

The other reason for the poor take up of development profile is due to the country's lack of capacity in implementing development plans. It needs to be appreciated that a development plan needs to be nurtured through the government system if it is to be considered for implementation. The provincial wards do not have the capacity to do that. They really do not have it, nothing at all. The ward grants have been given left, right and centre. This is due to the fact that wards, let alone constituencies were never in our system recognized as service delivery agents under our government system. No, it is something new, and this question will need to be

reconsidered, considering the fact that millions of dollars of development funds are channelled through members of Parliament and provincial members. There is need to formally constitute wards and constituencies as cost centres of the national and provincial budgets and all the administration support that goes with it. Failing that, funds channelled through MPAs and Members of Parliament will be vulnerable to misuse, which is currently happening right now as we are talking.

The other is lack of national capacity. We have many constituency profiles in 1997 where there was a big spree to get all constituencies to come up with development profiles and we submit all of them to the Ministry of Provincial Government and they are sitting there until today, in our case not one of the projects that we put inside the profile was addressed - lack of national capacity. Of all the activities, I think the ability of the country to earn from abroad in order to trade and the ability of the Government to collect the desired level of revenue to sustain a meaningful public investment program are most important. Important as well is the proper use of official transfers to the country by way of aid assistance. I am basically talking about our national capacity.

We just need to see the state of the economy and the deteriorating state of public infrastructures and basic essential services to believe that the country is performing below par in these areas. The road just in front of us, the road down there is deteriorating every day faster than we can repair them. That boils down to our national capacity.

The level of economic activities in the country, yes I believe is inadequate to generate the level of revenue and required savings to sustain a viable public investment program and infrastructures and essential services. Furthermore, the country's export sector could not support a healthy level of foreign reserves without accounting for official transfers. We could pride ourselves on that but if not the official transfers, our own ability to accumulate a reasonable level of reserves will not happen.

The other factor is aid donors' attitude towards constituency and ward development plans and profiles. Our aid donors that pick up constituency priorities have been very selective and in all cases in areas they traditionally engaged in with the national government. This should be in the area of social services and infrastructure development where identified developments are picked up, not necessarily because they are identified as priority by the people but rather in line with their established program in Solomon Islands.

Here lies a significant problem as far as the use of aid money is concerned because of the fact that there is no real agreement on priorities. That is not necessarily a bad thing. I guess aid donors have a duty to ensure that their tax payers' money is used to achieve the purpose of their assistance. The standing objective of aid in some countries is to advance their national interest through the alleviation of poverty and the promotion of sustainable development. Aid donors consider investments in social services, infrastructure development, education and health and good governance as directly addressing sustainable development and alleviation of poverty. In other words, they are interested presenting a Solomon Islands that foreign investors can trust as a worthy destination for investment. That is where the focus of aid donors is on. And so you can come up with all sorts of ward profiles and constituency profiles and whatever but they will just sit there to collect dust because they do not go in line with the thinking of the aid donors.

Lastly, one problem that I see with the uptakes of profiles is lack of commitment to development plan by the people themselves. This is a major hindrance to the successful implementation of constituency and ward development profiles. Even though there are development plans or plan whatever, but people still come up with new priorities. Despite of the fact that we may have already have a list of priorities in our development plans but they will still come because they do not really understand what is going on and so they come up with new priorities and that disturbs what is already put in the development profile. I am not saying this to discourage the formulation of ward development profiles, as it is a good thing to do, but rather what I am trying to say is that we need to be conscious of the possible hindrance to the successful implementation of ward plans.

I have no problem with the other resolutions except a comment or two at the committee stage when this report will go to the committee of the whole house. Having raised these comments, I have no problem supporting the intention of the Minister to refer the Communiqué to the committee of the whole House to consider the report in more detail. I support the Minister's motion.

Sitting suspended at 11.25 am

Sitting resumed at 2pm

Mr STANLEY SOFU (*MP East Kwaio*): Thank you for recognizing me to contribute to the general debate of this very important Buala Communiqué of the fourth Premiers Conference.

I join my two colleague members of Parliament who have already contributed to also register my vote of thanks to the Minister for bringing this Communiqué to Parliament for our deliberation. On that note, I wish to also congratulate the Minister for his reappointment as Minister of Provincial and Institutional Strengthening. I must also take this opportunity to register my thanks to our nine provincial premiers for the good work they have done in putting their executive thinking into this Communiqué. I must also thank officers of the Ministry of Provincial Government and those who contributed towards this very important report.

I think this report is not late but timely because I believe the hardworking Minister of Provincial Government has held consultations with various stakeholders and finally took a paper to Cabinet for its deliberation and now before us members of Parliament to register our observations. I think the Minister of Provincial Government on behalf of the Government is doing a very fine job.

I was a former minister and I attended the last two conferences held in Lata, Temotu province and at Tulagi in the Central Islands province. And we only took the observations of those two meetings to cabinet for noting, and that is it. It does not come to Parliament so that members of Parliament can air our views on this very important Communiqué. On that note, I must once again acknowledge the Minister of Provincial Government, MP for Lau/Mbaelelea.

The resolutions in this communiqué presented by the premiers, as a former provincial member I can understand the premiers wish is for their views to be brought to Parliament. That is their wish and so now it is here, the paper is here before Parliament for us to consider.

As my two colleague members who have already contributed stated that the premiers' conference is a very important meeting, a very high level meeting because the nine provinces, including Honiara City Council as the tenth is getting the views and thinking of our provinces - the people that we represent on the floor of Parliament today. It is the provinces that are closer to our people and they listen to our people's views. I believe this is the wish of our provincial premiers. To say this report is late is dispelled by me, it is not late, it is still on time because proper consultations have to take place. It has to go to the AG's chambers, back to Cabinet, the Cabinet considered the

document further, and if there is need for further consultations with the provincial premiers then it has to happen before it ends up here. And so I think it is timely because when we pass something it is something proper. This communiqué is just over a year, from October of last year up until today is only 14 months and the Government needs to settle down to carry out its responsibilities.

On the comment that the provincial government system is weak has my support. I agree with that comment because our provinces depend very much on the national government. What always happens is that many times when provinces submit their budget, the national budget has already been passed; provincial budgets come later. Therefore, what the provincial premiers were doing is trying to make adjustments for delivery of services to our rural populace. That is what our provincial premiers are considering.

We might think that some of the things recommended by the premiers are administrative matters. I agree, but you do not actually feel what it is like. They feel it, they experienced the difficulties, it is within their bounds and they understand it and that is why they really wanted to take it to the national government. Let me use an example here. When I was the provincial minister of education in Malaita province, at the end of the year when teachers travel home, and they are entitled to that, maybe the Ministry of Education or the national government for that matter only budgets for that province say \$100,000 where right now it is about \$1.3million to \$1.7million, for provinces like Malaita, Guadalcanal and Western provinces for teachers travel. How are they going to go about that? It is beyond the ability of provinces to meet the cost of their teachers travelling home and coming back to resume normal classes after the Christmas break. That is really a difficulty and that is why you see it under Resolution 17. It is put in there because they find it very difficult, they are the ones who feel it, they are the ones who know it. Although this is an administrative matter that should be channelled directly to the ministries responsible, it is brought up here to the level they understand can be addressed because teachers' travel will continue every year and it increases every year. It is very important that this is brought before the Government and even Parliament.

I agree with the member for Parliament for East Choiseul that the premiers' conference is a very important meeting. I too would like to recommend that the Prime Minister or the Minister of Provincial Government to chair this meeting on the spot, and not the Permanent Secretary because we must treat provincial governments with very

high regard. The provinces are going to that meeting on behalf of our people in the rural areas. I just want to remind my Minister and my good Prime Minister that because of the importance of the premiers conference, I would like to suggest that in the next premiers' conference, I join the member of Parliament for East Choiseul to say that the Minister himself should chair the conference or even the Prime Minister and not the Permanent Secretary.

If we look at Resolution 3, I experienced this during my time as a provincial member. Whilst I acknowledge the request of the premiers and the minister, for stabilisation of provincial governments, in my experience, when one is added, for example the Malaita Provincial Assembly has 16 members, and if one member is added to that number, the other side with a minority will come to nothing. Sometimes there may be important matters that the minority group should have a say on, but it would be difficult for them because the majority rules. And so I would like to caution my Minister for Provincial Government and the AG's chamber to carefully look into this. That is very important because I had gone through this and experienced it myself and so it is very important that whilst the Ministry of Provincial Government to look into it, it is also important to consider the point I raised here because where there is majority and the government side has the number it will go through. I want to caution the Minister and the Government to look into this.

I do not have much to say on this communiqué because I support it. I stand up purposely just to register my support to the Minister and the Government on this very important communiqué.

Some of us might think that while waiting why come up with resolutions and recommendations like this, we just wait for the federal system'. But if just wait without doing anything, what is going to happen? Are we just going to wait like this? We need to get the ball rolling while waiting for the federal system, which I believe every province is looking forward to. I believe officers of the office of the Prime Minister are working very hard on the federal system.

The thinking of the premiers is that they wanted this system very quickly. They want the federal system to be quickly completed. That is their thinking, and maybe the thinking of some of us sitting down here as well. This is a big thing and we cannot rush with it. Whatever we finally come out with for this nation must be a good thing for our people for the future of our children, and so it is very important. Therefore, for me even though it is slow but if done properly I would be very happy with it. We want a very

good end result, a very good fruit, the outcome of those who are assigned to this very important task.

However, the government of the day must try to improve the delivery of services to our people. When I say this, my colleague MP for North Vella is smiling because he supports what I am saying as true. That is my point. Whilst waiting for the office of the Prime Minister and the review committee that is dealing with this, the government must get something going so that our people receive the services they need. Sometimes we members of Parliament stay here in Honiara for a few months and when we go back we can see things happen in our constituencies. I think our service delivery system needs to be improved.

I want to register my small observation here on Resolution 7 on national development to be centralized. I must thank past governments for doing their very best. Every time, a government comes up, it comes up with its policies, which I believe they are also Solomon Islanders and they come with policies or their thinking with the aim of improving services to our people. Whatever angle they might come up with, the thinking is just the same and that is the aim of providing services down to our people. Right now if you look at the setting in our country, some services never reach our people, nothing at all! May be some of you sitting down here and laughing now may have services reach the whole of your constituencies, like North East Guadalcanal.

Hon Sikua: Yeah, the RCDF is doing it.

Mr Sofu: Yeah, something like that.

Every government that comes into power tries to draw up policies to enable services reach the end, to reach those lacking services. The Minister of Health is over there looking at me and I believe the policy of the Government is that within certain kilometres clinics must be established because health service is very important. The same is with schools, which are social services. In this particular communiqué under Resolution 7, there is mention of economic growth centres, which I believe our people can fully participate in any activity that gear towards improvement of their rural livelihoods, and I really want to see this happen.

The only thing is that the government must look carefully because there are line ministries that can connect with provincial governments so then they go ahead with the work and not a body that is set, for instance, to provide what we want that consumes

up money and does not reach the rural end. That is what I want to caution the Minister and the government about because we want our rural populace to fully benefit from government policy that is intended for them. And I would like to thank the Government right now for continuing with some economic growth centres in some of our constituencies and our provinces. Whatever we do we must not forget that resources owners are there; there must be wider consultations with them.

Many times some of the things we do without resource owners, even though the government's policies are good but they will not work. This is a very important area and the reforms the government is doing now will address such situations. It will be difficult, it will not be easy. Even you, Mr Speaker, would understand that this is not easy but we will continue to go on. That is my comment on Resolution 7.

Resolution 10 talks about consultations with host province on major national development projects. That is very good, that is fine and that is what we want to see. The thinking of the premiers' on consultation is that any major development activity in our provinces, I think it is equally important that it be taken with care. Otherwise all major developments only concentrate in just one province. Or development can happen in a certain province but its neighbour province does not know anything about developments going on there. While the idea of establishing growth centres in our various constituencies is good, if the government sees it fitting for an area, establish it there because we want services to reach our people, and not only because it is an urban setting. The government's aim I know is that it wants to keep our people remain in the provinces so that they do not migrate to town. Because when they come to town they will create a lot of problems because we all come from different provinces, languages and cultures. Let us be fair to distribution of developments in all the provinces as we want to address the needs of our provincial premiers.

On 'ward development profiles', I also want to join my two colleagues who have already spoken to also register my vote of thanks for the good work that is going on at this time. This is very important because only then would we be able to tell the need in a provincial ward, in a constituency, or in an area and so it is very important. We have to have ward development profiles so that we can do our planning according to what we see and know in our areas. And here I want to thank the UNDP program for continuing to assist the provincial governments and members of Parliament for putting services to the right places that are needed. That is on Resolution 14.

My final point is on Resolution 15, and I agree that may be that is what we want to see. Prior to the national budget there must be wider consultations with our provinces, with provincial premiers or in the absence of the premier his deputy or the minister of finance, and the provincial secretary and the provincial treasurer to come maybe for three months as recommended in here to talk with the National Government team rather and relevant ministries that the provincial governments think would work together with them to improve the delivery of services to our people. They must come. In the past in the 1990s and up by the time provincial budgets get here, the National Government budget has already been passed. And because of this many times things that we think are very important for our provincial wards or for our province are normally missed out. The thinking in Resolution 15 is fully supported by me.

We cannot do things at once, it is very difficult but with the understanding of provinces, we members of Parliament from this side and the other side will work together to achieve what we wanted for our people because both the provincial government and the national government are singing the same tune. I think our understanding, our cooperation by working together and helping each other is called for in important reports like this. With these few observations I support the Buala Communiqué of the Premiers conference.

Mr. SETH GUKUNA (*MP Rennell/Bellona*): I am privileged for giving me this time to contribute to the motion before the House. Like those who have spoken let me take this opportunity to first of all thank the Minister, the hard working Minister of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening for bringing this motion on the Buala Communiqué.

I am not going to talk about the content of this communiqué, but I am going to talk about the communiqué itself, just a general review of the communiqué. But let me first of all say that I am a member of the People's Congress Party (PCP). There are two members of the PCP here, of which one is now the Minister of Aviation on the other side. In fact, he is the parliamentary leader of our party. They said we are useless, but we are one party, just separated by the seats opposite of each other. But I consulted him at lunch time and I am speaking on our behalf. So Prime Minister, what I am going to say is on our behalf, and he agreed for me to talk on our behalf.

First of all, let me frankly say that I am really surprised why this communiqué is brought in here. It is a waste of Parliament's time. The Minister has already said he has

taken this to Cabinet. That is the highest I think it should go. We are bringing it here on the floor of Parliament but what are we going to do with this communiqué? I am not talking about the content, which is very good, but I am talking about the theme of the Buala Communiqué.

And first all, why did you start with Buala? Why do you not bring the communiqué of lake Tengano? What do you start with Buala? What is important about this Buala Communiqué? Where is the Tengano Communiqué, which is the first one should come here if you think that they should come here. The Tulagi communiqué too should come here, but you start with Buala. But anyway the theme of the Buala Communiqué says "unity, harmony and progress". The guiding principle of this particular communiqué is based on the statement by the minister who was present at that conference. I do not know what the Minister was saying. It also says 'the issues of the Communiqué must be of substance'. Another principle behind this Communiqué is that it must be in line with the development plans of the government of the day.

My understanding of a communiqué is that it is almost like a press release. It is supposed to be informative. After the premiers discuss issues, I expect what they discuss or their resolutions to come in a different format, a presentable format. This Communiqué is just a public document for us to know what the premiers' conferences are talking about. Because no one knows what most of the conferences are discussing and so the communiqué is just like a form of press release to inform the public what the premiers are talking about. Their resolution must come in a more official form.

When you look at this Communiqué there are no discussions in here but all demands for the government to do this, this and that. The Minister stated that about 44 percent, more than half of this has been achieved. Therefore, if this entire document is all achieved will it end up here? Or has it been brought here to lever the unfinished items in the Communiqué? That is why I am not quite sure why this document was brought in here. But in my opinion, 56 percent complete is enough for this Communiqué. If there is any unfinished item in this Communiqué it should be discussed in the next premiers' conference and bring it up again. This should already go, it does not need to be brought in here, it is out of date. There was one communiqué passed in October, which should come here and the Communiqué of the Choiseul conference. That is the one that should come in here and it should contain some items that are not finished in this particular Communiqué. In my opinion this is out of place because after this motion we are going to go to the committee stage to go through this

document to pass one by one of these 25 listed items in here. More than 50 percent of this has been done, and so what is the use of passing it? Most of these have already been implemented. That is why I say I feel out of place with this Communiqué.

A lot of good points have been discussed here. Most of them should go to the Public Service Commission or the SIPEU so that they can talk about the increase in salaries and so forth. These are administrative issues as it is not us that should approve pay rise for provincial members and their direct employees.

One particular item in this Communiqué that I disagree with is the one on the Melanesian Spearhead Group. As you know, Sir, there are certain issues that belong to the central government, they belong to the state. Dealing with foreign countries, national security and all these are issues of the central government, the state and it is not for the provinces to meddle around with. And under our structure these issues belong to the central government, they belong to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and that is its work. And so I do not see why this Communiqué requested that they should be involved in these matters. Next they will request to be involved in national security too, if this is allowed.

As I said I am not going to touch the content of this Communiqué. My short contribution is about this document and one point that I want to make in closing is that this document is out of place, the Cabinet has already considered it and that is enough. For it to come here requiring us to pass the increase in the salary of those people, I think we will not be doing the right thing. Thank you.

Hon DICK HA'AMORI (*Minister for Education and Human Resources Development*): I really intend to just sit down and listen, until the member for Rennell and Bellona made his speech. I thought that if the member for Rennell Bellona can speak, then so would I and that is why I am standing up now.

I would like to start on the questioning of the communiqué coming into Parliament. Over the years we have been talking about decentralisation, effective delivery and all such things for our people. When our people's voices get to this Parliament we change our colours again and start to declassify ourselves. Definitely some of us have the thinking that we are much higher than others and all that. We no longer see ourselves as a team. If we compartmentalise governments in this country and there is no coordination in it then we cannot hope for any effective delivery of service to our people.

We should see ourselves as a team to deliver services to our people. We operate here and our people, another of our system is operating out there. What appears to be the case all these years would seem like members of Parliament are afraid to fully increase the capacity of the provincial government, I think because they are afraid that when they go to the general elections the others will beat them or I do not know. The sort of attitude we have been showing to provincial governments all these years really ruins this country. People question us; they thought those people are eating themselves, but what about us?

The 80 percent we keep on talking about over and over again are living in the rural areas where really it is the provincial governments that deal with them day in day out or supposed to be anyway. We members of Parliament we go from Vavaya Ridge, down to Point Cruz, Vavaya Ridge to Point Cruz, and that is all we go. We hardly rub shoulders with those people, and there are only about 50 of us around here. A lot of things we talk about here are really also subjects of provincial governments. These things are not only national interest. We keep on talking about either provincial government or constituency matters. On that basis, there is really no difference between us members of Parliament and the provincial governments.

What I am trying to say here is we should take some time and listen to what the provincial governments wanted to say. And so I am indeed grateful that my colleague Minister for Provincial Government did not stop this paper at Cabinet but instead moved it up to this honourable chamber. Because it is fitting for this honourable chamber as it belongs to the people represented by the premiers and so it is fitting that we hear their voices up here.

I would like to mention something about the Lands and Titles Act. A general observation is that many times we talk about moving those lands back to our people. Well, to begin with, most of the lands belong to them. I think what we are talking about is what traders of before came and took it and when we became independent whether they are still in the hands of the government or I do not know, maybe in other different hands. That is why every time we talk about land issues because most of the lands in this country are well and truly secured and are still there. In my opinion, the lands in this country are a bit over secured in the hands of our own people. And so if we want to take up the style of development that we have been talking about, the western style of development, then the protection we had on our lands needs to be relooked into. And there are only two things we can do We can either go down that path or we forget

about going down that path, because if we are deciding to go down the western of economic development, then we need to rethink about how we regard and lock up lands. We need to loosen resources like that because if we do not loosen resources then it would be very hard for us to develop. We do not need to mention names or whatever but we are very aware of some developments we wanted to do around here cannot be done. Because we may say 'since this person signs his name it is okay', but when you want to start brushing the place, maybe his uncle or his brother comes saying it is 'not yet sorted out. That is the case of land ownership in Solomon Islands. But it is those same people who stop their land from government keeping on complaining to the government that government is not helping them. But how would the government help when something the government needs to make services available to you has been locked? This thought about returning land to people, I think would be a little counterproductive because the national government is one service provider to every one of us. It is a service provider and so if we remove things that government can use to provide all those services, then we are seriously incapacitating the government, the government that is providing the service.

If we go down and give 100 percent to our people on land, so that the money received from the land, a bulk of it goes to the hands of our people. That sounds nice but in practicality it will not be very good. This is why it would not be very good, for an example, I have a gold mine and a mineral deposit on my land and then most of the money comes to me. But do you think I am responsible to pay for the doctors? I am not responsible to pay the doctors. Do you think I am the one responsible for maintaining the roads for the public service? No, I will eat up my money until I die as a result of indulgence in my money. But when I get sick I will be expected to go back to the same hospital. That is it.

This is the kind of thing that makes me to question advancing the idea of the kind of lands the government is holding at the moment. It looks like we are talking too much about this only for political gains during election time. I say this because I think I have not yet shaved when I heard people talking about land issue that it will be returned to people until now but it is yet to be returned to our people. We cannot give it back for very practical reasons and that is because the government still needs those lands. Because when government wants to put a clinic somewhere it is better that the land acquired by the government sometime ago is in the control of the government and so it is easy. Because if you go to ask for a new land to build a clinic or a hospital, it will

not be easy to build that hospital or clinic we know that we cannot start a new clinic if we are to go and ask for land. Every one of us knows the reasons why. And then we will turn around and complain to government that government cannot provide service in our place. How would that service be provided when people lock everything up?

Those are the things we must talk about here. It is not good to talk about such things on the floor of Parliament just to make us sound popular with it. Let us be practical, explain that government needs money for its services to the general public of Solomon Islands. That is what we need to be doing. We keep on talking about a good policy is returning this and that, but this is only scoring political points for election purposes but there is no practical purpose. We must not lie to our people but tell them straight that government needs these lands and so the people have to allow those lands, do not talk about it but allow the government to own some of the lands so that it can help the general public.

Those are few comments I want to make on the land issue. The basic point, of course, is that government needs those lands and so allow the government to own some of the lands. Therefore, the idea of the state and the people of Solomon Islands owning lands is a good one because it is very democratic. Why is it democratic? It is democratic because we talk about government by the people, of the people and for the people and so the government and the people are just one entity. If you only want to give land to people and not the state, then you are trying to divide an entity that should not be divided. Democracy shows that people are the government and the government is for the people.

On that point it is important that when we address it as it is. A saying goes like "if it quakes like a duck it is a duck". Let us say the truth, do not beat around the bush about it but tell it to our people in the country that leave some of the lands for the government to use for its services. The government will not service itself but it services Solomon Islands as a whole. For that reason we should be straightforward in talking about it. We must not keep on advancing the idea that it only serves political expediency during election time.

The issue of ward development profiles maybe is true that a lot of profiles have been done by the UNDP, as mentioned by some of you. But I do not think all the provinces benefit from this. When the books were issued out I wanted to get one for my province but I could not remember collecting anyone, only a few did. In fact, how we paint this country is we make it lopsided or skewed. Everybody outside of Solomon

Islands think that Solomon Islands is made up of Malaita, Guadalcanal and West because people keep on coming for all the major projects only in those three provinces. Is it not made up of Rennell/Bellona, Temotu and that is why we cannot hear any major projects in those provinces? Or maybe Makira is not part of Solomon Islands and that is why I did not see any profile when it was released? Or are Choiseul and Isabel no longer part of Solomon Islands? I think there is still room for some of these profiling, and profiling is not only a picture about the future but also about where the wards and the provinces are located, their economic existence at a point in time. And so there is still room for the ward development profiles to be made.

I will now move on to Resolution 17 on the salaries, entitlements and travel of teachers. This request sounds good but as we all know we keep on advancing partnership, we always talk about partnership. If you want this you help in so much percent and I will come in on so much percent. This principle of partnership that we always advance is a good one, except that provincial governments do not have the financial capacity for them to become effective partners. It is therefore important at this point in time for me to mention that we keep on referring to provincial governments as agents. The word 'agent' is a bit degrading. They are provincial governments, we call them provincial governments, and if they are provincial governments let them be governments. That is what we are supposed to call them. If we want to make reference to them let us make reference to them as governments and not agents. Because if we make reference to them as only agents and not provincial governments, then our attitude will not provide them with the necessary capacity to be able to be effective partners when we talk about partnership in the development of our people.

It is good that this paper comes to Parliament so that we start talking about some of these issues. We can tell them this is what you can do and this is what you cannot do. I think let us try to avoid repetition. Allow them to do some of the things so that they fully do it so that that function is removed from the national government - let it happen in the provinces. That is what I think we should do to the provinces so that we share. But the attitude that we have been doing all along is very counterproductive when we continue to consider the provincial governments as simply agents. It is very timely and it is a good thing that this set of resolutions or rather the communiqué it so happens it is the Buala one and not Lake Tegano, but it does not matter. A probably better one is Buala, I do not know that we have this communiqué coming here.

On salaries, I think all along that is what the government has been doing. In fact if we start to take on board some of these things, you must have to accept that half of the national budget will be eaten up by the Ministry of Education. As it is, the Ministry of Education has taken a substantial chunk of the national budget, and so to start entertaining something other than partnership, is in my opinion, going to make the budget imbalance a little bit. But otherwise the issue to be paid from the consolidated funds, as we all know, the ministries are basically using consolidated funds. To say let them pay it off their consolidated fund, I think is not quite correct because they have been paid under the same consolidated fund.

On the issue of agriculture in the syllabus, some of the issues worth noting only is loading of the national curriculum. As is it now, there are core subjects; that is how it is organized and then there are the electives. In a given day, we only have 24 hours; you take 12 hours away for sleeping and all that, and then you start counting the hours in school, if we load so many things inside, especially the suggestion here, it might not be very feasible.

I appreciate and I take on board the importance and the emphasis placed on agriculture for whatever it is, but for it to be a core subject just in two years may not be very advisable. If we are going to have a core then we better start at the beginning, from primary all the way to exit in the upper secondary school. But the only concern is loading of the national curriculum.

Having said that does not mean it cannot be done. It can be done. I believe some educational systems around are a bit more loaded than what we have here. But I just want to point out that those who will be responsible and might want to take on a bit more consideration than this is one issue that has to be considered.

Overall, it is not a mistake that the Minister of Provincial Government brought this paper in here. It is very correct for him to bring it in here, because finally we get to formally talk about things that our premiers who represent, just like we are, represent our people have to tell us what they want. Considering that our premiers live with our people day in day out, rubbing shoulders with them, and so to stifle their voice is unwise. With these few comments I fully support the motion that brought this communiqué in this honourable house.

Hon DEREK SIKUA (*Leader of Opposition*): Thank you for giving me this opportunity to contribute to this motion brought to this House by the Minister for Provincial

Government and Institutional Strengthening. Let me thank the honourable Minister for moving this motion and to congratulate him for the success in achieving so far in implementing or setting out to implement 12 of the 25 resolutions contained in the Buala Communiqué. Also I would like to thank colleague opposition MPs and other colleagues on the other side of the House who have already contributed to the debate.

I think the question of why this communiqué is tabled in Parliament for us to debate will be clearer when we go to the Committee of the whole House. To my mind it will become clearer on the issues why there are brought here. But the Buala Communiqué is quite typical of the evolutionary process that now marks the inherent part of provincial politics in Solomon Islands where we see resolutions reminiscent of the need for us to unite, to harmonise and work with progress in mind, especially the work of provincial governments, and that is embodied in the theme of the Buala Communiqué “unity, harmony and progress”.

Also the statement of guiding principles to the resolutions is reflective of the position of weakness that is perceived and is often paraded by provincial governments, not only during the premiers conferences, collectively as premiers of their respective provinces, but also other times separately as well by premiers and executives of individual provinces. And as you know, they always refer to them as only agents of the central government and they can only perform as much as the national government allows them to perform either legally through the legal frameworks, financially or administratively.

When we look at the resolutions, much of the resolutions are basically requests to the national government to be supportive if the national government wish for provincial governments to be effective in implementing national policy frameworks and implementation strategies, which are, as they have specified there, are achievable and in line with the overall development plans of the government of the day. And here lies the paradox of governance and the relevance as indicated by Resolution No.1, which is an advocacy of the formation of a premiers’ council to be established as an act of parliament. And as mentioned by the member for East Choiseul this morning, that is already captured in the draft federal constitution. But as you know at the end of the day, the rational for and the relevance and the powers for this particular body, if it were to be established, will be debated and discussed by members of Parliament once the bill is introduced in this Parliament. So we will be keenly looking forward to such a bill.

Resolutions No. 2 and 3 of the Communiqué call for amendment to section 25 of the Provincial Government Act to, firstly, harmonize proportionately the salaries and allowances of provincial assembly speaker and the clerk, if I am correct, and furthermore it seeks to amend section 19 of the same Act for each provincial government executive to command absolute majority to ensure some form of stability necessary for the development process. Now whether such amendments will necessarily achieve stability is also subject to the dynamics of the politics of numbers, and I do not think it will be dependent upon the dynamics of good principles. This is something that has to be thought through quite carefully. I am not really sure what the member for East Kwaio was saying on this particular communiqué, Communiqué No3. I think he has confused the whole thing. But to my mind, politics being what it is, when we do come to such amendments, we should be looking at the principles and why we want to amend those laws in this regards.

Resolutions No. 4 and 5 and 22 calls for the revision and amendment to the Lands and Titles Act as well as the Mines and Minerals Acts, mainly calling for simplicity in procedures of land acquisition and at the same time attempting to maximise benefits to landowners, especially for mining activities. Whilst amendments to both acts are necessary for many reasons, firstly, I must say that these acts are well out of date and I am mainly referring to the Mines and Mineral Act, simplicity and sharing of benefits in my mind are very much administrative procedures and not necessarily legislative. And so the transfer of perpetual estates by the Commissioner of Lands to our people including provincial governments is something that is being requested here. I heard what the Minister for Education is saying in that we have been talking a returning alienated land back to our people. But I disagree with the Minister when he said that these things are only used as platforms for political campaign.

Handing alienated land back original landowners is not as easy as it sounds. I think the government has already got a very clear policy on handing back alienated land to our people. But it is also encumbered upon our people to fulfil certain criteria; certain criteria that are very clear, and if followed closely, then land will be handed back to them. But it is at this point that it proves very difficult because identifying who the original landowners are when there are disputing parties, maybe where two becomes three and four arguing that they are the original landowners, is not an easy thing to solve.

But what I am saying is that it is not a political ploy for us to win votes during elections, no! I think we mean what we say, but the process is slow because the process of identifying original landowners is quite difficult and time consuming. That, I know, is the case with the Lungga/Tenaru land here on Guadalcanal. And much as I would have liked to give that land back to them when we were in government, it was not that easy. And I would like this government to continue with that work and make sure we start returning land back to people who can prove to us that they are the original landowners.

Resolutions No. 6, 7, 8 and 9 echoed the perennial call for decentralisation either for constitutional changes or even policy changes with huge demands for providing facilities for rural development including investment initiatives which would in turn improve economic activity. That, we all know, has been the call every now and again. But the serious question that needs to be asked is would decentralizing governance necessarily improve economic performance and growth? That is the main question; if we decentralize governance will it necessarily result in improved economic performance and growth? Think about this very carefully because sometimes if we think that up here there is a lot of corruption and abuse, how much more if it is given down to a person who is not properly prepared to handle this kind of money, this kind of responsibility and that kind of thing. There has got to be a lot of thinking through. And there are arguments for and against whether it will result in improved economic performance and growth and service to our people or will it be just the worse. That is the question.

Resolutions No. 10, 11, 12 and 13 advocate consultation and sharing of development planning, cost and revenue sharing and ways and mechanisms in collecting revenue whether through rents, fees and charges. I believe this is best achieved by continued dialogue and meeting obligations and legal requirements, in which I think the Ministry of Provincial Governments needs to be proactive, and I think the Ministry of Provincial Government will be proactive because it has a very good Minister there now, my dear friend, the member for Lau/Mbaelelea. Just a bit of proactiveness making sure that we keep on top all these resolutions as they come in every year. Those set of resolutions to me are basically administrative work that the Ministry needs to keep on top of.

The same is with Resolutions No. 14, 15, 16, and 17, which is basically again participatory planning and budgetary issues best addressed at the Ministry of

Provincial Government level where the coordination of all planning and budgeting for provincial governments should take place as a core function of the Ministry of Provincial Government. Again those are mainly administrative functions and I think that is why the Ministry finds it easy to get on with those and starting doing something about.

Resolution 17, which the Minister for Education has already covered, I thought that already reflects the status quo. The Minister mentioned that teachers' salaries, teachers' entitlements in the teaching service hand book and the travel cost of teachers, all these have already come out of the consolidated funds. I am not sure what is being referred to in this particular resolution by the premiers because my understanding, unless I am out of date now, I have been out of education for a couple of years now, but what I understand before is that fares for teachers to go home is paid for by the Ministry and then for them to return to schools, and I think that is the partnership the Minister is talking about, it is the education authorities that meets their fares back to schools. I am not sure if that is still the case. If that is what the premiers are talking about for government to take over the whole travel cost for teachers, then it is something the Ministry can look into. Not just to go home for holidays but also to bring them back to their schools they are posted to in the following year. That is administrative.

Resolution 18, as the Minister for Education has said is a stand-alone resolution, advocating the teaching of agriculture in forms four and five, which is something that is already in place. If the curriculum or syllabus is out of date or impractical, then I think it should just be updated for relevance and practical application. But I agree with the Minister that we have to be careful not to crowd out the curriculum. If another core subject is added, examinable at the SISC level, it will load the system too much. Those of us involved in education know this very well that we have to try not to crowd out the curriculum and this is will make teachers and students to work really hard.

Agriculture, if it is compulsory will also disadvantage schools that are based in urban areas because it is a practical subject and so where will they plant vegetables and things like that? St. Johns, for example, is a Community High School that has forms four and five. Or are you giving them a piece of land at Lungga, St. Nicholas, for example. It will not be practical. Even some of the community high schools in the rural areas will also have very limited land space where they are located, some of them are even on customary land and may be the landowner is not prepared to give more land to the school. Practical wise, it would be really difficult to make it.

But it can be done like the Minister has said if it is compulsory in forms four and five. But this means introducing a mixed mode curriculum system where there is the academic stream from form four, and then the vocational stream follows the vocational strand. It is only in this strand - in form four and five that agriculture can be compulsory. But we have already got that system planned; it is only its introduction that is yet to happen, and I think the Minister is going to get on with it in the next four years or so.

Resolution 19 clearly highlights the deficiency in conceptual functions of provincial governments as agents of the national government and the desired privileges of autonomy as resolved by the premiers, to also participate in regional organizations and specifically mentioned are the Melanesian Spearhead Group and the Pacific Forum. To go as separate entities or to go with the Minister's delegation, I am not sure. The dynamics of such a delegation, I am surprised why the Minister for Foreign Affairs agreed to this as mentioned by the Minister, because it is very interesting, this would be very interesting in terms of foreign policies and sovereignty issues, as you can understand. You, Mr Speaker, and I have been to three or four forums and three or four MSG meetings, and practically I cannot see where provincial governments will fit in; where the premiers and provincial secretaries of provinces will fit in. I think it specifically mentions trade for trade purposes, and if that is so then I am sure there will be appropriate bodies within these organizations, the MSG and the Forum for them to join government delegations to go for basically trade issues. But to go to the MSG proper and the Pacific Islands proper accompanying the Minister for Foreign Affairs or the Prime Minister for that matter, I think is an unnecessary expense to government.

Resolution 20 is the need for intra-ministerial dialogue and consultations between ministries and the Ministry of Provincial Government which should link issues of national importance to provincial governments as is the case with climate change highlighted in this resolution. That is again administrative, in my mind.

Resolutions 21 & 24 basically request the provincial government's participation in donor meetings and other donor partner's participation in previous conferences, which I am sure as the Minister reported in his opening speech of this debate, is already beginning to happen. I am sure ministry of Planning and Aid Coordination and the Ministry of Provincial Government can talk to each other on the need for this kind of thing, which I think it would be healthy.

The last Resolution 25, is administrative again and is a call for the efficiency of running the Premiers conferences. And as you know, Mr Speaker, this is the fourth one, the fifth one has just happened at Taro, the Ministry of Provincial Government should be better off at organising this conference. The staff and the Permanent Secretary are still the same, and as long as there is funding is made available and in a timely manner, I am sure this meeting can be well organised and should come up with what it is intended to achieve.

There are some real concerns in the Communiqué and it is important that the national government take steps to attend to the whole. The view of those of us on this side of the House is that the government having taken this Buala Communiqué up to this level, it should also take up the other previous communiqués, take ownership of them with great responsibility use some of the points that I have raised to ensure a balance need to review and amend whatever that are being suggested, and indeed the provincial government system with a view to making it work. That is the institutional strengthening part of the Minister's ministry to make sure that the provincial government system works. Therefore, we need to do some reality checks and then do the right thing. It should not come as a surprise to anyone of us that provincial government as agents of the national government are getting more and more expensive and complex, and thus we need to unite and harmonize if any progress is to be made.

The challenge for the national government is to respond appropriately to the difference and unique situations in each of the provinces. Our provinces have very huge, marked and unmarked differences in population size, remoteness from Honiara and they are also different in their varying economic and infrastructure challenges, as well as their human capacities and manpower, and indeed the needs, as reflected in the Buala Communiqué of 2010. Therefore, whatever strategies we come up with, as the member for East Choiseul has mentioned, we must not come up with the "one size fits all" because all our provinces are different in size, in needs, in their manpower capacities and the other things that I have mentioned. So whatever strategies the government comes up with, the government must ensure it suits that particular province, and we cannot entertain a strategy where "one size fits all".

Whilst there are a few legislative changes that should be flagged at the National Parliament for proper consideration and resolve, most of the resolutions of the Buala Communiqué only highlight and repeat sentiments also raised in previous premiers conferences. And the main complaint is that provincial government are only agents of

the national government and therefore they are not very proficient, thus we need to give them more power, more money or rather we have to look for an alternative government system. And so how much longer the national government can rule over this issue is probably the biggest challenge of the Ninth Parliament.

But in the mean time we believe that as a matter of policy the following needs to be considered in the light of the current provincial government debate. Firstly, the work of provincial governments must be supported and facilitated by the Ministry of Provincial Government so that their operations are not held up or delayed.

Secondly, a revenue sharing formula is agreed and implemented between the national and provincial governments which would be based on variables such as population, natural resources, distances including contributions to the central government, revenues and a portion deriving from indirect taxation; that is the value added tax.

Thirdly, provincial planning, decision making and management processes are of a high standard and are providing services to our people. Do not forget that the same people who voted in the 50 of us now here or 49 at present are the very same people who voted in members of the provincial assemblies. Indeed, our constituencies are made up of the very same wards which we members of Parliament also serve and so we are all basically taking about the same people.

Fourthly, provincial governments are able to look after their own finances and I think this is being done - and apply this to service delivery, gaining respect from their communities. Sometimes some provinces misused their funds and their grants are held up, but the Ministry of Provincial Government should be looking very carefully at these provinces and making sure they do what they are supposed to be doing in delivering services to our people.

On further functions devolved to provincial governments, I think the provinces are getting it the wrong way around. They think that if they complain and make a lot of noise they will be heard. They should be doing the groundwork themselves and then come up to the national government and say 'look we are ready to take this over, can you give it to us because we have the manpower, we have the knowhow, develop this, along with the money'. I think that is the way it should happen rather than complaining every year through the premiers' communiqués.

We need to be supporting the provinces by making sure that their elections are effected in a timely and proper manner. We also need to recognise that the premiers'

conference needs to be held annually and well planned and attended. I think one of the things that need to be put on the agenda of our provincial governments is the resettlement schemes, especially for communities in need of relocation; that they are properly considered and affected in collaboration with adaptation programs of the Ministry of Environment, and the Prime Minister knows this very well.

I think one very important thing to be put into the agenda of our premiers to discuss is resettlement schemes for our people that are affected by climate change and sea level rise. That is the right forum for it to be discussed. I do not think we at the top level can push it down the throat of any province. Provinces having jurisdiction over land area — I think the right forum will be there. Let us start it from there and I want to see this happen.

I am happy to see provincial consultations are taking place and are active in reviewing, not only the provincial government act, but very recently the federal government system. I think we need to be involved in our promises in these areas. That I think should be happening in the meantime. With these remarks, I support the motion.

Hon GORDON DARY LILO (*Prime Minister*): Thank you Mr Speaker for the opportunity to contribute briefly on the motion moved by the Minister for Provincial Government that Parliament resolves into a committee of the whole House to consider the Buala Communiqué of the 4th Premiers' conference.

I would like to join the other colleagues who have contributed in commending the Minister for bringing in the Communiqué. I have no prepared speech, but listening to some of the comments that have been made, I think it would be good to share some ideas and information on the ongoing discussions that are going on about the whole issue of decentralisation in Solomon Islands.

I think it is absolutely fitting that the Communiqué of the premiers' conference must be tabled here. When the idea of having a premiers' conference was conceived some three or four years ago, I think it was a right thinking by those people at that time that we need to start to have this forum where premiers throughout the country can congregate and share ideas, share experiences about the difficulties that each of our provinces in our country is facing. In fact, it was not by accident and you can actually tell there are some people who are so critical about the way the provincial government runs or the premiers' conference runs. Some have actually expressed their opposition

on the way the premiers put their positions on certain development issues, and some of those people are found in this House.

I think we need to remind them of where the origin of how the provincial government system comes into the country. You need to read the constitution. And when I hear members contributing and make very ill-conceived thinking about the way the premiers runs the conference, I feel sorry, because if you read the preamble of our constitution, it says it all. The preamble say, 'that we agree and pledge that we shall ensure the participation of our people in the governance of their affairs and provide within the framework of our national unity for the decentralisation of power'.

That's where the origin comes from. For us, we are elected in a different way, and for them, they are elected in a different way as well. The Constitution also says that "there shall be executive authorities to be elected in assemblies". It does not say one assembly, it says assemblies. And in a country like Solomon Islands where we continue to be faced with the challenges of how we effectively govern, all these questions arise. For us here, we think the best way for us to deliver or to bring governance closer to the people is through decentralisation and so we come up with tiers in government like national government and then you have the provincial governments and then one that we used to have before, the Area Council. When member of North Vella was in taskforce, they do away with the area council, it is gone. That is why he rose up first today and made that contribution today. I was expecting that he would be the first one because he was in that task force some seven or seven years ago or 10 years ago where they finally abolished the area council, which is another tier of our government system. It might come back again member for North Vella. Because in the new federal constitution, which is the 2011 draft constitution we have now, it is proposing three tier: federal or central, state government and what is called a community government. It might be a bit different, and so do not be angry if that is introduced, but it is quite different from the area council that you abolished. That is what we are all looking for - how do we effectively govern this country or how do we bring governance closer to the people? Because that is the whole concept! Where should the supremacy of governance should lie? It must lie with the people, and not on us in here so that when the communiqué of the premiers come here we say "throw that out of here". No, that is wrong, we cannot do that.

In fact, communiqué, I think is the right terminology that they have agreed to put upon themselves. They did not say it is an agreement, they did not say it is a

memorandum or a contract. Or what kind of words do you used? They said it is a communiqué, a vocabulary that forms something like communication or communicable disease where, Mr Speaker, you know very well, communicable disease, and most of you know it. Those things come under that. It means transmitting the message and that is what a communiqué is, it is transmitting the message to the highest authority. Why? What has it to come to Parliament? Because the constitution says so! We must have a decentralization of powers in Solomon Islands.

The way we govern is what we need to talk about. Is it decentralization or is it through national development strategy and so we abolish those governments and we only have an effective national development strategy so that when it is delivered from the national it goes down to the people down there or what should we do? These are the questions we should continue to ask. And of course, the member for East Choiseul was talking about how we can come up with this very important strategy or think about a strategy to deliver it right down to people in the rural areas. We still have the federal constitution taskforce that are still working very hard right now trying to find out whether or not the model of governance that we are going to have where federal, state and then to community government will work well for us. Those are the things that are going on now.

But we need to start the groundwork for us to build up that capacity. You do not just start by saying it and then expecting something to happen. No, we have to start it now and I think that is exactly what this communiqué is all about. To tell us at this highest level that this is coming or this is what you need to do, government. Parliament has to have that oversight responsibility; this is what you need to look for so that we can keep the message flowing and people of this country must understand what we talk about.

Of course, sorry we did not bring the communiqué number one, two and three but when you ask those two people beside you, both were there. When this communiqué one was made, I think with that person from East. Communiqué two and three is with us two people here. Communiqué four is with us that's why we brought it here. Why is the minister responsible for it? The Minister has gone out. I think he is going to go and energize himself to come and face you guys very shortly, and so you wait for him.

Communiqué one and two is also me and him on that other side and not I myself, but the two of us. Communiqué 3, I think is the two of us on your side, and so

you should have asked both of them, where is communiqué one, two and three. We have given you four because it came during our time, and five will come later on. Communiqué four was signed by the guy who is making noise right behind me. And we have tried to reflect on how we can, as much as possible, give ourselves a commitment to be able to deliver on what our premiers want. But this is all about finding good governance, and that is what we need to be looking for. I am tired of hearing people coming here trying to urge some message of governance to the people and then ended up and say we need to revolt, we need revolution. Let us stop all these; there are better ways of us talking about this issue and find a solution to than trying to shortcut to the ultimate end of the road.

Who said that we cannot look beyond the horizon or our solution is beyond the horizon that we cannot fix our own problem. Our problem is, even if we do not look beyond our own horizons, which you must not try to do it because if you want to do, our eyes will stop; my eyesight is also not good this time. It is like a saying which goes “your thinking depends on your eyesight”. If you know that you cannot look beyond that, do not ever contemplate trying to find a solution to the thing that is beyond your sight. It is within us, we can find solutions to this problem. That is what the communiqué is all about, and it is to bring this communication here to us so that we can continue to find solutions to some of the problems that we have in this country.

Some questions have been asked about where is the development of the federal constitution. And in continuous debate and the public discourse that is going on right now we think that the solution is in the federal constitution, may be or it could be, but even before we go to that let us think about one thing. The geography of this country does not make governance simple to this country. That is the first thing.

Secondly, the spatiality of our population; by that I mean if you go to Malaita population is very high. If you go there it is low Renbell only 2,000 people there. So that makes even development or strategy for development very difficult because whether or not we like it. Economic growth is determined by the fact that where human settlement stays and human settlement that has little money to move around. Otherwise if you put goods in the shop who will buy them, why because you do not have the money to pay for it or you can put the goods in the store but if the population which should create the demand is not there. Who is going to go and pay for it? So that make things so difficult for us, so these are some of the realities that we need to look at.

Our geography and population spatiality in this country that makes governance very difficult that even makes the whole question of economic development quite difficult too. So where do we come. Let us come and anchor those questions on how do we govern, that is what we must continue to ask about. So when the minister of Provincial government brings those issues here, I think he really meant what he is saying; we have not yet reach the point that we establish good solution to the problem that we face. Let us start small we will come to the resolution but there has been some question ask about what is the faith of keep federal constitution task force. Some information given to me is that our federal constitution that is now currently being drafted will feature a three tier system of government - federal government, state government and community government. The area council is being reinstated. Boys, if we do not make it to Parliament, let us go and do it in the community government or in the area council.

Hon Sikua (*interjecting*): You go on first

Hon Lilo: You. And where is it as of today? The 2011 draft federal constitution of Solomon Islands is now ready, it is ready. The next thing we are going to do is to go around the provinces - that is what we are planning in 2012 and it is featured in the budget of 2012; we are now almost preempting what the Minister of Finance will deliver to us. But we are going put it to Honiara, provincial centres, all the provinces so that we can have a feedback on the 2011 draft federal constitution of Solomon Islands.

What is the time line of the NCRA Government for it to deliver on the federal constitution policy? The Federal constitution bill will be introduced to Parliament in 2013. So we will have the whole of 2012 to do consultations and have the feedback. If the feedback shows that the majority rejects it, then let it be, and then we bring it back here. We have also made some provisions so that provinces can be given some funding to kick-start the process of drafting their own state constitutions and obviously even the community government constitution too. That is the kind of timeline NCRA is having here.

In terms of the overall question that has been asked, it is not this one that you should be bringing here but the federal constitution – it is coming in 2013. But as we all know, we must give time for consultations, and that is exactly what is going on. All successive governments in the past have done that under the able leadership of those

two people sitting down there and also another who is not here, and then those of us in here will be still the same. We will give ample time for consultations to happen.

Some people have been asking resolutions like this have happened, this resolution has happened and this one not yet. Of course, we can go through all these resolutions and talk about them. I think that is the whole purpose of going to the committee of the whole House so that you can ask which one is working and which one is not working. I can say to you that most of these things, say for instance, if we have our thoughts right before that we continue on with the subject of national development strategy, we would not have gone wrong. I think a lot of the things we are saying in here would have been captured and we can be able to show it.

I really congratulate the current Leader of Opposition before that when we talked about the national development strategy, I think you were sudden by it?

Hon. Sikua (*interjecting*): No I am not.

Hon. Lilo: Alright, and in which we are continuing with it. If East Choiseul and I have not cancelled the one that we revoked in 2007, we would not have any problem right now.

Mr Speaker: Address the Chair please.

Hon. Lilo: Yes, of course. But now this national development strategy is like this. We would have got things right, and then a lot of the things we might have missed in terms of the way the provinces are raising concerns about would have been captured.

And for the first time we have this national development strategy again after an absence of about 20 years, and then we go to the annual program of action to the extent that the program of action nothing came out of it, nothing happened. But for the first time we have this national development strategy. Next year as we move into what is called the multi- budget rollover program, I am sure a lot of the concerns of the provinces would be really featured. And I think we need to support the Minister who is taking all the commitment with all passion to move the concerns raised by the premiers to see that we effectively implement some of these things.

I think these are some of the things that I want to share with us, but I would like to thank all of us who have contributed very constructively to this. This Communiqué

will not be the first and the last; the fifth one will be tabled very soon. I think the Minister is going to table the fifth one, and so that that will bring us to the current one of this year. Communiqués 1, 2, and 3, let them to be history. Let us conduct a funeral service for Communiqués 1, 2, and 3 but let us keep Communiqués 4 and 5 alive and then we will move forward with it. With those remarks, I support the motion.

Mr JOHN MANENIARU (*MP West Are Are*): Thank you for giving me this opportunity to join my colleagues in the house to contribute very briefly to Motion No. 2, which appears in today's order paper moved by the honourable Minister for Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening that Parliament resolves itself into a committee of the whole house to consider Buala Communiqué of the 4th Premiers conference.

Firstly, I would like to thank the Minister for Provincial Government and Institutional strengthening for bringing this Communiqué. And he as the minister responsible for our provincial governments on behalf of the premiers has brought their voices into this honourable chamber. I want to thank the Minister for the good work he is doing. I also would like to congratulate the honourable Minister in joining other colleagues, especially on his side of the House to congratulate the hard working minister for his reappointment to that ministry. When you are reappointed it is a good sign that there is no replacement. For someone who is hardworking needs to be there and to be given that honour, and so I really want to congratulate the minister for that.

I also want to join other colleagues who spoke earlier—when I look at this Communiqué it has the kind of message that must come to us and issues for us to consider as national leaders. But it also implies negatively as far as I am concerned, that have we been working? Have we been responding to our leaders who are caring for our people down there effectively, efficiently and timely sir? That is the question I come across when I consider this Communiqué. Why are these people talking to us when we have a government in place that is responsible for our provincial government's interests and issues? That is what I want to point out when I look at this Communiqué. We have been trying but I think we have slowed down in some areas or have neglected them, hence this Communiqué comes this far.

I want to join other colleagues on this side, in my view I want to congratulate the minister that we have achieved as he confirmed this morning in his opening remarks, about 50 percent of the resolutions. So if it is like that, what is the need for the whole

Communiqué to come to us? It should have been done better so that we can look at which particular resolutions and issues we need to further advance rather than us looking at out of date resolutions that have already been achieved; the hard working minister and ministry staff have already worked on. And so I see that a good number of the resolutions before us in this Communiqué belong to the ministry and the government. If the government works and sees that the reason as to why there is an existence of a provincial government, then these things should be addressed. If it comes here, it means that we neglected the importance of provincial government and its role. I think that is why they are shouting through their communiqués.

I do not want to bore us on all the resolutions, I will just pick up a number of them that I would like to contribute briefly on. And I would like to start with Resolution No 6, which looks at federal system implementation. The question that comes to my mind is that if we see the federal review as important, as number one priority why does it have to take that long? And I join the premiers to really call on those responsible to speed it up. They are tired of waiting. Why does it take that long if it is a priority review in our government system both provincial and national? I would like to also join them not only to call on the speeding up of this process, but also put in the appropriate resources in - the budget so that those people work on it day and night so that it reaches this floor of Parliament so that timely decisions are made. That is the comment I want to make on Resolution No. 6.

If federal system implementation, as highlighted in Resolution 6 is taking a long period of time, then it means it is costly, and the more it is delayed it is costing us to pay the consultants, the review committee and so forth. I feel that even though what we talk about is important, we do not put the words right in what we meant. If it is a priority, we must put resources behind and move it. That is my comment on that.

Change of our systems - our governance system, we have the provincial government and we now say it is not good. We want to change it. What is going to be good for us? Is this going to address our real issues in governance and governing our people? That is what I want to comment on it. The way I see it is that there is nothing wrong with our provincial government system. I think it is we ourselves that do not know how to implement it, how to carry out the governance system to our people, and maybe we have not given it time to really look at why we are failing? Why did it not work? Even if we come up with this new federal constitution, the problem I see there is with the people who are going to man it. It is us - leaders; leaders in the provinces,

leaders in government offices and our provincial offices. If we do not review ourselves and we do not look properly at ourselves whether we are fit or we know how to implement this new system we are putting in, then it will just be the same. Unfortunately, for me that I have to say that!

And so it is high time that we the leaders have to look at ourselves. Are we doing the right thing or we just come up with reports and reviews just for the sake of us working or not, but we are not actually achieving anything. It us ourselves - the human beings behind the systems that we have to look at ourselves, maybe we are the ones failing the good systems. And so I call upon us leaders at all levels that I think our people are crying to us that we need to start looking at ourselves.

Even for us in here, we are also confused too. Since we come in here for the last 14 months, I as a new comer to this honourable House, I am very confused. Is this how we are going to govern this nation - the happy isles? Are we doing better for our people or not? Or are we more confused than those who put us into this honourable chamber? Those have been some of my reflections. And it seems that we are the ones wasting our time because we are confused and so we cannot lead our people properly. And so it is high time that we should sit down and think about what we have been doing? What should be our role? How should we really get into governing our people as leaders and as parliamentarians?

I would like to comment on Resolution No 2 that is on the salaries and allowance of workers such as the speaker, clerk and provincial assembly officers in the provinces. What I can pick out from there is when government helps and the provinces are still crying for help, are provincial governments going backwards in terms of development? What is happening with their income that they cannot afford to support their services to their staff as well as to their people? Or is it the national government that does not fully resource provincial governments with the right amount of resources and money for them to look after our people? Has the national governance really recognize the problems of provincial governments? Or are we just busy with our work and thus we just forget about the provincial government and so their resources are very limited hence they cannot render services to our people as we expect.

I only want to see if they ask for their salaries to come from the main basket, let us give them the money so that they manage it themselves. The Minister, you budget for our people and give them money, as they are leaders. Rather than paying them as

our workers, I want the national government to budget for them and give them the funds required.

Resolution 4, if I may comment briefly on it is about the Land and Titles Act relating to the acquisition of customary land. We are well aware of this. Land is critically important to the development and advancement of this country. But do we see this as priority or are we just talking about it for nothing?

How do I come up with this statement? If you look at it, we are talking about customary land for how many decades now in this honourable chamber? What is the real action we have put behind these lands so that they are ready to be developed? To me, it is like only putting on paper - policy but there is no action after that.

The NCRA Government came up with this important policy of land reform, and now it is pursuing this reform on customary land. What about alienated lands that are already with the government? Why not start with those? Start on those first, put developments on them and then proceed on to customary land. I see that as a bad start although it is a good policy. It will take time because we do not want to start easy rather we want to start the hard way.

If you look at customary land at this time, our people are even further confused by our acts in the ministries, in particular, forestry - logging inside the country. Today, if you talk to them, they will say what is this person going to do with our land? Who will hold the title? Since logging is now the main income earner of the country, it really ruins our people to become very confused. And so it will rally challenge us as to how we are going to address customary land to open it up for development. Those are the challenges I see the government really needs to be focused on how to address ongoing issues where year in and year out we continue to talk about.

I would want to contribute on Resolution 9 where the national government must support and facilitate provincial investment initiatives. If this has not been done, why not, is my question. The national government, where then will it plan its investments when provincial governments have the lands and resources. How then do we imply here in the communiqué that the national government has a plan and the provincial government has yet another plan?

I believe that these two should have been one off. They were the same development plans for this country Solomon Island, the same people, the same provinces and the same resources. And how comes that we have come up with a number of reports. The national government came up with its own report, the

provincial likewise, and they never come together. This is where the confusion is and this where we have been wasting our time. And hence our people continued to become poorer and poorer because we are not doing what is expected of us. We are also confused.

I see that this is where, we need to focus on and the NCRA government and provinces as well, representing our people, we should just come and look at our national development plan for this nation, which we the national government implemented, province implement them and our people too implemented them. That's what I see as outstanding for us. We need to really come together focus on how we can achieve this long term development plan for this nation; and all the stakeholders as well to play their part. And so if we have been developing our plans, I see that hat is where we have been fall short in achieving our investment goals.

The Minister talks about a budget of \$24million that has been injected to kick start the aspirations of our provinces. There are nine provinces, how can they be able to commence. How will they utilize these funds? Those are the questions that came to mind. It's good; we need a lot more funds to inject into our provincial governments - that is where the resources are. But whether the current system network that we have will better utilize those resources which the national desperately needs then we misused it again, that is my concern.

It is high time that we place our province in their right positions in terms of development, if we can see it our provinces re struggling as the honourable Prime minister make mentioned of earlier, if we look at our provinces- like the Minister for education has questioned, is East Makira part of Solomon Islands or not? Renbel? Because the concentration of our government is mainly focused on a few provinces, we are not looking at holistically developing our nation for our people. And when we are in government, our policies are good, but we ourselves execute discrimination. Only a few provinces are prioritized and we from the southern region of Malaita simply sigh "olowe nomoa, waswe mifala, nomoa nao? (*as usual, what about us?*).

I think it is high time we the leaders here, we represent the 50 constituencies of Solomon Islands and if we would like to look after the wellbeing of all our provinces, we must equally be responsible to them. We are the government. That is the point that I would like to stress, it seemed that a good number of our provinces have been abandoned in terms of development projects and programs, and it's high time that our

government adjusts its focus to the provinces fairly and equally far as the distribution of our resources is concern.

On Resolution No 10 which talks about consultations with host provinces on major national development projects, it implies to me that we never consult. Who is it that hasn't done the consultation? We the national government, if we have never consulted our development programs and projects, where will we established them? The land owners are our provincial government! And so I find it quite strange that resolution 10, when it again calls for consultation. It meant that for some of them we have ignored those important processes. And that is why as a result, our development programs and projects were never implemented, because we have been ignoring the land owners.

I also see that it is high time that our national government do come up with national development plans for our provinces. Work together on it so that we will only have one plan for our provinces and a same development plan our national government will also implement, and they established a partnership. At the moment if the provincial government has its own development program and the National government has its own, for the same province, same people, same resources, hence I see that we have been confused. It is high time that we come and sit together, the provincial and national government, members of parliament so that we can address our weakness in the past and we consider it and thus advance this country forward.

Lastly but not the least, resolution 14, ward development profiles, I see a wisdom in this call by our honourable premiers in their communiqué. I would also like to join the other members, especially the member for East Choiseul who pointed out clearly that several profiles in the provinces are there, but others that need to be made, are those we should focus and work on. So that all our provinces they have been profiles d and then those profiles when we fund them, it will be an achievement.

The MP for East Choiseul mentioned that they have been self-funded. And so what are we trying to achieve from these very expensive exercise? Therefore I see that in order for us to develop this country holistically, justly and fairly for our citizens and friends of this country, we need to have but only one development plan for this country for all the nine provinces and it will wards. Rather then we waste our time being isolated from each other, and we politicalise and boast our individual provincial plans from other, - in the end the result would be us wasting our time and resources. We need to really pull up our socks, especially us in this honourable chamber, members of

parliament that we better address this issues in the communiqués which represents the aspirations and cry of our people and we are here representing the provinces, so we should better address these issues.

As I have said earlier, I do not have any problem with this motion, I thank the honourable Minister for tabling this on the floor of Parliament and I do support it.

Mr Speaker: I will call upon the Deputy Prime Minister to adjourn the debate of this motion until the next sitting day.

Hon Maelanga: I move that the debate of the Buala Communiqué of the 4th Premier's conference be now adjourned until the next sitting day.

The question agreed to

Debate on the motion adjourned to the next sitting day

Hon Maelanga: I move that Parliament do now adjourn.

The House adjourned at 4.11pm