

JOINT SUPERVISORY BODY ARAWA, AUTONOMOUS REGION OF BOUGAINVILLE

29 JUNE 2018

OPENING ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT J.L. MOMIS

Prime Minister, Ministers accompanying the Prime Minister and members of the ABG, members of the Diplomatic Corps, Officers of the national government and the ABG, and other observers:

I am pleased to be at this meeting of the JSB for 2018. As always, there are important matters for us to discuss at this JSB meeting. At the outset, I ask that we all remind ourselves of the important roles that the peace agreement and the National Constitution give to the JSB.

In fact, we should all do well to recall that it is the National Constitution that established the JSB.

It is a constitutional body, with important roles given to it by explicit words in the Constitution. Those roles include oversight of the Implementation of the whole of the Bougainville Peace Agreement. That means oversight of all three pillars of that agreement – autonomy, the referendum and weapons disposal. The second main role of the JSB involves providing a forum for consultation between the two Governments and their agencies. The third role is in relation to conflict resolution between the two Governments.

It is timely to remind ourselves of these roles of the JSB, because in this meeting of the JSB there are items on the agenda related to implementation of all three pillars of the Peace Agreement. And the ABG is seeking to consult the National Government about many of these matters. But for some of the matters, we are coming to the JSB with the aim of settling disputes.

Here I refer to our concern, once again, about the calculation of the Restoration and Development Grant –the RDG. While we reached a compromise in the December 2017 JSB meeting, we did not resolve issues about calculation of the RDG going forward. On our calculations, according to the formula for the RDG set out in the Organic Law on Peace- building, we should be receiving about K70 million per year in RDG-not the K15 million that has been budgeted, but not fully paid in several recent years. This year again the National Government proposes to pay K15 million, we have not yet seen a single toea of RDG so far, six months into the year. I hope, Prime Minister, that we will reach agreement here on what the RDG payments should be going forward, and that in 2019 we will see payment at the correct level, of more than K70 million.

While talking about ABG finances, I must raise the issue of the extreme budget crisis now faced by the ABG.I realise that the National Government faces its own budget crisis.But the lack of funds being received by the ABG is leading to a desperate situation for us. We simply do not have the money to do anything. We are not even receiving the amount of recurrent grants needed to meet salary costs, and not enough for our public service to do much at all. We have received no RDG. Most of the Police grant has not been paid. Our share of the National Government taxes collected in Bougainville is in arrears. Prime Minister I ask you and your Ministers for Treasury and Finance to do all you can to ease our terrible financial position.

Prime minister, I turn to the referendum, and in particular to the work needed to ensure that the referendum is held before the end of five year window within which the peace agreement and the national constitution say it must be held. That window ends less two than years away – in mid - June 2020.

Prime Minister, all Bougainvilleans have been heartened by the assurances you have recently given in public statements that you and your government will honour the peace agreement in full. On several occasions now you have stated that the referendum will be held – and held on the target date in June 2019.

But the fact is that a huge amount needs to be done, and done very soon, if there is to be any hope at all that the referendum will be held, either in 2019, or before the end of that five year window in mid-June 2020.

Amongst other things, the following are some of most urgent things that must be done.

First, the proposed chair of the Bougainville Referendum Commission (the BRC), the Honourable Bertie Ahern, must accept the appointment, and his appointment must be notified in the National Gazette and the Bougainville Gazette. Only then can the full BRC convene, and only then can the BRC appoint the chief Referendum officer. Only then can the chief Referendum officer appoint the other staff of the BRC secretariat. Prime Minister, I ask that your officers take urgent action to confirm the appointment of the chair of the BRC by the necessary notice in the National Gazette.

Second, Prime Minister we need the appointment of the two National Government appointees to the BRC. While the BRC can meet once the chair is appointed, I would be worried if were to meet without national government representation. That will happen, I'm afraid, if we do not hear of the National Government appointees.

Third, we must do everything possible to protect the constitutional independence of the BRC, something which is guaranteed by the Organic law on peace-building in Bougainville, and charter establishing the Constitution. The independence of the BRC is essential if the referendum process is to have integrity. The Referendum can only be free and fair if the BRC has full independence from Government.

In relation to protection of independence I am concerned about a proposal emerging from the JTT for the two chief secretaries to co-chair an intergovernmental committee to provide guidance to the BRC. If the BRC is to be independent it cannot be subject to guidance from the chief secretaries. On the other hand, if such a committee plays a role in ensuring liaison between governments and the BRC, that would be acceptable. I hope that we can reach agreement on arrangements that recognise the independence of the BRC.

Third- Prime Minister, the BRC is in desperate need of the earliest possible flow of funding. If the BRC were to have had much real chance of organising the referendum by the target date of mid-June 2019, the enrolment of voters should have begun in April, But in the absence of the funding expected from the National Government, the BRC has so far been able to do nothing to start the enrolment process. The BRC needs at least K5 OR K6million to undertake the major enrolment process required.

Prime Minister, I am sure that you will agree with me that it is essential that the roll of voters for this referendum should be of much higher standard than we have become used to in PNG National elections. We cannot have thousands of people turned away because their names cannot be found on the rolls. A truly free and fair election will depend on an accurate roll providing all voters with the right to vote. I am pleased to hear that the BRC is proposing to work with the ward recorders that are part of the ABG's new community government system, with the goal of having a grass roots check on the accuracy of the rolls. All these efforts to get a real accurate roll will be costly- but it is a cost well worth incurring.

Prime Minister, please make the flow of adequate funding to the BRC a top funding priority in the next couple of weeks.

Fourth, Prime Minister, it is essential that at this meeting of the JSB that we BOTH agree the question to be asked in the referendum, and agree to the criteria of enrolment of non-resident Bougainvileans. Both of these issues are essential for immediate agreement if the referendum preparation are to go ahead. Without the question being agreed, we can not have adequate referendum awareness- because awareness must be directed to explaining carefully and in simple language the issue that will be decided in the referendum. As for the criteria for enrolment, the BRC will not be able to undertake enrolment of non-resident Bougainvilleans without agreement on those criteria.

Fifth, Prime Minister, I am concerned about security for the referendum. There are two major issues that I must mention here. One concerns weapons disposal. Much work has been done, jointly between ABG's Department of Peace Agreement Implementation and your National coordination office of Bougainville Affairs, to develop a four phase program for disposal of remaining weapons.

A joint weapons disposal secretariat has been established. The former BRA and BRF and the Me'ekamui factions have agreed to join this new disposal process. But without funding, this disposal process cannot proceed. I ask that the necessary funding be released.

The second issue about security concerns the role of Police. I am afraid that the Bougainville Police service still has very low levels of capacity. As a result, I am concerned that the Bougainville Police should be the main factor in security arrangements. Experience elsewhere in the world shows that good security can be vital.

Prime Minister, I want us to consider here at this JSB the possibility of an invitation being given to the United Nations to provide an International security force for the referendum, perhaps one that could work closely with the Bougainville Police Service.

Prime Minister I have no doubt that you are serious in the public assurances that you have been giving about honouring every last word in the Peace Agreement, and ensuring that the referendum will be held. But if the money required does not flow, and if other things I have mentioned do not happen quickly, then not only will we miss the target date for referendum in 2019, but we will be struggling to achieve a referendum by the last possible date-June 2020.

I understand your government has other pressing priorities with APEC, and the complex current situation in the Highlands. I understand too that your budgetary constraints are grave. But we must also remember that the Peace Agreement ended a terrible conflict. There is a slowly emerging risk

of real frustration amongst Bougainvilleans about the lack of progress both with autonomy, and with the referendum. The time for action on the referendum is now. Prime Minister, I look forward to a productive meeting with you and your colleagues.

Thank you.