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## STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PERMANENT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY

12<sup>th</sup> April, 2018

**Mr. Speaker**, thank you for giving me this opportunity to present to this Honorable House a brief statement on the findings of the Permanent Parliamentary Emergency Committee.

**Mr. Speaker**, Pursuant to Part X, Section 228 (*Declaration of a National State of Emergency*) of the Constitution of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea; the National Executive Council (NEC) declared a National Emergency, Gazettal Notice No: 19 of April, 2018.

The Declaration of National Emergency covers Western, Enga, Southern Highlands, Hela and Gulf Provinces which were affected by the massive 7.5 magnitude earthquake that struck in the early hours of the 26<sup>th</sup> February 2018.

**Mr. Speaker**, Section 228 is in the following terms:

- (1) If the National Executive Council is of the opinion that an emergency exists or is about to come into being such that is necessary that the powers conferred by succeeding provisions of this Part be available, the Head of State, acting with, and in accordance with, the advice of the National Executive Council, may publicly declare the existence of a national emergency in relation to the whole or part of the council.*
- (2) Unless it is impracticable to do so, a declaration under subsection (1) shall be made in relation to a part of the country only after prior consultation with the Emergency Committee.*

**Mr. Speaker,** Sections 242 of the *Constitution* empowers and mandates the Parliamentary Emergency Committee to carry out its investigations into the areas affected by the 7.5 magnitude earthquake, assess the operations of the current state of emergency and upon its return, present its findings to Parliament.

Considering the enormity of the disaster and the vast areas that were affected by a disaster of this magnitude, the Emergency Committee in its Meeting No.2 2018, passed a resolution to divide its Committee into two sub-committees. Both sub committees covered different disaster affected areas both independently and as a combined team. Mount Hagen was considered a sound base for operations. There were considerations of safety as Members had to go through stressful conditions in the delivery of this report.

**Mr. Speaker,** the Committee took over a week to investigate and compile a report of its findings to parliament. At the Conclusion of its investigations, the Committee feels that its findings are satisfactory to propose this following report.

#### **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

**Mr. Speaker,** the Constitution under Part X, Sections 240-242, empowers and mandates the Parliamentary Emergency Committee to carry out its investigations into areas in the Southern Highlands, Hela, Enga, Western, Gulf and West Sepik Provinces that have been affected by this disaster.

Section 242 (2) of the Constitution requires that, the Emergency Committee, at each meeting of the Parliament during a period of declared national emergency, to present to the Parliament a statement as to –

- (a) *Whether or not the period of declared national emergency should continue; and,*
- (b) *The justification for and the operation of the emergency laws; and*
- (c) *Whether or not any emergency laws should be altered, and such other related matters as it thinks fit.”*

**Mr. Speaker,** to assist the Emergency Committee to make informed decisions and advise the

National Parliament accordingly, the Committee undertook the assessment and inspection of the affected areas in Western, Enga, Southern, Hela, Gulf and West Sepik Provinces.

### **INTRODUCTION**

**Mr. Speaker**, this report describes the situation on the ground in the affected areas following an independent assessment by the *Permanent Parliamentary Committee on Emergency* (Emergency Committee) of the damage to physical assets, psychological trauma, the subsequent losses sustained, and the general impact of the disaster in all the affected provinces. Although there were a lot of reports presented in parliament since the disaster struck; this is an independent assessment undertaken by the Emergency Committee which is an extension of parliament itself. Thus, this report sets the scene for the committees' continued work during the emergency period.

**Mr. Speaker**, report is organized in five broad areas: (i) background information on the disaster and its context; (ii) the impact of the earthquakes on livelihood of the people in the affected areas; and (iii) the current situation in regards to the relief efforts, (iv) Observations made by the committee during our visits and (v) the committees recommendations to the National Parliament.

**Mr. Speaker**, the committee is aware that this report may not be accurate and conclusive due to the fact that there are many unreached communities that are still suffering and are yet to get in contact with relief supplies and agencies on the ground. For instances, whilst this report was being compiled another 6.5 magnitude quake hit Hela Province and felt in most parts of the affected areas. It was also learned that West Sepik Province was also affected.

### **SUMMARY OBSERVATION**

**Mr. Speaker**, the following observations were made as a result of visits to actual disaster affected areas and interviews with witnesses and other responders on the ground:

- 1. Lack of Coordination amongst Government Agencies and communication breakdown between relevant stakeholders in the relief effort was prevalent.**
- 2. The lack of the Controllers presence in the affected areas either personally or through representatives has added to the disorganization and duplication of effects.**
- 3. Most of the affected people in the remote areas are unreachable by road**

network. Therefore, medical supplies are brought into the Aid Posts by health officers and village volunteers on foot walking for very long distances.

4. Despite countless killings in Hela no arrest has been made so far by the police. These murderers are freely roaming the township. The criminal elements have more fire power compared to the police rendering useless entire justice system in Hela.
5. Although timely funding from the National Government was an issue, officials in SHP and others were able to coordinate and provide relief supplies to most of its affected areas. However, in Hela, as a result of the Law and Order situation has made it difficult to direct relief supplies to the affected people.
6. Whilst many view this disaster to be natural, people in Hela do not share our views, they believe it is an induced disaster directly caused by the pumping out of oil and gas (PNG LNG Project) from Hela Province. This view has been confirmed and firmly cemented in the minds of the Hela people; especially, after the magnitude 6.5 quake that struck again on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> April 2018 soon after Exxon Mobil resumed pumping gas. Eyewitnesses said they saw the “*Fire Light*” again and then the “*Earthquake Hit*” again. Still others maintained that Hela was being punished under the ancient “*Gigira Laitebo*” prophecy.
7. During the 12 – 48 hours’ response period, relief supplies were distributed on *ad hoc* basis to areas that were worst affected. In the absence of the Controller and his agents on the ground the *ad hoc* distribution continues resulting in food supplies reaching only a few.
8. Whilst most displaced people are living in care-centers; outbreak of air and water-borne diseases is very high.
9. There is no proper authorization for a call-out for the PNGDF to restore law and order in Hela and affected areas in the Highlands provinces. However, the PNGDF is only involved in the distribution of relief supplies, protecting state assets and assisting the police.

- 10. High cost of transportation is hampering delivery of relief supplies to all affected areas; therefore, hungry and displaced people are walking long distance to main provincial centers to seek assistance; others make it successfully and others died whilst walking.**
- 11. Growing frustration by people in affected areas towards the government due to the slow delivery of relief supplies is building up. Also rugged terrains and bad weather are also factors affecting the non-delivery of relief supplies on a timely manner.**
- 12. Lawlessness has made it difficult for proper and coordinated distribution of relief supplies to the affected areas. Often relief supplies are being hijacked by thugs and warlords and resold (Tari) Hela Province.**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Mr. Speaker,** based on Committee observations, the following recommendations are made to the National Parliament:

- 1. Extension of the State of Emergency for a further two months.**
- 2. Full PNG Defence Force Call Out to provide assistance to the police force and the civilian authorities during the national emergency declared to curb crimes and restore law & order in Hela Province and other affected areas should the need arise.**
- 3. Provincial and Local Level Government authorities to return to their respective provinces and districts to ensure normal government services are functional.**
- 4. To put doubt and suspicions of the people of affected areas and PNG to rest, a proper enquiry into the cause(s) of the Earthquake and its impact to be undertaken immediately.**
- 5. All disaster coordination functions and responsibility (PNG National Disaster**

- Center) be decentralized to regional centers, provinces and be adequately funded.
6. Government to expedite the appointment of the Provincial Administrator for Southern Highlands Province to restore confidence and bring stability back to the province.
  7. The appointment of The Controller must be from the disciplinary forces.
  8. The displaced people from the worst affected areas are re-settled and relocated as soon as possible.
  9. Amendment of the *Western, Enga, Southern Highlands and Hela Provinces (WESH) Restoration Authority Act 2018* to include West Sepik and Gulf Provinces.
  10. Counselling services be made available to deal with trauma caused by the earthquake and after effects.

**Mr. Speaker**, in concluding let me thank you once again for the opportunity and I now commend the report and its recommendations to Parliament.

Thank you,

**Hon. Kobby Bomareo, MP**  
*Chairman of the Parliamentary  
Emergency Committee*