

FIRST DAY

Tuesday 2 June 2020

DRAFT HANSARD

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FIRST DAY

Tuesday 2 June 2020

The Parliament met at 2 p.m., according to the Terms of the Resolution of 2 April 2020.

The Speaker (**Mr Job Pomat**) took the Chair.

There being no quorum present, Mr Speaker stated that he would resume the Chair after the ringing of the Bells.

Sitting suspended.

The Speaker again took the Chair at 2.50 p.m., and invited the Member for Goilala and Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, **Honourable William Samb** to say Prayers:

‘Lord give us the wisdom, knowledge, understanding and peace of mind to address these issues. Tenkyu long olgeta lida ol I stap long hia, Lord, the fact is that we are sinners and we ask for your forgiveness today and ask that you lead us in our deliberations this afternoon, Amen’.

ALLEGATIONS IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA – STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Mr SPEAKER – Honourable Members, the Chair would like to make a statement. I have to inform this Parliament that just a week ago, there were allegations made against me and certain officers of the National Parliament. Most of you who are on social media, especially on Facebook may have come across these allegations. These allegations concern misuse of funds totalling almost K60 million.

On that issue alone, I personally think that this House, the Chair and Office which I am occupying as the Speaker, is too big for just one person, like me, Job Pomat.

Therefore, I have consulted the Director for Fraud and Anti-Crime Squad to conduct investigation into these complaints. I have also asked him and his team to investigate me and the Parliament officers concerned.

I have also invited the Ombudsman Commission carry out an investigation into these allegations. This invitation also applies to other concerned government agencies such as the Auditor-General and Public Accounts to carry out likewise, investigations here in Parliament.

As I have mentioned earlier, this Office is much bigger than one person. Therefore, my official letters are in progress and I will deliver them to the Fraud and Anti-Crime Squad and Ombudsman Commission to come and carry out investigations into these allegations.

In the event that the Police Fraud and Anti-Crime Squad begins its investigation, I will step aside and allow them to carry out the investigation.

I will step aside and wait for their verdict on my involvement in these allegations; on whether I am guilty or not.

When these allegations were raised, I made a number of observations.

02/01

I looked at how these allegations would adversely affect my relationship with different groups and people. From my church, people will say those from that church do that kind of thing; from the people of Manus, people will say we entrust Manusians with the job but they do this

My supporters and voters will be implicated. And people from where I come from will also be affected because they will say, people from that place do these things.

These allegations also affect my immediate family and clan, especially the memory of my father, from people who know him. They will say, he is a good person but his son has destroyed his good name. Those allegations also affect the reputation of my Party, upon which I stood and entered Parliament.

If I continued to perform my official duties, I will bring disrepute to the good name of my Party and the Parliament. Over the next couple of days, I will considering my position in relation to protecting the integrity of Parliament and stepping aside to allow investigations to take its course and to conform the allegations or clear my name. So this is the path I will take and I am now making it known to Parliament.

**SUPREME COURT DECISION SCCOS NO. 1 OF 2020 (MR BELDEN
NORMAN NAMAHA) – STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER**

Mr SPEAKER – Honorable Members, on May 29, 2020, the Supreme Court made a decision SCCOS/No.1 of 2020 application pursuant to *Constitution, Section 18(1)* by the Honourable Belden Namah, MP in his capacity as the Leader of the Opposition.

The Court ordered that the Honourable Belden Norman Namah, MP has been, with effect from 18 October 2017, suspended from duty, under *Section 28(1)* of the *Organic Law on Duties and Responsibilities of Leadership* and has also been suspended for a continuous period from that date.

The suspension will continue until a final determination is made on the leadership code of proceedings regarding him or until an order of a competent court stay or otherwise sets aside or dissolves such a suspension.

Honorable Members, the Chair is satisfied that the honorable Belden Norman Namah, MP will remain as a Member of Parliament but that he would continue to be suspended under the *Organic Law on Duties and Responsibilities of Leadership* and therefore, he would not be performing his duties as a Member of Parliament and this includes any roles and responsibilities as the Leader of the Opposition.

Honorable Members, the Chair is further satisfied that this matter remains *sub judice* as it is a subject of a continuing court proceedings and so will not entertain any statements or questions regarding this matter until the issue is dealt with by the courts. Thank you.

**TABLING OF RETURNED WRITS, DECLARATION OF OFFICE AND LOYALTY
(MENYAMYA OPEN ELECTORATE) – STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER**

Mr SPEAKER – Honorable Members, I wish to inform the parliament that in accordance to *Section 175* of the *Organic Law on National and Local Level Government Elections*, I lay on the table, the Return to the Writs issued by His Excellency, the Governor-General for a by-election to fill the vacancy in the Office of the Member for Menyamya Open Electorate held from Thursday 13 February, 2020 to Monday 11 May, 2020 and that by the

endorsement on the writ, it was certified that Mr Benjamin Philip was duly elected as the Member for Menyamya Open Electorate.

03/01

The honourable Member was sworn into office at the National Parliament State Dining Room on Wednesday, 13 May 2020, where he made his Declaration of Loyalty and Declaration of Office before me. I welcome the new Member to Parliament.

**BROADCASTING OF PARLIAMENTARY PROCEEDINGS –
STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER**

Mr SPEAKER – Honourable Members, I have to inform the Members that the Permanent Parliamentary Committee on Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings met today and resolved that: (a) the National Broadcasting Commission will be allowed to broadcast live the Questions Time (b) the National Television Service, Kundu 2, EM TV and TV WAN will be allowed to telecast live Questions Time for news purposes for the duration of this meeting.

CERTIFICATION OF ACTS

Mr SPEAKER – Honourable Members, I have to inform the Parliament that in accordance with *Section 110* of the *Constitution*, I have certified the following *Acts* as having been passed by the National Parliament:

- (1) *Appropriation (Judiciary Services 2020) Act 2019*
- (2) *Appropriation (National Parliament 2020) Act 2019*
- (3) *Customs Tariff (2019 Budget)(Amendment) Act 2018*
- (4) *Customs Tariff (2020 Budget)(Amendment) Act 2019*
- (5) *Emergency (Defence Force)(COVID 19) Act 2020*
- (6) *Emergency (General Provisions)(COVID 19) Act 2020*
- (7) *Employment of Non-Citizens (Amendment) Act 2019*
- (8) *Excise Tariff (2020 Budget)(Amendment) Act 2019*
- (9) *Income Tax (2020 Budget)(Amendment) Act 2019*

- (10) Papua New Guinea Fiscal Responsibility (Amendment) Act 2020*
- (11) Public Finances (Management)(Amendment) Act 2019*
- (12) Public Money Management Regularisation (Amendment) Act 2019*
- (13) Public Health (Amendment) 2020*
- (14) Public Services (Management)(Amendment) Act 2020*
- (15) Quarantine (Amendment) Act 2020*
- (16) Supplementary (Appropriation) Act 2019*
- (17) Whistleblower Act 2020*

MOTION BY LEAVE

Mr RAINBO PAITA (Finschhafen – Minister for Finance) – I ask leave of the Parliament to move a motion without notice.

Leave granted.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS – REARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

Motion (by **Mr Rainbo Paita**) agreed to –

That so much of the Standing Orders be suspended as would prevent;

(a) The Chairman of the Permanent Parliamentary Committee on Emergency presenting a Report on the State of the Emergency, and

(b) The Minister for Health and HIV presenting a Ministerial Statement on COVID19 Health Response and Transiting into the New Normal.

PERMANENT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY – STATE OF EMERGENCY REPORT – PAPER AND STATEMENT – MOTION TO TAKE NOTE OF THE PAPER

Mr ROBERT NAGURI (Bogia) – I present the following Report pursuant to statute:

'Corona Virus (COVID-19) Pandemic in Papua New Guinea'

I ask leave of Parliament to make a statement in connection with the Report.

Leave granted.

Mr Speaker, the Permanent Parliamentary Emergency Committee is pleased to present its Report on the COVID-19 Pandemic State of Emergency pursuant to *Section 242(2)* of the *Constitution*.

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak was reported in Wuhan City, China on 31 December 2019. The World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic on 11 March 2020.

Subsequently, the Government of Papua New Guinea declared a State of Emergency on 24 March 2020 in order to prevent and control any outbreak of COVID-19 in Papua New Guinea. As required under the Constitution, the Parliament met on the 2 April 2020 and deliberated on the COVID-19 pandemic and the imposition of the State of Emergency.

Parliament subsequently extended the State of Emergency and passed the *Emergency (General Provision) (COVID-19) Act 2020* with other emergency laws and amendments to the *Public Health Act 1973* and the *Quarantine Act 1953*.

The Emergency Committee began its investigations into the COVID-19 pandemic with a series of interviews on 14 April 2020.

Mr Speaker, at the completion of this Report on 1 June 2020, the total confirmed COVID-19 cases globally was 6,268,146 infected and 373,980 deaths; Papua New Guinea experienced eight confirmed COVID-19 cases with zero deaths.

On that note, the Committee would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the actions of the Prime Minister, the Emergency Controller, The Emergency controller, the Cabinet and the staff of the National Operation Centre, respective departmental heads for the speedy and effective response to the COVID 19 pandemic.

04/01

The quick response to declare the SOE on 24 March 2020 and implement emergency measures to control the spread of COVID 19, or Papua New Guinea maybe in the far worse situation. And possibly would have joined many other countries that have been severely overwhelmed by COVID 19.

Mr Speaker, under *section 242* of the *Constitution*, the emergency committees are required to consider all emergency laws and orders in all operations during a declared National Emergency. The justification of those emergency laws and consider whether the period of declared national State of Emergency and other related matters should continue In that regard, the committee decided to examine health, economic, social, education and legal issues during the SOE.

Mr Speaker, before I discuss the questions this report intends to answer, I would like to highlight very briefly some concerns that I have observed. Despite our attempts to prepare our health sector in the last two months and during the 14 days, PNG is not ready at all to deal with an outbreak of COVID-19. The global pandemic has exposed our weak health system as highlighted in the report. We are not well equipped to respond to an outbreak of COVID-19.

We lack critical health care equipment for life support and other essential supplies such as personal protective equipment. The committee specifically noted, that the procurement of PPE and medical supplies became enormously challenging due to factors outside of PNG's control. There is now a greater need for a reliable procurement system for medical supplies and PPEs. Epidemiologist use an epidemic modelling formula to predict 45,000 COVID-19 cases in PNG as of May.

But we only had 8 confirmed cases and experts still do not understand why this is the case. Contact tracing exercises were done to all those who have come into contact with those eight conformed cases, yet they came back negative. Our testing capacity is still very low; therefore, we do not know enough about COVID -19 prevalence in PNG to make accurate decisions. These observations show that PNG cannot become complacent about COVID 19.

It is still a real threat globally and as a member of the global community we are just as prone to its health risks. And now to the most important questions that this report needs to answer is whether the SOE should expire according to the law or should it be extended. If so in what way and on what conditions. The committee understands that either decisions will have both positive and negative implications to the general well-being of our people. Any decision made must be made with the least negative implications on the well-being of our people. On this basis, the committee discussed three options. The first option is to allow the SOE to expire by the operation of the law.

Mr Speaker, if this is the case all the emergency laws and orders that impose measures to control the spread of COVID-19 in PNG will expire. This will in turn undermine all good work that has been done to control and prevent the spread COVID-19 during the SOE period.

There will be no emergency controller to issue emergency orders and to coordinate the efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19. There will be no laws to control the movement of people, locally as well as internationally. There will be no laws of place of business, social distancing or hygiene measures. There will be no laws to restrict the sale of alcohol.

There will be no laws to ensure public transportation implement proper hygiene and social distancing arrangements. There will be no law to prohibit, restrict or ensure proper hygiene and social distancing is applied in night clubs, gambling areas, sports clubs, venues selling tickets for sporting activities, musical or cultural events and other businesses.

05/01

Mr Speaker, if there are more confirmed Covid-19 case after the expiry, there will be no laws that can be relied on to swiftly shut down provinces and prohibit movement of people. The National Executive Council may have to declare another state of emergency and reconvene Parliament. However, businesses that have been most affected by restrictions imposed by the emergency orders will become fully operational. Employment may increase when hotels, clubs, airline industries, sports clubs and other industries affected from the emergency measures resume normal operations.

Mr Speaker, this is good for the economy in the sense that we will generate greater income as businesses and individuals are able to pay tax. In saying that, the Committee is not aware of the extent to which Covid-19 has impacted the Government's revenue-generating ability. It is also not aware of the level of debt or the effects this SoE has had on the cash flow or foreign reserves and economy generally. When the SoE expires, normal business activity should see an increase in economic activities. However, social distancing measures used to contain the spread of Covid-19 will be difficult to apply.

Mr Speaker, the second option is to extend the State of Emergency for the whole of PNG. If this is the case, then the emergency laws and emergency orders will continue to have control over the movement of people, international travel and domestic flights, traditional border crossers and land border crossings. If there are more Covid-19 cases, the Controller can respond to it using the emergency laws without the need to go back to Parliament to seek permission but the extension would only be for a period not in excess of two months.

Mr Speaker, an extension of the SoE will continue to have a negative impact on the Economy. Businesses may not be able to reopen or recover and unemployment will continue to rise. There is a real risk of economic recession. This economic recession may lead to

poverty and civil unrest so the government may have a greater problem in its hands than the effects of Covid-19 itself, unless restrictions are relaxed to a level where the economy can revive itself.

Mr Speaker, nonetheless this extension will allow specific legislations to be drafted or amendments made to existing laws to take effect after the removal of the SoE. Such a measure will buy government time to take stock of the deficiencies in the legislation and provide for it without the expiry of the measures currently being imposed under emergency laws.

Mr Speaker, the third option would be to extend the State of Emergency at specific parts of PNG. This may allow the economy to pick up and a return to normalcy as restrictions can be applied selectively. However, if the SoE is restricted to specific parts of the country then other parts of the country cannot implement emergency measures if Covid-19 cases are confirmed in other provinces that have not extended the State of Emergency. Parliament may have to declare a State of Emergency in those parts not covered under emergency laws again.

If for example, the SoE is extended only in border provinces and NCD then it may make it easier for those provinces or areas to respond to Covid-19 but if Covid cluster cases emerge elsewhere in Papua New Guinea, the response may not be as swift and it may be difficult to coordinate between provinces.

Mr Speaker, in considering those three options the Committee also noted several facts:

The spread and growing number of Covid-19 cases is still increasing globally and within countries that share land and sea borders with Papua New Guinea; and PNG's health system is not prepared to deal with cluster cases or community transmissions of Covid-19; and there is a lack of specific legislation enabling Covid-19 measures to continue after the SoE period thereby increasing the risk of Covid-19 exposure and vulnerability for the whole country.

Mr Speaker, in light of all of the above, the Committee recommends that:

1. The State of Emergency be extended for another two months for the whole country.
2. Emergency measures be relaxed in all provinces except the land border provinces of Western Province and West Sepik and any other areas that the Controller deems are of high risk especially areas where there are international flights and ports of entry into PNG.
3. Legislation that specifically relates to the containment and prevention of the spread of pandemics, epidemics and infectious diseases such as Covid-19 be enacted before the expiry of the extended State of Emergency.

4. A review of current institutions that carry out research into infectious disease and consider establishing an institution such as the Center for Disease Control similar to that of countries in the United Kingdom and the USA.

06/01

Finally, a comprehensive review of the medical procurement and distribution system be carried out immediately. Serious consideration be given to the immediate reinstatement of UNICEF with the primary role of managing the national procurement and distribution of PPEs and medical supplies, ensure the procurement of medical supplies be tied to current systems, capability to avoid unnecessary purchases without consideration of other factors required.

Possibly consider out sourcing the procurement process to a UN agency or a non-profit organisation or not for profit company to ensure best practices and ethical distribution.

Mr Speaker, the committee commends this report to the Parliament.

CORVID-19 HEALTH RESPONSE UPDATE – MINISTERIAL STATEMENT – MOTION TO TAKE NOTE OF PAPER

Mr JELTA WONG (Gazelle – Minister for Health and HIV/AIDS) – Mr Speaker, honourable Prime Minister, colleague ministers, governors, Members of this esteemed House and, most importantly, our citizens who are listening and watching from all over the world, it is my absolute privilege and honour to stand before you and provide you all with an update on our Corvid-19 operations as Health Minister in the Marape-Steven Government.

The focus of my statement to this august House, rightfully so, is on the global Corvid-19 pandemic that has claimed close to 400 000 lives and will have surpassed 6 million confirmed cases in over more than 200 countries.

Closer to home, our neighbour Indonesia, to the west of our border has approximately 25 000 confirmed cases and 15 000 deaths. To the south, Australia has recorded well over 7 000 confirmed cases and over 100 deaths.

Mr Speaker, these results are indeed staggering and are a major cause of concern regardless of which side of the House you are sitting on.

I think every leader in the House who has rightly put the safety and well-being of our people first, our results are a testament to this and the decisions made during our March Parliament Sitting.

Mr Speaker, many have asked why Papua New Guinea has such low numbers with a health system that is so stressed. As of today, Mr Speaker, we only have eight confirmed cases and all have recovered. We have recorded zero deaths from Corvid-19.

The reality is that, like the rest of the world, Papua New Guinea is fighting an enemy we still know very little about. We are fighting an enemy that is evolving and is resurging in countries who initially thought they had it under control.

I can categorically state that our government took a clear decisive action at this very critical time to protect our country and our people. We mobilised 5 000 health workers for the Corvid-19 preparedness and established over 200 responders at the National Operations Centre. Currently there are over 100 health staff at the National Operations Centre.

Mr Speaker, timing is everything. Therefore I would like to highlight the critical timeline milestones achieved during this time.

On the 11th of March 2020 Corvid-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization. But prior to that my department had already achieved some significant milestones.

07/01

On the 27th of January, the National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) for COVID-19 response was established and activated by the National Department of Health (NDoH)

On the 28th of January, the NEOC commenced health screening at Jacksons International Airport and at major seaports around the country and further ensured that mandatory health declaration forms were implemented, with the support from the National Airports Corporation (NAC). This hugely supported the NEOC preparation for contract tracing as required.

On the 2nd of February a Ministerial Committee was initiated by the Prime Minister, Honorable James Marape.

The National COVID-19 Taskforce had its inception meeting on 19th of February, chaired by the NDoH. It consisted of inter-government agencies and relevant stakeholders, including development partners.

We rolled out the PNG COVID-19 Emergency Response Plan on the 4th of February, which justified the approval of our first health sectoral budget on the 13th of February 2020.

By Valentine's Day on the 14th of February, we initiated our first travel restrictions for passengers inbound from China, and distributed over a tonne of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for our health workers.

Again, Mr Speaker, all these milestones were established prior to COVID-19 being declared a global pandemic.

Parliament then declared a State of Emergency on 23rd of March 2020, just after the first COVID-19 case was identified. The National Operations Centre then became operational at Morauta House, Waigani. This is day 72 of our declared State of Emergency, but importantly for the team at National Department of Health this is actually day 128.

It is not just the deaths that have left countries staggering and on the brink of disaster, but people have lost their jobs in unprecedented numbers and livelihoods have been hugely affected. People have been living in fear and uncertainty and edging closer to poverty. Our country is not exempted from these effects and our good Treasurer will no doubt expand on this more comprehensively when he speaks to us on this.

We started our preparedness and response activities with K3 million reconfigured from within my department's budget with an additional K45.3 million provided by our government.

Once the State of Emergency was declared and to ensure a whole-of-government response, my department transferred its National Emergency Operations Centre from the NDoH base to Morauta House and joined the NOC with security forces and other agencies. The National COVID-19 Taskforce and the high-level Ministerial Taskforce was also absorbed into the NOC.

Mr Speaker, a State of Emergency and establishing a whole-of-government response through the NOC was important as it gave us time to enhance our capacity to identify, isolate and care for the sick, contact trace and quarantine persons of interest and their contacts. It also enabled us to prepare our health system and mobilise resources to protect our health workers and our ports of entry at Jacksons International Airport and designated seaports of Motukea, Lae and Rabaul.

This experience has prepared our communities on how to protect themselves and their families. We have mobilized a whole-of-government approach and expanded our emergency operations to include key partners. For example, Mr Speaker, we have mobilized more than a hundred partners composed of development organizations, NGOs, Churches, UN agencies

and private companies to support the COVID-19 response. These partners have provided funds, technical expertise and donated supplies, materials and equipment.

Mr Speaker, it was always going to be a challenge to equip our 741 Health Facilities to fight COVID-19. Even the most sophisticated health systems around the world have been overwhelmed by this pandemic.

08/01

I am proud to advise this Honorable House that the National Department of Health, more specifically the logistics team have mobilized 4 million Personal Protective Equipment since the beginning of this operation. We have moved close to 24 tons of medical equipment gear around the country as part of our preparedness plan. We are working through our established Provincial Health Authorities (PHA) to ensure all required PPE, program commodities, communications material and other medical equipment reach the most remote clinic and health center.

The PHA is a decentralized system giving the responsibilities back to the provinces to manage its health requirements and needs. Currently, we have a 6 months' supply and I will be driving the department to ensure our frontline health workers are equipped with necessary protective equipment to respond appropriately.

Mr Speaker, in relation to training - NDoH with technical support from the World Health Organization continue to carry out comprehensive training on clinical management, Infection Prevention Control, Surveillance, Rapid Response and Risk Communication; either virtually or face-face.

We have trained healthcare workers, OICs in health centers, district health managers, Health Extension Officers and clinicians in hospitals. Our training has been comprehensive and far reaching. Given the threat of COVID-19 potentially crossing our border, our team has scaled up training in Western Province and in May conducted a 2-day training for 32 healthcare workers in Kiunga, North Fly District.

Mr Speaker, extraordinary situations require extraordinary action. We have revolutionized the way training is conducted in Papua New Guinea and recently 31 health care workers in Madang underwent a 'Virtual Training on COVID-19 Response' upon request from the Provincial Health Authority. These are only two examples I felt inclined to highlight as I have been encouraged with the work of the department, and equally pleased with the readiness of our people in the provinces to learn.

This is the New Normal, and the way forward Virtual Training will assist Government Departments and Agencies to carry out training cost effectively and expeditiously as the need arises. This is vital in times of uncertainty and travel restrictions.

Mr Speaker, our Surveillance Team are among the hardest working teams in our response. Our Call Center has processed over 65,000 phone calls through our COVID-19 hotline. I am proud of the work they carry out and they with the Rapid Response Team have managed to collect 4, 646 samples to date. As you all are aware, we have had 8 cases tested positive for COVID-19, 4, 410 tested negative while 228 samples are still pending result as I present to this Honorable House.

We continue to learn more about the novel coronavirus disease and our people have been very understanding of the need to be tested and our communities to be safeguarded. It is important also to note that 1000 calls have been processed requiring counselling through our designated Hotline developed to assist individuals affected by stigma or hardship as a result of COVID-19.

During the State of Emergency, my department established a Medical and Scientific Advisory Committee (MESAC) to provide evidence-based advice derived from population screening through antibody based RDTs and serology testing. There are only two approved diagnostic modalities currently available for COVID-19 diagnosis in PNG, they are PCR and GeneXpert utilizing a specific COVID-19 Cartridge.

GeneXpert is not new to Papua New Guinea, we have fantastic GeneXpert coverage and capacity in the provinces and currently use GeneXpert for TB and HIV testing.

09/01

We need to ensure we have the appropriate supply of GeneXpert cartridges in the provinces, that our team are trained and that the necessary infrastructure is available at the Hospitals to carry out more testing. Our results will then be used to determine the proportion of the population that has been exposed to this specific coronavirus.

We have extended the case definition to cater for people presenting with respiratory issues and influenza like symptoms at our hospitals. This will allow us to widen the net to determine whether there is spread which we may have missed.

Mr Speaker, this testing and studies are a work in progress. As approved by the Medical Research Advisory Committee (MRAC) in PNG, the studies have

to be objective to better our ability to truly understand this enemy and its behaviour in our country. I have charged this committee to also provide me with regular reporting on the science being developed around the world. COVID-19 is a developing virus, therefore it is important to keep regular tabs with scientific evidence and community of practice around the world to ensure that our decisions are evidence based and that there is adaptive learning going forward.

As the current state of emergency concludes, I cannot emphasise enough the need for our government and our people to remain vigilant and focused on the need to consistently carry out our good hygiene messaging. Good hygiene not only protects you from COVID-19 but other diseases caused by the different germs including food poisoning, pneumonia, skin infections and TB to name a few. These diseases have a direct correlation with inadequate domestic and personal hygiene.

The Government of PNG Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Program must continue to be rolled out, and I have already expressed my willingness to support this program with my colleague National Planning and Monitoring Minister. This is an important government initiative being rolled out in schools, churches, halls and other communal areas and will need to be supported for sustained implementation.

Mr Speaker, we must take into consideration the impact COVID-19 is having on core health business, especially our essential health services. Essential health services must continue and be adequately funded. For example, in 2018 there were 1 million cases of malaria in PNG, 28,000 cases of tuberculosis (TB), and 48,000 people living with HIV.

We must not lose sight! If we neglect the efficient financing for our essential health services which include detection, treatment, and prevention services, especially such as immunization, TB treatment etcetera, we then hugely run the risk of potential health emergency outbreaks within this pandemic. health emergency outbreaks such as the surge of multi-drug resistant TB.

As we gradually transition to a ‘new normal’ way of life, we will make basic health prevention and promotion of our new culture. We need to apply this in our homes, wards, communities, businesses, places of worship, schools, markets and health services delivery institutions.

We have developed a manual and a series of guidelines to help our Nation transition to the new normal. These include the continuation of physical distancing; disinfecting homes and places of work; and restricting international travel and crowds.

The transition strategy has been developed based on other country experiences, what has worked so far, specific to PNG's unique needs and context, and within the capacity of our health system and the society as a whole.

The document provides new normal guidelines for how schools and educational institutions, workplaces, markets and business establishments, religious organisations airports and airlines should function once COVID-19 induced restrictions are lifted.

10/01

For now, this means accepting COVID-19 as part of 'the new normal' and adjusting our expectations and lifestyle accordingly.

Mr Speaker, irrespective of what the GoPNG decides today, whether it is to extend the State of Emergency or not, be rest assured that we are better prepared than we were. However, I do strongly advise that we must continue to build the capacity of the provinces through their respective Provincial Health Authorities and ensure that routine health financing is timely to ensure that essential health services, not just COVID-19, are delivered for our people. Furthermore, we must use this opportunity to strengthen our Health Care Delivery System to ensure that health investments particularly in the provinces are adequately monitored and accounted for better and sustainable outcomes.

This calls for commitment from all of us as Members of Parliament and indeed as Chairmen of Provincial Support Improvement Program (PSIP) and District Support Improvement Program (DSIP) funds respectively.

Mr Speaker, the mobilisation of whole-of-government response remains relevant and pivotal as we prepare for the New Normal after the State of Emergency through an effective and efficient coordinating mechanism.

Mr Speaker, under the State of Emergency, I am proud to report that all our partners, including health care workers, security forces, Customs, NAQIA, PNG Ports, the Media, Air Niugini and many others have collaborated very well in a fashion that is streamlined and efficient in delivering results. This a valuable lesson that we must consider beyond the State of Emergency. Specifically, the logistics, surveillance and rapid response teams have all done an exceptionally well under extremely challenging circumstances to meet deadlines and the demands of services at national and sub-national levels.

Mr Speaker, on behalf of the Marape Steven government, I appreciate and thank all that have worked long hours and on weekends to ensure we maintain a high level of vigilance for this invisible enemy. Your contribution is immeasurable and our success to date is attributed to our combined efforts.

Mr. Speaker, as the Minister for Health, I would like to reassure this Parliament and the people of Papua New Guinea that I am committed to ensure that there is political will and demonstrated support to the National Department of Health to continue its efforts in addressing this challenge as we embark on the long-term strategy of living with COVID-19.

I also take time to acknowledge our Development Partners and Donors for supporting our preparedness and response efforts. As a government, we will continue to work closely with you to ensure that the National Department of Health approved COVID-19 Emergency Response Plan is fully implemented. We have identified isolation in 20 provinces and are focused on implementing our Emergency Response Plan.

Mr Speaker, having said all these, I would like to summarize by saying COVID-19 is the wake-up call no one would have ever wished for, but we in Papua New Guinea needed it. This viral pandemic is shedding light on the worldwide neglect of healthcare systems. The sudden demand for personal protective and medical equipment revealed where we stood in line of global priority, the extent to which suppliers would drive up prices and the inefficient procurement processes would leave us vulnerable for far too long. Even the economically strongest of nations were struggled to cope with the devastation the virus caused and many are still suffering as we speak. The road to recovery is long.

Mr Speaker, my fellow Papua New Guineans, we did not escape this out of pure luck and we are not out of the woods yet. You can find the statistics on countries' response to COVID-19 online. Please research these for yourselves as well.

11/01

The reality is, countries that did not close their borders early, had much more damaging circumstances to overcome and a prolonged, and much more limiting lockdown period than we have had here at home.

Through God's grace and strong leadership, we firstly ensured all our crucial entry points into the country were thoroughly checking inbound travellers. And as soon as we picked up one case, we closed our borders immediately, removed the imported case from our shores and ensured all others that may have been in contact were safely contained until given the all clear.

Mr Speaker, such swift action has potentially saved thousands of lives for a developing nation with limited resources, battling the many challenges we already faced, we have done remarkably well.

But, as long as the virus continues to move through other countries, the reality is we are still at risk and this virus threatens to stick around for a long time yet. So I remind you, we must not be complacent.

If you were able to see the faces of our frontline workers, nurses, doctors, military, police, the drivers and those helping to get awareness, testing and feeding programs out to where it is needed the most, you would appreciate the hardships they have faced during this time immensely. Although I am humbled by these efforts, I am not able to ignore the needs this virus has brought to the forefront of our minds.

Mr Speaker, we are fighting to overcome difficulties arising from our neglected health system which has left us virtually defenceless. We have relied heavily on our Melanesian spirit to get us through this. The shortfalls are becoming more and more obvious.

As a parent, I understand the fear of seeing our children fall ill. This virus took away entire families from their children. The fear of leaving our children with no one to look after them, is something most of us have never stopped to consider before.

This virus may have been the most humbling experience the entire world has faced together and if that doesn't drive home the importance of a quality health system, I don't

know what will. We were facing battles with TB, HIV, Cancer and Diabetes before COVID-19 and lifestyle diseases will continue to plague us if smart interventions are not made now.

Mr Speaker, we must make health care a priority. Our hospitals, clinics and healthcare professionals have been starved of support for too long and as I said, this is the wake-up call we needed. This will be my mission so long as I am Minister for Health. The time for change is now!!

Finally, Mr Speaker, as we cautiously re-open our doors for business, we do so with a "New Normal" mindset, in which basic hygiene practices are of the highest importance.

I understand what losing a job feels like, or what closing a business can do to a family, and I want to see you all be able to go about earning a living again but I want to stress, go about this safely! Remember, the virus doesn't move, people move the virus.

Mr Speaker, I thank you and may God Bless PNG.

Mr ALLAN BIRD (East Sepik) – Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I thank the Chairman and Minister for Health and HIV for a very comprehensive, detailed and very eloquent delivery.

Mr Speaker, I did not plan to speak today, so you can see that I am unprepared. I decided to come here and sit quietly –

Mr SPEAKER – Honourable Governor, can you move a motion to take note of the Paper before you speak.

Mr ALLAN BIRD – I move –

That the Parliament take note of the paper.

12/01

Thank you, Mr Speaker, forgive me for my inexperience. I am a first term MP, I am still learning but back to the substance, while we have had a very detailed report, my request when we first sat down in this House to pass the State of Emergency, I requested humbly that those responsible present evidence that they should present data in this House. It is a constitutional requirement for us to do so. I am standing here totally disappointed, that this was not done. And we have been presented evidence of what has been happening in America, China, and Australia and we are understand that but Papua New Guinea is not America.

We need to understand what is happening in our own country. We need to make decisions based on data from our own country. This is what I would have expected from months of shut down. I expected to see that. This House needs to be presented with that. It is so unfair for us to me and sit here and be presented with evidence from America, which we all know about. while we sympathize on its devastating effects in America but we need to be told what is happening in our own country.

We represent Papua New Guineans not Americans. Only eight people got sick, they all recovered with no deaths recorded. I would have thought we would have gone and investigated that. As to why this happened, why is it that no one else was detected apart from those. We never did any of these, so what did we do.

At this stage it is very preliminary and I am very disappointed because the mothers in my province were belted by policemen using SOE powers. The SOE powers that we gave from this House for the policemen to abuse.

Please shut up and sit down before, I walk over to your end of the Chamber.

Bryan Kramer – Point of Order! The point of order is in relation to the Governor's comments to say that police used SOE powers but it is actually incorrect. There was no such SOE powers that gave any police officer, the right to violate people's rights or human rights. The actions taken by those officers were not lawful or SOE powers, these were their own actions. And should be held accountable if the Governor would have reported them., thank you.

Mr ALLAN BIRD – We cannot deny that abuse has taken place and our people have suffered. No matter how we want to decorate and color it. I do not want my people to be subjected to anymore of these, unless you give us the evidence. Please respect the intelligence of the House. We are not dumb here so you can come and tell us and we just follow. It is out of respect that we listen and follow. However, if our respect is destroying the livelihood of our people than I cannot be silent. I therefore asked my administrator, who is a graduate of Harvard University, a medical public health expert. The country has not really done a good investigation and I really want to understand this. Can you get the IMR to do some tests and we will pay for it?

My Governor from West Sepik, we both got together, put in some funds and we sent our doctors who were accompanied by four IMR staff based in Maprik to do an antigen test.

The results of which are before me. And I do not want to present it here because the results will be misinterpreted.

13/01

What is an antigen test? It is a test you do to figure out if someone got sick or not?

Mr Speaker, we tested people in four villages including soldiers in Moem Barracks and also the hospital. We found out that 50 people got sick and recovered without us ever knowing about it. This was out of a test sample of 1153 people that we tested. Why did the National Government not conduct those tests? I had to spend my tax money of the East Sepik people to carry out these tests.

All you ministers stand here and give us sweet talks but I challenge you to provide us evidence like what I am doing here. You need to respect the mandates of other MPs as leaders mandated by the people. We might not be as smart as some of you but we have a genuine concern for our people. I planned and promised that I would be here and not say anything in Parliament for these two weeks but this is unacceptable and insulting.

Mr Speaker, you people announced an allocation of K200 million for the Police but I spent K4.3 million of my people's money and now I have to justify it to them. With these huge sums of money, I don't see your studies and results. I will vote against it today! If you wish to close the borders then do so because you already have laws that allow you to do that but do not suspend my people's rights.

Mr Prime Minister, I respect you but I ask you to please pull your ministers in line. Discipline them and get them to do their jobs properly. You ministers are making us look silly in the eyes of our people when you these things. I sorry to be harsh but I have evidence. I was just outside calling Dr Clement Malau to send me results because the Parliament was about to pass another two months of SoE.

Mr Speaker, the people of East Sepik say no to this vote. Thank you, Members of this Honourable Parliament.

Mr PETER NUMU (Eastern Highlands) – I am qualified to debate because I had one case in my province. My people and I as the governor on ground have felt the effects and pinch of the SoE.

Mr Speaker, before I continue with my debate, I would like to acknowledge and commend the Prime Minister on his strong stance and leadership in coming out and

upholding that Papua New Guinea is a Christian country and putting God before everything and protecting our people. I would also like to thank the NEC on your decision to endorse the SoE that was passed here in Parliament. I must also thank the Controller of the SoE, the Police Minister and all the hard working police officers in the country. I further thank the Health Minister with his secretary and all the hard working health personnel right throughout the country for a job well done to contain the spread of the virus. I also thank the Defence Force and all other stake holders that were involved in helping this Government and the people of Papua New Guinea.

Mr Speaker, I acknowledge and would like to join hands with the Governor of East Sepik in affirming that the SoE should not be extended. I have my reasons for supporting my agenda.

14/01

Mr Speaker, to be realistic, I as the Governor on the ground have evidence. I have not seen any local transmission of Coronavirus and also which is as stated by the report presented.

Eastern Highlands has reported one case; a female had it. We have also seen the same in East New Britain. A woman had it. But, their husbands, children, family, communities and neighbours did not contract Coronavirus or Covid-19. This does not need medical explanations. These are evidence that we can see with our eyes. We do not need to rely on evidence or studies from other countries. The reality, in Papua New Guinea these two cases have shown it clear that there is no local transmission. And there is no evidence to show that these eight cases have spread to the communities.

Unlike other countries who have appropriate medical facilities compared to Papua New Guinea. Our social or lifestyle is able to make those eight cases spread a long time ago. We do not have evidence to show local transmission.

Mr Speaker, this is a foreign disease and its characteristics are different in China, America and in other countries. Why are people dying? What are the characteristics of this Coronavirus in those countries? And in Papua New Guinea, what are they, is it killing us?

We must compare these and look at other diseases which are killing people right now.

Mr Speaker, in Papua New Guinea's history no virus has killed all the people at once compared to other countries, diseases like HIV/Aids probably did, but it took time for people to contract, live and then die. There is no evidence to indicate that any virus has wiped out the entire population of Papua New Guinea at any one time in our history. These are our history

to study before we make a decision that may have implications on our economy and affect our people and country.

The other reason, Mr Speaker, there is a funding problem. We at the provincial level have come here and seen the money allocated. So far, I can see that K200 000 has come. To this date, Mr Speaker funding is a big problem. The taxpayers from the provinces, we in Eastern Highlands generate K1.4 million a month, we saved and we were able to contribute K2.5 million.

There are no PPEs also. Just recently we used our initiative and the Eastern Highlands Provincial Government gave K100, 000 to China and when they went to China for the Covid-19 crisis, they gave 72 boxes of medical equipment. Some were donated by our sister province, Fujian Province through the Health Department who verified them and gave them to us.

So, when will ours be sent to the province? People are shopping without masks, facing each other and talking idly. Our lifestyle has not changed at all. There are no PPEs to protect ourselves in the town area.

The police are also complaining about their allowances they have been disturbing us at the provincial government. The provincial government did not pass this SoE. Sometime ago an issue arose and I complained and said deal with these police officers. The SoE is very important. It is serious. Who is in charge of all these? They have not dealt with the police officers.

15/01

I have instructed them to deal with the police officers for this SoE period and I am also not sure of who is control of their allowances. Because of this delay in allowance, police officers were aggressive towards me and my people of Eastern Highlands have mobilized to face the police officer as well.

Mr Speaker, as we have seen on the front page of the *Newspaper*, police officers have gone to the Provincial Headquarters of Western Highlands Province, Yanapa Building to shut it down completely. How will we sustain our livelihoods if we have no money?

Mr Speaker, I have been to the settlements and I saw that everyone lives their normal life. In this House we are talking about the State of Emergency (SoE) control measures. There is a shortage of police manpower.

People are gambling away in the settlements. We are talking about control measures like social distancing but people do not adhere to it; it's just a theory. It is not happening.

Maybe we have less police manpower or funding issue. We do not have to say SoE and extend it for that sake while people are living normal lives, but except for the borders which are well controlled.

I would like to commend the Controller, the Police Minister and the Defense Minister for taking control of the borders. But within our nation alone, Mr Speaker, I do not think this SoE is functioning, due to funding issues.

I recommend that we uplift the State of Emergency, but only to control the international borders or point of entries. Mr Speaker, evidence shows that, there isn't any spread of coronavirus present here in Papua New Guinea. We do not have to make assumptions to put SoE in place.

Mr Speaker, we must have control measures in place for the international borders and allow all businesses to operate as normal for the sake of our people. Some people are fortunate to go through this situation while the majority are being affected. We must think of these people. So, Mr Speaker, that is what I recommend. Thank you.

Mr PETER YAMA (Madang) – Thank you, Mr Speaker. I would like to speak in line with the statements made by two of the preceding speakers; the Governor of East Sepik and the Governor of Eastern Highlands.

We are talking about coronavirus, but the virus is in Italy, America, China and other countries. If the coronavirus is here in Papua New Guinea, those eight people who have been cleared from the virus should have been dead already.

With our type of customs and cultures here in Papua New Guinea, we would all have been affected if the coronavirus was present.

I spent the past three months in Madang unlike other members going in and out of Port Moresby. I was with my people contemplating how to counter attack this situation in order to save money and to deal with my people for them to be aware of the coronavirus.

16/01

I came up with an idea to allocate the money to the council wards which I budgeted for in 2019 so that the councilors can carry the message to the people.

So, I cut down on costs by gathering each council ward to spread the corona virus message to the people.

The only expense was the helicopter. It has really worked very well, Mr Speaker, I covered almost three provinces already and got two more to go. I have covered Madang; the

message was already spread in urban Madang, Arbinop council ward and in Transgogol where they renowned for chopping people to death. Mr Police Minister, I do not mean to demean you, but sorry you were not there when I went there. You are a scientist and used to roam around while I am caring for your Madang.

(Laughter in the Chamber)

Mr PETER YAMA – So I am shouldering Madang’s burden by working very well with the doctors so that the people are receiving the right advice.

With the little revenue we get as a province, we try to train our good doctors, nurses and other staff in the use of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE). They must be made aware of their roles and at the same time we must put in more efforts to attend meetings and work together with staff in order for the people to be aware. This is because the people are our number one priority. If we talk about this corona virus and do not conduct awareness and explain or relay information to our people, what’s the use. How will people know that corona virus is a disease? So the only way we can disseminate information is through the ward councilors and doctors must visit the villages, Members of Parliament must also go to the villages and inform the people about what the coronavirus really is.

In Madang we had banners printed which had cost us almost K180 thousand and spread it throughout all the districts. I hired a helicopter and I called all the council presidents to come into Madang, sit with me and take the message across on a helicopter. The presidents then further informed their councilors to inform their people on the ground and it worked well as the message reached the people.

It is one of the modal projects we set it up in Madang now. I thank and commend the Health Authority, Police, Customs, NAQIA, Port Authority, and Air Niugini in Madang because they have worked very closely with my government.

With regards to the money issues, we are trying our very best to manage even K200 000 came from the National government. We understand the problem faced by Finance Department. We didn’t put much pressures on Health Department, the National Government, or even our six Open Members for Madang, including Police Minister. He didn’t fund anything but it is fine, he can keep his money and later can use it in 2022.

With the K200 000 we received from National Government, my provincial government added another K250 000. In addition, I made a personal contribution of K260 000 cash because I have been a businessman over the past 40 years.

I am not like small boys sitting and talking a lot. So, I contributed this much to show the people of Madang that whatever things God had blessed me with has to be given back to the people of Madang. The beautiful people of Madang had raised me up and I must consider that and give back to my people.

My Speaker, it's not a huge amount of money like K3-K5 million. No, at least K1.5 million or less than that with K10 000 we budgeted for each council ward. We can pay full amount of K10 000 at one time, but we've managed to pay them K2 000 quarterly. With the K2 000, the council is doing a terrific job.

17/01

With that effort, I commend the 451 councillors of Madang for carrying out an excellent job in fighting the Coronavirus pandemic. The Coronavirus didn't originate from PNG to kill us. We really don't know how it came and we all are confused.

This virus can kill the people in Italy, America and the rest of the countries all around the world but no one died from this virus in PNG. I fully support the remarks made by the Governor of East Sepik and Eastern Highlands; our people are really affected by this virus.

Madang won't continue to accommodate this SOE orders and deprive the rights of our people. It's not only the people from Madang but other provinces as well because they buy betelnut and transport it back to their respective provinces to sell. SMEs have one way which boost the economy of this country because our people from Highlands travel back and forth the highlands highway to buy and sell betelnut. Whatever amount they make will cater for their children's school fee and their day to day living expenses.

Yes, most people chew it but the nut doesn't kill people that instant. This SOE orders has really affected the daily living of the people. The people think that if they chew they will die.

During our ancestral times no one died from chewing of betelnut so we can't create confusions between chewing of betelnut and coronavirus because it won't work out well here in Madang. But yes, some people die from mouth cancer, Governor of NCD. We the people of Madang know how to chew betelnut. So Governor of NCD don't try to bring other provinces problem to Madang please!

(Laughter in the Chamber)

Mr PETER YAMA – Mr Speaker, the economy of this country is really affected. But I commend the Prime Minister for an excellent job and with that I thank Father God for the Prime Minister, for his wisdom upholding the work of the church and therefore the covenant of the Lord is protecting this country. I also thank him for his prayers and also the other church leaders and the prayer warriors in praying continuously for the protection of the Lord over this country. When protection is granted this country won't be affected by this virus. Prime Minister, you must believe in your God and continue to rebuild the economy of this country.

The country as a whole has suffered very much for far too long. The mothers, fathers, children starting from provinces, districts, villages have felt the pain. Since the SOE was put in place it deprived the freedom of the people to move freely around the country, the day to day activities of the people have come to a standstill. This issue of SOE is something totally new which we have never experienced before. Mr Speaker, if we extend this SOE for another two months then most people will be badly affected.

I have watched in the news of policemen driving into settlement areas and destroy tuckshops and even go to the extent of stealing the store goods, phones and other valuable items.

The SOE is purposely put in place to control the movement of people from one place to another. This means that police are there to carry out the SoE Orders in ensuring that public transport carry the allowed number of passengers and must not exceed the SoE Orders.

18/01

You are there to guide and teach our people but not to go and harass them by removing their personal belongings and stealing from their stores. Of course, there is a ban on betel nuts but you are supposed to advise them to take their betel nut bags back home but not to remove them and have all destroyed. These people are not our enemies; they are only defying SoE protocols. Those implementing the SoE protocols are fighting with our people, who are just trying to survive daily. Our focus should be on healthy living, healthy hygiene and not to get the police force to come in and harass our people.

Mr assistant speaker, I believe it is not necessary to extend the SoE, we can only maintain guard of our borders, airports and sea ports but please ease the restrictions surrounding the movement of people to and fro locally. Social distancing is important and we need to follow it but our culture of caring for

one another is paramount. What happens if a mother is sick and no one is there to take care of her because we are practicing social distancing? We will eventually die, so why restrict gatherings when the origins of the virus have yet to be made known. In Papua New Guinea, where is the Corona Virus?

So much has been spent on the virus and while we are battling all the negative results our people are suffering, because they can't go to work, go fishing, go gardening, and they are hungry. Will they die from this virus or from staying hungry at home? When people want to move about and sustain themselves; the police are there and, in some incidences, police even used force and pointed guns at our people.

If they can point guns at our people, it won't be long before they point one at you, Police Minister. And when the police have no overtime, they will jump up and down. And ask where is our overtime?

Mr Bryan Kramer – Point of Order! Mr Assistant Speaker, I ask that you direct the Governor to stick to the issue. I know that the Opposition Leader is not around, so he will take his place. I hope he is mindful of what he says; like saying the police will turn the guns on me, is unbecoming of a leader.

Let us talk about the issue at hand, which is the SoE. And whatever differences we have outside, let us deal with it outside.

Mr ASSISTANT SPEAKER – Governor for Madang, please stick to the point and I recommend that you withdraw the statements that you have made.

Mr PETER YAMA – I withdraw my statements but I don't like what he said about me trying to take the place of the Opposition Leader. This statement is not right and I want him to withdraw that too. I am not the Opposition Leader, I have voted for the Prime Minister.

If he wants to be the Opposition Leader, may he do so, because he did not vote for the Prime Minister. He might as well pull out from there and go sit over there.

Mr ASSISTANT SPEAKER – Governor for Madang, you need to apologise to the Minister for Police.

Mr PETER YAMA – There is no such apology. I am saying that this is what the policemen do. He is never in Madang and I am trying to cope with all those policemen.

Mr ASSISTANT SPEAKER – I may use my authority as the Assistant Speaker, to ask you to sit down if you continue in this manner.

Mr PETER YAMA – I have only six minutes to go, so I will withdraw my statements; because I want to speak. Thank you, all I am trying to say here is, that there are problems everywhere. Since the SoE, there are rogue policemen out there who are taking advantage of this situation. And yet, they want overtime and when its not given, they show their frustrations.

19/01

The policemen in Madang are coming up with their own rates and are demanding to be paid K200 per day by the Provincial Government but I do not have such funds for the SoE. I did not call for the SoE to come into play in Madang.

In fact, I shutdown Madang Town three days prior to the Government announcing the SoE. I decided to do this because I knew that the best way to address this virus was through my counsellors.

So, what I am trying to say here is that if we are allowing the SoE to come into play then we must have enough funds to accommodate the allowances for the Police, Defence, health workers and also those who are assisting to carry out awareness in the communities. Although the Government has announced an SoE on COVID-19 no funds have reached Madang Provincial Government to pay those who are required to work during this SoE.

Mr Speaker, I hear about the budget cuts and money going to SMEs but I have not received that money yet. Madang Provincial Government only have K200 000. And, if we are going to be serious about this virus and support our Government we have to do the right thing and not go against our people because we will face bigger problems later.

The people of Madang Province are starting to see that if the SoE is extended and Government is extended they are going to really suffer. The SoE has really had an impact on the SMEs as it has stopped people from marketing their products and produces which helps them generate an income for themselves.

Mr Assistant Speaker, from my observation, the people of Madang Province do not want this SoE to continue. And more money should be given to the Police Force so that they can take care of the law and order issues. I ask the Minister for Police to put more time with me so that we can fight the crime in Madang because this is a very important issue.

Mr Assistant Speaker, I think that each province should be dealt with differently according to how we build our economy and address our law and order issues and not by letting the Police to take control of the people.

We must be mindful that this SoE can have an impact on us as members and governors in the next election because we are not performing our duty to our people.

Thank you, Mr Assistant Speaker.

Mr LEKWA GURE (Rigo – Minister for Civil Aviation) – Thank you, Mr Assistant Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to contribute to this debate.

Firstly, I want to commend the Chairman for the Emergency Committee for his comprehensive report and also the Minister for Health and HIV/AIDS for report on the COVID-19 virus.

Since, the 5 May, 2020 up until yesterday, I have been out in my district carrying out the awareness on this virus.

20/01

And in those 26 days, I visited 52 wards out of 92 wards in my Rigo district. So, some of the information which I have been sharing with the people, I would like to share with you all, and hopefully, put this issue in its proper perspective as we are debating the issue and in trying to answer the question; whether we should extend the SOE or not.

Mr Speaker, the statistics that were given by the Health Minister, these figures are fluid and they are changing everyday but the statistics as of this week are almost 6.2 million people globally have been affected by this pandemic. Out of which more than 3, 070 000 have died. So, when we do the mathematics the mortality rate of this virus is between 5-7 per cent. What that means is that out of every 100 people who contract the virus, between 5-7 people will die from the virus.

And although the figures might sound alarming, there is no need to be afraid or panic, because other diseases like cancer, TB, HIV/AIDS and malaria kill more people globally annually. So, these are statistics and there is nothing to be afraid of. There are some important

things that we should know about this virus. Our health officials are telling us that one infected person will infect two other people and that is a very conservative infection rate. Which is 1 is to 3. So, that is one person affecting 2 other people becomes 3 people and it goes on. So, if we are not careful and do not practice the preventative measures that is how fast the virus will spread amongst our people.

Mr Joseph Lelang – Point of Order! I think the Minister needs to be very careful about those kinds of ratios and statistics, because in South Korea, patient 31, an elderly lady infected 6,600 people. So, that is about 60 -70 per cent infection by only one person. That is why I would like to caution that we should not be definitive by saying that one will affect two or three. It depends of the lifestyle and the behavior of the infected person. So I am just letting you know the statistics in South Korea.

Mr LEKWA GURE – I thank you for that Point of Order, but I do understand and as I have said, that is a very conservative infection rate. And in actual fact one infected person will infect more. And based on that infection rate, there was a presentation made by the Department of Health at the State Function Room. They said based on that infection rate, we should see that based on our first case in PNG on March 13th, we should see, a rise in the number of cases during that period, but then based on the declaration of the SOE and the lockdown, it may very well be that we have managed to contain the virus, therefore that rise in the number of cases in PNG may occur later in the year; say between the month of August to October. Those were the charts that were given by the Department of Health.

21/01

The charts that were given to us by the Department of Health then. But if it does not happen between now October then that is fine. We just need to continue our awareness and vigilance and our preparedness in as far as the Coronavirus in concerned. It is also important to know that a person with the Coronavirus will not show any of the symptoms for up to 14 or 21 days, hence the requirement to quarantine people when they come in from overseas. The dangerous part is a person with the virus and not showing symptoms can infect other people.

Mr Speaker, the mode of transmission is simply close physical contact with an infected person. The virus is also spread through coughing and sneezing if the person has the virus. The cough droplets carry the virus and infect people around them. Even when there are

no people around them the droplets fall on different surfaces and innocent people get infected when they come into contact with these surfaces. For example, door knobs or telephones as many of us regularly use these tools.

Mr Speaker, as we know the symptoms are fever, headache, dry cough, muscle pains, difficulty in breathing or shortness of breath. These are the symptoms of the Coronavirus. At this point in time, there has not been officially declared treatment for the Coronavirus. Although they are suggesting other alternatives, for instance, in the absence of an officially declared treatment or vaccine then we are advised to treat the symptoms as what it is.

Mr Speaker, in the absence of an officially declared vaccine then prevention is better than cure. Therefore the key messages that we should be taking out to the people are: Maintain social distancing or I prefer the term physical distancing. Maintain personal hygiene; wash your hands regularly with soap and water and maybe if you have alcohol based hand sanitizer to clean your hands with it.

We also need to observe our good manners when we are coughing or sneezing and that is to cover our mouths with a handkerchief or tissue when we cough or sneeze. If we do not have a tissue or a handkerchief then we cough into a crooked elbow.

Lastly a very important point is self-isolation. If a person is showing any symptoms of Coronavirus then they should self-isolate themselves in their house preferably in the room that they normally sleep in with only one caretaker attending to the sick patient. The idea behind this is prevent or minimise the spread of the virus amongst our people.

Mr Speaker, this health issue has become a social issue, a law and order issue, and an economic issue. When the first case was detected on 13 March 2020, the first term school holidays were brought forward. The children went on holidays and stayed on due to the outbreak hence lost five to six weeks of the academic year.

22/01

Any of the schools are still gradually getting into full operation given the fact that they have to conform to new normal that has been issued by the Department of Education through their circular things like WASH facilities so that students can wash their hands regularly or the enforcement of requirements to wear masks in class. So, that's what we mean by a health issue affecting the very important social sector; the education of our children.

Law and order issues during declaration of the State of Emergency and the subsequent lockdown. Obviously economic activities slowed down. People rely on PMVs to go back and

forth and trade store owners in the villages or communities rely on PMVs for the transportation of their trade store goods back to their communities.

And then the average Papua New Guineans in the villages sell their produce in the markets, whether in their local markets or in the towns and cities to earn the money. They go back to their local trade stores and they buy the required supplies for their family's sustenance.

So, it just goes to show that everything is dependent and because of this State of Emergency and the lockdown obviously business activities have slowed down to the point where some families are finding it very difficult to make ends meet on a daily basis.

So, under these circumstances this Coronavirus has introduced a law and order issue in the sense that some people can and have reverted to unlawful means to survive and that in itself introduced law and order issues.

So, a health issue is now becoming a law and order issue as well as a social issue. All of us can acknowledge the fact that this Coronavirus has caused devastation to the world economy. Companies are shutting down or scaling back in their operations people are getting laid off. When people get laid off they don't get paid and therefor their families suffer as well.

Let me give you how this Coronavirus has affected the aviation industry. A lot of these information is already out there in the public domain. We have seen pictures of these through print media, television or social media. So, in the airline industry analysis have shown that come September this year many big airline firms are parking big aeroplanes against the fence or in some instances parking along the runways in rows. We are talking about big aeroplanes capable of carrying 200-300 and more passengers.

So, as a result come September, if passengers do not travel due to the lockdown the airline companies will have parked about 80 000 big aeroplanes and as a result, more than 900, 000 pilots will be out of jobs, not to mention the cabin crew and ground staff as well. So that's how this health issue has affected the airline industry.

When aeroplanes are not flying, they are not burning the fuel. Aviation fuel comes from oil so as a result, as you all know, at some stage, the price of oil went down below zero. And because the oil is not being processed or refined for aviation fuel, then the oil tankers are floating all over the world with oil just sitting there. So, Mr Speaker, this health issue has really caused great devastation to the economy of the world including Papua New Guinea as well.

So as we are debating the issue or as we are trying to make a decision because only this Parliament has the authority and the power to extend or not extend the State of Emergency, it's one of these issues where, if I may use the word, we are damned if we do and we are damned if we don't, because if Coronavirus doesn't kill us then hunger will kill a lot of our people as well. Businesses have really slowed down.

So, it's a really fine balance that we are walking now. Whether we are going to extend the State of Emergency or not. And as we debate. Let's debate it responsibly. Let's put our perspectives on the table and then Parliament in its wisdom will decide whether we are going to lift the State of Emergency or we are going to extend it. And if we lift the State of Emergency what are the actions we going to take in order to make sure that our people conform to the new normal.

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If we lift the State of Emergency, what are the actions we will take in order to make sure that our people conform to the new normal? Because, at the end of the day we are talking about the behaviour of our people. We've been up there talking about social distancing and its practical applications, like on the public transport. The State of Emergency Controller's orders are, the 25-seater buses and open back PMV's which normally carry 25 passengers should only carry 15 passengers. The 15-seater buses should only carry 10 passengers. But our people travelling up and down the Magi Highway, they are chock-a-block. They are not listening to any of these orders. We are talking about the behavior of our people, obedience to lawful instructions issued by a lawful authority.

Mr Speaker, let me finish off by saying, only this Parliament has the prerogative, the power and the authority to extend or not to extend the State of Emergency. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr JAMES MARAPE (Tari-Pori – Prime Minister) – Thank you, Mr Speaker. Let me firstly thank the Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Emergency for delivering a report on Covid19. I thank our Health Minister for delivering a statement that embraces what we have done, thus far and what we will do going into the future. Let me thank, Mr Speaker, all Members of Parliament who are here for sitting in, listening and some have contributed thus far.

The State of Emergency we passed to address the threat of Covid-19. If I am not wrong, it is possibly the first National State of Emergency in our life as an Independent State or an Independent country. And so, many of the contexts that are at play are not as expected.

These are new uncharted territories we are moving into and I know many Members of Parliament want to speak and have a voice on this issue. We will be sitting for two weeks in relation to Covid-19 as well as other Government businesses that our country needs us to address as Parliament. There will be opportunity for us to speak on this for the balance of this sitting of Parliament so, let me apologize to some of my colleagues in Parliament who stood but the Speaker has allowed me to take precedence and for that I apologize. We will give time to everyone to excessively discuss on this.

Whilst, speaking on the Covid-19 issue, I ask for Members of Parliament to be present from both sides of the House. There will be a public address on the status quo. What has happened and what we have been doing so far which basically embraces what the Minister for Health has summarized. It will also look into the situation and scenario that our Parliamentary Committee on Emergency has addressed and for us to establish a way forward. Hopefully in my short presentation, I will give an indication as to where we are heading in this one.

There will be a fine compromise or fine position we will take that ensures our people are brought back to life as normal as we can, but all within consciousness of the fact that the treat of Covid19 is real amongst us.

As I conclude my speech hopefully, this recommendation finds the fine balance where we are not compromising the safety of our nation in as far as Covid19 threat is concerned. At the same time, we are listening to our people's desire to get going, work and to earn their living, also ensuring our countries economy is brought to life early.

Mr Speaker and Honourable Members, as I have said earlier this is a unique challenge and we are placed in a very difficult place to make decisions in as far as what we must do.

24/01

When we embarked on a State of Emergency 72 days ago, Mr Speaker, Covid-19 was already classified a global pandemic. Needless to re-echo the numbers but just for emphasis, the global statistics when we first entered the State of Emergency through National Security

Council and through Cabinet on the 24 of March, stood at 16, 231 deaths and 300 of those deaths were from the 372 765 Covid-19 patients globally.

Fast forward, 72 days later, global statistics has it and today as I speak, the number is increasing by the second. The last data I received 45 minutes before I stood up is 6,365,473 established Covid-19 cases globally.

Of that, total deaths globally stands at 377 404. Mr Speaker, that is the global scenario. Tomorrow you are invited to State Function Room, you will see the presentation on the Western Pacific region as alluded to by the Health Minister. There's also a growing threat on the other side especially the Indonesian border and also right next door to us is the West Papuan provinces, the number of deaths has surpassed hundred in as far as Covid-19 is concern.

On March 24, there was a breach of security at the Jackson's International Airport. We took a quick response unlike many other nations to shut down our borders. We went into overdrive because we felt there was a security breach.

Mr Speaker, we all know the state of our health in our country. We can't blame anyone too for that matter. Mr Speaker, since 1975, up until today, our population has grown much faster than the rate of our economic growth. So, you can't really blame the Prime Ministers, or Finance Ministers or Health Ministers of the past. Our population has far out-grown the resource envelope we have in our country and that is a reason why some of us are working overtime to change resource laws to bring back more money in to our pockets.

So, the state of our affairs whether it be the state of our economy or in this instance, its state of our national health is not something we are proud of but we can't help that it is where we are today.

I bring home some possible statistics. Mr Speaker, we have if I'm not wrong, 500 trained and practicing medical doctors in our country. We have under 5000 nurses and community health workers in our country. We have less than 200 ICU beds in our country, of those 200 ICU beds, only 44 have oxygen supply attached to them.

That is the status quo, my colleague leaders. I stand here not to blame anyone but to admit that this is the reality and the Health Minister's point that perhaps going forward, investment in this sector must be made.

25/01

And thankfully Covid-19 has raised the consciousness of our nation to invest in a big way in this sector.

I can totally understand why our provincial governors were yelling and shouting at Waigani. Because Waigani has for a long time been very distant to them. And so in the middle of all these, the systematic impediment we have. The bureaucratic and structural layers of impediments and the non-existent of infrastructures are what causes the real threat. Mr Speaker, not a hypothetical threat real threat if Covid-19 is not controlled.

Governor, Powes Parkop always is an advocate of strong control in Port Moresby.

The statistics and global trend compels us to think that we mustn't be complacent. We must always be on guard in ensuring that we protect our citizens from being exposed to someone who is Covid-19 infected and for that person not to pass on to someone else.

Mr Speaker, that is why remaining vigilant has been our Government's priority strategy. We remain vigilant and be defensive within the context of our own capacity we have in our country.

Our National Health Department has established their own operation centre in the Health Department on 13 January 2020. These are all activities that are being pursued. Let me give one or two statistics that I have at hand.

We have been able to conduct 5000 PCR tests and 12000 rapid diagnostic tests. The difference between these two tests is that; RDT tests, which I am not a medical scientist but having worked in the Covid-19 centre for sometime I have learnt to educate myself.

The RDT test are just to established whether there is evidence of immune system in the human body. A month ago, I instructed the WHO representative and our Health Department to go out there and start to do mass RDT test because of the same issue you have here. I was sitting in the control room and baffled that there was no evidence of community transmission. I asked the WHO and the technical advisers from abroad, but more importantly our established medical doctors of Papua New Guinea were present always at the national operating centre.

We were not playing marbles inside this centre, in case someone might think so, medical practitioners like Professor Sir Isi Kevau, Dr Evelyn Lavu, Dr Tau and others. One of our own top scientists' who is the wife of Governor for Eastern Highlands Province was present also. We were baffled by what was happening. The first established case in Wau/Bulolo had no evidence of community transmission.

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We zeroed in on the case in East New Britain, the test in the six villages concerned both the RDT and the swab test.

Mr Speaker, evidence showed us that there was no community transmission, hence a month ago, based on advices that I received, both, myself and the health minister instructed for RDT tests to be deployed in central areas, central areas where we felt where hotspots.

Mr Speaker, let me say and without divulging too much, there are indications of evidence that possibly there was a passing through of Covid-19 in some of our areas. In the RDT test, two specific immune type, IGG and IGM were evident in about 6 or 7, specific localized testing sites. Mind you and for record sake, this is not Covid-19, this is a presence of our own human immune anti-body type that possibly indicated that there might have been coronavirus strength of Covid-19 or possibly another strength of coronavirus. Only the Lord knows what had happened but there was evidence that there was presence of anti-bodies that God gave in our system to fight disease, I saw the 3.5 percent prevalence. Minister Temu and those of you in the medical background in our Parliament, for those sample of population we tested had 3.5 percent presence of these specific swabs of anti-bodies.

Mr Speaker, since then and for public information, our control system has not been lazy. We have kept 31,000 people as persons of interest especially those who travelling in and out. We have monitored over 8517 people. So within the context limitation we have in our country, budget constraints, medical constraints, capacity constraints, by the grace of God we were able to hold up because we did absolutely everything to battle it out, I believe.

Mr Speaker, I thank the leaders because I saw first-hand when Waigani did not send any money, the Honorable James Donald flew to the bush. Member for North Fly stood partners with his Governor with no money from Waigani, as local leaders responsible as they are, today they have a very good isolation facility built somewhere in North Fly and this is commendable, same spirit of community effort was there in the six villages in Gazelle or Kokopo. When those six villages were locked down, they did not cry, they responded. They locked down and their neighboring, the entire Peninsula, Gazelle and Kokopo responded, I commend Governor, Hon Nakikus Konga, I commend the Member

for Kokopo and Minister for Tourism, Minister Gazelle and Minister for Health, Member for Rabaul.

Leaders rallied and people rallied and resolved through Melanesia consensus of working together because National Government never foresaw Covid-19 when we formulated Budget 2020. Mr Treasurer, did you?

Mr Speaker, an element of good story that is emerging, amidst the shock that we all face, is about how a small resource depleted struggling nation was able to rise to defend and with the help of Christians who were praying in the thousands.

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Mr Speaker, I can't claim credit that I did it on my own as Prime Minister. Mothers, children, clergymen and churches fasted and prayed so when we all rallied in we were able to stop what was globally emerging and spreading from eight cases.

Now, speaking on day 72 just because the statistics is at eight and there is no evidence of the actual COVID-19 transmission in the communities we are seated with sound minds and elements of complacency. The same voice of complacency will be the same voice will be the accusation on the other end of the spectrum.

Mr Speaker, let us remain vigilant on what we are proposing, and let me commend the Attorney-General, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Health Minister and his team. Our Government is a government who hears both sides of the Floor and in the centre we are debating these issues which we have taken a proactive approach as recommended by our Parliamentary Committee.

Mr Speaker, this Parliament must be matured to know that the Parliamentary Committee's recommendation is not the Executive's recommendation. It is totally independent from the Executive Government. There are two independent bodies which give recommendations upon their assessment in the communities.

So, the Parliamentary Committee has made his call to extend the SOE based on an apparently correct view that there is a glaring deficiency in our system to contain a disease of pandemic nature.

Mr Speaker, the Executive Government has made a decision that once they hear that the Parliamentary Committee calling for extension of SOE then we will propose to make a fine line. Our Deputy Prime Minister and Attorney-General and his team are working very hard and let me commend those fine young lawyers who work under the State Solicitor's Office,

who have come up with a law in discussion with our Health Department. The law is promulgated to ensure that the power that is given under the SOE is now transferred in a structured manner and there is a law that is available for utilisation. And, we can operate within the structure by embracing that law to move out of this SOE period but operate in a control environment being COVID sensitive as we go to the balance of this year and into the future.

Mr Speaker, instead of living under an extended SOE, as I speak to our Health Department technicians and researcher, as well as our Parliamentary Committee on the State of Emergency, we can extend SOE for the next two months but COVID will go on beyond the next two months. But what is the utility for extending the SOE for two months?

I ask this Parliament to come to the State Function Room tomorrow, where the Deputy Prime Minister and his team will present the law that has been drafted for this Parliament to pass. This law will embrace how we will go to school, church, work and use of the transport regulations; the new normal of living with COVID for the rest of our lives.

Globally speaking, this country might be the first to pass a law that especially guides our citizens in respect who are living with COVID for the rest of this.

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So, we are embarking on this path to pass a law that will be entitled, Public Health Emergency Bill that will be deployed during the existence of COVID – 19 on planet earth and during the existence of other pandemics and diseases. That Bill is being drafted and I ask all honourable members to come to the State Function Room tomorrow at lunch time where we will hear a presentation from our lawyers and health officials. This Parliament will be asked within the two weeks we are in session to pass this so that we can live in a responsible manner, allowing control to remain but that control will not be based in Waigani. Stronger autonomy will be funneled through provinces so that based on provincial needs, provinces will design their own programmes in respect to Covid-19 and how they are going to live with it.

I asked those in the Government to attend the government caucus to hear what is being discussed and members on both sides of the House to attend tomorrows session at the State Function Room.

Mr Speaker, this is a serious national business. I stated earlier that our country does not have the health system and capacity to handle an outbreak. Let us not be complacent! Let us not take the mercy of God for granted. God gave us ability and wisdom and enough time

now to prepare in response. I think we are doing an appropriate thing and I ask every leader to come to support the cause. After the leader of government business dispense with the business that is currently on foot, I will rise to move a motion for us to extend the State of Emergency by 14 days during which we will work on this law and get it passed. After the meeting of Parliament each one of us can go back to our respective provinces with the law in hand to take charge and control in respect to Covid-19. Thankyou Mr Speaker.

It will be unfair of me not to thank God. God of this country has kept the country safe. Let's not abuse his grace and work together to keep our country safe and kept even safer. Thank you and God bless.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Rainbo Paita**) adjourned.

MOTON BY LEAVE

Mr RAINBO PAITA (Finschhafen – Minister for Finance and Rural Development) –
I ask leave of Parliament to move a motion without notice.

Leave granted.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS – ALTERATION OF HOUR OF SITTING

Motion (by **Mr Rainbo Paita**) agreed to –

That so much of *Standing Orders* be suspended as would prevent:

- (a) Parliament sitting beyond 5 p.m. this day; and
- (b) Parliament adjourning on a motion to be moved by a minister anytime.

29/01

**FURTHER EXTENSION OF NATIONAL STATE OF EMERGENCY –
COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

Motion (by **Mr James Marape**) proposed –

That Parliament as authorised by *Section 239, Sub-Section 3* of the *Constitution* extend the National Emergency declared in relation to Covid-19 Coronavirus Pandemic in in Papua New Guinea by a period of 14 days from its expiry on Tuesday 2 June 2020.

The motion requiring an absolute majority of 56 Members as required by the *Constitution*, the Speaker ordered that the Bells be rung.

30/01

The Parliament voted (the Speaker, **Mr Job Pomat** in the Chair) –

AYES – 80

NOES – 2

Motion so agreed to.

Mr RAINBO PAITA (Finschhafen – Minister for Finance and Rural Development) –
Mr Speaker, I wish to thank both the Government and Opposition Members for supporting the motion for extension and also for their attendance in the Chamber today.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion (by **Mr Rainbo Paita**) agreed to –

That the Parliament do now adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 5.15 p.m.

