

THIRD DAY

Thursday 15 February 2024

DRAFT HANSARD

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

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KENNETH SEBEPMIN

Acting Principal Parliamentary Reporter

THIRD DAY

Thursday 15 February 2024

The Acting Speaker (**Mr Koni Iguan**), took the Chair at 11 a.m., and invited the Member for Central Bougainville, **Honourable Simon Dumarinu**, to say Prayers;

'God, our Heavenly Father, you are so good. You are the creator and our maker. You have shaped us each and every day in our decision making, our work, and life. You have called us to this mission of Christ, your son, husait em i kam long dispela graun na mekim wok na kolim ol wokman, ol aposol long continue long wok mission bilong Christ long dispela graun, na ol i continue. Emi kamap tru long ol aposol, mission, na ol pipol.

Today we are in this world of Christian life, together as brothers and sisters from different churches and denominations. We have come together as your people. Among them, you have called us as leaders to serve your people in many ways. You have called us this morning to do your mission and work, especially through this Parliament in decision making by following the processes of this Parliament.

You have called all of us today starting from the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, ministers, governors, the Opposition Leader, all members of Parliament, including the Clerk of Parliament and the public servants who work under his administration. This morning, we ask for your spirit, life, and way of looking at what we can do.

Today, we commend all your work, especially through the work of the Parliament that we are now here for. Please continue to deliver your mission of love, care, compassion, and forgiveness to each other and to the work of the nation. We also pray for the citizens of Papua New Guinea as well. Continue to direct and empower them with the Spirit of the Lord. May the people and the leaders work together for the good of this nation. We commend all these in prayer. Amen'

MOTION OF NO CONFIDENCE – STATEMENT BY THE ACTING SPEAKER

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable members, I have to inform the Parliament in regard to the above Notice of Motion of No Confidence in the Prime Minister, Honourable James Marape, Member for Tari-Pori Open that was delivered to me on the 13th of February 2024.

The motion was the first item of the business for the Private Business Committee for deliberation yesterday 14th of February 2024 at 12.20 p.m., at the Speakers Lounge.

The committee is aware of the very important constitutional motion and the process of it.

02/03

We also note that a Notice of No Confidence is a matter of national importance and for that reason, we want to ensure that this motion meets all the requirements. We found that the Notice of Motion has only one defect that the committee is of the view that it should be corrected. The Leader of the Opposition was informed soon after the committee meeting concluded.

A new Notice of No Confidence Motion was delivered yesterday at 3.30 p.m. The Private Business Committee in its next meeting will consider the motion.

Thank you.

Mr Pila Niningi – Point of Order! Was this supposed to come to Parliament as a Matter of Procedure for it is a parliamentary matter that should have been brought to Parliament before communicating out to the press. Is that proper and could you please advise the Parliament?

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Minister, I would like to reply to your Point of Order. This statement hasn't gone out to social media or on media. I haven't released anything to the media in regard to this matter.

This is the time that the Parliament is sitting and I am now releasing this information.

Parliament was suspended yesterday preventing me from releasing this information so as of today I am releasing it. Whatever that was on the media was not from me as I have just released the information on the resolution of the committee, as of yesterday.

**DEATH OF FORMER MEMBERS –
MESSRS GEREGA PEPENA AND BROWN SINAMOI –
STATEMENT BY THE ACTING SPEAKER**

Honourable Members, I have to inform the Parliament of the deaths of the following former members;

(a) Mr Gerega Pepena on 1st January 2024. He was a former Member for the Abau Open Seat and was first elected in the Second National Parliament from 1977 to 1982, and served as the Minister for Defence in 1980; and

(b) Mr Brown Sinamoi on 14th January 2024. He was a former Member for Chuave Open Seat and was first elected in the Third National Parliament in a by-election in 1985 and re-elected to the same seat in the Fourth National Parliament in the 1987 General Elections.

He was elected as the Speaker of the National Parliament from 1985 to 1987 and served as Minister for Communications from September 1989 to July 1992.

As a mark of respect to the memory of the late honourable gentlemen, I invite all honourable members to rise in their places.

I thank the Parliament.

03/03

Mr RAINBO PAITA (Finschhafen – Minister for Finance) – Mr Acting Speaker, I move that this Parliament has Confidence in the Prime Minister, Honourable James Marape.

Mr Kerenga Kua – Point of Order! Mr Acting Speaker, this is a Parliament of laws and everything we do must be prescribed, either by the *Constitution*, an *Organic Law*, an Act of Parliament or by the *Standing Order*. So, if we are to entertain a normal called a Vote of Confidence, Mr Acting Speaker, you must seek the assistance of the Clerk and your lawyers first. If they advise you to proceed then we shall continue, otherwise we couldn't be conducting an illegal procedure on the Floor of this Parliament. Thank you.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable members, I'll make a ruling on the Point of Order. This is a motion that the Leader of Government Business has brought forward and that it's a motion that has been agreed by the Floor of Parliament, which I, the Chair, will

entertain the motion. The precedence has been set before on such situation of the Vote of No Confidence, and the Parliament will also follow the precedence that has been set.

Mr RAINBO PAITA – Mr Acting Speaker, I'd like to continue on with my motion.

(Members quarrelling in the Chamber)

Mr James Donald – Point of Order! Mr Acting Speaker, my Point of Order is; according to *Standing Order*, if the government ask for a leave and when we the Opposition refuse to grant the leave, you cannot entertain it. You have to vote for it!

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Member, your Point of Order is out of order. The leave as been granted.

Mr Douglas Tomuriesa – Point of Order! Mr Acting Speaker, just a few moments ago you received and entertained the motion from the Opposition, that now should be entertained by this Floor. You cannot have another competing motion coming forward to this House. Mr Acting Speaker, you have already made your decision and you should stick with your decision and throw out this motion.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Opposition Leader, your Point of Order is out of order. I have just read the motion that you have served on the Speaker and your motion is at foot, the Parliament will still follow the process of entertaining that.

(Mr Douglas Tomuriesa interjecting)

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Opposition Leader, please resume your seat. Honourable members, I will not entertain any more points of order to this because I already made a ruling. I will let the Leader of Government Business to continue.

Mr RAINBO PAITA – Mr Acting Speaker, when I move my motion –

(Members interjecting)

04/03

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Governor, resume your seat.

Mr RAINBO PAITA – Mr Speaker, when I move my motion those in favour –

Mr Allan Bird – Point of Order! I want to suggest a correction.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Governor, you resume your seat. The Chair has already made a decision that I will not entertain any more points of order because I have seen that the points of order have been rejected by the Chair and the Chair has decided to continue on the motion. So, I will allow for the Leader of Government Business to continue with his motion.

MOTION OF CONFIDENCE

Mr RAINBO PAITA (Finschhafen – Minister for Finance) – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. I move –

That the Parliament has confidence in the Prime Minister Honourable James Marape.

Motion – That the Parliament has confidence in the Prime Minister Honourable James Marape – put.

(Shouting breaks out in the Chamber)

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable members, those in favour of the motion, please stand up.

(More shouting followed by the Opposition walking out of the Chamber and clapping from the Government side)

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Order! Order! Order!

(Shouting continues on the Floor)

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable members from the Opposition, order!

(More shouting and interjecting in the Chamber)

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Order!

(Shouting continues with an exchange of words followed by cheering and jeering in the Chamber)

05/03

The Parliament voted (the Acting Speaker, **Mr Koni Iguan**, in the Chair) –

AYES – 84

NOES – 0

Motion so agreed to.

MOTION BY LEAVE

Mr JAMES MARAPE (Tari-Pori – Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs)

– I ask leave of the Parliament to move a motion without notice.

Leave granted.

Mr Acting Speaker, I want to thank you for allowing the decorum of the House to prevail. This is the House where leaders come and show their character, intent, and what they want to do for the country. You die on your shield in this Parliament, and don't vacate your space on the Floor of this Parliament. Whatever is on your side of the House, there is enough provision in the *Standing Orders* that allow for dissensions, contests, and views to be heard

properly in this Floor of Parliament and not for us to protest like imbeciles or immature people in this House.

Mr Acting Speaker, I just want to inform every one of us and I thank the Members on this side of the House who were able to maintain decorum, patience, and understanding that parliamentary procedures must run their course.

The *Standing Order* is very clear that if you are in the dissension and the Speaker asks you, you say no, then you say no and if you feel that the Speaker is being unfair to you then say 'division' and show your numbers on the Floor and defeat the government's motion. That's how our Parliament is structured by the forefathers of this country and not for imbeciles and cowards, who change here every now and then to abuse the responsible positions they hold.

Mr Belden Namah – Point of Order! There are no cowards on this Floor of Parliament and I ask the Prime Minister to withdraw that statement because there are no cowards. We were equally mandated by our people to represent them on the Floor of Parliament. Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Member for Vanimo-Green, your Point of Order is in order. I will ask the Prime Minister to withdraw the word, 'cowards'. Thank you.

Mr JAMES MARAPE – All right, as you are the boss of this House, I withdraw the word 'cowards' but the English –

(Uproar in the Chamber)

Mr Douglas Tomuriesa – You have no respect for your heart!

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Order! Order! Order!

Mr Kerenga Kua – On what standards?

Mr Douglas Tomuriesa – Shut up!

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Opposition Leader, I warn you from the Chair to refrain from making loud noises in this House. Respect this House and allow the Prime Minister to continue with his statement.

06/03

Mr JAMES MARAPE – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. You can yell, shout and scream but fire will not come down. It's not about yelling, shouting and screaming.

Mr Acting Speaker, it is good the members of the Opposition are back on their chairs when I'm making the statement on this side. As I said earlier, the fathers of our *Constitution* prescribed procedures in Parliament that allows for the dissension to be heard. The conduct of Parliament is by rule of numbers. The process in Parliament allows for a dissension to be heard, and if you have the numbers, you will defeat the motion the government proposes. It is simple as that. You don't need to yell up and down, shout, and scream just because you are a lawyer on the other side.

Mr Kerenga Kua – Point of Order! I have a career as a lawyer. Some of you don't have a career. I am proud of what I am as a lawyer.

Mr Acting Speaker, the Point of Order is this, we will accept what the Prime Minister is saying so long as he can give us the assurance that after today, there will be no further consequence out of this unlawful exercise. But if there is a hidden motive behind this –

(Uproar in the Chamber)

Mr Kerenga Kua – Mr Acting Speaker, I'm not finished with my Point of Order.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Member, resume your seat! The Prime Minister has sought leave of the House to make a statement so I will allow him to continue because the Chair cannot allow for a point of order on a statement.

(Mr Kerenga Kua interjecting)

Mr JAMES MARAPE – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. Let's not abuse the Chair of the Speaker. The Speaker conducts Parliament based on numbers; motions are sustained based on numbers, divisions are sustained based on number, and dissents are sustained based

on numbers. You have every opportunity to produce your number to dissent on a motion that is according to *Standing Order*. I don't need to teach some of you who are much more learned than I am in as far law is concerned.

Mr Acting Speaker, I want to appreciate you for upholding the *Standing Orders* of our country far from the noise that our friends on the other side have been spinning since the 9th of January 2024. If you care to read in the public space, since 9th of January 2024, public spins were happening and on 10th of January 2024, the ugly mayhem happened and today the voices keep on getting bigger and bigger. You can shout and yell but fire will not come down, produce your numbers on the Floor of Parliament.

Mr Acting Speaker, today I want to thank the 83 members of Parliament, was it 83? I keep on forgetting. I was trying to go down to 83 but thank you, it's 84. That is enough number to ensure that constitutional matters of this country are run without fear or favour. No one is going to run away from Vote of No Confidence under the watch of Mr James Marape. It's on *Hansard* records, the parliamentary processes will take its own course. If you want to entertain a serious business such as a change of government, a government that is born as a result of people exercising *Section 50* rights to vote in a recently concluded election. It is a serious matter, produce your numbers.

If you are inexperienced in politics, let me teach you. Numbers are shown in the first instance when you dissent on a motion, you don't go into the deep sea thinking that there is a tuna there and trying to put a hook in the deep sea. You must know your numbers.

(Mr Belden Namah interjecting)

(Laughter in the Chamber)

Mr JAMES MARAPE – Mr Acting Speaker, I am happy that my long-time compatriot, the Honourable Member for Vanimu-Green indicates that I am not a businessman in the interest of tuna but am a politician in the interest of looking after my country.

07/03

I do not know about fishing, forestry or anything else but I have the interest in looking after this country, with the numbers that matter most to keep this country moving on. We want to assure you that this is your House and we on this side will not break the process of Parliament. If the members on the Opposition feel that there are enough grounds for a 'Vote

of No Confidence;’ it is within their total right to do so, and no one will deny them that right. And I am happy they nominated my brother, Governor Allan Bird, who is a friend first aside from politics.

On matters of public policy, he has a dissenting public policy opinion, it is totally within his right to be on the other side, but you have to also respect the rights of the members to be on this side. It is a God-given right to exercise what they feel is important for their people, for their constituents, and collectively for the country.

The process has been there since 1974 when this *Constitution* was mounted. The process was entrenched within Parliament on 15th of June 1975, when the *Constitution* was birthed. You ask the last man standing there, he knows this process. You dissent on the Floor of Parliament; you die on your shield. If you are man enough, you die on your shield and not walk out of Parliament.

You are man enough representing your people, be man enough to accept defeat. I see my friend; the Member for Ialibu- Pangia standing up. He should be the last one standing up. In 2015 –

(Shouting in the Chamber)

Mr Peter O’Neill – Point of Order! We have known for a long time about the Prime Minister’s verbal speeches which he continues on forever without making any profound statement but I want to say something about this motion that he has explained quite well. That is right and the Parliament has its own rights to make its own rules and conduct itself. But as the Governor of Morobe said there was no seconder on the motion.

The motion that was introduced and there was no seconder. If you look through your *Hansard* records, the mover was the Leader of Government Business. Anyways, it has been voted so we accept it but the reality is this, we can’t continue on behaving like this.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Member for Ialibu-Pangia, I will rule your Point of Order, out of order. The Prime Minister has sought leave of this House and the House has granted him leave to make a statement of which I allowed. You cannot debate the statement that he is making. I will allow him to complete his statement.

Mr JAMES MARAPE – Motions do not need a seconder; all they need is a mover.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – In reply to the motion, it has a mover and a seconder in which the table has recognized and we entertained on the vote. And I mentioned that I have a copy of a mover and a seconder. The seconder is Honourable Jelta Wong. And the mover is Honourable Rainbo Paita.

Mr JAMES MARAPE – Mr Acting Speaker, I will make my conclusion very quickly. I want to apologize if I have offended anyone on the Opposition. You have your right to defend your standing on the Floor of Parliament, not walking out of the Parliament but I can understand where you are coming from.

I want to thank all members on this side; Pangu Pati at 56 members, URP had 11 members, STB had six members, Pipol's Party had four, People's First Party has four members, Liberal Party had two members, National Alliance Party, one of our strong foundations since 2019 had one member, People's Movement for Change had one-member, Melanesian Alliance had one, and Melanesian Liberal Party had one member.

I pay special mention to the former Opposition Leader. If only those of who would give respect to his decency, you would have had a better team, then the mad rush for ascension on the other side. I want to thank the Government side; we have much bigger issues at play.

08/03

We need to conclude on Wafi-Golpu, P'nyang Gas Project and we need to ensure that the Porgera arrangements we have started with 51 per cent to PNG beneficiaries and 49 per cent to our former investor, who previously held 95 per cent, that we negotiated in this Parliament. It is now three months from being fired up. Very soon, we will be asked to go to Porgera to receive the first gold produced under the new arrangements. That is important for the economy, we need to bring the Wildebeest gas field to shape up to be the biggest LNG in our country to be crossed. We need to do more work.

The unemployment issues raised by the Governor of East Sepik is absolutely correct. We are redefining the definition of employment by trying to create SME opportunities for our people in the country. This work is huge for us; we don't need to contest unnecessarily like little children on this Floor of Parliament. If you have the numbers, produce the numbers.

I want to assure this country, our investors and everyone that my side of government will not run away from the process of Vote of No Confidence, that I can give assurance. But it

is in the responsibility of those of you who proposed, that you tick of all requirements of a Vote of No Confidence process. I'm not going to school you again on ticking that off. Most of you are educated leaders on the other side, you claim to read law better than most of us. Do it properly. Bring a competent Vote of No Confidence into the process where the Private Members Committee will have a handle on it.

I give assurance to this Parliament, the people's House that I will not run away like the former Prime Minister used to do and asked us to do when he was Prime Minister.

(Members interjecting)

Mr Peter O'Neill – Point of Order! We respect the Prime Minister making his statement, but as usual he is diverting all the time. All he has to do is go back and read the *Hansard* on how we conducted Parliament and he will learn a few things. He is trying to do his best in going to court and show confidence in this Parliament to beef up his support. We understand the game but of course the motion is already on the Floor and it will be determined by the Private Business Committee, we will see you next Thursday when we have to take a vote and that will determine whether you have support or not. Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER –Honourable Member for Ialibu-Pangia, I have warned you earlier on making statements when raising a point of order. And your Point of Order is out of order. I will ask the Prime Minister to continue.

Mr JAMES MARAPE – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. I will come to a conclusion.

If he wants to get assurance from our side and he made reference to *Section 19* that is before the Supreme Court, I want to give assurance to this House, that this is not to gag the process of Vote of No Confidence. The court will run its own course. We are asking the court to shed greater light into the reading of *Section 63* that the Member for Ialibu-Pangia did file to try and get me out of office when he filed after I was elected as the Prime Minister.

And in that ruling, the court made a good look into *Section 63* invitation and affirmed that *Section 63* is constitutionally congruent and is in order and we are asking the court to look into what *Section 63* means in the context of *Section 145* provision of our National Constitution. So, this is before the court.

Mr Acting Speaker, I give you my fullest assurance that the Attorney-General is under instruction that whilst we have an opportunity also to ask the Supreme Court on matters that are before court and subjudice, we members on this side have the numbers that we show today. We will not be running to court to invoke the provisions of subjudice. The Supreme Court will make and do their job and the Parliament will do our job and we will sit in Parliament next week and the following week.

We have important bills before us in this House. You produce your numbers on that side if you feel that you have the numbers. The Prime Minister's seat is not James Marape's birth right. It's a matter that belongs to our people. And you don't be a lone voice thinking that you have people on your side. Opportunities were given in 2022, to receive *Section 63* invitation.

09/03

Pangu Pati on this side won 39 seats, the highest-ever number since 2001 when the *Organic Law on Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates* came into play. If you want to unbundle the party that received 63 invitations with the number that we have here, produce your numbers on the Floor of Parliament.

Sir Puka Temu – Point of Order! Mr Acting Speaker, the Prime Minister just said that the matter that he mentioned a couple of seconds ago is before the court. So, why is he trying to defend his Attorney-General on the reasons why he has brought the matter to court?

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Member for Abau, your Point of Order is in order. The Prime Minister is explaining what has been raised by the Member for Ialibu-Pangia and we cannot go more and talk about the decision of the court.

Honourable Prime Minister, continue with your statement.

Mr JAMES MARAPE – Mr Acting Speaker, I will conclude soon. The Member for Abau has raised his point of order thinking that we will go to court saying that it is subjudice and will stop the Parliament from having the Vote of No Confidence.

We will not do that. We respect this *Constitution* which Pangu Pati birthed in 1975. It is not our development party's constitution or it is not a party that came later. The *Constitution* is birthed by Pangu Pati and the fathers of our country.

The process of Vote of No Confidence is in our *Constitution*. We will allow it to run. You have seen the numbers. The alternate is absolutely clear as the sun and moon, right and wrong, or night and day. There are only two choices; the opposite choice and the government's incumbency. The leaders will be allowed total freedom to exercise what they feel is important.

These are no ordinary times. The cast of the shadows of the Covid-19 pandemic, global inflation burdens, and our recovery effort in our economy still continues. These are serious times and not for someone who dreams or has fantasy of playing with this office.

This is a serious matter and so produce serious numbers on the Floor of Parliament, take control of the Parliament's motions and procedures, and change the government. This is not my birth right.

Mr Acting speaker, I rest my case. I also want to thank everyone who is here. We are not going to camp. As the current Prime Minister, I ask the members of Parliament to invoke your consciousness on the opposites alternate and the current the incumbent in government and make your choice based on the merits.

Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker.

(Mr Douglas Tomuriesa interjecting)

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Opposition Leader, please resume your seat. The Honourable Prime Minister has sought leave from the Parliament to make a special statement as an explanation and he did. That is allowed for but we cannot allow for a debate on the statement.

MOTION BY LEAVE

Mr RAINBO PAITA (Finschhafen – Minister for Finance) – Mr Acting Speaker, 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 the Minister for Works and Highways on presenting his ministerial statement as he stated yesterday.

Mr Allan Bird – Point of Order! Traditionally, Thursdays are private members' days. Why are we moving government business on private members' day?

(Uproar in the Chamber)

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Governor of East Sepik Province, the *Standing Orders* have already been suspended to allow for the business that is now before the Chair. Therefore, the Leader of Government Business has moved to allow the Minister for Works to make a statement in which I will entertain.

10/03

Now, I ask that as the majority has voted in favor, I will ask the Minister to make his statement.

**MINISTRY OF WORKS AND HIGHWAYS – UPDATE ON THE PROGRESS OF
FINANCING AND IMPLEMENTING THE CONNECT PNG PROGRAMME –
MINISTERIAL STATEMENT – MOTION TO TAKE NOTE OF THE PAPER**

Mr SOLAN MIRISIM (Teleformin – Minister for Works & Highway) – Mr Acting Speaker, thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide an update on the Government's flagship Connect PNG Road Infrastructure Development Program, as required by the *Connect PNG (Implementation and Funding Arrangements) Act 2021*.

This statement also serves as a response to a series of questions raised by the Governor of Southern Highlands, Honourable William Powi, including many other leaders on both sides of the House who have been complaining about this program. Also, there has been

a lot of misinformation or fake news circulating in the mainstream media and on social media by our leaders.

I welcome this opportunity to not only correct the record but address the concerns of the honourable members. This government will always be open and transparent in the delivery of services to PNG.

Mr Acting Speaker, firstly, let us all be reminded that our founding fathers fought for our political independence, they worked tirelessly to ensure that the 800-plus ethnic groups were connected with better road accessibility through the pre-independence days, uniting this country.

In this regard, the value of road transport infrastructure to PNG's economy is immense and cannot be underestimated. Roads continue to serve as the backbone of everyday life, underpinning 86 percent of socio-economic activities.

Since the pre-independence years, the country's road network has been the artery of PNG, linking farmers to markets, businesses to customers, and enabling people and communities to access basic services. Yet despite the critical role of the road network, regrettably, due to many years of underfunding and mismanagement, 85 percent of the country's road network has declined to almost irreparable stages.

We are determined to correct this under this government. As of 2012, road evaluation studies carried out by the Australian Government under its TSSP Program estimated that the government would require K45 billion in replacement cost to clear the deferred maintenance backlog accumulated over the last 20 years of underfunding and poor management.

This has made our country's road network unfit to support any socio-economic development efforts and aspirations of successive governments, including ours today.

Mr Acting Speaker, it was under these circumstances that when our government first took office in 2019, we developed the 20-year Connect PNG program to immediately deal with the threats of the growing deferred maintenance backlog and at the same time, meet the country's future demands by embarking on a long-term vision to connect the entire country, with 100 per cent road connectivity, by 2040.

11/03

Mr Acting Speaker, to ensure uninterrupted implementation of the 20-year program is supported by sufficient funding guarantees, the program targets and the funding annual allocation of 5.6 per cent of the annual budget are legislated by an Act of Parliament. We are

not running the Connect PNG on an ad-hoc basis as many assume but we are doing so in full compliance with program limits provided by the act of Parliament.

Mr Acting Speaker, we, as the government, are 100 per cent focused on increasing road access and connectivity by upgrading, expanding, developing, and maintaining the existing 16,000 km of roads as well as constructing the major missing link roads of 1,800 km.

Mr Acting Speaker, only in this way will we, as a nation, connect the unconnected, reach the unreached, and unlock economic potential in the unlocked regions identified in the Vision 2050. We owe this to the people of PNG.

Mr Acting speaker, let me state very clearly that the 20-year Connect PNG program is implemented in a planned and systematic 3-phase approach.

Phase 1 covers the current medium term (2020-2027) with a total investment plan of K7.982 billion, which equals the world standard practice of spending 4 per cent of GDP on road infrastructure.

Mr Acting Speaker, in line with the legislated 5.6 per cent budgetary commitment, which equates to a minimum of K1.2 billion per year, key priority program targets cover almost 8,000 km of strategic national highways, missing link roads, provincial and district roads, and rural and national bridges.

The combined effect of delivering these program targets will contribute to national outcomes of creating employment, building local contractors' capacity, increasing rural agriculture productivity, and ultimately supporting the economic growth aspirations to make PNG become a middle-income country by 2030.

Mr Acting Speaker, these priority programs include:

(1) Improving and upgrading of the 4,220 km of 16 priority national highways to a two lane standard highway, including Hiritano, Magi, Sepik, New Britain, and Ramu Madang.

(2) Expansion of 1,900 km of new missing link roads to connect 17 per cent (1.7 million people) of the 10 million population not yet connected by road and providing road link to landlocked regions.

(3) Improving rural roads to the Department of Works and Highway (DOWH) rural road standard to increase rural accessibility by at least 60 per cent for 85 per cent of the rural population.

(4) Delivering 4,000 meters of national and provincial bridge infrastructure across all districts, provinces, and regions to ensure road accessibility regardless of the weather.

Mr Acting Speaker, despite the commencement of the *Connect PNG Funding Act 2021* to allocate annually 5.6 per cent per year, comparing the projected total budget estimate for the Department of Works and Highways against the actual funding received for the 2020-2023 funding period, the estimated total budget bid was K6.402 billion but the actual total budget appropriation was only K4.53 billion, giving an overall shortfall of K2.4 billion.

12/03

Mr Acting Speaker, on the contrary, the Connect PNG program is implemented within the annual budget appropriations set by Parliament including our contract commitments. When the program has been underfunded over the last four years with an accumulated total of K2.4 billion, the accusation by some honourable members of spending baseless figures of K50 billion, the same period of four years is completely false and is misleading and will only serve and mislead the public.

Mr Acting Speaker, now let me give true figures, the numbers on the performance and achievements over the last four years of the phase one medium term program targets against the self-fabricated, fake figures floating around in the public media by the former Prime Minister, Mr Peter O'Neill, Member for Ialibu-Pangia.

Our progress on 16 priority economic roads or economic highways to date is approximately 3,500 kilometres which account for 21 per cent of the total 16,200 kilometres of strategic highways has been upgraded to a good condition.

Mr Acting Speaker, this achievement represents over 83 per cent of the phase one packet of 4,200 kilometres. The government over the last four years has spent a total of K2.2 billion on the main highways, almost 50 per cent of the total expenditure at K1 billion of the 60 per cent share of projects funded by loan and donor grants including the ADB funded 10-year Highlands Highway improvement program.

Mr Acting Speaker, despite many challenges and constraints the road upgrading and improving works are on schedule. By far, this is the biggest investment program on our critical highways by any government in the history of Papua New Guinea.

Mr Acting Speaker, at the current rate of progress, by 2027 more than 80 per cent of the 4,200 kilometres of key economic backbone highways of our country including Hiritano, Magi to Highlands highway, Ramu, Madang, Sepik coastal, East and West New Britain, Enga, Boluminski Highway will be brought to two-lane highway standard conditions.

Mr Acting Speaker, I would invite those honourable members who continue to call the Connect PNG a scam program, to personally go and drive around the main highways throughout the country and see for yourself that the overall condition of these highways has improved to 60 per cent good condition from what was only 12 per cent in 2016. I'm asking my former Prime Minister, the Member for Ialibu-Pangia, Honourable Peter O'Neill to go to Lae and drive from Nadzab to Ialibu-Pangia or even go to Kikori and drive from there to Ialibu-Pangia.

Mr Peter O'Neill – Point of Order! He forgets that I approved that maintenance program and upgrade. You did not do it, so please don't make claims you are not entitled to. Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker.

Mr SOLAN MIRISIM – We gave you time to speak yesterday so please sit down and allow me to complete my statement.

Mr Acting Speaker, our achievements on our missing link roads progress to date of the 1,800 kilometres of missing link roads to be constructed under the program, more than 350 kilometres, 55 per cent of the phase one packet of 633 kilometres of new roads has been constructed and opened to standard class three roads. These roads include the Erave-Simbriki section of the Gulf-Southern Highlands Highway, 100 kilometres of Vanimo-Aitape sections of the Sepik Coastal Highway that six kilometres is done. I know the Member for Vanimo is fully aware of that.

13/03

The Trans-Island Highway and the Magi Highway, Finschaffon-Lae Road, Wabag-Maramuni Road, Tabubil-Telefomin Road, Gumine-Karamui Road and Kainantu-Obura-Wonenara - Menyamya.

Mr Acting Speaker, connecting the unconnected is the central theme of the Connect PNG program. Today, in line with the long-term vision to connect the entire country by road, we have connected the Gulf of Papua to the Highlands and to the Northern Regions. You can now drive from Kikori to Mendi, Hagen into Morobe, and to Madang on an uninterrupted continuous highway system unlike before.

Similarly, you can now drive from Kiunga to Tabubil and onto the first village in Telefomin through the hidden back walls. This is not fake but the real story of the Connect PNG that is driving change for better PNG. Do we say it's a scam? No!

By the end of this year, we will be opening the famous transnational corridor that will truly connect Papua New Guinea and fulfill the dream of our founding fathers to physically connect and unite Papua New Guinea by road on the mainland.

Mr Acting Speaker, this corridor has a total length of 356 kilometres, comprising the Wau Highway section up to Bulolo, and the Trans-Island Highway section, which comprises the current Aaseki Road, from Bulolo to the Oiwa, in Aseki, and the approximately 159.8 kilometre missing link section, between Oiwa to Morobe Province and Epo in Gulf Province.

Progress up to August 2023, on the Trans-Island Highway missing link section, is 41 per cent (66 kilometre), the remaining 93.8 kilometre will be completed before September 2025.

Mr Acting Speaker, let me remind those awaiting miracles to happen that to achieve anything of value, there has to be a sacrifice. Many have been questioning the value of investments made in the construction of missing links, to reach the unreached and connect the unconnected for the first time.

However, sharing the tears of joy of my people in the remote Telefomin District, the rural people upon mountain tops of Kaintiba, and the people of Maramuni in the middle of Enga-Sepik, to see a road for the first time connecting them to the outside world, I asked myself: 'what would be the monetary value of giving a lifetime road access for many generations to come?' This operates outside of the current standard economic appraisals people use to prioritise project viability.

Mr Acting Speaker, yes, we do economic feasibility studies and they guide us, but we also have to take risks to ensure greater prosperity not only now but for the future generations to come.

Mr Acting Speaker, the rural environment of Papua New Guinea remains the untapped growth engine of our country, where our rural population is the custodian of our land, environment, and ecosystem.

Mr Acting Speaker, in this regard, the Connect PNG program provides road services that fit into the larger goals of rural development and priorities for economic and social growth. This is where we all come from and it is a noble aspiration that must be supported by all.

Mr Acting Speaker, these are indisputable record-breaking achievements that cannot be underrated by people living in the relative luxury of big cities and towns. As such, the government is proud that it has spent more than K400 million on the construction and expansion of missing link roads throughout PNG over the last four years, including K200

million from tax credit scheme-funded projects. The returns on this will have a generational effect in the future.

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Progress on provincial and district economic roads

Mr Acting Speaker, provincial and district roads make up 21,000 kilometres of the 30,000 kilometres of PNG's road network, serving our rural road network. All provincial and district roads are legally the responsibility of the provincial and district authorities under the *Road (Management and Funding) Act 2020*. This means for now the management of the rest of the 12,000 kilometres of subnational roads is with the provincial and district authorities.

Our records show that both the Department of Works and Highway and the Department of National Planning and Monitoring have been continuously funding road projects worth more than K2.7 billion over the last four years since the 2019 Supplementary Budget.

This translates to an enormous 60 per cent of the total Connect PNG capital expenditure going to rural roads. Districts like Sinasina-Yonggamugl in Chimbu Province and Ialibu-Pangia District in the Southern Highlands Province on the Opposition side are benefiting from this funding that is given directly from the Department of National Planning.

Also, the Department of National Planning has given some funds to members from the other side too. Like Chuave, a K30 million was given.

Mr James Nomane – Point of Order! Mr Acting Speaker, the good Minister for Works and Highway can fully appreciate the struggles that we have had with warranting at the Department of Works and Highways so don't talk about funds that the people of Chuave haven't received. Thank you.

Mr SOLAN MIRISIM – Mr Acting Speaker, let us note that more of the funding is going to the rural roads and under mutual obligations as compared to past years. Therefore, I ask all of us to make use of these funds to improve critical road infrastructures to improve and increase road connectivity and accessibility for our people to access services and markets and improve their livelihoods.

In the same vein, the Honourable Governor William Powi was talking about some locals trying to burn down bridges on the Ialibu-Pangia highway by his supporters because Connect PNG was funding a provincial road in the province without his knowledge.

I wish to make it clear that this is a road project on a major provincial trunk road under the Connect PNG program. It will eventually be upgraded to the national highway standard to link Karamui in the Chimbu province. Why would people damage the very thing that will benefit their local area? Instead, I would invite them to work with us for the common good of all.

Mr Acting Speaker, however, many of the road projects are financed directly at the provincial and district levels, making it challenging to provide a comprehensive and reliable assessment of achievements to date due to data and information limitations.

Based on reports from the provinces, it can be noted that more than 40 per cent (approximately 1,200 kilometres) of the phase 1 target of 3,000 kilometres has been upgraded to good condition.

Progress in the national bridge development and upgrade program

Mr Acting Speaker, significant progress has been made in the construction and upgrade of bridges across the country. Notably, 300 meters of composite two-lane steel structure bridges have been built on the main highways, including three bridges on the Sepik Highway and six bridges on the Ramu-Madang Highway, funded through the European Investment Bank Loan.

15/03

Additionally, 12 bridges have been constructed on the New Britain Highway with support from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and two bridges on the New Britain Highway have been completed through Japanese grant funding.

Furthermore, more than 2,000 meters of rural bridges have been supplied and built on provincial and district roads throughout Papua New Guinea. These improvements have contributed to a 30 per cent increase in rural access, benefiting of the rural population under the rural bridging program.

Mr Allan Bird – Point of Order! The Minister mentioned three bridges on the Sepik Highway and I recalled those were done under the PNC Government. And I would like him to clarify how he now constitutes part of his Connect PNG program. It is just a bit confusing and if he could clarify.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Governor, the Minister is presenting his statement on what he had on record and I will allow him to continue on and if there is a debate on that we will allow for a member to do a debate on the statement.

Mr SOLAN MIRISIM – Under the rural bridging program; every district by now should have received a bridge and built on your district and provincial roads to bridge the rural population.

Mr Acting Speaker, I want to stress that projects funded and implemented under Connect PNG are equitably distributed across 14 major regional road corridors to ensure that all of PNG benefits and no region, province or district in Papua New Guinea is to be left behind. It is in the interest of regional balance that I substantiate with some contract values on some of the major projects in each of the regions as follows;

Momase

- 9 Mile Lae-Bulolo – K65 million
- Ramu Madang Highway – K140 million
- Hareich bridge Aitape – K145 million
- 6 Bridges on Ramu Highway – K88 million
- 3 Bridges on Sepik Highway – K32 million
- Bulolo-Aseki – K20 million
- Vanimo Wutung Border – K10 million
- Finschaffen Highway – K287 million
- Hawai'ian Bridge – K21 million
- Lae City Road – K100 million
- Four-lane highway, Lae to Nadzab – K400 million, total – K1308 million

Highlands

- Highlands Highway ADB funding – K740 million
- Halimbu –Idauwi – K52 million
- Nipa -Ambua Gap – K274 million
- Mendi –Nipa – K221 million
- Rindita –Kware – K94 million
- Mt Hagen city roads – K268 million
- Hiri- Lai road – K66 million

- Erave Samberigi-Gulf/Southern Highlands Road – K99 million, total – K1,814 million

Southern

- Central Milne Bay missing link road – K14 million
- Bautama -Imila Bridge – K73 million
- Imila Bridge Moreguina – K164 million
- Goilana Bridge Gadaisu-Magi Highway – K38 million

16/03

- Oro bay to Kokoda – K51 million,
- Kiunga to Aimbak – K10 million,
- Brown River to Bereina – K81 million (the contract will be given in two weeks' time),

- Epo to Kerema – K47 million.

NGI Region

- Boluminsky Highway – K50 million,
- Bamus Bridge to Novau Primary School, New Britain Highway – K138 million,
- Vunapaladin(kasaska) to Alakasam Baining East New Britain Province – K110 million,

- Kokopo to Tokua 4 Lane – K221 million,
- Manus Highway – K100 million,
- Bougainville projects – K439 million.

This totals to K1,058 million.

So monies are fairly distributed to regions.

Mr Acting Speaker, for the first time, this government is allocating funds equally to all four regions under the Connect PNG program. This is very much consistent with the requirement of the *Constitution* for equitable distribution of resources and levels of participation unlike before.

Mr Acting Speaker, the projects are subjected to proper benefit and impact assessments, then selected, designed, costed and procured through the *National Procurement Act* process, and managed with professional contract management support.

Mr Acting Speaker, I can assure the House that there are no shortcuts in the way projects are procured and contracts awarded. We are not like the previous government

bulldozing contracts on an ad hoc basis to foreign contractors without any due diligence, clear economic feasibility, and projected rate of return on those projects.

Mr Acting Speaker, the Connect PNG Program is providing major opportunities for local content and participation by local road contractors and project management professionals, consistent with the Government's SME policy and the provisions in the *National Procurement (Amendment) Act 2021* that serves local participation for all projects costing up to K50 million.

Mr Acting Speaker, in fact, the Opposition should be very happy that this government is implementing the SME policy they developed but never implemented. In line with the same policy, we intend to reach 50 per cent local contractor participation on major engineering, procurement, and construction projects by 2030.

Don't forget that the last government was known for issuing major contracts on record for infrastructure contracts equivalent to more than K2 billion which remains unaudited to this day.

Mr Acting Speaker, yet the former Prime Minister sees fit to accuse without facts the local contractors of false payments and a massive K3.5 billion figure contracts issued through nepotism and bias to one local contractor.

Mr Acting Speaker, let me refute in the strongest terms possible that the awarding of contracts and making contract payments to contractors is not done on a selective basis as alleged. These allegations are false and have no substance.

Mr Acting Speaker, I also make it very clear that neither myself nor the Prime Minister, Mr James Marape has any shareholding or 100 per cent owned construction companies under our names. In fact, the named companies were small local contractors that are part of 300 contractors comprising both local and international companies. These local contractors have existed during the time of the O'Neill Government and continue to participate in major contract works in our government today. They are not overnight contractors as claimed. Let me put it this way, the goal post has changed but the players are still the same.

17/03

Mr Acting Speaker, just like the big foreign contractors, local contractors go through the same bidding and tendering process and win projects through the competitive and lawful process on their merits.

Indeed, we are using Connect PNG as a vehicle to upgrade and build the capacity of more than 100 local contractors, including the four contractors discussed on social media. This is the only way that we will build a truly self-sustaining road contractor industry in this country.

Mr Acting Speaker, payments to contractors are paid on a monthly basis depending on verified and approved invoices, and availability of funds. Unlike in the past, Connect PNG program contractual payments are strictly governed by the legislated payment process. There is no room for preferential or being bias in payment for contractors as has been alleged by social media pundits. The vetting and verification of invoices for payments from contractors go through a stringent process starting from the field right up to the head office to ensure that everything is above board.

Mr Acting Speaker, yes, of course mistakes will occasionally be made but when they are, we will address these and we welcome anyone who points them out so they can be corrected.

Mr Acting Speaker, however, to minimize this risk, we have contracted independent project managers for all major contracts. They independently assess and endorse invoices for all payments by road contractors.

Mr Acting Speaker, the invoices are then scrutinized by our own officers at the headquarters to ensure that such invoices are for work outputs delivered for the invoiced period and that they are consistent with the terms and conditions of the project contracts. These processes are set by the Department of Finance and I welcome any genuine external scrutiny of these processes.

Mr Acting Speaker, the Connect PNG programme in 2023, operated within the appropriated budget limits of K450 million, which is K750 million short of meeting the legislated 5.6 per cent annual allocation ceiling.

The former Prime Minister's claim of blown-out payments in the last eight months completely exceeds the annual appropriation so how is this even possible when we have shortfall? How can we pay more than what we have? It is financially impossible.

Mr Acting Speaker, to set this record straight and for the benefit of the honourable members, I have provided a record of the real payments made to the contractors named on social media.

Mr Acting Speaker, this is in accordance with their progressive bills against their contracted amounts over the same eight months' period claimed by the Honourable Member for Ialibu-Pangia.

The honourable member, like all members, is welcome to comment on government business, however, such comments should be based on real facts and figures, not idle speculations or false allegations that have no merits as highlighted below in red.

You can see in the list below are the named contractors with their contract, description, true total contract values and true total amount paid within the last eight months. Then, you have the alleged values claimed by Mr O'Neill and the alleged payments, which he claims was made to these contractors.

(1) Albe Limited – Nipa to Ambua road, and Yalu Bridge to Nadzab road. The true value was K14,100,604.76 and the true total amount paid was K8,953,633.42. The alleged contract value was K50,967,219.63 and the alleged payment was K29,400,667.56.

(2) Amaku and Sons – Bulolo, Aseki and Menyamya, Morobe Province. The true value was K119,432,602.52 and the true total amount paid was K30,628,671.75. The alleged contract value was K124,580,626.50 and the alleged payment was K78,154,491.88.

(3) CIVPAC – Rindita Junction to Kware Station and Muriki-Erave Station in Kagua-Erave District of Southern Highlands Province. The true value was K240,411,288.88 and the true total amount paid was K47,414,856.32. The alleged contract value was K267,108,432.44 and the alleged payment was K70,237,551.00.

(4) Construct Oceanic – Kiburu Junction in Mendi to Nipa Secondary School in Southern Highlands Province. The true value was K221,851,364.25 and the true total amount paid was K27,279,423.08. The alleged contract was K1,700,000,000 and the alleged payment was K402,123,301.33.

(5) Ipwenz – Nipa Secondary School to Ambua, Hiri-Lai Road in Hela and Southern Highlands Province, and Tabubil to Telefomin Road. The true value was K331,024,618.63 and the true total amount paid was K43,339,441.49. the alleged contract was K3,520,000,000 and the alleged payment was K743,154,888.11.

These allegations are bullshit, this is untrue and false.

18/03

Mr Douglas Tomuriesa – Point of Order! Your statement is good but I would like to ask you to withdraw the word 'bullshit', as it is un-parliamentary.

Mr SOLAN MIRISM – It is not swearing but I will withdraw it.

In the red column you will see that these are fabricated figures and the black column are the real figures of the contract value and how much we have already paid.

Mr Peter O'Neill – Point of Order! Only yesterday the Parliament approved me to table the IFMS printouts on this Floor of Parliament. I did not fabricate those documents rather it was given to me by a proud patriotic Papua New Guinean whistle-blower.

Now, if you are man enough you should go through that and state which are correct figures and which are not because it has provided the contract numbers, the amounts paid, and the value of the contracts are all stated in that document.

So, please, Mr Acting Speaker, can he withdraw the word 'fabricated', because that is not what the Parliament accepted yesterday.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Minister, refrain from using other languages that you are using on the statement that you are presenting. I will ask you to continue on with your statement.

Mr SOLAN MIRISM – The truth hurts. I do not know why only five contractors from Hela are mentioned and not from other parts of Papua New Guinea.

The figures in the red column are not the real payments these are the false information that has been circulating and the black columns are the IFMS system cheques being paid to the contractors. You have tabled your reports already and we will go by our reports, records of cheques and we will see.

Mr Acting Speaker, the total ongoing contract value on record for the four contractors is only K764 million spread over a multi-year contract duration and not K3.897 billion as claimed by Mr Peter O'Neill. Contrary to some spurious allegations, there are no advance payments or any inflated contract payments to selected contractors.

Mr Acting Speaker, on the same token, let me respond to the Member for Hiri-Koiari, Honourable Keith Iduhu, on the oversight and management of Connect PNG funding by PNG Road Fund Board.

Mr Acting Speaker, let me make it clear that road fund is only responsible for managing offline revenues generated from road user related fees and charges for maintenance purposes only and not the development funds.

The operation of *Connect PNG Funding Arrangement and Management Act 2021* to allocate a minimum legislated amount of 5.6 per cent of the annual budget, came into effect in 2023, last year.

As such, all Capital Works Program Budget Funding for Connect PNG in the previous years were always allocated under the PIP budget lines under Department of Works and Highways as the implementation agency.

Mr Acting Speaker, all payments are made according to the budget items and contracts. For the first time, we have a proper payment register that details out all payments made to every contractor and service provider under Connect PNG including school fees for staff training and development programs paid under Connect PNG Project over heads.

I also admit that payment by Department of Works and Highways for a medical evacuation charter fees as the former Prime Minister stated yesterday. The department did this life saving assistance in a very critical situation for immediate life-saving treatment to Australia as recommended by local medical experts due to non-availability of the treatment and facilities locally.

19/03

If he put himself in my shoes, as he was a Minister, what would he and his department do? It's better to save a life!

Mr Acting Speaker, the Department of Works and Highway is in communication with the Parliamentary Services to reimburse the funds used.

Mr Acting Speaker, having said this, we are not discouraged but more encouraged by the comments and criticisms raised to do more and enjoy the satisfaction of reaching all our people with better road connectivity.

Mr Acting Speaker, hence, in moving forward to keep on par with the Medium-Term program targets for 2024-2027, as the Connect PNG program is a long-term 20-year program, there are more than a billion worth of projects at various stages of the project cycle including projects worth K1 billion at the tender stage as follows:

Projects at procurement stage, project name and cost estimates;

- Four-lane highway from Laloki to Edebu junction as part of the Port Moresby city expansion plan – K400 million
- Maprik- Lumi-Aitape missing link: Sepik Highway and Coastal Highway – K100 million
- Kimbe to Kandrian, Gasmata Road – K200 million
- New Britain South Coast Road: Kokopo-Pomio-Kandrian – K200 million
- New Britain Highway missing link section: Milo Bridge, Pandi River – K150 million

- Kundiawa-Gumine-Karimui – K200 million
- Lossuk Junction-Bo Junction-Matakan - West Coast Road – K100 million
- Lufa-Okapa-Kainantu Road – K100 million
- Magi Highway missing link: Moreguina (Central) Gadaisu (Milne Bay) – K300 million
- Enga-Sepik economic corridor road program – K200 million
- Rai Coast Highway - Ramu Highway junction, to Kelenoa, Tewai Siassi District to Finschhafen – K200 million
- Madang Bayer corridor: Mount Hagen to Baiyer River- Simbai - Madang under Indian Exim Bank – K100 million
- Vanimo-Bewani-Green River Highway upgrade to seal – K250 million
- Ketarabo-Kabiufa four-lane Highway – K120 million
- Coffee and tea plantation roads in Waghi Valley – K48 million
- Vanimo-Aitape road upgrading to seal – K200 million
- Hoskins-Kimbe four-lane Highway-Indian Exim Bank – K60 million
- Madang four-lane Road – K70 million
- Wewak four-lane Road upgrade – K100 million
- Vanimo town roads upgrade to support border trade – K100 million
- Baiyer-Madang missing link – K200 million, total of K3.598 billion.

Mr Acting Speaker, with the implementation of these balance of tenders, it is highly anticipated that by the beginning of 2025, there should already be a road network that extends from Madang-Ramu to Lae to Bulolo to Aseki to Kaintiba to Kotidanga to Epo to Port Moresby then to Abau and onto Alotau.

Mr Acting Speaker, then during the course of the programme, the Wutung Border (Sandaun Province) to Wewak and then to Bogia (Madang Province) section will be constructed so that an uninterrupted road network covering the entire length and breadth of the mainland is connected.

Mr Acting Speaker, furthermore, in order to improve governance and monitoring responsibilities necessary to get the best value for money, we welcome the Prime Minister's call yesterday for external independent audits to verify and confirm the figures that are provided today.

Mr Acting Speaker, ensuring independent technical and financial audits is key to adding overall value for money on these massive investments on the Connect PNG program.

20/03

Internally at Works and Highways Department, we are already engaging independent project audit firms from Canada and the US to thoroughly assess contractor performance and ensure the projects meet the performance standards. These audits ensure that work outputs meet technical, safety, and environmental standards necessary for high quality and long-lasting infrastructure outputs that give value for money.

Mr Acting Speaker, notable audits on projects like Lae City cement roads and Highlands Highway improvement program under the ADB funding have been the first lot of projects audited and have identified defects and poor performance issues leading to instructions for appropriate remedial works under existing contracts.

Mr Acting Speaker, let me inform the former Prime Minister, who approved the Highlands Highway ADB program loan that technical auditors have identified 30 per cent shortfall in the original scope that massively affected the project 12 per cent rate of return on the loan funded road investment. Our government had to fund an additional K400 million.

Again, Marape Government had to fund K400 million to make up for the scope shortfalls by fixing up the long-standing problem sections of the Daulo Pass, Simbu section; they call it the critical Simbu section. I hope my friend, Member for Sinasina-Yonggamugl should be happy about this, Kassam Pass, and introducing stabilisation technology on 40 per cent of the 430 kilometre section of the highway.

Mr Acting Speaker, this additional cost has increased the overall service life of the road and is expected to give high rate of return over the loan repayment period.

Mr Acting Speaker, furthermore, we are adopting best practice and high-quality design standards. We prioritise design readiness and deliverance of Connect PNG Road Projects to high quality standards aiming for longer operational life span with minimal maintenance cost. Notably, over 400 kilometres of highways have already been stabilised including sections of the Highlands Highway to Ramu-Madang, Lae City roads, New Britain Highway, Magi Highway, Enga Highway and Gulf-Southern Highlands.

Mr Acting Speaker, these road sections have proven to last more than five years without developing potholes exemplifying our commitment to long term infrastructure quality.

Mr Acting Speaker, Rome was not built overnight, problems of many decades of underfunding and poor management cannot be fixed overnight but be rest assured that for the

first time, we are slowly doing things right to ensure Connect PNG can improve our road network to right standards that can contribute to achieving socio-economic development on a sustainable base for our country.

Mr Acting Speaker, it is an absolute shame and hypocrisy for some of our leaders who viciously demand development at the same time negatively criticise, when the Marape-Rosso Government is doing exactly that, bringing development to our people.

Mr Acting Speaker, they argue for nothing but to ensure that our people continue to be trapped in misery and poverty in the same way our ancestors have been living for hundreds of years in the local graves.

Mr Acting Speaker, the Marape-Rosso Government is the people's government and therefore, it will continue to do what is best for the entire population of the country.

Mr Kerenga Kua – You are lying!

Mr SOLAN MIRISIM – You were just in this government yesterday.

Mr Acting Speaker, trust me, our members with your understanding and support in this notable cause of 100 per cent road connectivity by 2040, truly Papua New Guinea will never be the same again. Let's work together for the betterment of our beautiful country Papua New Guinea.

21/03

God bless Papua New Guinea and God bless this House.

Motion (by **Mr James Marape**) agreed to –

That the Parliament take note of the statement.

Debate adjourned.

MOTION BY LEAVE

Mr JAMES MARAPE (Tari-Pori – Prime Minister and Minister for Treasury) – I ask leave of Parliament to move a motion without notice.

Leave granted.

Mr Acting Speaker, before I do so, I want to ask members on both sides of the House that whilst we are supercharged and excited to change, form, and establish governments, our core focus must remain as legislators and this government is also about trying to ensure correct changes are brought into our Parliament for the betterment of our country, we are standing at the threshold of 50 years.

And 50 years ago, laws were fabricated to construct what we have in modern PNG today and this government has two important laws before us and the Attorney-General has been working on this for many months since he took office.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS – REARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

Motion (by **Mr James Marape**) agreed to –

That so much of the *Standing Orders* be suspended as would prevent the Order of the Day on Government Notices No. 70 and 69 being called on forthwith;

(1) Define our country as a Christian Country and that's a law which will be defined in the preamble and not an operating law to force everyone to worship as Christians, but just to identify ourselves in a nation that believes and subscribes to the judo Christian world view and seats in the front of the Melanesians world view and identity but add value to the preambles by saying that we are a Christian nation.

(2) For the first time introducing the Appeals Court, which we have been working with our judiciary because of the increase in case backlog and the need to separate Supreme Courts from the National Courts, and the proposal has been on the table for some time.

CONSTITUTIONAL (AMENDMENT)
(DECLARATION OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA AS CHRISTIAN COUNTRY)
LAW 2023

Second Reading

First required opportunity to debate and first Vote from 29 November 2023.

22/03

Mr PILA NININGI (Imbonggu-Minister for Justice & Attorney General) – Mr Acting Speaker, in accordance with *Standing Order 222(b)*, I now commence the first required opportunity for a debate.

In relation to the declaration of Papua New Guinea as a Christian country, the proposed amendment to the *Constitution* of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea to debate and declare Papua New Guinea a Christian country. It should not be a surprise to anyone because as we all know according to the 2021 census, 96 per cent of our people align themselves with the Christian faith. It is imperative that this fact be added to the ‘mama law’ of our country, the *Constitution*.

Mr Acting Speaker, as a responsible government, instead of pushing through its agenda using its numbers referred as a matter to the responsible government agencies to gather the views of our people before proceeding with the constitutional change. The public consultations have now been completed and our people have spoken.

Mr Acting Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to present to this honourable House the Amendment Bill to amend the *Constitution* to declare Papua New Guinea as a Christian country. This Amendment Bill will amend the *Constitution* to declare Papua New Guinea as a Christian country.

Mr Acting Speaker, in 2020, the *NEC Decision No. 234 of 2020*, directed the Constitutional and Law Reform Commission and the Department of Community Development, Religion and Youth to consult our people on their views in declaring Papua New Guinea a christian country.

Mr Acting Speaker, CLRC took 12 months to conduct public consultations with our people on the question of declaring Papua New Guinea a Christian country. On 9th August 2021, the CLRC submitted its report titled ‘Final Report on the Enquiry on the Declaration of

Papua New Guinea as a Christian Country to the Prime Minister, Honourable James Marape and the report comes in two volumes.

On the same day, the Prime Minister presented the final report of the Constitutional and Law Reform Commission to the National Executive Council. The National Executive Council deliberated on the final report of the CLRC and approved its recommendations and the final report to be presented to this Parliament in its *Decision No. 227 of 2021*.

23/03

Mr Acting Speaker, the Constitutional and Law Reform Commission made six recommendations in its final report that was approved by the National Executive Council. These recommendations are;

(1) Amend the preamble of the *Constitution* and declare God as the creator and source of all power and authority.

(2) Amend the National Goals and Directive Principles; create goal No. 6 to include Christian values and principles.

(3) Amend *Section 1* after the *Constitution* and insert sub-section of declaring Papua New Guinea a Christian country and make allowance for other religions to be practiced in peace and harmony.

(4) Insert a tenth basic social obligation in the preamble of the *Constitution*.

(5) Amend the *National Identity Act 1976* to reflect Christian Identity.

(6) Development of a National Policy on Religion.

These six recommendations can be grouped into two categories; legislative and policy reforms.

Amendments form part of the recommendations on legal reform and seeks to amend the preamble, *section 1* and *3* of the *Constitution* to declare Papua New Guinea a Christian country.

Mr Acting Speaker, the Marape-Rosso Government is a people's government and so it will respect the views of the majority of our people. And our people have agreed to amend the *Constitution* to declare our country as a Christian country. These amendments will adequately capture the wishes of our people reflected in the final report of the Constitutional Law Reform Committee.

In terms of policy reforms, the Department of Community Development, Religion and Youth has started working on the draft of the National Policy on Religion which is almost 60

per cent complete. With that I now commend the constitutional amendment to amend the *Constitution* to declare Papua New Guinea as a Christian Country to this honourable House.

Mr BELDEN NAMAH (Vanimo-Green) – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker, I note the Bill that has been presented and wish to debate.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Thank you, you may debate.

Mr BELDEN NAMAH – I am very skeptical as we live in a global village. This particular bill that has been presented is rather unfriendly and very highly hypocritical and contradictory.

You don't have to go anywhere; you just go to recommendation 3. That is hypocrisy right there. Amend *section 1* of the *Constitution* and insert new section of declaring PNG as a Christian country and make allowance for other religions to be practiced in peace and harmony.

24/03

Section 45 of the *Constitution* states very clearly, freedom of conscience, thought and religion. And you go back to the garden of Eden, God allowed Adam and Eve to have the freedom of choice, to either eat from the fruit of the knowledge and wisdom or not to. That's a choice they made.

What we are doing here, Mr Acting Speaker, we are forcing the people of this country. You may as well disqualify the Governor of West New Britain not to come and sit in this Parliament because he is a Hindu. Another hypocrisy.

Mr Rainbo Paita – Point of Order! I think no one on this Floor has a right to judge someone's religion and to say that this particular person has this faith or denomination. I think that is up to the individual. To call someone's name on the Floor and say this person is that, I don't think that the person raising the debate is a pastor to determine whether he is Hindu or Christian, that's up to him to determine. So, I would like the Member to retract the provision that he said that he is a Hindu.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honorable Minister, your Point of Order is in order. Honorable Member for Vanimo Green, I will allow you to make your statement but I will ask you to refrain from mentioning their faith.

Mr BELDEN NAMAHA – Mr Acting Speaker, we are legislating to say we are a Christian country. We are declaring ourselves to be a Christian country. That means we do not want to allow other religions. You are legislating to declare Papua New Guinea a Christian country, you are forcing everybody to be a Christian. Didn't our forefathers in their wisdom already address that? It's embedded in our *Constitution* in *Section 45*, the freedom of conscience, thought, and religion. What are we doing here? Another mockery!

You know our Prime Minister went to the airport and bowed down to the Prime Minister of India, another mockery. Hypocrisy at the highest level.

Mr Rainbo Paita – Point of Order! Our leader is a very senior politician on the Floor to infer that the Prime Minister bowed down. He should retract that statement. It was a show of respect in some cultures, for senior leaders to give that respect to other leaders. It's not an act of bowing down. Just so that we don't confuse our people.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honorable Member for Vanimo-Green, I'll remind you again that you go straight to your statement.

Mr BELDEN NAMAHA – I'm just trying to say that we are declaring ourselves as a Christian country but our actions must live according to what we preach. There is no need for us to bring this Bill to Parliament to declare Papua New Guinea a Christian country, this has already been addressed by the founding fathers who crafted this *Constitution*. This is unnecessary.

How many laws have we passed in this Parliament, and we do not follow them? We are making a mockery out of ourselves.

I warned this Parliament, I said, why did we have to put a Bible and the Attorney-General is sitting next to the Bible? Why did we bring the Bible to the Parliament, we should have left it at the Grand Hall? I hope it's reminding you well.

Our Prime Minister cursed this country twice in 2019 and 2020 –

Mr James Marape – Point of Order! I want to remind the Member for Vanim-Green that there was no instance I cursed Papua New Guinea, no instance whatsoever, get the full text of my speech on the Repentance Day, I said, “I curse those who practice corruption”.

25/03

There is a clear difference between cursing the country and cursing those who practice corruption in this country. In the same vein, I said ‘I curse myself if I practice corruption’ and I stand on this record. I do not tolerate corruption in this country.

He needs to withdraw this. I never cursed this country, I cursed those who practice corruption and I will not withdraw the curse on those who practice corruption.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Prime Minister, your Point of Order is in order and is in clarification of what the Honourable Member has said. I will ask the Member to continue but to also remember that we have the public listening to us on what we are debating.

Mr BELDEN NAMAH – I am sticking to the debate. It is about bringing a constitutional amendment to declare Papua New Guinea a Christian country. We are becoming very unfriendly. God in his wisdom gave the freedom of choice to our first parents in the Garden of Eden, and if we are really Christians, it has already been captured in *Section 45 of the Constitution*.

We are declaring ourselves as a Christian country and then we say we make allowance. Which one are we doing? We are saying one thing and doing the total opposite. That is what we have been doing on this Floor of Parliament. We passed legislations and then we broke them.

Today, shows a clear demonstration that there is a provision in *Section 145 of the Constitution* to allow for a vote of no confidence. We then came and introduced another law that we created ourselves through a motion of vote of no confidence. It is not in the *Constitution* but we invented it.

(Mr James Marape – interjecting)

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Order! Order! Order! Honourable Prime Minister, please allow the Member to make his statement.

(Mr James Marape interjecting)

(Mr Belden Namah interjecting)

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Order! Order! Order!

(Mr James Marape interjecting)

(Mr Belden Namah interjecting)

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Order! Order! Order!

(Mr James Marape interjecting)

(Mr Belden Namah interjecting)

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Order! Order! Order!

Mr Kansol Harwai Kamdaru – Point of Order! In Papua New Guinea, more than 90 per cent of our people are Christians. We got our independence through the name of the church. We can amend laws but we cannot give freedom to our people.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Member, your Point of Order is like a statement. I will allow the Honourable Member for Vanimo-Green to continue his statement because he still has time.

Mr BELDEN NAMAHAH – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. The Prime Minister is making allegations. I have gone to court and cleared myself. I do not know when he is going to court to clear himself of the serious allegations of criminal matters against him.

Mr Jelta Wong – Point of Order! Mr Acting Speaker, can we have some decorum? I want to remind the Member for Vanimo-Green, that when we are talking on this Floor, the public is watching. Never think that these things slip by our mindsets. Talk only about the

statement that has been presented. This is the House of our people so please have some respect.

If you have political intentions, put it aside. Let us talk about what the Minister has presented.

Excuse me! Let him finish and you can reply if you think it is in the best interest of this country. Don't divert, that's my point of order.

26/03

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Minister, your Point of Order is in order. Honourable Member, I would like you to stick by the paper that is being presented instead of diverting which is creating animosity in the Chamber.

Mr BELDEN NAMAHA – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. The Minister for Forestry should be advising the Prime Minister as well so that they do not make statements that are not in relation to what I am trying to debate.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Member, I am warning you again and if you keep diverting, I will not allow that.

Mr BELDEN NAMAHA – You are warning me but you are not warning the Prime Minister.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Member, make your statement. I am allowing you to make your debate.

Mr BELDEN NAMAHA – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. My argument is simple, this legislation will scare many development partners who are going to come and invest in this country; it will have a collateral effect on our country.

We are dealing with China which is a Communist country, India which have Hinduism, Indonesia which are Muslims and this legislation will scare these bilateral and multi-lateral partners.

We are amending the *Constitution* and we are not just playing up. All members of Parliament, we must seriously look at the collateral effect this *Constitution* is going to have. We are going to scare our development partners.

Mr point of order –

(Laughter in the Chamber)

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Member, it is the Chair that will acknowledge the point of orders and not for you to acknowledge.

(Laughter in the Chamber)

Mr Jelta Wong – Point of Order! Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. I will not come down to his stupid and silly standards of conduct,

(Laughter in the Chamber)

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Minister, I will ask you to withdraw the word stupid, it is un-parliamentary.

(Laughter in the Chamber)

Mr Jelta Wong – I withdraw that word.

Mr Acting Speaker, we cannot make assumptions of what others are thinking on this Floor because this is our country, we make the laws and anyone who comes into our country must respect our laws and our religion.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Minister, your Point of Order is out of order. And, I will remind the Opposition not to put words in my mouth.

Honourable Member, you can continue.

(Laughter in the Chamber)

Mr BELDEN NAMAHA – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker, I want to thank the Minister of Point of Order, for his –

(Laughter in the Chamber)

Mr Jelta Wong – Point of Order! Stop laughing and acting like we are kids in this House. Let's act like leaders in this House.

It might be a joke to you but it is not a joke to me, brother.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Minister, you raised to make a point of order, but the Chair has not recognized you.

Since you have already made mention of the importance of this House. Honourable members, I would like all of us to respect this honourable House in how we speak and what we are deliberating on because our people are in the gallery listening and some are watching and listening to us out there.

Honourable members, as you hear from one of the member in his statement of debates, the debate is still open and I will give opportunity to members if you want to debate.

Mr BELDEN NAMAHA – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. Christianity is a choice that we make, if you want to be a Christian it is your heart. Christianity is about your heart, if you want to be a Hindu or Muslim, it's all about your heart and the choice you make.

We cannot come here and legislate and legalize it because God never intended that in the Garden of Eden, never! I do not know where we are getting all these ideas from?

Our forefathers considered all those before they made that provision in *section 45* of the *Constitution*.

27/03

The Attorney-General needs to go back and read it. Tell your nephew to help you to understand the *Constitution*.

Mr Rainbo Paita – Point of Order! Mr Acting Speaker, I'd like him to withdraw the statement where he mentioned the nephew. I think we have gone beyond. Come on, he's a senior leader, just speak on the subject.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Minister, your Point of Order is in order. Honourable Member, I remind you again, I will not entertain any more point of order in regard to your statement, so I want you to stick by the statement.

Mr BELDEN NAMAHA – Mr Acting Speaker, I am only making reference because the Attorney-General has engaged his own nephew to advise him. There's nothing wrong with that. But it is in breach also of *section 12* of the principle of the lawyers, professional conduct and Christianity and then we have someone bring the bill to the Floor again. It is a total hypocrisy!

Mr Rainbo Paita – Point of Order! Mr Acting Speaker, he is using the debate to create inference on a different subject altogether. This is a separate issue he is raising, it has nothing to do with the debate on the legislation that we have in front and I want him to withdraw this inference. The Attorney-General cannot defend himself while he is presenting the Bill. Thank you.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Minister, your Point of Order is in order. Honourable Member, I ask you to withdraw the statement referring to a person that you've named.

Mr BELDEN NAMAHA – I cannot withdraw because it's a fact, how can you withdraw a fact?

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Member, this is a direction from the Chair asking you to withdraw.

Mr BELDEN NAMAHA – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker, I withdraw but can you please tell those people who are so excited about my debate to sit down and wait for their turns.

I'm basically trying to tell all of us that God never intended that in the creation, our forefathers saw all that and they did talk about freedom of conscience, thought and religion. It is embedded in the *section 45* of the *Constitution*. We must allow freedom of religion and we must allow every citizen to make their own choice because they have their free will.

Christianity is about the heart, our vertical and horizontal relationship with God and our fellow men. This is also believed by the Muslims and the Hindus.

We are just making mockery of our *Constitution* as our country is reaching 50 years. We need to start thinking seriously. It is not something that we come to the Floor of

Parliament to make a joke out of and make ourselves look like hypocrites. Many members of our Parliament are dying because our conduct is not right with God.

Mr Rainbo Paita – Point of Order! Mr Acting Speaker, this is a serious statement to make on the Floor of Parliament.

Mr Acting Speaker, may I remind this House that we have a brother who's currently not with us. Next week or so we will farewell his body and to make a statement like this is very insensitive. He needs to withdraw this!

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Minister, your Point of Order is in order. Honourable Member, I think I have warned you many times on this. I now suspend your remaining one minute of debate and ask for a new debate.

Mr LUTHER WENGE (Morobe) – Mr Acting Speaker, I thank you in advance for allowing me to speak on this very important issue.

First of all, I'd like to thank the Prime Minister for his wisdom and as a Christian he wants to make sure that this country is recognized as a Christian nation, not just by words but by the constitutional amendment. That is why he gave directions and set up a committee in consultation with the PNG Constitutional Law Reform Commission to tour the nation to seek views of the people whether what he is proposing can be accepted by the people.

28/03

From the record, I heard from the Minister's report, the people of Papua New Guinea have substantially, almost like the majority of the people have accepted the recommendation or the views of the Prime Minister of this country.

Therefore, the reports presented to the National Executive Council and by virtue of that report, the NEC has directed the Office of the Attorney-General to draft a bill to make sure that we recognise it as a constitutional law.

Mr Acting Speaker, by virtue of that, the Minister and his department have taken the necessary steps in accordance with the law to bring the bill to the NEC first and then to this Parliament.

Mr Acting Speaker, I thank the Prime Minister for that course he has taken.

Secondly, I want to thank the Minister for Justice and Attorney General for taking the responsibility and being the author of the bill to bring it to the National Parliament. It is up to the National Parliament to consider your argument, consider the substance of that Bill and decide and it is up to the Parliament to argue.

I can appreciate the Member for Vanimo-Green, he's in the Opposition and he is entitled as anyone else on this Floor of the Parliament to give a counter or rebuttal view. From the outset, I must say, I support this constitutional amendment and I want to debate as an honourable member before this Parliament without being boastful that I'm going to support this bill.

Mr Acting Speaker, the preamble of the *Constitution* is very clear that we asserted on the 16th of September, 1975, that in the guiding hand of God Almighty, we declare that this country is Independent. Surely, the whole of the *Constitution* doesn't define which God but because we are a Christian country by evidence, by our lives, we can say that this God must be the God of Israel, God of Hebrew and the God of Judah.

Mr Acting Speaker, I take it and if we serve this God of Hebrew, God of Judah, and the God of Israel, then of course, we will accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and those who believe in Jesus Christ can rightly call themselves Christians.

Therefore, by virtue of that, we can argue here and there but the majority of the people through the consultation and this requires no evidence, but it is a general knowledge, that this country is a Christian country. So, therefore, the God that we declare in the *Constitution* of this country must be the God of Judah and Hebrew.

Now, stepping out from there, we also declared in the preamble of the *Constitution* that we accepted our valued cultural heritage including virtues. Not the culture that will destroy our country, but the valued culture. The culture of payback killing is not a valued culture but valued culture which stems, I suppose from the Christian principles.

But, before I come to the Christian principles, Mr Acting Speaker, we have accepted the culture of this country. Our cultural heritage that's been practiced before we gained Independence. We declared it in the preamble of our *Constitution* and then secondly, we declared we will accept the Christian principles that are ours. That is quite clearly in unambiguous terms stated there in the preamble of the *Constitution* so that is clear.

29/03

Even when we don't get the constitutional amendment through, by virtue of the preamble, this country is a Christian country.

Let me emphasize on the argument by my learned brother, the Member for Vanimo-Green, *Section 45* of the *Constitution* clearly provides for the freedom of religion, it does not say freedom of Christianity.

Therefore, Mr Acting Speaker, having freedom of religion impedes on freedom of Christianity. With the freedom of religion, Christianity, Buddhism, Krishna, Bahai or other gods. Even if you believe in a tree or an animal; they are all captured under that provision.

Mr Belden Namah – Point of Order! The Governor of Morobe is misleading the Floor of Parliament, in regards to *Section 45*. He is a lawyer by profession and I am not but to my understanding this amendment indicates that we will now take away freedom of religion in this country and restrict it to a Christian country only.

(Uproar in the Chamber)

Mr Belden Namah – So that means everyone in this country must practice Christianity –

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Member for Vanimo-Green, we have already debated on this debate so I won't allow your Point of Order.

The Honourable Governor, I will have to remind you that when I entertain a Point of Order, you have to resume your seat. So, I will now ask you to continue.

Mr LUTHER WENGE – Sorry, I appreciate the point my learned Member is making, but *Section 45* gives the freedom to all sorts of religion. Any lawyer will tell you and that stems from the United Nations Declaration.

It doesn't come here for nothing because we are a member of the United Nations, that's why our fathers have employed *Section 45*, which is almost in the same terms as the declaration of the United Nations because there are all sorts of religious practices in this world.

Mr Acting Speaker, nobody can say that Buddhism, Hinduism and including believing in the root of a tree, as long as you don't commit a criminal offence whilst practicing your beliefs –

(Laughter in the Chamber)

Mr LUTHER WENGE – It's a religion or cult but you don't break any laws of this country in practicing your religion and it's authorized by *Section 45*.

So, I don't think the Minister for Justice and Attorney-General's Bill is to repeal *Section 45*, it remains but if we do then we are going to fight against non-Christians coming to this country. We are even going to fight with the United Nations and they can challenge you in the International Court of Justice.

I don't think the intention of the government is to repeal *section 45*, the rights of the religion remain because we are part of the United Nations.

Coming back, Mr Attorney-General, it is a general declaration and I don't think you will enforce it in any court of law. This country is a Christian country and majority of the people are Christians. We have every right to declare because majority of the people are Christians.

Of course, we may offend people who are Muslims and other religions in the world but we respect them and they can practice their religion in this country if they come here because *Section 45* permits them to do so.

30/03

They have every right and the law in this country is very clear in exercising your rights of practicing any religion. Do not infringe any laws in this country like the criminal code. Say, you are practicing your own religion and all of a sudden you get a young lady there and rape her, then this country's law will stop you from that kind of religion.

However, I don't think there is any practice in the Christian religion or from the Bible starting from the book of Genesis to Revelation that infringes or breaches any laws of this country, surely not. The Christian principles are consistent with the laws including the *Constitution*.

So, Mr Acting Speaker, it's only proper in my humble view, that we have every right to declare this country a Christian country, but I don't think we should stop the practice of other religions. That will be of breaking the laws of this land. All we are saying is we are entitled to answer and bring bills to give recognition to show that this country is a Christian country.

Mr Acting Speaker, I want to commend the Honourable Minister for bringing this Bill. I understand the concerns raised by my learned friend from Vanimo-Green that if we declare ourselves to be a Christian country, it might affect our bilateral relations.

For instance, some Muslim countries like Indonesia have a population of 200 million and ours is small compared to them. Now, if we are going to trade with them, we should be able to allow them into Papua New Guinea without any difficulties.

We will also allow other countries with different religions to come in as well because of *Section 45* of the *Constitution*, but sometimes people misinterpret things, like what happened in New Zealand some years ago.

The Christians in New Zealand went and slaughtered everyone in the church but I don't think this thing will happen here. We will make it very clear that we are a Christian country and the Christian principal doesn't allow fighting and killing and other bad things are not allowed by the laws of this country. Of course, it is disallowed by laws of any country in this world.

Mr Acting Speaker, what we are going to do is declare PNG as a Christian country and we will say that under *Section 45* of the *Constitution* any religion is allowed. Religions like Buddha, Bahai and other religions that you know of can be allowed to practice their faith in mind and action, and we will not interfere with that.

However, we want to tell you that we are Christian nation and I think with great respect we are entitled to do that. The overall constitutional provision from the first section to the last section and finishing off with the last schedules, does not disallow us to do this kind of things.

31/03

We are entitled to it and I don't we are doing it contrary to the United Nations Declaration which is almost in the same terms as *section 45* in the Papua New Guinea *Constitution*. And, I do not think we are doing that and it is like declaring yourself as a Tari, Wabag or Engan for that matter. If you come to Lae and declare that you are a Finschaffan man, who is going to tell you, you're not? What authority does anyone have to question you?

Your Honor! Sorry!

(Laughter in the Chamber)

Mr LUTHER WENGE – Mr Assistant Speaker, we did not break any laws of this land or of the United Nations, because we are a member of the United Nations. So, we must ensure that we comply with the laws of the United Nations. When we comply with all these

laws, especially international laws then you are not breaking any laws. If you do that, we are perfectly allowed on planet Earth.

Mr Assistant Speaker, I want to support this proposed constitutional amendment to declare this country a Christian country and we will say clearly to other religions and other countries that we are not making enemies with you. And, I am sure after the bill is passed the Prime Minister will talk to the world and tell them that we are not making enemies with members of our global community because they have a different religion.

In the meantime, this bill I can confidently say will receive overwhelming support by the people of this land. That at last a government of this country has specifically said, declared and asserted that this country must be recognized as a Christian country. I don't think anyone should fear that we should have the bill presented and give a vote to sanction that declaration.

Mr DON POLYE (Kandep – Minister for Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology and Sports) – Thank you, for giving me the opportunity to support this bill to make Christianity the official religion of Papua New Guinea.

I want to point out that the Freedom of Religion is already in the *Constitution*. This new bill will not breach what we already have or it won't have any contradictive effect because any religion has freedom. This law will maintain that Christianity is the official religion of this country; it is similar to saying that English is the commercial language of this country even when we have more than 800 languages but we make English the official language of business. The law is clear that Papua New Guinea has allowed freedom for all religions to be practiced, including our traditional cultures.

32/03

But what the Attorney-General has brought to the Parliament is clear, we must not confuse it. It gives it the official recognition that Christianity is our religion and it's a very good law.

Mr Acting Speaker, I will just touch on three areas. I think we all should understand these areas and I think we should always understand why religions are there.

I would like to point to this honorable House and the people of Papua New Guinea not to overlook science because there is the relevance of science being consistent with the principles that we are talking about in religion.

I come from that perspective, firstly, there have been some very latest studies done in neuroscience they articulate very clearly how our body works. If we look at religion, we should develop characters and an attitude in a person to develop a character in that person. And where there is the same character by all people of a nation, it becomes a common thing, and this becomes the culture.

In business we have the corporate plan, or a corporate culture in an entity, they get those cards into place by policies and corporate business plans and everybody is expected to follow that and live within the plans that are in that company. And in that company, you will find everybody acts and conduct accordingly within those cultures and then you will find that that company has a culture.

For instance, if you go to one of these grocery shops, you will find people dressed up so well and they are very welcoming and say things like 'how can I help you, what can we do for you', et cetera. They really psyche you up and you think you are a king or queen going in there and want to throw your money. I used to think that, that was only done by the churches. But when I go home and go to church, the elders will say, welcome, God loves you, God bless you, et cetera. So, when you go in you end up paying tithe and offering. And this is the same for businesses. So, there's a culture that people develop.

So, let's understand the substance of religion. It's not just because religion will save you. Christianity will not save this country because we are a Christian nation, no! It is the character, it's the context we live in Christianity.

So, I come from a scientific perspective, the big body of sciences is quantum physics, and if you would like to know more, google quantum physics. I'm touching on neuroscience, how the brain works, and how the body works. Science is very relevant to religion in this Bill.

I will not be very detailed. For the last 15–20 years, science has developed and discovered knowledge. You will be amazed if you study it. It interests me a lot and I read about it every time. And you can do that too to understand the substance of religion very clearly. See the thought in neuroscience will promote some of the principles you will find in other religions; Hinduism, Buddhism, etcetera. As I was growing up, we didn't have Christianity or other religions but we still had God in us.

So, in those areas, it is supported by neuroscience, and what neurological science has indicated is this, a thought that enters the mind triggers a biochemical reaction inside your brain which triggers a biochemical reaction inside your whole body system which then creates a feeling, for instance, an attraction to a person.

33/03

Mr Belden Namah – Point of Order! The Minister is getting away from the debate on the amendment to the *Constitution* to declare PNG a Christian country. He is creating a debate on science and higher education. This is about an amendment to the *Constitution* on Christianity.

He should stick to his debate on Christianity and not on the science that he believes in. Thank you.

Mr ASSISTANT SPEAKER – Thank you, honourable Member. Your Point of Order is in order. The Minister is explaining it so the people of Papua New Guinea will be aware of what we are passing on the Floor.

Mr DON POLYE – I will conclude this with the law and you will understand this. I said we must understand the substance of religion. So, the feeling we have creates a reaction neurologically and it gives you a habit and you act according to what you feel. It creates a habit when it becomes perpetual continuously. It then becomes your character and your culture.

If you look at Christianity, that is what you want to achieve. That is how it works. People think that when you talk about God, he will give us wisdom. But that is not correct. The wisdom we seek is in us. It works as a chemical in our neurological system. That is what science discovers.

Therefore, when we say religion, Christianity fits because it promotes good values. For instance, what happened on ‘black Wednesday’ comes from people with bad thoughts. They have negative feelings which lead to bad characters thus the violence, looting, and burning of properties.

So how do we change that mindset? Science proved that in the Bible in Philippians 4:8, whatever thoughts you think and feelings you feel are very important because they create your character. When it is the character of the 8 million people in this country, it will become our culture. We are not bringing up our young people with positive thoughts.

The Member for Vanimo-Green said that if we have the Bible here, we are a Christian country. Of course, we are not living accordingly because we are not managing our thoughts and habits thus our character becomes the culture of our country.

Therefore, we must look at both science and religion. Let us not confine ourselves to the fanatic that we are Christians and so we are saved. No! You have to understand how you can be saved. You have to live the Christian values. If you understand your thoughts, you will transform yourselves and change.

Mr Assistant Speaker, politicians must also look into science. We must understand how our brain works, how the neurological system communicates within itself, and how it administers a character out of us so that we can change and bring transformation to our country.

It is the culture of PNG. How can we create that culture? It is through Christianity. Christianity is a religion. If we can live that religion, not just talk about it but truly live it, for instance, embed it into our school systems. We used to have religious instructions in schools but not anymore.

34/03

We have to push that in our homes because if daughters and sons are brought up properly in the family, our welfare system and social development should work strongly so that the families are brought up in this culture so that they live it and don't talk about it.

You can have a law that says that we are a Christian country, we can have the Bible here, we can claim that we are a Christian country for the next 10 years but you will still find people not living Christian lives.

See, we talk about other countries like Singapore, China, and so forth, but I do not like to compare with other countries rather I would like to change within myself and in this country in the best way we can change.

So, why are we talking about China's growth? China is not a Christian country, Singapore is not a Christian country and India is now emerging, it is not a Christian country but why are they doing better? And, we talk about Jeremiah 28:15, 'you will be on top not underneath, you will not be the tail instead you will be the head and all these things. We talk too much in this country but we do not live the life that we are talking about so, what is this?'

Mr Assistant Speaker, it is because of our thoughts, habits, and character that we have needs to start from the bottom level in the children, families, and systems of governance. Even us as politicians here, we will talk but you will have to develop into a process when you are a small baby.

So, that is probably the essence of the Bill, this is not just any bill that we would like to bring it and say here, Papua New Guinea is a Christian country instead we must look at the substance of it and that is where it comes from.

The other cultural developing factor in promoting Christianity is that we should promote the rule of law. The rule of law such as the *Constitution*, we cannot break laws and then call ourselves a Christian country, or expect our cultures to be strong; we can't because they go together.

The governing systems must be strong, and the laws must be enforced by the *Constitution* that we must live by and that is really Christianity. If we follow the laws of this country that is actually living Christianity.

Mr Assistant Speaker, we have to be very substantial and strong in what we are saying here because it may not be just a law. We have to support this to guide and mold characters and the thoughts that they need to guide but we must live Christianity and not just talk Christianity.

Finally, Mr Assistant Speaker, the attitude of Papua New Guineans today desires and commands a lot of questions. We have lost our young people.

So, I am very thankful that we have this Bill and we must pass it because Christianity must go down to our young people and how we raise them and that is where it is.

Mr Assistant Speaker, I think that we should support this Bill but the substance we must understand is that, it has to do with changing of character and that comes from the scientific approach that I have established but also from the rule of law, the *Constitution* and actually living it and not talking it.

Thank you.

Mr ALLAN BIRD (East Sepik) – Thank you, Mr Assistant Speaker. Firstly, I must say that I am a little bit disappointed. I thought that the laws would be passed because the Prime Minister said were very important so I was expecting a bill that we would make changes to like for example the *Evidence Act*.

I was expecting that bill to come to this House because now if someone causes trouble like on Black Wednesday, when people are taking photos of themselves with stolen items and uploading them to social media, we do not have laws to charge them.

So, I was expecting that Bill to be brought in today so that we can help the Police by passing this law and prosecute the people who break the laws.

There is also a lot of cyberbullying going on where young people are bullying each other and they are committing suicide so I expected a Bill to come to the Floor so that we can outlaw cyberbullying amongst young people.

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Our people are having a cost of living crisis and I was expecting a bill that would help deal with issues like that. The Minister said that they've consulted the Papua New Guineans, I want to see the evidence of which Papua New Guineans were consulted.

I have a letter from some of my constituents and I want to say the largest Christian Organisation in my Province is the Catholic Church. If not, it is the largest Christian Organisation in Papua New Guinea, potentially the first Church to come to this country. Now the Catholic professional has written me a letter and they also have a statement from the Catholic Bishops and they said they do not want the Parliament to approve this amendment. So, Mr Assistant Speaker, who are we listening to?

If we have not listened to the Catholics and the Catholic people in East Sepik Province, then which Papua New Guineans have asked us to amend this *Constitution* or which Christians? We should ask all the Christian churches and they should write a letter to the Parliament because that is the right thing to do.

How many bishops and pastors are in this House? We are all politicians! We are supposed to represent our people and well, I am representing the Catholics and I'm not a Catholic and I speak for the Catholic. The bishops who said no, I don't do this, I speak for them in this House.

Who are we speaking for? I am going to vote no, not because I am a Christian or not a Christian but because the Catholic Bishops said no. This House should hear the voice of the people and make decisions. Again, who are we listening to? Why wouldn't the Catholic Church object if they were part of this process? If they think that this amendment would change our people's lives, and provide job opportunities, I'm sure they will agree.

We have spent hours trying to make a law that we don't need to. *Section 45* is already there; our founding fathers weren't silly, they spent years going through these things. Now suddenly declaring this country a Christian nation is going to somehow solve all of our problems. If you are a member of the Catholic faith sitting on this Floor, you have to listen to your bishops and vote no. You have to! Otherwise, you don't have to go to church on Sunday, because you don't listen to your bishops.

How many of you are qualified to speak on behalf of God? How Many! I'm not qualified to speak on behalf of God, and you, what makes you think that you are qualified to speak on behalf of God? I'm not a pastor and I did not attend a Seminarian school where I can say I have the right to talk on behalf of God. No, I don't! So I have to listen to my bishops even though I am not a Catholic.

We are here to represent our people. Well, let's represent them. We need to let go of this kind of cargo cult mentality like our fathers and grandfathers. Let's be a modern country that embraces all faiths, and if we are going to pass a law, please my good Attorney-General bring a law here that is going to penalize people who bully each other on social media. This will help protect young women from suicide when they are being bullied on social media. I want to see that law here that protects our young women and girls. Not this law that serves no practical purpose. I want to pass a law that serves a practical purpose that improves the lives of Papua New Guineans.

I want to see a change to the *Evidence Act* so that all the people who steal on Black Wednesday, take selfies and post on social media can be prosecuted using those evidences. I want to see laws like this coming to the Floor. When you say it's important, at least in my heart, I will feel like I am saving a young girl's life by passing this law. The girl could be bullied because her boyfriend decided to post all her nude pictures on social media. I want to pass a law against that, that saves young girls and women.

36/03

Not this. So, I am announcing here now that the vote of the people of East Sepik will follow the Catholic Church and I will vote no, we will not support this amendment. Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker.

Mr RAINBO PAITA (Finschhafen – Minister for Finance) – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. This is a very important debate so I want to join. Thank you for acknowledging me.

Mr Acting Speaker, as some of our leaders have been talking about this subject and the Governor of Morobe is supporting it and Governor of East Sepik is not, I'd like to declare my position as well.

Like the Governor said he is not Catholic, I am Catholic, Lutheran and SDA. My personal views on this subject matter is this, I think we are confusing the subject. The subject is not about conversion, meaning that if we pass this law, automatically everyone has to

convert to Christianity. It is a question of identity. How do we identify ourselves in this world? All these countries identify themselves under different religions like, Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism?

Mr Acting Speaker, if you look at the statistics, there's about 83 countries in the world who have identities associated with religion. For example, in Malaysia, Islam is the national religion but tolerance of religion is practiced. Look at other Islam countries, their state declares their official religion as Islam but they allow other religions to be practiced in their nation. I think we are confusing the subject that once we pass this law, everyone must convert. So, it's a subject of conversion.

Mr Acting Speaker, I'd like to say that no other religion in this country deserves the recognition as much as the Christian religion. The first people to arrive in this country were Christian missionaries and without their support, most of our jurisdiction will not be here. The fibre that holds us together, when the Government fails, it's the Christian churches that maintain social order.

Mr Acting Speaker, you can see the progression of other countries, when you take away the provision of being a Christian nation; for example, the US. They removed the provision that they are now a more secular country. They took away God from every institution. They take away God from schools, they take away God from court houses. They take away God from every provision. Look at the trajectory they are going down into.

Mr Acting Speaker, the foundation of all the laws and I appreciate the Governor of East Sepik for saying that we need to bring laws to improve lives, but where does the foundation of all that law come down to?

Mr Acting Speaker, when I was in school, I used to drop in one or two classes. I'm not as qualified as most of those who are seated here but the foundation or the moral anchor that governs every law should be something that is identified in our mother law.

Mr Acting Speaker, if we removed and just allowed or tolerated any law, in 10 years' time we will not be here. What is the anchor we want to put for this nation? The question is, how do we identify as a nation in terms of religion? It's an issue of identification and not to do with conversion. All of us sitting here are Christians. Most of us are Christians but some of us are not practicing Christianity. We are not forcing by legislation that Christianity should be a mandatory practice in Papua New Guinea. It's just saying that we recognise ourselves as a Christian country in the future for leaders to embrace that our foundation is built on Christianity and no other faith deserves that recognition other than the Christian faith. If some

other religions are competing to be recognised, you do your time. Christianity came here hundreds of years ago and they've done their time.

Most of you can attest that we are who we are because of the Christian religion that our parents practiced. Churches, schools, some of us attended Catholic schools, some of you are descendants of missionaries on whichever denomination. Let us not confuse that, if any religion deserves the recognition in our *Constitution*, it is the Christian faith.

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Mr Acting Speaker, it's an issue of identification and not of practicing or conversion, so let's not confuse this issue.

I support this Bill by placing on record and will vote on conscience because we identify ourselves as a Christian nation.

Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker.

Mr CHARLIE BENJAMIN (Manus) – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker, for allowing me to contribute to this debate. I just want to elaborate on what the other colleagues have mentioned.

I am a Christian and not ashamed to be called a Christian because that's my identity. As Christians we have hope and that is even better than other religions that's why we love Christianity. All of us here represent all the Christians all throughout our provinces and districts. But I am ashamed to say that we don't want other people to call us Christians. We want to go to church but we don't want people to know that we are a Christian. Otherwise, other people from other denomination will be angry with us.

I don't think it's the right way, Christianity means a lot and it's not just this paper. Even you can't force someone to follow what you do or believe because that's how sin came into this world. But as individuals, we must identify ourselves as Christians and I am proud to be a Christian. And being a Christian, you have hopes because we are sinners but Jesus died for our sins and that's our hope in Christ Jesus and Jesus went back to Heaven and one day will return and take us to Heaven. And that is Christianity so why are we ashamed of declaring it.

I want to remind us all that when Jesus lived on this Earth, his worst enemies were the Christians. So, when we debate, we must think properly and make decisions on our understanding. I would be surprised if we take a vote today and any one of us opposes it. I don't have much to say but as a Christian, I will vote, not because I want others to become

Christians, but because it is our identity and as such, we should show to the world and they will know who Christ is.

Thank you.

Sir PUKA TEMU (Abau) – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. I thank the Minister for Justice and Attorney General for bringing this constitutional amendment to this Honourable House. I stand to debate against the amendment for a couple of reasons.

(1) In the six recommendations, number six should have been the first. We have to have a national policy on religion. And in its absence, we are short cutting everything to amend the *Constitution*.

We don't have a policy, we don't know what we are talking about because policy dictates law and without policy how will you accommodate the law and that's from my point of view.

We already have letters from some of the largest churches in this country, who are against this move but we have not listened

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So, in the absence of a national policy on religion, we are just coming to shortcut to dig into the '*mama*' law which is dangerous. That's my first point.

Mr Acting Speaker, the second point is, when sectarianism is practised. Sectarianism is practised anywhere, it can be on the Floor of Parliament, in the church or in a religious organisation or a business organisation. When you impose your personal views on the development of a policy or law, you are on a dangerous ground and that is called religious sectarianism. I see religious sectarianism being practised right now in this honourable House. When you enforce your personal views or personal beliefs

Mr James Marape – Point of Order! The learned gentleman and Member for Abau knows very well the functionality of the Constitutional Law Reform Commission.

The Constitutional Law Reform Commission is a constitutional body that embodies all findings through survey and research on everyone. It is not personal or sectarianism or whatever the term he is using. I wasn't born with English. He may use that term again but it is not personal. It is not someone trying to impose his religion on someone else.

A constitutional office that is in charge of consultation with the people so he shouldn't make an impression that someone else in his personal religious view is trying to influence everyone. That is a wrong message sent to our country.

Respect must be given to CLRC for presenting 80 per cent of findings to the Cabinet on 9th August and the Cabinet then processed it to the correct policy process manner for this law to find its way to Parliament.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Prime Minister, your Point of Order in interpreting what you have said is in order. I will ask the Member to continue with his debate.

Sir PUKA TEMU – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. We are in this honourable House debating an important amendment to our '*mama*' law, therefore, we need to move away from personal believe systems and own religion orientations. This call sectarianism. Go to Google and look it up.

Let me highlight a few things, actually my phone went off so I haven't got the actual figure but there are top 10 countries in the world with highest number of Christians. This includes Russia and China. In China, the number of Christians is about 80 to a hundred million.

But, the largest number of Christians in the world live in the United States of America. Even though they have enormous number of believers in Christ, they don't box God in their law. God is bigger than the laws of this land and the entire universe. You cannot box God in a letter of a nation's law. It is tiny, you can't confine God, it's too small. God is bigger than us, bigger than Papua New Guinea and bigger than any prime minister. That is why the professionals from the Catholic Church have issued a warning and a concern. You cannot just legislate God because you know the principles of condemnation. When you don't follow, condemnation will follow.

Mr Prime Minister, you stood up against and debate on the Honourable Member for Vanimo-Green and you agreed that you cursed those who practice corruption. The word curse is a very powerful word.

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And you did say it, Prime Minister, again confirming that even if I practice corruption myself, I also am cursing myself and that is a very serious confession. So, Christianity, the Bible and condemnation go together. We label Papua New Guinea as a Christian country, yet

we are still burning, killing, and causing violence upon our women and girls; for instance, the events of January 10. What kind of a Christian country are we portraying to the world?

Hypocrites, condemnation will come and no investor will want to come.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Member, I will ask you to address the Chair by looking to the Chair when making your statement.

Sir PUKA TEMU – Mr Acting Speaker, when this Holy Bible was planned to be brought in, I also went against it. I said look, put it at the Grand Hall because in here, our language is different. In here we are flying things here and there while this Holy Bible is here. This is the Holy Book of 400 years old right here. It is like how Jesus cast out people who were selling and buying in the temple; we cannot be playing with the name of God.

In this phenomenon, you can't write a letter of the law and declare God in a little country called Papua New Guinea also declaring it a Christian country. Let me read the actual amendment; I do not know if you have actually read them but this one scares me even more.

The amendment to the preamble. The preamble of the *Constitution* is amended by adding immediately after United in one Nation the following; and this is what scares me.

'Acknowledge and declare God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son and the Holy Spirit as our creator and sustainer of the entire universe, the source of our powers and authority delegated to people and all persons within the geographical jurisdiction of Papua New Guinea.'

God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, we are bringing the Holy Trinity into a country's constitutional letter of law. This an awesomely huge God, you cannot quote him into a law. Thank you.

Mr CHRIS HAIVETA (Gulf) – Mr Acting Speaker, sitting here and listening, I have heard a lot of talk and I think it is just pride. I believe these amendments are not for God. You should not bring God into these changes. Christianity is a religion just like Hinduism and other faiths. Our *Constitution* allows for the practice. And if you heard what the Governor of Morobe was saying, you are not banned from practicing any kinds of religions in this country. What this amendment is doing is trying to clarify Christianity.

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When our parents, our grandfathers and even ancestors were converted to Christians, there were no bishops, there was no great church hierarchy in this country, they were simple missionaries and they brought the word of God. The same word of God that is lying there in front of us. The changes in the *Constitution* is not holding the people of Papua New Guinea to one religion or to one worship of a god. But since over 90 per cent of our people believe in the Christian religion and believe in the Christian God, who is defined as God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. It's as simple as that.

So, after we define God, what do we do? Put it back in the curriculum of our schools. Teach it, we're not teaching it now. The Minister for Higher Education has come out clearly with that. Now where do we start, we start with defining God in our little box called Papua New Guinea. What's wrong with that? There's nothing wrong with that.

I thank the Prime Minister for going through the consultation process and the consultation process is what I'm in court with your National Government for. Consultation between provinces and your government or any other government is so important. I can see that the consultation process is taking place here.

It did not take place in a matter of beneficiaries before it was done by the former Minister, I can see that taking place here. There's no need for us to shout profanities at each other as the Honorable Member for Abau has said, there's a Bible lying there. We wanted it, we brought it here, so let's do that Bible justice. It's our Christian religion, the word of God written down and seated right in front of us. Support on your conscience. Thank you.

Mr ELIAS KAPAVORE (Pomio) – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. I would like to start with a quote from the first president of the United States of America, President George Washington. He said, 'we cannot truly run a country without the Bible and God' and he was the first President of America who started in 1732 – 1799. That's how that great nation was founded.

Mr Acting Speaker, the *Constitution* that we enjoy today is nearly 50 years and rightfully we need to go back and see our failures. The values that are actually corroding in our systems today is because of lack of Christian principles. With the recommendations, I would like to say that they are in order and I want support this and declare that God is the creator, the source of the powers and authorities.

Someone from Opposition mentioned that recommendations (6) should be moved to recommendation (1) but I don't support that because recommendation (6) talks about the

development of a national policy on religion. The first is to declare that God is the creator, which in my view is in order.

I would like to say that many of our cultures and traditions came to light because of Christianity in the past.

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We did not come together as a group or as a district before Christianity came. Christianity united us as a district and as a country and I believe that we need to re-establish our identity again as a Christian nation and amend this *Constitution*.

We need to acknowledge the Creator God as the God of our nation. Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker.

Mr RICHARD MARU (Yangoru-Saussia – Minister for International Trade and Investment) – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. I also want to debate in favour of this amendment to the *Constitution*.

Firstly, I want to rebut what has been said by my younger brother, the Member for Vanimo-Green. I do not see investors avoiding this country because of this amendment.

Mr Kerenga Kua – Point of Order! We are all equal in status as elected members of Parliament. No one is below another. So, can the Minister withdraw his statement referring to the Member for Vanimo-Green as his younger brother? The Member for Vanimo-Green is not a little boy.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Minister, please resume your seat and I will make a ruling on that. Honourable Member for Sinasina-Yonggamugl, your Point of Order is in order. I will ask all of us to remember that whatever titles you have must be addressed out of this House. Every member must be addressed as a member of this Parliament.

Honourable Minister, withdraw your statement and continue with your debate.

Mr RICHARD MARU – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. I withdraw my statement.

As the Minister for International Trade and Investment, I want to say to this House that I do not believe this amendment will affect *Section 45* of the *Constitution* and scare investors. I want to make this clear to this Parliament that it will not scare investors. Why do I

say this? All other countries of the world including Israel, a Jewish state, allow other religions to be practiced.

This happens all over the world. Even though they have an official religion, it does not scare investors. To say that or to try and infer that investors will not come because of this constitutional amendment, I totally disagree and think that that is wrong. We cannot say that it will scare investors. Many countries of the world have official religions and it does not scare investors. I want to make that clear.

Secondly, I have a brother who is a priest and as part of my family is catholic. None of them have called me to say that this amendment must never be passed by Parliament. I am surprised at hearing this. Many of us represent Catholics. I have not received a call from them prohibiting me from voting for this.

We need to bring balance to this floor. When we talk about representing churches, who do you represent because I have not received a call from my electors? We must be careful when we talk about representing people in Parliament because I represent Catholics also on the Floor of Parliament.

Thirdly, our Founding Fathers saw a need to sign a covenant with the God of Israel and now we have the National Repentance Day. He is a very senior and prominent Catholic. He recognised God. Today, Parliament will give prominence to our God.

And as a Christian, I make no apologies for this. I will support this bill. We cannot be scared because we go to church on Saturday and Sunday and pray to God to bless our nation. This God has blessed us with so much gas and oil and we do not recognise him. It is time we entrench him into our *Constitution*.

I am surprised that we are scared to entrench God in this nation. I am surprised that you are behaving the opposite, and yet we go to church on Saturday and Sunday and praise and thank God.

As clearly stated by Governor Luther Wenge, freedom of religion is not affected in any way, shape, or form. If it was, then many of us would be concerned. We are only declaring God to be the God of Papua New Guinea by affirming it in the *Constitution* the God who has blessed us. I thank God for us being one of the blessed nations.

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And my people in Yangoru-Saussia will be very pleased that we are going to pass this amendment today because there are many Christians in my electorate.

Recently, I accompanied the Prime Minister to Israel and I am happy that we opened the embassy there. So, please let us not mislead the nation that we are going against one church, that is a lie that we are bringing to this Floor.

Secondly, do not say that investors will not come and invest because that is another lie we are bringing to this Floor.

At this time, the Nation affirms God as the Creator and God of Papua New Guinea and the source of all our blessings and so I and the people of Yanggoru-Saussia are right behind this Bill and we are giving 101 per cent to it.

Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker.

Motion (by **Mr Pila Niningi**) proposed –

That the law without amendments be agreed to.

Motion – That the proposed law without amendments be agreed to – put.

The proposed law without amendments requiring a two-thirds absolute majority of 79 Members, as required by the *Constitution*, the Acting Speaker ordered that the bells be rung.

The Parliament voted (the Acting Speaker, **Mr Koni Iguan**, in the Chair) –

AYES – 80

NOES – 10

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Motion so agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Ordered – In accordance with *Standing Order 222(e)*, I now order the Third Reading which is the second required opportunity for debate and the Second Vote be adjourned for at least two months this day, as required by the *Constitution*.

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**CONSTITUTIONAL (AMENDMENT)
(COURT RE-STRUCTURE) LAW 2023**

Second Reading

First required opportunity to debate and first Vote from 29 November 2023(see page...)

Mr PILA NININGI (Imbonggu – Minister for Justice and Attorney General) – Mr Acting Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to make a statement. I acknowledge the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, my fellow ministers and the Leader of the Opposition and members of Parliament.

Mr Acting Speaker, as the Minister responsible for Justice and Attorney General, I wish to thank the Marape-Rosso Government as the executive arm of the Government for supporting the judiciary.

The National Executive Council recently approved for the amendment of the *Constitution* to restructure the high courts of justice in Papua New Guinea. The restructuring process would entail various legislative enactments and the consequential amendments. The primary policy intention and beyond these constitutional amendments is to enhance the efficiency and the effectiveness of the high courts and the system in which they operate to make them more responsive to the increase in load case accumulation of court case backlogs and the load clearance rate of cases.

Restructuring the courts would ultimately allow Papua New Guineans greater and more effective access to justice and also ensure that the judiciary fulfils its constitutional duty in the dispensation of justice.

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Mr Acting Speaker, the current structure under *Section 155* of the *Constitution* provides only for the Supreme Court, the National Court, and other Courts. With the court restructure, a Court of Appeal will be established and it will be between the National Court and the Supreme Court.

The Court of Appeal will deal with appeals from the National Court and any referrals from the Supreme Court. The Court of Appeal will review all judicial acts referred by the National Court. It will have jurisdiction and powers as are conferred by the *Constitution*. The Supreme Court is to become the final appeal court.

Mr Acting Speaker, again I reiterate that the separation of the three courts will enhance work efficiency, accountability, and better management. The judges of the three courts will now have their own matters and operate independently from the judges of the other two courts. They will concentrate full time on the matters relating to their own court level.

In essence, the caseload for the judges will be relatively lighter as their work will be limited to their respective courts. This will then reduce the backlog of cases.

Mr Acting Speaker, the court restructure will include an increase in judges progressively for the three superior courts. I am pleased to advise this Parliament that the Marape-Rosso Government has complemented this restructuring process by recently approving the increase in the ceiling of the number of judges from 40 to 60.

The amendment to the *National Court (Number of Judges) Act 1984* will be introduced in the next Parliament sitting to give legal effect to this decision. Based on seniority, qualification, character and experience judges will be appointed not only from within Papua New Guinea but also overseas especially from the Commonwealth countries. The Judicial and Legal Service Commission which is the appointing authority for judges, for which I am Chairman, has appointed new judges and will continue to appoint judges progressively to meet the required level for the restructure.

Mr Acting Speaker, on a related note, the Judicial and Legal Service Commission will also be transitioning into a standalone setup given its constitutional nature and functions to effectively support the increase in the number of judicial appointments and also improvement in the respective court systems.

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Currently, the Commission is supported administratively through a Secretariat within the Department of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr Acting Speaker, I am also pleased to note that the court infrastructure that is now being worked on will complement the court restructure. The Marape-Rosso Government has provided funding support for the new court complex in Waigani to be completed. The development comprises a series of new modern buildings housing the Supreme Court, Court

of Appeal and National Court functions. The facility includes 14 new court rooms, judges' chambers, detainee holding cells and administration building accommodating court registries and other corporate service functions. The development also includes refurbishment of the existing Supreme and National Court building and site landscaping.

Mr Acting Speaker, the court restructure is a result of years of work by the Judiciary under the leadership of the Chief Justice. Discussions to restructure the courts began in the early 90s to post 2000, which resulted in the publication of the Government's "White Paper on Law and Justice" in 2007. This paper reflected the Judiciary's initial proposals for court restructure of both the higher and lower judiciaries. A more comprehensive review of the higher court structure was done by the Judiciary through its Court Restructure Committee. This was followed by an authorized study tour of the higher court structures of the Australian Capital Territory and Victoria in Australia. The result of which was published as the "Report in the 21st Century Court Restructure for Papua New Guinea in 21st March 2010.

Mr Acting Speaker, I therefore, would like to acknowledge the time and effort put in by the Judiciary through the leadership of the Chief Justice to see this work come this far. I would like to encourage my colleague members of Parliament to therefore, support the constitutional amendments that will give effect to the court restructure in the upcoming Parliament sittings.

Thank you again for the opportunity to make this statement, Mr Acting Speaker.

Mr JAMES MARAPE (Tari-Pori – Prime Minister and Minister for Treasury) – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. I want to rise and state from the outset my absolute support in this one and the Marape-Rosso Government and our coalition partners see this as a fundamental and monumental change to anchor our democracy and the vitality of our economy and our people.

Mr Acting Speaker, the rational is simple. We are a constitutional democracy. We have divergence of opinions on almost anything. Our litigation volume has increased in the last 49 years. Our work load has increased in the last 49 years. Our economy has increased in the last 49 years and our court deserves a fair go and fair treatment.

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Whilst we have been increasing elsewhere, we have not given fair consideration to our court system. For instance, before this Government came into place, they were operating

at a cap of 40 judges only under the *National Court Judges Act* until we amended this *Act*. Firstly, we increased to a minimum of 60 and then we increased to a possibility of 200 judges. We're in the process of working with the Chief Justice to bring in additional judicial capacity, externally from our development partners who have similar jurisdictions like ours; namely, Australia, possibly New Zealand, Canada and the Commonwealth nations. This will ensure, we resource and capacitate our judiciary.

Mr Acting Speaker, this law in essence is simple, it now brings in a fundamental change into the structure of the third arm of the government. If this law is given full support, we will elevate Supreme Court higher, insert an Appeals Court and distance the National Court from association with the Supreme Court in respect to judges migrating up or coming down, so there will be a pool of judges presiding over National Court and same for the Supreme Court matters.

That is why I just want to give assurance to everyone that this one was worked in tandem with the Judiciary and they recommended the changes. We looked at the recommendations from the Judiciary and we knew it was timely, especially when it came from the third arm of the government.

We thought we must give support and I want to appeal to the members on both sides of the House, let's not divide on matters of importance. This side of the House is sitting and doing peoples business. The earlier constitutional amendment that we passed in this first instances, I want to thank the 80 who stood to support. I want to take this time to thank the 80 members who stood to support the earlier constitutional amendment that we passed.

The definition in the preamble of our country as a Christian nation does not dilute *section 45* of our *Constitution* rather the freedom of worship is augmented, which allows our citizens to exercise their freedom. Every one of us may not be practicing Christianity or you may not be a Christian, nonetheless you have a right for individual practice of religion. This is maintained in *section 45*, but our country deserves to have an identity.

Our Judiciary is based on a Westminster Judo-Christian principle world view. Earlier laws and this law function together and work side by side. Our Judiciary knows exactly where the source of authority and law is. The source of authority and law, morally speaking comes from God. We acknowledged God in the earlier law and we now bring in this amendment to our judiciary to ensure we empower our judges better. The opposite may argue later after me saying that talking about empowerment, what have you done for our Judiciary?

Our judiciary knows exactly the level of support we have been giving them since 2019 to 2023 including 2024 and going forward. We will not compromise help to the Judiciary in a nation of so much differences; tribal differences and differences of every sort.

An efficient functioning judiciary that clears the backlog of court and expeditiously deals with justice dispensation is important and incumbent for the country. We felt this reform is necessary knowing that for 49 years, the current structure has carried us. Going forward into the future with a population load of minimum 12 million people and an economy that is growing, separating of Supreme Court, bringing in an Appeals Court and supporting a better defined unique National Court that is not associated with the Supreme Court deserves this change. We feel we'll best set our country beyond 50 years of Independence inline with some of the fundamental changes this government wants to bring into this country and not just talking about cat and mouse in this Parliament.

Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. I offer support to this Bill and I ask my caucus; those who belong to the Marape-Rosso Government, this is foundational change to entrench our third arm of government, let us give full support to this one.

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Mr KERENGA KUA (Sinasin-Yonggamugl) – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker, it is un-Christian –

(Members interjecting)

Mr KERENGA KUA – Not to allow the Opposition to speak before you put through a Bill on the Floor of Parliament. Thank you very much

We support the Bill; I have the support of the Opposition to lend our support to this particular Bill. And we want to express our appreciation and gratitude to the Attorney-General who we've seen work very hard overtime to bring about this reform that's been talked about, I must say for the last 30 years. That reform was needed and talked about 30 years ago and it's taken us this long to come to this particular point where this Attorney-General has taken the bull by the horn, done all the work that is necessary from the Government to have this brought to the Floor of Parliament.

It is a necessary reform and we must all support it because of the situation we have in our country. Our country is growing both in terms of population, social activities, trade, and

administration, all these issues are multiplying and along with it the disputes come, including crimes.

So, we need to improve the systems that are there to deal with these social issues and the courts play a very important role starting at the top. Superior courts which consists, used to or up to now just consists of the National Court and the Supreme Court, the introduction of the Court of Appeal as a second tier to the court structure will help to diffuse some of the congestion of traffic at the National Courts throughout Papua New Guinea.

This will free up the judges, free up the resources and they will be able to deal with dispute resolution in real time. That's been one of our big issues. This reform will help the courts to deal with disputes in real time. Especially with crime, when you don't deliver in real time there's a gap between the commission of the offence and the final determination of the courts on whether it is a crime or not and whether it should attract some penalty or not, people forget it.

So, I think that as we improve the court system, we also need to invest more money into it and not just the court system but the entire law enforcement system. So the priority of this country at the moment is not so much road infrastructure, education or health but its law and order.

Mr Acting Speaker, all things told, our priority is now law and order. If we are able to put law and order under control, our population, 10 million or whatever population, we have, their creative juices will be unleashed.

Business men, young people, people who want to go into productivity a lot of them a suppressed. Even the cost of doing business, the security component escalates it. Profitability goes down, new businesses are not asking place at the rate they should be. But if we can contain law and order by reforming the systems of law enforcement in this country, it will go a long way in solving our law and order problems.

So going forward, I would ask and encourage us on both sides, please let's give more money to the Minister for Police. Let's give more money to the Attorney-General, let's give more money to the CIS Minister, those are the people responsible for upholding and enforcing our laws.

So, if there's plenty of money to do things like Connect PNG, we can do that but please cut some back and spread it out to these institutions. Let's do that for a balanced approach. Let's create a society that's receptive to receiving development.

At the moment, our people are not settled, law and order is their biggest problem so what the Attorney-General has done is leading us to a small step in the right direction. He'

has our full support, those of us who are here and we'll support any other facilitative amendments that he might bring down the track.

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We will also support it because we need to have this court restructure in place at the earliest. Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker.

Motion – That the question be now put – agreed to.

Motion (by **Mr Pila Niningi**) proposed –

That the Law without amendments be agreed to.

Motion – That the Proposed Law without amendments be agreed to – put.

The proposed law without amendments requiring a two-thirds absolute majority of 79 Members, as required by the *Constitution*, the Acting Speaker ordered that the bells be rung.

The Parliament voted, the Acting Speaker (**Mr Koni Iguan**) in the Chair –

(Voting in progress)

50/03

(Voting in progress)

51/03

AYES – 94

NOES – 0

Motion so agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Ordered – In accordance with Standing Order 222(e), I now order the Third Reading which is the second required opportunity for debate and the Second Vote be adjourned for at least two months this day, as required by the *Constitution*.

ADJOURNMENT

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

That the Parliament do now adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 3.25 p.m.