

PRIME MINISTER STATEMENT ANTI-CORRUPTION INTERNATIONAL DAY

9th December 2015

Let me first of all thank the organisers - UNDP, Transparency Solomon Islands, the Central Bank of Solomon Islands, various Government agencies including my very own office- for organising today's event allowing us and the whole country to refocus our attention on the problem of corruption and what we should do about it. I thank you for inviting me to address you today.

I am very glad to see so many of you from civil society organisations, the private sector, the public sector and development partners who are present here today to mark the International Anti-Corruption Day.

Many of you would already know that the fight against corruption is the highest priority of the DCC Government. This is the will of the people, and as your Prime Minister and with the support of my Cabinet, we are committed to do something about this problem.

I have no doubt that the detrimental and draining effects of corruption, as you know better than most, are directly or indirectly felt by, I would say, every single person throughout Solomon Islands.

Corruption, indeed, is a huge problem and it is a serious challenge that affects and should unite us all.

Every one gathered here this morning agrees that it is a problem. But I am sure all of you will agree also with me that doing nothing about it is the biggest problem of all.

Corruption defies and undermines fundamental human rights. It exacerbates poverty. It deepens inequality by diverting money sorely needed for health care, education and other essential services in our societies.

And it in fact undermines institutions and the beliefs in the systems that we have created for these institutions.

It is a very dangerous phenomenon.

It increases the costs of doing business. It distorts markets. It impedes economic growth.

It is driven by and feeds criminal activity. It results in malfunctioning state institutions and weak governance.

It has always been and will continue to be a barrier to achieving our national aspirations, Millennium Development Goals, and our work for a more equitable and prosperous country.

Because of its contagious and transmissible effect on our system of governance it is critically important therefore that we continuously review and re-strengthen our accountability measures, transparency measures, and measures to promote the rule of law and good governance to keep pace with changing corrupt behaviours.

As your Prime Minister I want all of us, who are in the fight against corruption, to continuously set our goals including our goals for 2016 in the fight against corruption.

Your Government, of which I represent today, has an ambitious agenda in the fight against corruption for the year 2016.

It is opportune now that I publicly announce the DCC Government's agenda for 2016 in the fight against corruption.

1. Anti-Corruption Bill

Our top priority for the first quarter of 2016 is to enact the Anti-Corruption Bill. This will be the first comprehensive legislation consolidating old and new offences of corruption with revised levels of penalties. The Solomon Islands Independent Commission Against Corruption (SIICAC) will be established by way of this law.

2. The Integrity Whistle Blower Bill

The second highest priority is to introduce the Integrity Whistle Blower Bill to Parliament for enactment during the first quarter of 2016. This new legislation will primarily protect any person who report in good faith suspected act of corruption, maladministration and/or improper conduct of officials, from discrimination and retaliatory actions.

3. The Ombudsman (Special Provisions) Bill

Another high priority for Government is for the new Ombudsman (Special Provisions) Bill to be enacted by Parliament prior to mid-year 2016. In the new Ombudsman Act the powers of

the Ombudsman have been re-emphasised and a requirement that the finding by the Ombudsman must be acted upon without delay, will now be part of the new Act.

4. The Leadership Code (Further Provisions) Bill

Another high priority of Government is for Parliament to enact the new Leadership Code Bill prior to mid-2016. The new Leadership Code Act will clarify which official in the public sector it will concentrate on given its overlap in jurisdiction with that of the Ombudsman. The new Act will also establish the Leadership Tribunal to hear cases of misconduct in offices.

5. The National and Provincial Election (Further Provisions) Bill

The National and Provincial Election (Further Provisions) Bill is another top priority of Government for 2016. Work on this new election Bill has already begun from the beginning of this year and Government intend for Parliament to enact this new law by mid-2016. The new election Act will provide for the new election system in which the 2018 General Election will be conducted under. A new anti-defection measure will also be provided by way of this new Act.

6. The Freedom of Information Bill

The Freedom of Information Bill is another top priority of Government. This is a Bill that will promote and exert transparency measures making available government information for public consumption as well as the right of Solomon Islanders to have access to official information from any government agency. It is our intention that this Bill is enacted by Parliament towards the end of 2016.

7. Review of the Political Parties Integrity Act 2014

It is a top priority of Government to re-examine the current Political Parties Integrity Act with the view to strengthen it based on the experience of the 2014 General Election and the continuing behaviours of political parties and their members. Work on this review has already begun this year and Government should be receiving a comprehensive report on this review by early next year.

In providing for these new laws, Government is fully aware that they are themselves not enough to make us effective in our collective fight against corruption. Because of this belief, the Government will be producing the National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS) not later than six months after the Anti-Corruption Bill has been enacted.

The ultimate aim of the NACS is to reduce opportunities for corruption as well as to increase the probability for detection, civic education and punishment. Because the NACS will be a mechanism where the coalition between the Government, civil society and the private sector

business community will be consolidated in the fight against corruption, it makes it inevitable that the NACS will be produced through a consultative process with all stakeholders.

It is already clear to Government that corruption is a challenge that not one segment of society can solve alone. We have to do it together. Nobody can do everything, but everybody can do something together.

To achieve sustainable results, we all must take up the fight against corruption alongside each other.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have talked about the DCC Government plans to tackle corruption in the next 12 months. Let me make a plea to you today that I would like you to invite me to come back to address you again when we celebrate the International Anti-Corruption Day in 2016.

This is very important because I would like to talk to you more about results rather than our plan to tackle corruption. Results is the correct gauge to indicate whether we are making any progress or not in the fight against corruption.

Many of you would agree with me that we are running a nation today at a time of most unstable and volatile environments. We face corruption risks that can undermine our efforts to advance development, peace and human rights. The Government needs to develop a strict system of internal controls and to remain vigilant and work hard to set an example.

But Government cannot do this alone. We need partnership for all of us to work together collectively. And to stay this course, it is important for all of us, as fighters against corruption, to embrace principles of ethics and principles of integrity, to act against corruption and to do business based on fair competition and good governance.

I am pleased that the Leader of Opposition has commented recently as to the where about of the Anti-Corruption Bill.

Indeed, I am counting on the support of the Leader of Opposition and all Members of Parliament.

The series of deliverables we are to deliver under Government anti-corruption programme are those that the people of Solomon Islands have wanted for us to deliver. They are indeed deliverables perpetuated by the will of our people.

Let us all, together, take a collective stand against this poisonous social, political and economic disease that beset Solomon Islands for so long.

To achieve an equitable, inclusive and prosperous future for all, free of corruption, we must foster a culture of transparency, accountability and rule of law.

You can count on me as your Prime Minister and your Government in advancing this important cause.

Tangio tumas.