



SPECIAL PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

**STATEMENT TO PARLIAMENT ON THE FINAL REPORT OF THE
COMMITTEE ON GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

BY GOVERNOR ALLAN BIRD, DEPUTY CHAIRMAN

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(Final text subject to delivery by Governor Bird in the House)

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Speaker,

I am very pleased to present to you and the House the second and final report of the Special Parliamentary Committee on Gender Based Violence. This report captures our final reflections and recommendations, which we hope will provide guidance to the officials across the country who have responsibilities for addressing GBV.

I acknowledge that the Government will soon be going into caretaker mode, once the election writ are issued, but I still encourage every member of this Parliament – and indeed every candidate who will be running into the national elections – to read this Report.

Gender-based violence is one of the most critical issues facing this country. Any person who wishes to be elected to represent the people must be ready to take action to end GBV. I believe that our Report contains important, practical ideas for how we can do that. I hope that every MPs and candidate uses it to start

discussions with voters in their electorates about how we can all work together in the coming months and years to end GBV and make our country safe again for all women, men and children.

BACKGROUND

Mr. Speaker,

Before I discuss some of the most critical recommendations in this Report, which I would like to draw to the attention of my Honourable colleagues, let me put a few introductory remarks on record.

As many of you will recall, this Special Parliamentary Committee on Gender-Based Violence was established in 2020 by this Parliament. We have seven members – Chairperson Hon Charles Abel, who sends his apologies for not being able to table this Report himself – myself as Deputy Chair – and 5 other members, namely Hon Powes Parkop, Hon Michael Dua, Hon Aiye Tambua, Hon Ginson Saonu and Hon Allan Marat.

Mr. Speaker,

I wish to thank this House for establishing this Special Parliamentary Committee. As Deputy Chair I speak on behalf of all of our members to thank this House for the broad mandate you gave us which empowered us to take a serious and proper look at the issue of gender-based violence, which has been plaguing our country for far too many years.

Mr. Speaker,

I would also like to officially thank the Parliamentary Secretariat and the United Nations Development Programme for the support they have given to our Committee. UNDP responded to our request for technical and financial

assistance through the UN-EU Spotlight Initiative. They supported the organisation and livestreaming of both our Committee public hearings and have provided ongoing technical support to our Members.

Mr. Speaker,

We have long known that gender-based violence is a critical threat to our national development, but this is the first time we have ever dedicated a parliamentary committee to undertaking a specific detailed review of the issues which are impeding our ability to prevent GBV from occurring, and to properly responding to GBV when such cases do occur across our country.

We have done our best to discharge our mandate transparently and accountably. In doing so, I hope that we have been able to demonstrate the value that parliamentary committees have in overseeing the work of government bodies and using our oversight powers to hold government officials to account and to encourage them to work harder in the service of the nation.

Mr. Speaker,

I know that many members of the public were initially wary of whether our Committee would just be another “talk-fest”. On social media, I know that many people asked what we would achieve and whether we would be wasting everyone’s time by holding public hearings.

I hope that the two public hearings we have held – the first in May 2021 and the second in March 2022 – and the two Reports we have tabled in this House – the first in August 2021 and the second of which I am tabling today – will show the public that we took our mandate very seriously and have done our best to produce concrete recommendations which aim to improve the national response to addressing GBV.

PERMANENT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE

Mr. Speaker,

As you are no doubt aware, our mandate as a Special Parliamentary Committee is limited. Now that we have submitted this Final Report, our mandate will come to an end. To address this, the very first recommendation in our Report calls on this House to endorse a motion that would establish a GBV Committee as a permanent parliamentary committee, whose work continue through to the 11th Parliament and beyond.

Mr. Speaker,

We have the motion prepared and ready to table. I urge my Government colleagues and the members of the Opposition to come together to prioritise this motion on the notice paper and to endorse the motion as a matter of urgent priority before the House is prorogued. We must show the people of our country that we are serious about tackling GBV and to do that we must have a parliamentary committee that is empowered to continue to hold government officials to account.

Mr. Speaker,

I would also like to state for the record that it is my belief that government officials have also appreciated the work of the Committee. I think many of them would like for the committee to become a permanent body that can be used to oversee their work, as well as to publicly advocate for more resources to be provided and more reforms progressed to address GBV.

When we first held our hearings in May 2021, I got the sense that officials were surprised at our questioning because many were not used to being held to account for the work they are supposed to be doing as public servants.

However, I was very impressed with the engagement we had at our second public hearings in March 2022. Most officials came very well-prepared with many teams equipped with written submissions that responded directly to each of our recommendations.

I wish to put the thanks of the Committee on record for the commitment of those officials – and the many officials and CSO people working tirelessly across the country to address GBV. As one of the officials said to us – her team is deeply committed to making sure that GBV survivors are supported but they simply lack sufficient staffing and funding to do their jobs.

HIGH LEVEL LEADERSHIP

Mr Speaker,

Many of the officials from whom we heard testimony seemed genuinely committed to doing more and doing better. It became that as leaders, we need to make sure we use our powers to clear the way for them. I encourage the Government Ministers here today to use your platform within the National Executive Council to secure better funding for your own departmental teams working on GBV.

I urge my fellow Governors to use our positions as heads of Provincial Governments to ensure Provincial GBV Secretariats are established and properly funded. I urge Governors and District MPs to use our PSIP and DSIP grants to provide a minimum amount of funding to GBV each year. Every extra Kina will ensure that more people can be helped.

And last but not least, I urge the Treasurer to ensure that each and every year, the National Budget allocates proper funding. It became very clear during our

inquiry that we need proper funding not only to set up and run the National GBV Secretariat, but also to properly fund the work of critical teams such as the RPNGC's Family and Sexual Violence Units that have been established across the country but remain severely under-staffed and under-resourced – the Department of Health's Family Support Centres which provide immediate health care GBV survivors – and the Office of the Public Prosecutor's Family and Sexual Offences Unit, which currently has only the most minimal staff available to prosecute the huge backlog of GBV cases that are occurring across the country.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr Speaker,

While funding is obviously a core challenge that we must deal with, let me now move to some of the more technical recommendations in our Report. I encourage all of the Members of this House to go through the full Report.

We have tried to be very specific in our analysis and to provide very clear and concrete recommendations for action. We used the August 2021 Committee Report as our starting point. Where no action has been taken, we noted that the recommendation must still be addressed. However, where progress had occurred or more information provided by officials, we have updated or added to the recommendations.

We now have more than 75 recommendations for action. I know that may seem like a lot, but there is indeed a lot of work that still needs to be done. I humbly ask all Ministers here to go through the Report to see which areas your departments could take action to address.

Mr Speaker,

I do not intend to go through every recommendation here, but our Committee wanted to focus specific attention of the House today on a handful of critical recommendations where action can still be taken even in the few weeks we have left or where we would like the next Parliament to immediately take action.

Firstly – the Committee calls on the Government to urgently establish the National GBV Secretariat, by recruiting the CEO and the 10 staff that are needed to immediately start rolling out the National GBV Strategy.

The establishment of the National Gender Based Violence Secretariat was approved by the NEC in 2016, but even to this date, the Secretariat is not in operation and does not even have a permanent director.

At the March 2022 public hearings, we had conflicting accounts of what is needed to progress the key recruitments. As you will see from the Report before you, we are concerned that the Department of Personnel Management has not progressed the recruitments, even once TORs were shared by the Department of Community Development and Religion.

Mr Speaker,

As Members can see in the correspondence attached as Annexes 3, 4 and 5 of the Report, DFCDR – in accordance with our own recommendation that the head of the Secretariat be a very highly qualified GBV expert – DFCDR has recommended that the CEO be recruited at Public Service Level 4.

We realise this is very senior – but at the same time, it is the same level as the head of the National Office of Child and Family Services, which has similar responsibilities to the GBV Secretariat.

Mr Speaker,

The CEO of the National GBV Secretariat must be given proper seniority if they are to be empowered to drive the GBV agenda across national departments as well as across all of the provinces. A less senior person will simply not have the proper status and power amongst public servants to get the job done properly.

We are also well aware that it will be virtually impossible to find a sufficient qualified manager as well as GBV expert within the current public service ranks, which means that the CEO position needs to be sufficiently senior to attract qualified candidates who are currently working in the private or development sectors.

Mr Speaker,

As Chair of the Salaries and Remuneration Commission which must endorse the CEO position, I urge you to please convene the SRC one more time before the election is called to review the paperwork that has been shared by DFCDR and endorse this position. This will enable recruitment to commence, and ideally, will ensure a new National GBV Secretariat can be in place by the time the next Parliament sits.

Mr Speaker,

In addition, we need the Department of Personnel Management to approve the 10 staff TORs that have been shared with them by DFCDR. We understand that they are now suggestion some form of workforce review and analysis needs to

be done before the positions can be approved at the level requested. With respect, this is just more unnecessary delaying.

Mr Speaker,

We need the GBV Secretariat staff now – we need to set up the national GBV Secretariat without any further delay.

I cannot stress enough – although the National GBV Secretariat will be a small staff, it is for this reason that the positions must be properly senior. The small core team will need to be extremely expert and have the power to take the initiative and offer technical advice and support to national and provincial stakeholders working to address GBV across the country. We don't need large numbers of low level staff – we need a core team of smart, dynamic, well-qualified GBV specialists who can lead this agenda.

Ideally, our Committee would like high level intervention from the Prime Minister or the Minister in charge of personnel management to progress the approval of these positions before the caretaker period commences. Once approved, recruitments can commence. Realistically, this would then mean that at least by the start of 2023, our country would have the National GBV Secretariat in place that was supposed to be operational in 2017.

Mr Speaker,

This brings me to **our second recommendation – namely, the release of the GBV funding allocated for 2022 and a commitment to include a minimum of funding in subsequent years.**

Our Committee is extremely proud that our advocacy resulted in the first ever substantial funding being allocated to DFCDR for GBV. I would like to publicly thank again the Treasurer for his commitment to ensuring a proper budget.

7.93 million Kina has been allocated to DFCDR to address GBV in 2022. We understand that 1 million Kina has already been released by Treasury but our Committee encourages Treasury to release the bulk of the funding before the caretaker period commences, to enable DFCDR to disburse the funding to their partners, to progress implementation over the next 6 months.

Mr Speaker,

Our Committee has seen the budget produced by DFCDR and we know that they want to disburse funds to support provincial partners, including by making grants to NGOs. As our last Report made clear, NGOs have filled the gap in Government funding for GBV by providing a range of GBV support services across the country, including crisis response, safe house, counselling, legal advice and other support to GBV survivors. Let me take this opportunity to publicly thank them – not only on behalf of the Committee but on behalf of a grateful public.

If DFCDR is to more effectively work with NGOs, including by funding their work to some extent, then they need their funding to be provided right away. Funding cannot be given to NGOs in drips. Grants need to be provided up front. To do that, DFCDR will need the money in their account. We understand that there may be concerns regarding accountability and capacity to manage the funds, but we understand that the DFCDR Secretary is working closely with UNDP to use their financial management capabilities to disburse the money.

If we are serious about dealing with GBV as a priority, we simply have to get this money out of the Government coffers and into the hands of the local groups and people who we know can do this work properly.

Mr Speaker,

Let me now move to the final area of urgent action which I want to discuss with this House, which is **the need to strengthen access to justice for GBV survivors by improving the response of every single institution involved in the justice process.**

From our Committee inquiries, it remains clear that every single part of the justice process remains under-funded and under-staffed in relation to addressing GBV. Law enforcement in relation to GBV needs to be addressed through proper funding, staffing and training, in particular, through (1) better police responses and investigation of GBV cases (2) more effective and timely prosecutions of alleged GBV perpetrators and (3) survivor-centred court processes.

Our Committee Report includes specific recommendations addressed to all aspects of the justice system. I encourage every single Minister and official with responsibilities for justice in this country to read our recommendations closely and to action them.

Mr Speaker,

We cannot let GBV perpetrators continue to operate with impunity. We have to make sure that justice is served and that perpetrators know that there will be consequences for their bad behaviour.

I remain deeply concerned that still read in the papers of far too many stories of perpetrators committing heinous acts of violence and never being charged or brought to trial. This must stop.

Mr Speaker,

Before I conclude, I want to specifically draw attention to the need to make sure that we address perpetrators of GBV but also specifically those people committing sorcery accusation related violence. As many will know, this is an issue I am very personally committed to addressing.

I am very proud that through our advocacy and a very fruitful partnership with the Tribal Foundation, this House passed amendments to the Criminal Code Act which aim to make it easier to investigate, charge and prosecute SARV, including by criminalising the activities of the glasmens and glasmers that are taking money to denounce innocent people and bring violence down on their heads.

I encourage every single police officer and every prosecutor across the country to familiarise themselves with the new amendments and to use them to make sure that we stamp out this barbaric practice. It is not a part of our country or our culture.

CONCLUSION

Mr Speaker,

I now come to my conclusion and I thank you for the time you have given me to make this Statement.

GBV hurt every single person in this country. Every one of us has been touched by violence – whether we were the ones beaten or we have had to watch a loved one be hurt. We simply cannot tolerate this in our communities any longer.

I want every single Papua New Guinean to feel safe. I also want every single one of us to show respect to each other. No person has the right to hit another one – to cause them harm – to hurt them. As Christians, we are taught to show kindness to our fellow human beings. We must follow those teachings.

Mr Speaker,

I am proud of the work our Committee has done and I commend this Report to you all as a document which should guide our efforts to stamp out violence across the country.

Let us debate this Report in the spirit in which it has been tabled – as a roadmap for all of us to use to guide our own efforts. Let us use our voices as leaders and our positions in our own communities to role model the behaviour we want to say and to make a commitment ourselves to show zero tolerance for violence. Let us work to end GBV and ensure a safe and prosperous PNG for every man, woman and child.

With that, I commend this Report to you Mr Speaker and to the House.

Thankyou.