

**BILLS AND LEGISLATION COMMITTEE**  
**INQUIRY INTO THE**  
**CONSTITUENCY DEVELOPMENT FUND BILL-2013**

**13 March 2013**

**MALAITA MA'ASINA FORUM**

Members

|                       |   |          |
|-----------------------|---|----------|
| Hon Manasseh Sogavare | - | Chairman |
| Hon Douglas Ete       | - | Member   |
| Hon James Tora        | - | “        |
| Hon John Maneniaru    | - | “        |
| Hon Derek Sikua       | - | “        |
| Hon Matthew Wale      | - | “        |
| Hon Milner Tozaka     | - | “        |

Witnesses

|                       |   |                          |
|-----------------------|---|--------------------------|
| Mr Charles Dausabea   | - | President/Ma'asina Forum |
| Mr Charles Ashley     | - | General Secretary        |
| Mr George Kosui       | - | Technical team member    |
| Mr Delson Wale        | - | Member                   |
| Mr Henry Ata Daokalia | - | Vice President           |

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**Mr Chairman:** I will call the committee to order. We have the Malaita Ma'asina Forum with us. We thank you for coming to present your submission. It is a small bill but quite involved. We thank you for coming.

Yesterday, we had discussions with the ministries and today we go outside of the government system wanting to hear other stakeholders. You are protected under parliamentary privileges and immunities so anything you say here will not be taken up against you in any court of law, all in the interest of advising Parliament properly when the report goes to Parliament.

The bill, and I know you have a copy of it already, is called Constituency Development Funds Bill trying to provide a legal framework on how to manage the funds. We would like to hear your views on the Bill. As you probably have read the bill and you would like to make your submission to the Committee, and eventually what you are going to say will be taken up in the report that the Committee will submit to Parliament to guide Parliament on how it will proceed with this bill.

For Hansard purposes, introduce yourself so that Hansard can note your name and what you say so that it is clear to the Hansard. With that I would like to welcome the Ma'asina Forum, the president and members of the executive. We've heard so much about you and the issues you've raised are issues of public interest, and we think that you would be an appropriate organisation to come and express your views on this bill. Without further ado, I will now ask you to make your submissions and then we will take it from there. You organise yourselves as to who will speak first.

**Mr. Charles Dausabea:** First of all, on behalf on our organisation, we would like to thank you and your Committee for giving us the invitation to come and have dialogue with you in regards to a bill that is being talked so much about by the public. We thank you very much. This is the first of its kind for recognizing us and calling us to this kind of dialogue, which shows that we are mature in discussing issues and we do not just accuse each other but there are proper venues for us to come and have proper dialogue. On that token I as the President of the Malaita Ma'asina Forum wish to thank you for your wisdom and your Committee for including us in this hearing as citizens of this country to tell you what we think. On behalf of Ma'asina thank you for the invitation.

I will begin by saying that as one of the initiators of this fund in 1990, I want to let the public know that this fund was introduced in 1990 with all good intentions of helping our people. I would like to start off this way so that people are aware as to how this fund started and what it was for. Those are the questions I have been hearing people asking.

In the 1990s we did not have enough money so those of us who were backbenchers then pressurised the government at that time, the late Mamaloni and this is because ministers had discretionary funds in their ministries. But those of us backbenchers did not have such funds and therefore all of us went in and out of the offices of foreign embassies in Honiara. When the late Mamaloni who was PM saw what we were doing he thought it was not respectable for leaders of the country to be going in and out of foreign embassies offices. Because of that we had dialogue to have this fund introduced to maintain the integrity of leaders of the country rather than running to these embassies making us look like we are beggars in our own country. The intention and objective of the fund at that time was a noble one, to maintain the integrity of members of Parliament, especially backbenchers at that time of which I was one of them. But now with the fund in place, it looks like it has gone out of control because some things are not right. But I want to bring up this issue so that some of MPs know how it started. Because I believe a lot of members receive this fund but they do not know how it started. That is the reason why it was introduced in the first place.

I will now talk on a few things I observe about the Bill and then my team members will also make their contribution. My name is Charles Dausabea, President of Ma'asina. This Bill is a very good Bill and I think it is long overdue. My comment is on clause 4(3) about the CDO. In our view, since he is a public officer he should not be signing cheques because he is a public officer, but he should only be acting as a secretary. Our view is that since this is the Constituency Development Funds, you should include provincial ward members of a constituency and the member of Parliament to be the signatories to the account. They should be the ones to sign. If a constituency has three to five wards then it is the member of Parliament's discretion to choose which of those members from those wards should co-sign with him. This is to leave the public officer out of the signing. We think it is not right for a public officer to sign, he should just be the secretary taking minutes, preparing meetings,

checking on projects and making reports about them and then hand the reports to the member for that particular constituency, and the provincial member to co-sign with the member of Parliament.

In the constituency it is down to earth that is the level. But when you have the Member of Parliament with the CDO co-signing the accounts, and then you cut off the bottom layer of the provincial government system, it means you are leaving out one hand. This means of the two hands only one hand is working. That is our view on this. We therefore strongly recommend this because we have already discussed this with Malaita Province and we were just about to make recommendations to Parliament about how these funds should be managed and disbursed in the constituencies. But my GS will break it through because we have that ready but we are waiting on Malaita Province members to sign a petition for us to be put to you. But that is still to be done and you have called us early here and so we are telling you what our plans are. We were actually working on this.

For me as the President that is what I see but the GS and the others will also contribute as well as my technical team here on things that need to be addressed. That is the only thing I see is good about the bill.

The bill itself is good. I think it is long overdue, this bill should have come first before we go ahead with the fund but never mind it is better late than never. We thank you and the government for making this bill for the constituencies. We also agree with the constituency offices. The Ma'asina Forum agreed on that hundred percent. It must be in the constituencies because we might not know what is happening right now.

In the past if you ask for somebody in the village, they will tell you that he is inside his cocoa plantation or he has gone to see his pigs or he goes to make copra. But today if you go and ask at home where is such and such a person, they will tell you that he has gone over to Honiara about three months ago to see his MP in Honiara. We have now pulled away the dependency attitude in the families, we have pulled away the fabrics of our society from the hands of the fathers to the honourable MP.

Some fathers come here to Honiara and got into trouble because they don't have any sea fares to go back home. This bill addresses one of the main solutions to the problem that

needs to be put in. Constituency offices should be located at home so that there is no need for people to pay fares to come in trucks to Auki and pay fare in the ships to come to Honiara and upon arriving here look for the MP but it is difficult for them to find him because he has other commitments, and that is very costly. Today it is very expensive for families in the rural areas to come to Honiara looking for their MPs. Chairman, for offices to be located in the 50 constituencies, I believe is one of the initiatives you've tried to raise in 2006, which we can now see in the bill and this is very good, we are happy about it. I would like to encourage you that it must be done at the constituency level. From there, the people can get their own answers as to a 'yes' or a 'no' without spending even a dollar to go there.

I am sorry to say this but today I can find some of the offices in the motels; they rent motel rooms as constituency office. That big amount of money we are supposed to help our people with was spent on renting motel room. I therefore commend the government and all of you for this and I would like to see it happen.

The other thing as well is that this bill should come into effect in January next year and so we have a little bit of time but I think money must have hindered you for not coming around because had you come around you would have heard it straight from people at home that an office in the constituency is what they really want. What we wanted, Chairman and your committee members, is that the constituencies see that office as theirs, and this bill addresses that aspect.

I am not going to talk very much Chairman but I will hand it to the next person, but the point I raised earlier is that I want the post of the CDO which is a public officer to be secretarial in nature. We want to tell you that anyone to co-sign with the MP has to be someone else, and the MP has to sign because it is constituency funds. We do not disagree with that. How can the MP be up there and people do something differently in the constituency? For the MP to sign is not a problem to us, we see it as a straight one but you have to take your provincial member to co-sign with you so that there is coordination from national to provincial and even at the village level because it your constituency and your ward. If the MP doesn't sign who are you going to blame?

As long as the practice is not like what it is now where some of our brothers or friend MPs, when we ask them for money in the constituency, they put their hands inside their pocket, sign a cheque and give it to you. That is what we do not want to see. We want to see it better managed and if the Member of Parliament and his provincial members have a work plan for a year, they present it to the office and have it funded there. This plan can either be a four or five year plan so that when money is given we know what and where it is spent on and we do not go looking for it; it is used exactly for the purposes in the plan which was submitted to the ministry.

That is all I want to say as the President. I will give the opportunity to my members to also contribute and thank you again for your invitation. I will now ask those on my team to now do their presentation. I will now hand over to my GS.

**Mr Charles Ashley:** My name is Charles Ashley and I am the General Secretary of the Ma'asina Forum. Like the President has said, we want to thank you for this opportunity given to us to come and share our thoughts about this Bill. I gave a short letter yesterday just to let you know what we want to cover. I received your invitation at about 6pm on Monday. In my letter yesterday I said that we are going to put in more details on what we wanted to put in our submission.

But this morning I gave a brief outline, and I believe you have a copy with you, and I will just quickly run through the brief outline and then other members can say what they want and if there are any questions, we are ready to give the answer as well.

In our introduction we wanted to give some backgrounds as to how the Ma'asina sees this bill that if we are not careful, this discretionary fund will not only affect our leaders but this country as a whole. In your invitation you wanted submissions to mention facts and some information, and in our outline we talked about the prosecution, conviction and imprisonment of some of our leaders relating to the use of the discretionary fund. The Ma'asina believes that our leaders, our members of Parliament are elected by our people and their removal from office should also be from our people who elected them. If we are not careful, information with ulterior motives taken from the use of the discretionary funds can be used against our

leaders and this can bring down our leaders and even the governments of our sovereign nation. It is therefore very important to us and I believe also you as our leaders to recognise this fact because we believe that the few prosecutions that have happened to some of our leaders are selective in nature. So we have to be very mindful of how we pass laws for ourselves as these laws might bite us back, and others may use that. We must at all times try to protect our political and democratic processes.

What I am saying is that when our people elect our leaders, they should also be responsible for their removal and not when others take advantage or take information and use those to select who they should prosecute and as this will not only affect our people and leaders but this nation as a whole.

The second point is the title of the bill. The bill is called the Constituency Development Funds Bill 2013 and it is funds for developing the constituency. And inside this bill there is reference to applications from individuals and we do not agree with that because it is a bill that deals with funds for developing constituencies and not constituents. That is the main point we would like to put across to the Committee that this bill and the funds that will be administered under this bill is for developing constituencies.

And if we were to take Temotu Nende in the east, Shortlands in the west, Malaita Outer Islands in the north and Rennell/Bellona in the south of our 50 constituencies right across, there is very little development. If this bill is going to develop or is the framework to developing our constituencies, we are very happy with it so let's make that work. We also feel that this bill should lay the foundation for developing infrastructures, health and education in our different constituencies.

It should not be a bill where an individual or maybe a family and most likely someone that votes for a member of parliament comes and asks for assistance for his/her family's small project. We think that that should not happen. This bill should lay the foundation as to how a Member of Parliament working together with ward

members of that constituency, I mean those within the provincial assembly work together to develop that constituency and it should be in infrastructure, health and education.

Coming to the next point in the outline, the objective of the bill is about the management and disbursement, transparency and accountability. The preamble of the bill talks about management, disbursement, transparency and accountability, but when one looks at the actual clauses of this bill, the MMF is of the view that this is not going to happen. Because the way to manage and disburse funds as well as whether it is transparent and accountable of this process, it is not so. Therefore, work needs to be done and we have some suggestions when it comes to the minister coming up with regulations in putting that in place.

The other point in regards to the clauses of this bill, as I have said already, the Malaita Ma'asina Forum submits that this bill must be for the development of constituencies and not the constituents. We also feel that the MP as well as the provincial assembly member representing a constituency, for instance, I have my friend here, the Member for East Honiara, Douglas Ete, what the Ma'asina would like to see is for the national MP and the ward members of East Honiara constituency act as the board and be signatories to that development account. For instance, it can be called the East Honiara (IHE account), East Honiara Infrastructure, Health and Education Account so that constituents in that constituency know that these funds are to do with those arrears and it's not something where our people think they can just go and ask the MP for money. Our people need to work, but it is the responsibility of the member of Parliament or the government and the provincial members or the ward members of that constituency to put in place the means for them to have something that they can use. For instance, if the roads in East Honiara are in bad state, we believe this Bill will help address the need to fix those roads so our people can take their produce to the market. We also believe that if our people need



education for their children or the health clinics need facilities, those needs can be addressed through this Bill.

We believe the CDO and the office should become like a secretariat where people in that constituency can access. Let's take a remote constituency, for example, Pele, if those in Vanikoro need something, if that office is there, can apply to that constituency secretariat. They can make their applications there and the officer looking after the office, prepares and does ground work to find out about the application, prepares them and then the member of Parliament and the ward members of that constituency should have quarterly meetings to deal with those applications.

In the regulations it should state that when applications are received, they should be published in that constituency and then the officer prepares submissions and the member of Parliament for that Constituency and all the ward members meet quarterly to deal with the issues. Our people need their members of Parliament to go and visit them. We believe that if Members of Parliament visit their people on a quarterly basis would be really good rather than receiving complaints such as their members only see them every four years. Let us do away with that, but go down to our people to meet them and talk about issues affecting them. Our people in our constituencies know their own needs more than we do so let their needs be addressed at that level. And if they are not happy then they too can take steps to remove their elected leader. Let us not allow this Bill if it becomes law to be used by others with ulterior motives to bite us, especially our leaders. With those I thank you once again and I will wait to answer any questions. I will allow others on our team to also contribute.

**Mr George Kosui:** Thank you Bills and Legislation Committee for inviting us to be part of this dialogue to look at this very important Bill for Solomon Islands. I think my President and the General Secretary have covered most of the things I may want to say. And so I will make a few comments in regards to the view of the technical committee of Ma'asina Forum on this Bill.

My name is George Kosui and I am the head of the technical team of the MMF. I think without repeating what the president and the GS have already said, I have written an article a week ago titled "what's wrong with Solo?" and one of the things I discussed is the use of the

RCDF in the rural areas, which is its rightful place. Just to emphasize again that I think that is its rightful place because it is the right place of the people the name of the fund states and should not be disbursed in Honiara.

The second thing about this bill is that there is need for this bill to be specific. We see individuals, communities and even small family groups seeking assistance from this fund. The practice all along I have seen in most of the constituencies is that the funds given are for two things: one is consumption and the other is productive investment. Which is which? If it is about consumption then it has to be mentioned in the bill as well that the money allocated for development is not for consumption. Just to be a little bit clear whether it is for economic or productive investment to help development at the constituency level.

One other thing, I think in talking about bills, it is very important that it is not the number of bills passed in here that counts, but the quality of the bill itself. Thus, the MMF sees that in talking about this bill, there are some issues in relation to the processes and procedures of monitoring. I think the MMF has seen, and is common knowledge that if you talk about spending of public funds regardless of the RCDF being for cocoa or coconut or whatever, it is public fund, and it is spelt out very clearly, even under the constitution that Financial Instructions govern how the funds are used, who is the authorised signatory and all those. Talking about Financial Instructions, it is specific that accountable officers are usually the permanent secretaries. If you talk about this then there needs to be a bit more touch in terms of this bill in order to hit the head of the nail that the accountable is the PS, and how can you connect the officer in the rural areas in terms of compiling of reports, monitoring or even if something goes wrong, because at the end of the day the PS is usually the person who will be quizzed on how the funds are used. It is on that basis that the MMF sees in terms of the Financial Instructions, there has to be a clear line as to how it is emphasised here in the bill itself.

Another point as well, the GS has already mentioned that the appointment of committees, which is part and parcel of the group that talk about project submissions or even signatories to the accounts, there is the tendency that some members, if power is given to them, might handpick and there might a bit of biasness in terms of the committee and fairness

in the committee that will assess projects can be biased towards probably voters, will be in the committee. Thus, it will exclude those who did not vote for the member as it is now will not get anything, even if I ask for bus fare I will not be given anything out of the CDF. There is a tendency that there might be biasness. Some clarification as to the independence of the committee has to be spelled out as well.

Without repeating what my bosses have already said, I think the processes and the procedure is what I want to emphasise again that monitoring and the full process and reporting has to be spelt out clearly because clause 11(e) says “ensure that the accounting procedures as prescribed by the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Finance are adhered to”. I don’t know what this is referring to because the only one I know is the Financial Instructions (FI), so something has to be spelled out as to who is to give the procedures or are there any other procedures. That has to be made clear as well. But all in all, I think our main concern is the Financial Instructions, the PS as the accountable officer, but as can be noted the person giving approval is the member, and who is to be questioned, it is the Member in terms of reporting and accountability. That is the question. The accountable officer according to FI is the PS. You can also see this on the sample of the form, it is the MP who endorses and approves the application, which means that the PS is answerable to what the MP signs. I think that must be made clear as well.

Without further comments that is all I have on this Bill from the technical committee of the MMF. Thank you once again Mr Chairman and your Committee.

**Mr Delson Wale:** I want to endorse what the President has stated earlier on. The intended purpose of the fund is to maintain the integrity of Members of Parliament. As the years go by, we can see that people are no longer respecting our members of Parliament. I think this Bill is important to come at this time so that we maintain the integrity of the House.

It is a concern that our members of Parliament are no longer respected. The use of the fund at the moment is the cause of the disrespect shown to our members. People even call members “con-man”. It is important and timely that the intended purposes of the fund are maintained. Thank you.

**Mr Henry Ata Daokalia:** All in all I commend our speakers on this Bill, they did very well, and I hope you will come up with a good bill that takes care of our rural people as funds are intended for, for our rural people. It is evident through the media that people complain week in, week out for so long now and so I think it is long overdue, and we are looking forward to a good bill that will take care of our rural people's need and that would be justice. Thank you.

**Mr Chairman:** Thank you very much Mr President and your team for coming. I understand that we will be receiving a written submission from you to follow up on what you've just said so we look forward to that so that we can get your views in writing.

**Mr Chairman:** We seem to pick up from you that you really don't have any problem with, I guess the principles of the strategy to channel funds through Members of Parliament. We take it that that's not a real issue with you. You are more concerned about proper administration of this fund so that it reaches the people and used for the purpose for which it is intended under the budget. I guess that is the crux of the submission you put to us, so we will be interested to get your elaborate views on that so that it can help us advise Parliament and maybe the government.

This bill will not come into force until the 1<sup>st</sup> of January next year from what we get from the Ministry of Rural Development. The Committee grappled with some of the issues you raised here because the bill is a bit silent on some of these areas, for example, it does not come up with a proper governance structure right to the constituency level in order to achieve a number of objectives outlined in the bill. It is still very much heavily reliant on Members of Parliament and of course the Ministry so there needs to be a lot more work on the bill before it can achieve its full objectives, in the view of the Committee.

Just to get your views on some of the issues that have already been placed with the Committee. There are, of course, others who basically have the opposite view altogether that this is not the direction to go. We appreciate the submissions by the President and the background of how this fund came about. There are views expressed that this is probably the

wrong direction, we should not go down that direction, and probably it is the question of now maybe challenging the roles of Members of Parliament that we are legislators and we should not really be involved in administering the work of the executive in the delivery of services.

There are points like that placed before the Committee already. What are your views on that? Is there something we need to pursue maybe further? And if that's the case, how can we address it? And I think there is a point here because Members of Parliament are elected to be legislators. We should function inside here, read bills and read the business of Parliament and not act as project managers, project supervisors and coordinators in our constituencies.

But there is also the other side of the story and I think the background was well said by the President as to how this fund came about. It seems that the development needs of the constituencies were not specifically addressed. When everybody fights for a pool of resources from the consolidated fund or from the provincial budget, some people, some constituencies, some wards are going to be left out. When it is targeted down to constituencies, we can be sure that the \$350,000 will go for agriculture projects in the constituency, \$147,000 will go for reforestation in the constituency, \$400,000 plus will go to tourism development in the constituency and so on so that you are sure. This year we are talking about \$5.7 million that will go through the constituencies. Three or more of that money goes through line ministries and not the discretion of Members of Parliament; the Member of Parliament does not have any say in them. If it is an agriculture project then it is agriculture project. And the Member of Parliament should just direct where the funds should go. That is the other side of the story that we need to weigh that we are not project coordinators or managers. But in the interest of constituency development, the person who is in charge of that political district called "constituency" must have a say. That is the other side of the story as well.

What is your view on this doctrine of separation of powers? Members of Parliament should not, and that is the very fundamental question here. If that is the case and if the law actually stands as it is and is pushed through and says "yes, Members should not be doing the work of the executive", then we might really need to re-think this whole thing again. How do you see this? You may want to comment on that.

**Mr Charles Dausabea:** I only told you one side of the story earlier on today when we introduced the discretionary fund in the beginning. Why members were involved in the first place is because at that time applications to DBSI normally recommended by members did not receive fair treatment. For example, if a person from Choiseul is the boss of DBSI, then all the projects for Choiseul will be approved. Because of that we thought how can this be avoided so that each member has some kind of funds so at least each constituency can have a share of that fund so that people can have access to those funds. That was the experience we have had in making funds go through members when we started the CDF. We started the CDF called the discretionary fund. That is the reason why it has to go through members in the beginning.

In regards to what you've raised that members are legislators and should not be involved in the execution of the fund, we think of it like this: what will become of our people, the people whom we represent. It is very obvious how we have been doing the elections. If you are a person that foreign donors don't like, they will do what they can to oust you with the use of money. This is obvious unless there are people who do not recognise this. But leadership in the Melanesian way always goes with culture. You cannot separate those. So when you are a father, everyone looks to you as the father. We therefore did not have the thinking that "members should not be part of this fund". Of course, you represent a constituency but what we want to see is transparency, how you disburse the funds, like we have recommended. We want you to involve ward members in your constituency, for example, the Hon MP for East Honiara should involve ward members of East Honiara. How many members in your wards should participate in the disbursement of these funds so that it is transparent. That is all we want to see because there are always two sides to a coin. We as the legislators must be the legislators. But we can go on being legislators but be mindful that people are digging a hole at your back. This means you have to look after your people at the same time, especially when money these days is the major player. But what we want is what you do with the funds and how you do it must be transparent, like we had earlier expressed our objection to the CDO being a signatory to the account because he is a public officer. We want one or two of your ward members to be signatories so that you can work together to look after our people. That is our point. Of course, you have done returns for the past years.

Our stand is that we do not oppose the Member of Parliament being a signatory to the account or be left out. No, it is his constituency, he is the father to that place and his children are in the constituency. You do not only make laws but you must also feed your children. That is why we only recommend transparency in that area. But the leader there must have the right to take care of his people. We do not want to rule MPs totally out and leave this entirely to the others. No, only transparent is what we want and as the head of my technical team said, certain areas need to be spelled out in the bill. I am not a lawyer but some wordings in the bill are not right. That is what our GS who is a lawyer also confirms. This bill needs to be relooked at whether it was drafted by the AG Chambers or done by some offices somewhere there and then bringing it here. This is true. That is what we see, and our GS is a lawyer himself and he already questions this bill when it was given to us. This bill needs to be done properly that if it did not go through the AG Chambers then it must go through that office. Why rush this bill here? I question this rush. This bill will come into force in January.

There are other bills that we really need before this bill. They should find money and come around to Auki, to Isabel, Choiseul and so forth. This is a very important bill that needs wider consultations so that you hear straight from the people themselves.

To answer directly what you've said, we do not have any objection to members being part of the fund; not at all, because he is the head of the constituency. It is how you disburse the funds that must be transparent; make it clear so that everyone sees how it is being done. Criticizing is one thing but when you come in to lead is also different. I am someone who has already gone through this and so I know what it is like. Another thing mentioned by my GS is also very important because I am also one of the victims. When drafting bills do it properly otherwise someone will use it to bite us with.

Bills are good but look at their objectives and whether they are really genuine. As a layman I would like to stress again that it seems like this bill did not go through

the AG Chambers. If it is not, then you need to relook at it. You also need to put proper wordings into it, like the question by my head of technical team has raised earlier on is also important where another person approves it and another person is answerable to the PS/Finance. That is not right.

That's my view on this bill, we do not object to members being part of it but if there needs to be law then you need to put it up, but we do not see it as right for a father of a place or a constituency not to feed your children but you only make laws for them. Just look at balancing it properly so that as a leader you talk in parliament, make laws and at the same time look after the welfare of your people. Leadership in the Melanesian way is always knitted together with our culture. When you are a leader people come to you, just like our chiefly system of the past. If something goes wrong in the village, people do not go to anyone else but they go to the chief. When they go to the chief but the chief does not have any pigs then the problem cannot be solved.

We are happy about members' involvement and even if they direct it and are signatory to the funds. We are only asking for transparency so that funds fall direct on the constituency. This is why we put in the beginning that it has to go through members so that at least, even though it's \$10, the 50 constituencies can each get 25 cents. So that if a leader does not give his share to his children it will be obvious and then let the people judge. We support that leaders should take leadership both in parliament and in the welfare of our people.

**Mr Charles Ashley:** I just want to add a bit to answer your important question Chairman. In fact, we want the involvement of national MPs in the CDF as opposed to those that oppose it saying that as legislators you just make laws. The MMF feels that you should be part of it; you are the member for that constituency so you have to know what is going on in that constituency. The process leading up to you agreeing and putting your signature there is what we see as the safeguard and the transparency that



we wanted. This is because any application as we see it, must go to the constituency (we will call it) secretariat and he/she screens all the applications and the member of parliament and the other ward members of the constituency make the decision, and if the decision is in the affirmative then they sign the cheque. We see nothing wrong with that. In fact, a lot of organisations operate that way. For example, the NPF, the board of trustees or directors are the signatories to the account but the actual preparation of everything is done by the administration. Because the Member of Parliament is to be answerable he has to know what is going on in his constituency. We do not see any problems with that and we would be for the Member of Parliament to be a part of that.

**Hon. Milner Tozaka:** I also join the Chairman in thanking you for coming. I am very happy to listen to your presentations.

I would like to ask a question in regards to the President's comments. He endorses the constituency that the government should go down to the constituency. That is what you've implied, that the office should be down there in the constituency. You've also stated that you only wanted to see transparency and accountability, which is very important too. That is exactly what this bill is seeking to do. But how can that happen? At the moment, the bill only mentions two key people, which are the Member of Parliament and the CDO. When you look at this arrangement and say North Vella, this office will be in North Vella, in my constituency because it is easy and they have supporters there.

You also talked about, and I share with you about our culture but when we change again, this set up may not be agreed upon by the people then the MP might also like to set up another office in his constituency. And so the story goes. This is why when I look at this bill, I know where you come from because I was also working on a similar structure with the late Ulufa'alu, and our proposal is to devolve the government or send the government down to the constituency level. But what we also recommended to the government then is the structure as to how the system is going to deliver, its impartiality and so forth will happen. This particular bill is fine but it is a part of the system that we also recommended at that time to come in. My

question to you is, do you want to see that happen in this bill that you want to see the structure when you say that we are pushing it down to the constituency?

**Mr Charles Dausabea:** Yes, structure is the important thing that must be in this bill. But those of us sitting down here are discussing what is now on paper. I think the government should have done that in the beginning. It should have called us to meet with them in the first place, so that it is included in the bill. But now we are discussing a bill that is already drafted. And so it does not matter how much we may say now, only recommendations will be made to parliament. It is you who will speak in Parliament, the Chairman and your members, who are members of Parliament and you could raise that. I do not think anything we make here will make any changes. What I really wanted to see is the structure as you've stated. Never mind, one important part of the bill is that the office has to be in the constituency. That is the most important part because we should not make life hard life for our constituents who even cannot afford sea fares to come across to Honiara and have to ask their neighbours to contribute towards their sea fares. And when they come over here and the answer is 'no', they find it difficult to return home.

I think if we could recommend and if it is now late then you can make amendments later in Parliament. But the way we are discussing now, the bill is already drafted and the things we are saying here will form part of the recommendations you are going to put to Parliament. But if the government has the number, this bill will go through, doesn't matter whatever good things we say here will not be considered. That is the way we have been observing how you are going. All good things you have been telling the government have fallen on deaf ears. The government says 'let us just go ahead'.

I would very much like to see what you have said – the structure. But again I do not think the government will take it up because the bill is already here before us. That is what they should have done before drafting of this bill. They should have made wider consultations to take in all our views, put them in the bill and then come here for the final touches, so that when it is tabled in parliament it is passed unanimously. Had that been done, it would truly be

the people's bill. But the one we are discussing now is a government bill; it is not the people's bill because there was no consultation done before drafting of the bill.

And as I've said, I am not a lawyer but I can see some of the sections here as not straight. I said it, my technical team head also raised it that a different person approves it and a different person is answerable to another person, but it is the Financial Instructions that we should be answerable to, not a person. Those are the things that we see as not straight. But like I've said I really want to see the structure. Let us see how they will respond to the recommendations whether they will accept it or not. But I think this bill, if I am not wrong, is already noticed for debate.

**Mr Chairman:** Not yet.

**Mr Charles Dausabe:** If that is the case, and the government can take our recommendations seriously and wants to re-do it, then I will be very happy. The honourable for North Vella, if they listen to us, I want you to push in the structure so that it becomes part of this bill with that office down there. That is my explanation.

**Mr Charles Ashley:** Just to add on to that, if they are not able to put into the main bill some of the things we are discussing now, there is the provision of the regulations so that at least the minister responsible and those in the ministry can put in place the regulations that will help these things to work.

**Hon Derek Sikua:** I want to join you Mr Chairman to thank the executive of the MMF in taking time to come and appear before the Committee besides their busy schedules. I also want to thank them for a very thorough presentation.

I have two questions. Firstly, listening to what the General Secretary was saying on the issue of the Constituency Development Funds not being used for individuals but for the constituency. That is what I wanted to ask a question on. In terms of individual requests that members do receive from individuals when a person dies or when a person is sick at the

hospital, sometimes for compensation or bride-price, Church festivals and activities and things like that which usually comes from individual groups and not constituency development like the technical officer stated are consumptions and not development whereas the funds are for development. What is a member going to do in such a case when it comes from individuals? Where do we look for funds to assist our people in their individual requests if the Constituency Development Funds are not for individual requests, which is not development in nature? That is my first question.

My second question is I am interested to get the views of the MMF on the issue of disparity in allocations. At the moment all the constituencies are getting the same amount in funds. But there are big constituencies with about 30,000 or 25,000 in that constituency, for example Central Kwara'ae, East Honiara, Central Honiara and on the other side you have; and I am not picking on our brothers from Rennell/Bellona but there are just about 2,000 of them all up. And yet they all get the same allocation of say for this year, maybe more than \$5million. What is the view of the Forum on different populations, different development trends, different geographical spreads and so forth? And you know in some constituencies when you buy roofing irons they have to be freighted to their different destinations, different from those of us in Guadalcanal where we use vehicles and we reach our destination. But we still have the same allocations. What is the view of the MMF on this issue? Do we need to sort of have varying allocation for constituencies or leave it as it is? We are talking about fairness here. I am just interested as to the MMF's view on that.

The other one too in relation to my first question is we also receive applications from people not within the constituencies but outside, like church groups wanting to build churches they make appeals to Members of Parliament. What about these sorts of situations? Just want to get the views of the MMF.

**Mr. Charles Ashley:** Yes, there are two questions and I will answer the first question and the President will answer the second one. The first one on individual requests, I think our leaders have to tell our people too that this is the Constituency Development Fund. Individual request

should be treated as such, 'individual request and it is up to the member of Parliament how he feels he should deal with those individual requests.

This is going to be law if it is passed and it should be accepted and seen by our people to do with constituency development. That is my response to that and I will have something to say on the second question after the President answers it.

**Mr Charles Dausabea:** The point raised by the Committee member and Leader of the Opposition is true. I think the biggest constituency is East Honiara and the others follow suit. I know in the elections in 2010 that there are about 39,000 registered voters, the list is with me. And when you look at those who are under 18 years of age, I think the whole of Solomon Islands are living in that constituency.

This is an issue we have been raising all along, a long time ago during my time as MP for East Honiara. It is very unfair. Because when we look at other constituencies like the Malaita Outer Islands and Renbell, you can tell and compare that to the population of Central Kwara'ae and other constituencies as well. We think that this fund should be distributed fairly. There should be a survey carried out on constituency population and how much to divide by each person and then do the distribution.

I think former leaders in the past and even some present leaders are not comfortable with this because what I found out during our time is that when we tried to share the funds fairly, MPs in smaller constituencies wanted to walk away from the government and so the boss became very worried. He was worried and so he left it as it is. I think those of us from the bigger constituencies should have done the same too by walking away if the distribution remains the same. I mean let us make it fair. I think fairness must be applied here. When this becomes law we cannot alter it, so I think it should be by per population; we want to go that way so that it is fair to all of us. It would not be fair for the constituency of Ulawa/Ugi with a population of about 5,000 to receive the same amount of funds with a constituency of 2,000 people. But it is even worse with

the MP for East Honiara who receives the same amount as those from the smaller constituencies. If we are talking about fairness, somehow when it comes to the regulations part, the Minister must work on it.

But what I have seen is that when we try to work on it, the smaller constituencies wanted to walk away and so the government became destabilized and so we left it as it is. But then it was us the bigger constituencies that remained quiet because we should have also walked away so that the boat is shaken. Anyway, this has been an ongoing issue that was raised way back in the 70s. Even the former MP for Central Kwara'ae, the late Fred Fono also raised this because his population is about 16,000 in Central Kwara'ae.

Please if your Committee is to make any recommendations, request the Minister to make the regulations to be fair to our highly populated constituencies. That's how we would like it to be done.

**Mr Charles Ashley:** Just to add on to that to answer your question, one way of addressing that is we believe that if every application goes to the secretariat, the more constituents in a constituency at least applications should go to the secretariat for whatever they want. The way the bill is drafted and if my understanding of it is correct, those applications go to the constituency secretariat and from there they go to the ministry. Whilst the national government will decide on the problem we are addressing now that each constituency will receive the same amount, it maybe that not all of it will be used for the development of that constituency, unless there are more applications for the use of that money for that constituency. For example, if Temotu Pele or Temotu Nende constituencies, because the number of people they have is less than East Honiara, I think that not that many applications will come so that if the ministry responsible actually pays out the money to the different constituencies can manage that properly, then I think this fairness can be addressed.

**Mr George Kosui:** I just want to comment on what the GS and the President have said. I want to comment on this point of fair distribution. I was involved a bit with some members in trying to facilitate a few things to improve processes like the requisition process and other things and I can see that in some constituencies, some people from different constituencies come for the projects. And we can see that there is no control to this, even the MP himself cannot control it. Or even politically because somebody from a different constituency comes to vote for him at election day, thus inflating the population of that particular constituency.

I just want to say that other issues raised like wantoks coming with urgent matters such as a wantok has died and therefore cannot be ignored and relatives go to the MP, I would like to suggest that a discretionary or a special fund is put aside to address emergency issues and things like that. You cannot turn back people, you cannot look elsewhere and so this should be the only fund you can tap to address our people's needs. You might as well consider looking at a special fund. It might open a gap in a way that some will say it is open to abuse, but again it has to come to the discipline of the MP in terms of that.

It is clearly spelled out in there that anything to do with this bill and this fund is development and it's up to the committee that will come to assess the projects to see which projects are development, which ones are relevant and which ones are not, which ones are true, and those kinds of analysis. That sort of process should be strengthened and whoever is there to chair the committee, the public officer with the other members to consider the projects to fit the budget. Because a budget is a budget in terms of money because you cannot say 'I want an additional \$2million for some more applications'. That process must be spelled out clearly here.

On the other pointed made by Dr Derek in terms of other immediate commitments, we are of the view of putting some funds aside because it's part and

parcel of things that happen to us, so might as well consider having something aside to address issues like that. But just be cautious otherwise everybody looks but only your wantoks from Burnscreek come asking for that fund. That is a concern we also have to consider. Whilst the process is right but some external issues and factors have to be looked into as well to look at small things like that.

**Hon James Tora:** Many written submissions have been coming in and most of them totally do not want MPs to be involved in this bill, the MP must be totally removed, for instance, to be the signatory to the account and also the CDO. But as the President of the Ma'asina Forum stated, and I can also see that this team is here with a Melanesian heart and not a foreign heart. I therefore fully support your views.

I would just like to get your views, if at all this bill somehow comes and because of strong recommendations made by groups that appear before the Committee and it is the Committee that will make the recommendations in the report, somehow this bill is delayed or members of parliament are removed, what is your view on increasing the salaries of MPs. Now we are seeing our people always depending on members of Parliament. They look at the Member of Parliament as their father in the constituency. If people come to Honiara and they face difficulties, they will not go to their relatives but they go to their Member of Parliament. This is very true.

I would like to get the views of the President and your team of the Ma'asina Forum on the idea of increasing MPs salaries. MPs are receiving \$2,000 a fortnight as salaries and every time people come asking for help, what can we give to our families? What is your view on this? If some of our privileges and entitlements are taken away from us, what is your view? I just want to put this across to your team your view in the future, I am not saying tomorrow, but to increase the salary of members of Parliament from \$2,000 to a much higher figure?

**Mr George Kosui:** I think the view of the MMF is that salary usually increases according to the cost of living; salaries are adjusted according to the cost of living. If you have to increase just



because you have to satisfy your constituents, then I think that requires some more views from others. It is becoming more political in a way and not measured against what the real indicator is, like the cost of living adjustment (COLA).

We suggested that now that the constituency development fund is to be at the constituency level, we might as well look at an emergency sort of fund to take care of issues like that. In case you increase your salary but there is no indicator and that would be questionable. That is just a comment.

**Mr Charles Dausabea:** We have a legal system where salaries of Members of Parliament go through, the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission. I think we are not the right body to say yes or no. It is also measured in line with what the head of my technical team has said, the cost of living adjustment. If the cost of living increases, then certainly. Submissions will go to the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission and from there they will justify it. Any justifications made by the Parliamentary Entitlement Commission, according to information it gathers, whether based on COLA or whatever, we will always support that legal entity on whatever decision it arrives at.

**Hon. Douglas Ete:** I would like to extend a word of thanks that you have come. An important constituent to influence public policy is this team here, apart from every other stakeholder that influences the policies of making laws in the country, this team is one of the important constituents to influence policy making.

I am very happy that you have raised some important things here, and I just want to make a comment. The reason for doing that is to give funds to members and we, members have some funds as discretionary funds. It is not RCDF which is for constituency development purposes. We have a little bit of funds there running into nearly half a million dollars per annum, part of the \$5.8million under the *2013 Appropriation Act 2013* we passed last year.

The argument in support of getting funds channelled through different sources down to this new animal is because it bears with it community participation. It is the community that participates in it, which is good rather than the funds being stationed at institutions like the

Ministry of Forestry, the Ministry of Fisheries and the Ministry of Agriculture all having funds there. That would not be right, and the arguments 'for' and 'against' that we are debating are already in the mainstream media, as we have known.

One of the arguments 'for' this is that it speeds up the process because it bypasses the bureaucracy and the red tapes hanging in the ministries and really reaches the rural areas, which is true. That, I do not dispute, it is very true.

The other argument for, which is a cosmic argument, is that it is actually the decentralization policy that we are doing now, but not going through institutions. We made an institution that is called the 'Constituency Development Institution'. Actually, we are institutionalizing this whole thing by virtue of legislation. We will now have legal support and that is why this bill is here.

I quite agree with what the Chairman and the President have said that there are no wider consultations made on this bill. I think that is true. But the arguments against are these. No, it violates what is called the 'Latimer House principles on the separation of powers. I can say that I came out of the ballot box not to dish funds, and rural development is not about dishing funds. That is the argument.

The argument against is: what if a Member of Parliament has discretion over that fund and the Member of Parliament says "I want this project in the plan", "I want this bridge project here", "I want this cocoa house here", "I want 10 piggeries here", "I want this, it has to be inserted in the plan", and the plan must be agreed to by the Ministry of Planning and Rural Development. The Member of Parliament has to say "yes" to it before funds can be disbursed, and my accountant and whoever is there is to do it. In my mind, I am looking forward to the day when parliamentarians do not sign cheques but I still have my hands on my funds.

I will give one classic example here. Last year before the FOPA started, the tourism fund of East Honiara was already used up. We paid it directly to those who apply based on assessments. For us in East Honiara, they published us in the media along with one or two constituencies. But many members of parliament are left out. Only a few benefitted.

In my mind there is no need for me to retire those funds by virtue of an acquittal because it is paid directly to the people. But it is me as their Member of Parliament that

directed or approved the projects. I think I feel at ease with this arrangement, not having people running after me asking me to sign 10 cheques today, another 10 tomorrow and so on. That is an argument against it.

Another argument against it is this view that it weakens the real institutions. We are running a parallel thing here. And I am quite happy with the idea and the argument of the Ma'asina Forum, the President and the General Secretary, who were saying, 'no, if it does not happen this way, you get the member of Parliament and a committee comprising different layers of, and I think the President mentioned this, different layers of government in our country to sign the cheques, which is not in this current bill. I am quite happy about that.

The other issue I am quite happy about is the governance issue. If you look at this bill, it is absent of any governance issue. At what level is the exposure? In regards to transparency, at what level are we being transparent to our constituents, and not only our constituents but the people of Solomon Islands at large. That is not in this bill and I am quite happy that you have raised that. That point was also raised yesterday and we say that it is true.

Integrity and behavioral issues of the internal structures of this bill, and by internal structures I mean the Member of Parliament, the CDO and the financial controller, what behaviors would they display, would their behaviors come in the regulations or not?

This morning Transparency International said that the regulations must come with the bill so that we can see the whole body of the pig. What you are doing now is like chopping off the head of the pig and throwing it here without its whole body being seen, in which I as a committee member am quite happy with the expressions mentioned. Bring the whole thing here so that we see it. If you want to bring a bill to parliament, then bring it with its regulation so that we can see the full body of the pig so that we can see whether it is red, black or what colour. Otherwise we are not telling the truth, we might say it is a red pig when in fact it is actually a black pig when brought in here.

I am just commenting here that if this is a governance issue as we've raised, we would be mitigating some misdeeds that have happened. Today I can see that once this bill is passed as it is, and the Cabinet does not take into account the recommendations of the Chairman, as as you've said, no one would be able to beat us in the next house; the full house will come back,

and that infringes upon the democratic principles as to who comes out from the ballot box in 2014.

Secondly, if it is the governance issue that the President, the technical person and the General Secretary have raised, it means that today is the opening of the day that all of us members of Parliament will be imprisoned because as it is, it is ambiguous here, and you being a lawyer have directly stated. When I heard what you said, I said to myself that the General Secretary, Mr. Charles Ashley is saying something that is very true. This is because the way this bill is written is really ambiguous as you've rightfully stated Mr. General Secretary.

Those are some of my comments.

In passing, I would like to say that East Honiara by virtue of the constituency itself is the largest constituency in the whole of Solomon Islands. Choiseul Province has a population of 21,000 but there are more than 30,000 people in just one constituency of East Honiara. Choiseul has three Members of Parliament and East Honiara is only one MP. The point made by Honourable James Tora is very appropriate because gender balance is to be imputed into this bill, then my comment is that you have to look into the fair distribution of resources which is imbedded in the preamble of the constitution. Thank you very much.

**Mr Chairman:** Thank you very much Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. Maybe let's have the Leader of the Independent Group if he would like to respond and then we will conclude.

**Hon John Maneniaru:** I too would like to thank the President, the General Secretary and members of the Malaita Ma'asina for making their presentation before the Committee this afternoon.

I have one comment and a question to make. I join my colleague member for East Honiara and Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee on the comment he made about this bill. What he said is very true that whilst we are trying to look for a

mechanism of accountability and transparency, on the other side of it, it also looks at the opportunity for some people to go behind the bars. It doesn't mean we should be afraid of it, but what you have said is very good and clear and I would like to commend you for that wisdom.

This hinges on the fact that this bill is directed at Members of Parliament and the CDO is an employee of the MP at present, and only those two. Today, current Members of Parliament have a lot of enemies because we are coming close to 2014, and if this bill is passed, it looks like some MPs will go behind the bar and will not contest the 2014 elections. And that could be as the General Secretary has said, some people really want access to such things. And is that good for our country when we are struggling to develop and bring it up or are there better ways of managing ourselves and our issues. I would like to register that comment.

I would like to take us back to the intention of the Constituency Development Fund as highlighted by the President earlier on. I can see the good intentions behind it and it sort of really go in line with our culture as we are Melanesians, and our people have respect for the chiefs as their father in the community or villages. They are the first people they will call upon before they go to the next line of people and down.

We cannot really sort of put aside this thinking as it is within our blood. And so when there is provision for it to uphold that office and those holding the offices, our honourable Members I can see that it makes sense.

On accountability and transparency, I think a part of it has been highlighted, which I also agree with and I said we need it because it is people's funds that we are accountable to or are entrusted to us leaders and therefore it is very important.

Another thing is service delivery direct to our people and the original thinking is that if it doesn't work for some constituencies, say in agriculture, only a few, maybe if your wantok is there you would be lucky to get assistance, but if not then your

constituency for how many years will not get anything. That is the history we've had and it still continues to exist until today.

Even now there is no fair distribution at all. I mean some of us who are in the independent don't get anything. If you are not in the government, you will not get anything; over and above what is normally given to the constituency, you are left out. It only goes to constituencies that support the government and only those that are lucky. I think that's the right way of saying it. That is why it is causing a lot of instability in our politics today. People keep running away from the opposition and independent, even though they don't want the government but they have to join the government because extra funds are there and that is where funds are accessible. This can cause and grow instability in our democratic country.

My question is if this bill is passed we are going to have the ministry (the government), the provincial government and the constituency. These three will be responsible for service delivery to constituents or the rural people, and where will their boundaries be. What will the national government be responsible for? What will the provincial government be responsible for? And what will the constituency development fund be responsible for when we are talking about the same people in the same constituency and in the same location? That is not very clear in the bill. There is going to be duplication here.

If the trend now continues, it looks like the constituency will take over from the ministry (the government), it will take over from the provincial government and where will those two be. That's one question I want to put across.

There is no mention of provincial government in the bill so maybe it would be good for some provincial governments to be made redundant because they are not serving their purpose and function to their people. And when you put the ward members to be joint signatory with the national members, there is one practical side that I can see.

Secondly, seeing that the members are under the provincial government, which is an institution with also similar functions and grants, who will be signing the provincial grants that ward members are receiving? Is it the members? Or should we say the people make up the constituency. We make up the governance structure and the people themselves do it because it is their money. The people sign with the provincial member for the ward grants. In the bill, it is still a national function. I want to get your views on that.

Another question I have is accountability and transparency of honourable member is in this bill. What about our constituents who are the recipients of the funds? That is the question asked. Where is the accountability of the constituents? If the funds for tourism, as raised by my colleague member, Leader of Opposition yesterday that people got the funds for tourism but did not use it as intended or they got drunk with it, where is its accountability? Is this bill only concerned with the MPs, what about the recipients in the constituencies. What is the Forum's view on this?

**Mr Charles Dausabea:** Thank you member for that question. You may have heard what my GS said that this bill is like a razor blade that is sharp on both sides. It is to cut another person but if you do not handle it properly, it can also cut you. As I have said to you members, I am one of the victims, and that was when this bill was not yet in place. But now that you are coming up with this bill, you will see people running to the offices to collect copies of the funds in order to use it against you, as my GS has raised.

Your question in regards to the provincial member and the national member, I think there could be a way out because the national government also controls the provincial government so that rather than the funds going to the provincial government, it comes through this fund.

The point on duplication you've mentioned has also happened. What we would like to see are the end results in the constituency. Because as the Member for East Honiara

mentioned, this amount, some people are having sleepless nights about it. They are listening out and looking for anything to happen. It is the end result the people are looking for. If that amount of money goes down to the constituency, today we should be better off. That is what our people are complaining about. This is why the office has to go down to the constituency, and this comes down to the idea of the late Ulufa'alu – for the constituency to do down. But then Mr Chairman, you took it up when you formed the next government, and that is to go down to the people. What we wanted is coordination between the national member and the provincial member, because at the end of the day we are targeting the same people.

We do not want division there whereby some go with the provincial member and the others go with the national member. You are the father of the constituency. What you said is true about funds in the province. You might as well just tell your colleague in the provincial government to just put it through this fund so that all of you can sit down together and talk about only one project in order to properly manage the project, to avoid one person having a piggery here and another also has one there. This is disunity when you are supposed to be uniting those people. It is very easy for the government system to do that. But I do not know what is the mind of the government because all of us sitting here are not from the government side. We can only talk but I do not think they will take what we say into consideration. That is the sad thing about this kind of meeting because it is up to them to take them onboard otherwise people hear what we are saying but at the end of the day there is nothing.

What you've said is true, Hon. John Maneniaru that they did not talk about the fund for this person. I think the office down there at the seaside has to explain this. Because this bill once it comes into force, as my GS has said as a lawyer, this is a constituency development fund and nothing else. Therefore, the name 'constituency development' alone, even if you use this fund just to help people, you will be answerable for it and you may end up in court because the name of the fund is for development purposes.

But our culture says that you are the father. There are only two things that unite us the Melanesians: death and marriage, and those things for sure, being a former member, people come to me for those things, and I know they also come to you. Nobody can deny that. That is why I say our culture must be taken into consideration.



When the head of my technical team talked about a special fund, if what the Member for East Honiara said is true, then fair and well as that will look after that component. But what we want is for national and provincial members to work together, and you are the leader because they are just provincial members. Get ideas from those in the provincial governments and the national so that the constituency can work in unison and not the other one pulling the other, like two blind men inside a canoe who wanted to escape but one face the one direction and the other in the opposite direction. They kept paddling thinking they were running away but they remain in the same spot. But we would like to see is unity and working together so that the constituency has maximum benefit at the end of the day because when we judge you at home, we will judge you according to the things in the constituency. If the cocoa plantation never increases but we hear that money was given out already, people will question that. We've seen that some cocoa funds were used to buy vehicles. Can you plant the cocoa trees first before you buy a vehicle? That is what we want in our working together, but the way this bill is drawn, it only talks about you. Be careful, otherwise 'only you' is in this bill because it will only be you.

This bill is targeting honourable members and I can only say that this bill's motive is different. It seems like it is to keep you here and nothing to do with what we are trying to talk about here. Because even though we may talk until the evening, it cannot change the motive of the bill. We want to see togetherness in the provinces so that our people in the constituencies have maximum benefits.

We want the funds to be disbursed in the constituencies and not in Honiara. Most of the funds are released in Honiara and that is what we really objected. We want you to meet at the constituency office, make disbursement at the constituency office and people collecting their materials or payment at the constituency office, and not in Honiara where they come sitting down here until there is nothing and they go back home. So that people know what time the honourable member will come down to release the funds to pay for the projects. It is transparency and accountability that we want and working together by both provincial members and national members of a constituency so that we do it for the betterment of our constituents and wards. That is how I can answer you honourable John. Thank you.

**Mr Charles Ashley:** Just a part of the question by the honourable member is those people who took funds and whether we should legislate as to how to bring them to account for the funds they received. Like maybe they get money for tourism but they just use it to drink alcohol with it.

I think it is a straight forward thing like one check and balance that we want to make submission on is when people make their applications, the constituency secretariat or whoever is manning that office must carry out proper checks on the applications before funds are actually released rather than waiting to pay out the funds and then it ended up like that. But in situations it ended up like that, then constituency should have the right to pursue it through legal means. And I would suggest doing it in a civil matter rather than trying to criminalise everything. There is a way to taking back the government's money. It is just pointless as a government when we criminalise activities of our people by sending them to Rove and the government pays for their upkeep there. Our people should not go through that.

If we can get the money back from our people through the civil courts, do it that way and not criminalize it. It would be our government and our people losing money just for the upkeep of people this way. I am saying this because I was there and I see what is happening there. The government spends about \$100 for each individual each day in that place. At this time I think about 250 to 300 of our people are there, so add that up. But if we can get that money back from them through the civil courts would be good. Let us not try to criminalise people, talk about them as it does not serve any purpose but we are just destroying ourselves. That is what I want to comment on. Thank you.

**Mr Chairman:** Thank you very much. I think we have exhausted everything we wanted to say and so we thank you very much for coming. We would, of course, expect a written submission from you to elaborate on the points you've made today so that they can be taken up. But I would like to take this opportunity to thank the President, the GS and members of the team for coming before the Committee on this very important bill.

