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MEDIA RELEASE

Release Meeting Minutes: NFP

The National Federation Party has called on the Electoral Commission to be transparent and release the minutes of their meeting of 7th March in which the Commission resolved to increase the number of parliamentary seats from 50 to 51 in the 2018 elections.

While the Section 4 of the Electoral Act mandates the Commission to only make public their decisions within 5 days, it is at extreme odds with the assurances made by the Attorney General and Minister for Elections when he was trying to sell his amendments in Parliament during the debate on 9th February 2017.

The Attorney General and Minister of Elections distinctly stated in Parliament that the **minutes will also be made available in the interest of transparency, and in line with the cherry-picked recommendations of the Multi-National Observer Group.**

The Hansard of that debate on the Parliament web-site on page 603, in paragraphs 3-6 (<http://parliament.gov.fj/getattachment/1e85b01d-2833-4ad4-ae21-f8c5c90621f9/Thursday-09-02-2017>) confirms this and we quote what the Minister for Elections said: -

“Paragraph 5, Madam Speaker, on page 9 of the Multinational Observer Group (MOG) Report states, and I quote:

“Despite a general invitation for the MOG to observe the meetings of the Electoral Commission in practice, invitations were not forthcoming. Furthermore the Minutes of the Electoral Commission’s meetings were not published, which limited the transparency of administrative preparation.”

“In other words, the Electoral Commission’s preparations and what they have discussed in the meetings were not available. The Minutes were not available and that is what the MOG observed”.

All correspondence should be addressed to the general secretary

“So, in order to do that, we made an amendment through Subsection (4A) to say they must publish the Minutes and the decisions. The requirement for the publication of decisions will greatly enhance the transparency, as I have highlighted on the electoral process.”

Since the Minister of Elections has made these pronouncements in the highest court of the land, it behooves the Electoral Commission to then follow through, in the interest of transparency and accountability.

The NFP cannot simply accept carte-blanche what the Commission said in arriving at the decision. The Commission Chairman told the media they considered population data provided by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics and the National Register of Voters. Together with the Minutes, the Commission should also release statistical data namely like projected population trend that led it to make the decision.

This is a simple matter and there is no reason why the Commission cannot adhere to the assurances provided by the Elections Minister.

Furthermore, the NFP anticipates that the Electoral Commission will open itself up to wider consultations with political parties and NGOs to have regular discussions in the lead up to 2018 elections.



Professor Biman Prasad
NFP Leader