

Gov't funding to churches

Thursday, 11 December
2008

DEAR EDITOR – The conceptual financial support from the Government to the Church refers to as “Tithes” is on again.

This time it is no longer in rhetoric, but in figures, the lump sum to be diverted to all the members of Parliament to give to their local churches.

Many people will view this step by the government as ‘Good’ Government that not only thinks of politics, but also about the welfare of the Church in Solomon Islands.

The funding says a lot about the government’s recognition of the contribution the church have towards all aspects of development and spiritual Development in this country.

However, the question that needs to be asked is this. What exactly is the government funding: “Church as a building” the activities of the Church, Church based schools and clinics, paying the salaries teachers and nurses that work specifically for the church or the welfare of the poor and the needy?

These are some of the Church activities that the government need to concentrate on when giving funding in the name of the church.

For the government to announce that a package of \$6.1 million had been put aside to be paid to the MPs to assist their local church with less strategic plan is most fearing.

There are certain important areas that the government has over looked, the role of the Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA) and the Ministry of Home Affairs.

SICA is an ecumenical Christian non-governmental organisation in the Solomon Islands that consist of the five largest Christian churches, the Anglican Church of Melanesia, the Roman Catholic Church, the South Seas Evangelical Church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and the United Church.

SICA also organises joint religious activities and religious representation at national events.

However, there are also establishment of other faith based organisations in the country that need to be considered in this sense.

SICA has its own structure in place. As an organisation it has a Board that deals with issues and challenges that affect the people (Church) in this country.

Therefore SICA is in a better position to be the recipient of such fund. It is not the responsibility of MPs to be giving funding to the local church without the involvement of SICA.

The role of the Ministry of Home Affairs as Chief of Administration system in our country to develop programmes that are relevant to facilitate civil participation and the economic and the development of our country needed to be seriously recognised by the government.

Its responsibility is to strengthen and to provide the services for institutions that come under its jurisdiction such as the Church, NGOs and Civil Society.

This is about mainstreaming these bodies so that each can draw from the resources of Central Ministry.

To be realistic, there is now an established Desk within the Ministry of Home Affairs that called “Special duties” that is responsible for religious issues and other matters.

The responsibility of the Government is to interact with churches through the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Solomon Islands Christian Association to provide financial and any other forms of assistance to the church in Solomon Islands.

The subject of the government diverting church funding to each Member of Parliament to give to his local church is a CONSPIRACY.

Why? This is again another planned tactic by the government. The debate has altered now from “TITHES” to “Government Assistance.”

Tithes are to be given directly to the church and that is one of the reasons why it has changed to Government Assistance.

In this way because it is Government assistance, it has to come from the government itself to their local churches.

Is it a current Policy now that any funding for the church in Solomon Islands has to come through the Members of Parliament?

Maybe such a strategy has been discussed between the cabinet, SICA, the Ministry of Home Affairs and other relevant bodies for such an funding to be directly given to the Members of Parliament for disbursement to their local churches.

For one this is an issue to be debated by policy makers and the religious Communities (SICA) in Solomon Islands.

Such a discussion will raise fundamental questions about whether and how government policies reflect the religious values in this country, as well as issues that deal with personal responsibility and social justice.

Majority of Solomon Islanders tend to support the concept of the church receiving government funding to provide effective services to its congregation, however for some it is troubling, in particular, the influence of government on particular churches and the impact of these churches and the people they are trying to assist.

The most powerful argument against such a proposal was the notion that government might get too involved in what religious organisations or the churches do.

The overall concern here is the fact that MPs are more upfront about receiving funding in the name of their constituencies, but rarely get in touch with their people about the real issues and needs of their constituents.

The MPs are receiving millions of dollars in the name of their constituencies from RCDF, MDG fund and the Micro-Project funding that targets the grassroots, yet people are still questioning the beneficial aspect of it.

The way the funding is channelled directly to the MPs is very suspicious. Is this another tactic played by the Members of Parliament in preparation for the 2010 national election?

Whatever the purpose of such a giving may be, only God knows.

In conclusion, I would like to say this to our leaders.

Your position to represent your people is not about putting yourself in a position of financial influence, but to empower your people by giving them sense of responsibility.

Members of Parliament should avoid being the recipients of funding that are purposely for the people of Solomon Islands, but look to explore other avenues.

MPs are Policy makers not so much Implementers. Being a leader is about trust and confidence in others.

Everything does not depend on you. What ever we do, it is about partnership, about placing responsibility on the shoulders of other Sectors within Solomon Islands to implement certain government policies on its behalf.

It is about recognising the roles of other institutions, their capability with a sense of confidence and trustworthiness.

Finally, the decision made by the Government to divert funding for the Church to the Members of Parliament for their local churches is not good enough.

Such a decision only reflects the lack of knowledge these MPs have in relation to SICA and other relevant bodies that the funding should go to before it can be distributed to the local churches.

There is need for Members of Parliament to stop the nonsense of exercising their Power to be the rightful Recipients to funding that are for the people of this country.

I encourage you to rise above your own battle of who to pocket the funds and be a real leaders whose vision is towards advancing the status of this country in a more strategic and effective way.

Ella Kauhue
Honiara