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Press Release by the Special Mining Lease Osikaiyang Landowners Association ("SMLOLA")

MEDIATION PROCESS IS A FIRST FOR OUR PEOPLE - A LANDMARK OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL OUR SMLOLA MEMBERS AND HAVE THEIR SAY FINALLY

The Chairman of the SMLOLA, Mr Phillip Miriori says "As many would be aware, we Bougainvilleans have been through a tough history with the disasters that came from the past operations at Panguna, then owned by Bougainville Copper Limited ("BCL"). One of the key issues that lead to our civil war, where around 20,000 of our friends and family died, was the way we were treated by BCL then, entering our lands without consent, poisoning our gardens and lives, removing our mountains, inviting in the military and ignoring our views, without compensating us fairly. Since the end of the conflict, BCL has made no effort to resolve the damage they caused to our people, lands and rivers – infact they deny any responsibility and are trying to tell us what to do again, calling us impediments when we do not agree with the rules they try and dictate. Have they learned nothing or think we have forgotten?"

Chairman Miriori says "We have fought hard to protect ourselves from the same thing happening again if Panguna re-opens, and the new Bougainville mining law transferred ownership of the minerals to the landowners. As a result, now nothing can happen to our minerals without our consent. Our SMLOLA members are now in a position to make BCL, the Autonomous Bougainville Government ("ABG") and the world respect our views. One of the key steps in the process of late has been our efforts to protect ourselves from the attempt to force the return of BCL without our consent. We have had to use the Courts to ensure we are listened too and the result has been a landmark mediation process, right here on our lands at Dapera led by Justice Kandakasi."

"The mediation process was initiated by me to try and help resolve the challenge to my leadership of the SMLOLA by Mr Lawrence Daveona, despite the fact he is not following custom in recognising my leadership position, a position I was born into. He also wants BCL to return despite everything they have done and failed to do, which is strongly opposed by the majority of our members, as demonstrated by the petition against the return of BCL which now stands at around 2000 members saying "No to BCL".

"The mediator has now given us one more opportunity to try and resolve this among our family which I am keen to do" says Mr Miriori. "I firmly believe we can all unite to protect our people against the return of BCL and I promise to make every effort to do that with Mr Daveona and the ABG. I want to work with them to ensure any redevelopment of Panguna is done properly this time and our members are protected and looked after, respected and treated equally and fairly."

"The primary objective of the mediation was to try and resolve the challenge to my rightful leadership of the SMLOLA by Mr Daveona, which I firmly believe is unlawful and will take to the Court again if necessary. I am making every effort to accommodate him as unity will have a very valuable benefit for all of us and the future of Bougainville.

"One of the other valuable objectives that has come from the mediation and I have committed to work on, is to more closely align our Association's Constitution with our Nasioi customs, moving key decisions back to our clan system that has been our way since time immemorial. I strongly support that and encourage everyone to participate as I believe it will assist in making any benefit sharing from a future mine fairer for all" says Mr Miriori.

"The mediation over the past few weeks, has also given our women, the owners of our land, the opportunity to stand up and be heard. Some of them are against mining and one of my important tasks will be to work with them further as I believe Independence for Bougainville is very important and mining, if done responsibly and with people who we can trust, who will show us respect and fairness, will enable us to get there quicker" says Mr Miriori.

"As part of that process, in my role as the Chairman of the SMLOLA and an Elder to our clans, I have worked

hard to attract a reputable international mining company who has both the social and environmental track record to make sure this time the mine could be developed successfully, fully integrated into our local community. From the time the new transitional mining law was passed in 2014, I worked closely with President Momis and both Mining Ministers Mr Michael Oni and Mr Robin Wilson. In fact, on the day the law was passed I was invited to meet with President Momis at the ABG parliament to celebrate the new revolutionary Bougainville Mining Act, which uniquely, gave ownership of the land and minerals, back to the landowners to try and repair some of the mistreatment of our people in the past. They were then opposed to the return of BCL and supportive of our efforts right through until March this year when suddenly and inexplicably something changed. They would no longer engage with us, would not explain why and started a very public campaign supporting BCL and a challenge of my leadership by Mr Daveona " says Mr Miriori.

"I didn't select RTG Mining Inc. lightly, even going to a mine their management developed in the Philippines with a group of both Panguna landowners and ABG Ministers to see how they do things. In fact, the three ABG Ministers that came to see the RTG operation in Philippines expressed support for RTG. Over time we came to develop a trust with RTG's management and believe they will make the redevelopment of Panguna a great success, working closely with our members. They have supported the hard work we have done over the last year to defend ourselves against the illegal return of BCL" says Mr Miriori.

"It is disappointing that some try to mislead through lies. The suggestion that improper payments were made to ABG officials is both ridiculous and untrue. They are currently working against us and strongly pushing BCL and Lawrence, rather than being impartial which is all we ask of them" says Mr Miriori.

"Despite the current position of the ABG, we are confident that they will eventually hear our firm views - "No to BCL!" and we remain committed to working with them to find a solution where all will win, including the ABG. We must talk openly and respectfully to find a fair solution. The law and views must be respected and we will continue to fight for that for our members" says Mr Miriori.

"The mediation is not a forum to make a final call on who the developer should be and if the mine should be redeveloped, which must be done in conjunction with all our members, but it has been invaluable to be able to showcase the opportunities to highlight the issues and concerns with a possible return of BCL. Infact, BCL and the ABG have publicly admitted they cannot develop the project themselves and would have to find a partner, who will that be, why won't they tell us? How can someone support them when we do not even know who the actual developer will be? I hope that the discussions at the mediation will assist Mr Daveona to understand why our people would be better off without the return of BCL and I will continue to work with him to try and reconcile our positions so we can stand united against them and get a far better result for our people, developing a model that is win-win for the people of Bougainville and the ABG" says Mr Miriori.

Phillip Miriori
Chairman of the SMLOLA