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TIPNG - Minister Aimo must clear air on guns purchase

Transparency International PNG (TIPNG) Chairman Peter Aitsi, is calling on the CS Minister Hon. Tony Aimo to fully disclose the commitments made in relation to the K9m firearm purchase from Australian firearms manufacturer Metal Storm.

TI PNG is making this call after the Minister and Commissioner's media statement in the daily papers (Monday 04/10/2010) seems to be contradicted by an official press release from Metal Storm that says a purchase contract was signed by Minister Aimo.

Metal Storm Limited the Defense technology specialist announced in a press release dated 3rd August that it was awarded a major production contract to supply 500 MAUL™ weapons and 50,000 rounds of non-lethal ammunition.

The company stated that the contract order, valued at US\$3,365,000, (PGK9million) was placed by the Correctional Service of Papua New Guinea and signed by the Minister of Correctional Service, the Honorable Tony Aimo MP and the Acting Correctional Service Commissioner Mr. Henry Wavik.

It said the MAUL™ weapons will be deployed to Correctional Service Officers in charge of security at prison facilities throughout the country, providing non-lethal response capabilities that can be lifted to immediate lethal response if necessary.

In the press release Minister Tony Aimo MP said he expects ratification of the urgent purchase through the usual government protocols shortly, and the first 50 weapons to be delivered by February 2011.

Meanwhile Minister Aimo and Commissioner Sikani in a joint media statement claim that "what transpired in Australia was "only an expression of our interest" to bid with the arms supplier that we are interested in replacing our firearms".

The media statement further claims that "this issue was merely a quotation" that Correctional Services asked from the Australian weapons supplier and nothing else". But the Metal Storm media statement says otherwise.

TIPNG says the Minister must come out now and clear the air on this contradicting information, it seems someone is misinforming the people of Papua New Guinea. TI PNG says the People have a right know how the decision to spend 9 million kina in public funds was made, what stage it is currently at and what real benefit, if any would flow back to the public.

We remind the Minister that after the fiasco of the Kapris "Walk Out" we have yet to hear or see of any real action taken to systemically improve the management of the PNG Correctional Services. Do we want large numbers of high powered weapons and munitions going to an organization who's systems and accountability is so weak that it can be so easily fooled?

If the Minister is to reassure the people he must make public the process that was undertaken in deciding on why and how public monies were committed for this purpose; was there an open and transparent tender process; was their sufficient independent research to establish the suitability of the technology; was there an assessment of the operational environment in which these guns would be stored?

Given the current state of public services TI PNG says the public has every right to ask the Minister if this is the best use of K9 million of tax payers money?