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### **TIPNG SLAMS PARLIAMENT DECISIONS ON LEADERSHIP CODE & CONSTITUTION**

Transparency International PNG today slams recent decisions by Parliament to vote in favour of amendments to the Organic Law on the Duties & Responsibilities of Leadership (OLDRL - the Leadership Code) and the Constitution.

The anti-corruption organisation says the amendments, if endorsed by Parliament again in two months, will seriously weaken the Ombudsman Commission, make it harder for the Commission to do its job, and erode the standards of integrity that MPs and public service heads must adhere to.

TIPNG Chairman Mr Peter Aitsi says "the fact that these amendments have been passed points to the selfishness of the country's political elites. They are shocking decisions that certainly are not in the best interests of Papua New Guinea."

The decision to revoke the Ombudsman Commission's powers to issue directives to public service leaders is a huge step in the wrong direction, TIPNG says. These powers were previously used to stop abuse of public funds and have saved the nation millions of kina. Taking away this power will allow more scams and scandals like those identified by the Commission of Inquiry into the Finance Department. More public money will be misappropriated if this amendment is passed.

Mr Aitsi says "The Commission's directive powers have been used effectively in the past, preventing public funds being spent on election campaigns and politicians' unnecessary overseas travel. They were used to freeze the education infrastructure (RESI) funds when they were being misspent. If these powers are removed then public money will be wasted or embezzled."

TIPNG is also disgusted that MPs approved amendments easing required disclosure of share trading. The excuse that MPs need more relaxed rules to take advantage of market developments on the other side of the world ignores the real question - why are MPs concerned with trading shares when they should be more interested in their work as people's representatives?

TIPNG also says that the work of the Ombudsman Commission will be made harder by the time limits imposed by the amendments, and it will therefore be harder to hold MPs and public service heads to account. TIPNG agrees that the Ombudsman Commission should work hard. However if the government wants the Commission to work harder, they need to provide more resources and support, not the kind of short-sighted solutions proposed.

TIPNG is also very worried that proper consultation was not carried out in the community regarding these amendments. It says that if the constitution is to be amended then the community must be widely consulted - including business, NGO's, and the grassroots community. So far the government has produced no evidence of consultation and therefore has no real mandate to meddle with the constitution.