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## Joint Media Release

# O'Neil Government has NOT protected the Interests of Customary Landowners

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ACT NOW! and the Bismarck Ramu Group ("BRG") have commended the Prime Minister, for acknowledging that, Special Agricultural Business Lease (SABL) as "a Scam"<sup>1</sup> - that the illegal SABLs will be cancelled and expressed concern that corrupt government officers who are there to protect the rights and interests of landowners have facilitated bad deals. However, the Prime Minister and his government have yet to take any action to cancel the illegal leases.

John Chitoo, Program Manager for Bismarck Ramu Group says this is not the first time the Prime Minister has come on air in a public talk back show to say that the government is looking into the Report of the Commission of Inquiry. *"...On the 6th of February 2014, in a similar TalkBack Show, he said, the COI report and recommendations will be implemented and SABL leases cancelled. However, all these now appear just talk and is certainly not promising to the dispossessed landowners..."* says Mr. Chitoo.

The Commission of Inquiry ("COI") into SABL investigated a total of 78 SABLs and reported on 42 of which 38 leases turned out to have been fraudulently obtained.

Effrey Dademo, Program Manager of ACT NOW! says while Prime Minister and his government delay cancelling these SABLs, illegally acquired logs continue to leave our shores and landowners customary rights over their land remain suspended causing unnecessary suffering and environmental degradation. *"...It was obvious that the Prime Minister and his Government had no plans in place to protect the interest of landowners in the interim. He was only concerned about the legal implications on his Government..."* says Ms Dademo.

Meanwhile an estimated 5.2 million hectares of customary land remains alienated for 99 years in the form of State Leases, subleased to dubious palm oil companies which continue to illegally export round logs. According to data obtained from SGS, the PNG Government's log monitoring contractor, PGK 170 million worth of logs were exported from 13 SABL areas in 6 Provinces between 2011 and 2012. That figure has obviously increased to date.

For more information please contact:

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<sup>1</sup>FM100 Talkback Show, 26<sup>th</sup> May 2014

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