Extraordinary deathbed confession exposes Julian Moti frame-up

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The Australian Labor government's vendetta against former Solomon Islands' attorney general Julian Moti on trumped up rape allegations has suffered a devastating blow.

The father of the alleged sexual assault victim, Ariipaea Salmon, has publicly admitted that his daughter had ulterior motives when she first accused Moti in Vanuatu in 1997-98. He has accused the Australian Federal Police (AFP) of threatening his family and offering them inducements, and said that the Australian investigation was politically motivated. Salmon apologised to Julian Moti and his family, declaring that neither he, his daughter nor his wife would continue to cooperate with the attempted prosecution of the international and constitutional lawyer.

Salmon, who suffered long standing health problems, spoke with Australian freelance journalist Susan Merrell on March 17. He died just three days later from a heart attack. The deathbed confession has again laid bare the legally bogus, politically motivated character of the Australian government's protracted pursuit of Moti.

The initial charges in Vanuatu were thrown out of court for lack of evidence and the case was closed—until 2004, when the allegations were dredged up by Australia's high commissioner in the Solomon Islands, Patrick Cole. The senior diplomat was concerned that Moti—a known opponent of Canberra's neo-colonial intervention force, Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI)—could be appointed attorney general, so requested an AFP investigation on the highly dubious basis of Australian child sex tourism laws. The investigation was stepped up in mid-2006 when Solomons' Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare appointed Moti attorney general.

The Australian citizen was then subjected to a ferocious campaign waged by the Australian government and AFP, and aided by the Australian media. The witchhunt culminated in Moti's extraction from the Solomons in December 2007 and his immediate arrest upon arriving in Australia. It began under former conservative prime minister John Howard and has seamlessly progressed under Labor PM's Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard. The aim has been to destroy Moti's personal reputation and professional standing because he represented a threat to the economic and geo-strategic interests of Australian imperialism in the South Pacific.

For the past three years Moti has waged a courageous struggle in the Australian courts against the government, AFP, and public prosecutors. In December 2009, the Queensland Supreme Court issued a permanent stay of proceedings, forbidding a trial, on the grounds that the staggering amounts of money paid by the AFP to the so-called victim and her family had brought "the administration of justice into disrepute". This decision was overturned last year in the appeal courts, but Moti subsequently applied to the High Court to appeal the result.

It appears, however, that Ariipaea Salmon's public statement and death has had no effect on the determination of the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions to proceed with the prosecution. Moti's High Court application remains scheduled for April 8.

In Salmon's video recorded interview, he said that in 1997 his then 13-year-old daughter levelled rape allegations against Moti to try to prevent the family, who are all Tahitian nationals, from being deported from Vanuatu for violating visa conditions. Moti had been a personal friend to the family and had legally represented Salmon. But relations soured, and Salmon believed, incorrectly, that Moti had instigated the family's pending deportation.

Salmon said of his daughter's actions: "When we are children of that age we do things, stupid things, we say things that we think is right or, because we don't have the mental capacity at that age to, how should I say this ... You know when you're 13 or 14, we do things very radically, in a rush, without any thinking sometimes, most of the time—that's how we are when we're kids ... I believe that out of protectionism, I would say, [to] protect her family, she did that move [i.e. accused Moti]."

Asked why Moti had paid for an abortion his daughter had secured at the time, Salmon replied, "out of compassion ... he was very kind, he was generous."

The Salmon family was not contacted by the AFP until mid-2006, despite the Australian authorities re-examining the case in 2004. It was revived without any complaint against Moti being issued by the alleged victim or her family. Salmon said that he had not wished to issue such a complaint, and was never asked to do so by the AFP.

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"We were just swept into the whole thing," he said. Salmon explained that Australian police officers told his family that the case against Moti would proceed even without their cooperation. One cop, Salmon added, threatened that "if we don't cooperate it may go against us." As a result, "fear was in the house."

Asked if the AFP had offered the family access to a lawyer, Salmon replied: "Oh no, that was out of the question. They didn't want any legal advice from others. We asked for legal advice and they say no, this has to be done only by them. We repeatedly asked, we even asked that we wanted lawyers who speak French fluently and English, to translate."

Salmon stated that the AFP had directly prompted the family's written statements. "They were coaching us," he said. "They were there [saying], 'you can't say that, say like this.'"

The alleged victim's father continued: "She [his daughter] was made to believe that by writing her story in a book it would make her wealthy. One of the [AFP] agents told her that, 'you can make story, write a book, and make money out of it.' I said to him, what about this family, it is crushed now, the [family] business is all gone because of you, and he said, 'just put it on Moti.'"

These are all extremely serious allegations of AFP intimidation, inducement, and unlawful impropriety.

They further underscore the absurdity of the finding of Justice Debra Mullins in the Queensland Supreme Court that there was "no evidence of any impropriety associated with the AFP's approach to the investigation". Even as she granted a permanent stay of proceedings, on the grounds of improper "witness" payments, Mullins felt compelled to reject any suggestion that Moti was being pursued for political reasons. She acknowledged that Australia's high commissioner, Patrick Cole, wanted an investigation to block Moti's appointment as attorney general, but insisted that once the AFP began its work, things proceeded properly.

Salmon's confession demolishes this argument. By any objective account, his statements should lead to the immediate dropping of all charges against Moti and the payment of substantial compensation for the destruction of his reputation and career.

Asked if he had realised in 2006 that there were possible political motivations behind the AFP's pursuit of Moti, Salmon replied, "At the beginning it was not very clear to me, but it became apparent after a while."

Questioned how he felt about that, he answered: "Disgusted. I felt I'd been used completely by the government, to use this case of a small girl. The mighty Australian government with all the intelligence could not took [sic] Moti out, so maybe out of desperation they used this case to get Moti out. So of course there's political motivation. There's no doubting there, I mean there's no doubting for anybody with some sense. They took over the Solomons ... This is what they were after, taking over a country. And they use any means, foul means, to get that. This is what they have done. This is what Australia has done—foul means to get this."

Salmon's statement makes clear that his entire family was aware of what was at stake for the Australian authorities. They extracted ever higher "witness" payments by repeatedly threatening to withdraw their cooperation. In January 2008, the alleged victim sent an SMS mobile phone message to an AFP agent, insisting on certain conditions being met and warning: "pressuring me and negociating [sic] otherwise will only encourage me to denounce that I may have been used as a tool by the Australian Government for political and neo colonial reasons [...] The aim of all this was to put in the Government of your choice in the Solomons."

In the March 17 interview, Salmon claimed that he only went along with what has happening because his poor health prevented him from reading or even being able to concentrate for extended periods. But he said he now realised that the case was a "total mess", and that his family had been "crushed" and "broken" because of its cooperation with Canberra.

Salmon concluded the interview by saying: "I'd like to apologise to Mr Moti, and his mother especially, and father and his family. And to all his friends, Manasseh Sogavare, who went through hell to help Mr Moti, to protect him—you've done well ... We've all been battered by all this." Asked who he blamed, he answered: "The people who have pressed the button to start all this, of course. The [Australian] government at the time."

An Australian media blackout has been imposed on Ariipaea Salmon's confession. No outlet was prepared to run Susan Merrell's interview, and so the freelance reporter published the story in the small Fijian publication *Islands Business*. The story has since been widely circulated in the South Pacific, and Merrell has been interviewed by radio news broadcasters in Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, and Fiji. Yet not a word has been raised in any section of the Australian press. This is entirely consistent with the media's filthy role as Australian government propagandists throughout the entire Moti affair.

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