

Inquiry adjourned for two weeks

THE coronavirus pandemic has forced the adjournment of the commission of inquiry into the Union Bank of Switzerland loan for four weeks and is to resume again on April 14 at 9 o'clock in the morning.

But commission chairman Sir Salamo Injia also indicated that the COI could be further extended depending on the seriousness of the Covid-19 threat.

Sir Salamo said a couple of former prime ministers were supposed to appear this week for directional hearing but that has been deferred to April.

"This morning the commission has more than 10 cases in terms of

witnesses who are listed to appear, and the commission anticipated that there will be a sizeable crowd in attendance, and the commission considered that it was not appropriate for the commission to sit this morning with that size of crowd in attendance given the threat of coronavirus pandemic that is now facing the country" Sir Salamo said in a media conference yesterday.

"After the government announced that it was declaring a state-of-emergency and started restricting the movements of people and gatherings of more than 100 persons in a group, the commission considers it appropriate that it should suspend its sittings for the next two weeks

starting today (yesterday)."

Sir Salamo said the commission had requested for a number of witnesses to appear for directions in regard to filing of documents, and the commission also had a number of people that were summoned to appear.

"A good number of them would have attended on extended summons, including two former prime ministers. This week the commission had also scheduled a particular witness to give evidence and that would have been the first witness to give evidence, he was the acting chief ombudsman of PNG.

"He was scheduled to give evidence, then there is appearance

scheduled for this Wednesday, the acting Clerk of Parliament and then next week we have a number of persons listed also to appear. Up to April 9 we would have had a number of witnesses appearing to give evidence, including former Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare.

"So given the threat of the coronavirus pandemic that is threatening the country and PNG having registered its first victim, the commission considers it appropriate that it should not conduct public hearing in the coming two weeks.

"Specifically the government through the prime minister has announced that government offices, schools and even the court house

will be closed for business for the next two weeks, so as a precaution the commission this morning has decided not to sit as scheduled for the next two weeks,

"All the case listed for witnesses appearing either on direction or extended summons to give evidence this week and next week have all been deferred and adjourned to Tuesday, April 14 at 9.30am.

"In the event that the coronavirus epidemic reaches high state of alert and gets worse, than the commission will consider its position on Tuesday April 14, and the commission may extend further time for those matters to be heard," Sir Salamo said.