



Message to the people of Solomon Islands

Special Coordinator Nick Warner

Henderson Airport, Honiara, Solomon Islands

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People everywhere have a right to live their lives peacefully, to go about their daily business without threats or violence or intimidation, to have their children educated in schools, to have illnesses attended to in hospitals and clinics, to have a government that is permitted to govern for the benefit of all people, free from intimidation or coercion by armed thugs.

Solomon Islands used to be such a place.

But for too long this country has suffered at the hands of a small number of militants and criminals who have terrorised Solomon Islands society, brought the country to its knees, and done a disservice to the reputation of Solomon Islanders as a good and generous people.

The men and women from around the Pacific who arrived on your shores today as part of the regional assistance mission come at the invitation of the Solomon Islands government, and as guests of the Solomon Islands people.

We are calling our involvement here *Operation Helpem Fren*, because that is what we are here to do. We are here as friends, to work in partnership with you, to restore promise to your country, to restore hopes for a better life to you and your children.

Our immediate purpose is to restore law and order in Solomon Islands. Our police will be working hand-in-hand with the Solomon Islands police to provide safety and security to streets and villages and to get guns out of communities. Only then will conditions exist for the revival of the economy.

The men and women in military uniform who you saw arriving today, and the ship that you see in the harbour, are here to provide support to these police efforts. But, should criminals seek to sabotage our assistance efforts, endanger public safety, or prevent the police from doing their duty, the military will not hesitate to act.

The partnership that we begin with Solomon Islands today is a long-term commitment. The problems confronting Solomon Islands will not be fixed overnight. While law and order is being restored, we will work with you to bring stability to the budget, to rebuild the machinery of government, and restore the delivery of essential government services to people. The conditions for economic growth and improved living standards will be put in place.

Those individuals who have profited - at the expense of the nation as a whole - from the disorder of the past few years will no longer be permitted to do so. We will stop the culture of extortion that has brought this country to its knees. It is an ugly distortion of Solomon Islands customs and values.

Let me emphasize again that Australia, New Zealand, and the other Pacific countries involved in the regional assistance mission are here at the formal and explicit request of your government. All of us respect the fact that Solomon Islands is an independent and sovereign country. We are here to help you and your government restore that sovereignty - to restore the capacity of government to represent its people and to act in the public good. We will ensure that the people of Solomon Islands regain control of their destiny from a minority of criminals with guns.

Solomon Islands is a young country of great promise. We, your partners in the Pacific, and with God's help, are here to help Solomon Islanders fulfill that promise.