



Message to the people of Solomon Islands

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Honiara, Solomon Islands

31 October 2003

31 October marks exactly 100 days since your friends from around the Pacific, through the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, arrived to begin the process of restoring law and order and rebuilding your country.

As I said on 24 July, the people of Solomon Islands 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.

Working in partnership with Solomon Islands, a great deal has been achieved in the first 100 days, but much more still needs to be done. The 100 day milestone is an opportunity to reflect on the achievements so far and to look forward towards a brighter future for all Solomon Islanders.

RAMSI's immediate objective was the restoration of law and order. RAMSI police, working closely with the RSIP and supported by RAMSI's military component, have helped bring back peace and respect for the rule of law.

Solomon Islands is a much safer place than it was 100 days ago.

RAMSI police have now established police posts in all nine provinces, allowing people to report crimes without fear, and creating an environment where reconciliation between communities can take place. But strong and lasting reconciliation has to come from the hearts of Solomon Islanders.

Solomon Islanders responded to calls for a gun-free society by handing in more than 3,700 guns, including more than 660 military-style weapons. This is a wonderful result that came about through a partnership between RAMSI, the Government and the National Peace Council.

RAMSI police and the RSIP have arrested more than 350 people and laid about 600 charges for some very serious offences. A large number of former militants have been arrested for serious and violent crimes. We continue to investigate crimes alleged to have been committed by many others and will do so wherever evidence emerges.

As a result of this positive change in law and order, some elements of RAMSI's military force are now heading home. Some 1,800 men and women of the military forces of Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, PNG and Tonga, including ground troops, planes, helicopters and ships have contributed by providing security and logistics support to the police. I thank them for their important contribution, thanks I see reflected in letters to the papers, correspondence to RAMSI headquarters, and from people in

the street. But let there be no mistake, RAMSI retains a robust military capacity, and we will respond if our police are threatened or attacked.

RAMSI is about much more than just restoring law and order. This was a crucial aspect of the first 100 days, but RAMSI's focus will increasingly be on nation building. This will include helping to rebuild the police and judiciary, ensuring an effective prison system, stabilising government finances and ensuring basic government services, economic reform and rebuilding the machinery of government.

Everyone knows that corruption is a serious problem in Solomon Islands, that it has helped ruin the economy and brought development to a standstill. RAMSI will investigate corruption, no matter who is involved, and will act fairly and in accordance with the law. But for this, we need the help of the public to provide credible evidence that will stand up in court. We need people to show courage and to trust the police and tell them what they know.

We are determined to ensure the RSIP is rebuilt as a professional and disciplined police force that all Solomon Islanders can be proud of. To assist with this, a Strategic Review of the RSIP has begun. The Review focuses on strengthening and rebuilding the RSIP, and making sure that people who do not belong in the RSIP are removed. Professional Standards investigations have led so far to the arrest of more than 25 RSIP members on more than 90 serious charges.

RAMSI is providing additional assistance to the Ministry of Finance for budget stabilisation and to the justice sector to improve the workings of the legal system. This assistance includes significant civilian expertise. In addition to those advisers already provided by Australia through its aid program, a total of 48 personnel have been placed in key agencies, with 16 advisers and in-line personnel now in Finance, 12 in the justice sector, 19 in the prison sector and another in the Ministry of Planning.

RAMSI, through contributions from Australia and New Zealand, will also support Solomon Islands government expenditure with direct and indirect budget support worth around SBD200 million between now and the middle of next year. We are working closely with the Solomon Islands Government to help develop a credible and effectively managed 2004 budget, a budget that allows the Government to deliver much needed services to the people of Solomon Islands.

But let me emphasise again that much work remains to be done.

We need to keep working on improving the law and order situation. We need to rebuild the RSIP into a well-trained force that is trusted by all Solomon Islanders. And we need to continue to rebuild the machinery of government and the economy of Solomon Islands. All of this will take time and much effort.

RAMSI is here for the long term. We will stay until the job is done and for as long as you want us. But we cannot do these things alone. Solomon Islanders must continue to take the lead and put in the hard work to turn this country around.

I have often been asked what RAMSI wants in return for helping Solomon Islands. The answer is simply this – only for Solomon Islands to return to the happy, peaceful and prosperous country it once was.

Solomon Islands is now on the road to such a future.