



## **RAMSI's 1<sup>st</sup> anniversary**

**Special Coordinator Nick Warner**

**Honiara, Solomon Islands**

**24 July 2004**

A year ago today I declared that all Solomon Islanders had a right to live their lives peacefully, to go about their daily business without threats or violence, to have their children educated in schools and their illnesses treated in hospitals and clinics.

A year ago today Solomon Islanders opened their arms to RAMSI and embraced this opportunity to rebuild your nation.

A powerful partnership between RAMSI and the people of Solomon Islands was born when more than 2000 men and women from around the region arrived by plane and by sea to assist this nation. We were invited in by your government and your parliament, but it has been the courage and commitment of ordinary Solomon Islanders that has given real meaning to the Operation: Helpem Fren.

Our immediate job was to restore law and order. This we have done - the guns are gone and many of those using them have been arrested. We could not have done this without the co-operation of the every man and woman in every town and village. Solomon Islanders handed in nearly 4000 guns and these have been destroyed and buried. Solomon Islanders are once again free to go about their daily business without fear of intimidation, but it is you who must now do the work of healing the wounds within your own communities.

RAMSI's job is not over yet. A year ago today I told you that the partnership we were forging was a long-term commitment. Although the number of military personnel may have gone down in recent weeks we retain a potent military force. RAMSI is not about to pack up and go home. There is still much to be done.

When RAMSI was formed it was agreed that together with you we would not only fight the thugs and the thieves but that we would also help Solomon Islands carry out reforms so that this nation can better fight corruption, run a more efficient public service and ultimately restore the wealth of this nation to its people, putting in place the conditions for economic growth.

Already the police have carried out comprehensive reforms. More than 400 police who were no longer fit to serve the nation have left the force and the first batch of new recruits have started training. With about 3000 arrests, Solomon Islands' courts have never been busier and many, many crimes are still being investigated. Rebuilding the RSIP will be a long term job and the RAMSI police will be here for some years to come to ensure that Solomon Islands has a strong, honest and reliable police force to protect its citizens and enforce the law.

Government funds are now being spent as they should be: on restoring basic services to all citizens. People have once again started paying their taxes and duties, giving the government a bigger cash flow, but we still need to improve how this money is spent so that services reach right

down to the provinces and every corner of the nation. This means better control by every government department and every provincial government of how they manage these funds and a return to proper procedures and processes, such as tenders. The very machinery of Government needs to start working again: repairing and rebuilding the public service will be a priority for RAMSI in the year to come.

The joint RAMSI and Solomon Islands Government Economic Reform Unit recently announced by the Prime Minister will be working with all departments to strengthen the Solomons' economy. This will be done by implementing policies that will encourage investment, including in the provinces, which will lead to the creation of new jobs and growth in the economy.

RAMSI is committed to addressing the evils of corruption. A year ago today I declared that no one is above the law and that is, of course, still the case today. RAMSI police and RSIP are already making arrests. We have many investigations under way. We will also strengthen the Leadership Code Commission, Ombudsman and Auditor General to ensure that corruption can be prevented through better education and prompt investigation of complaints.

RAMSI and Solomon Islanders have worked over the past year to restore this nation's sovereignty, and to ensure that once again Solomon Islanders are in control of their own destiny. As we enter this next long and hard phase of nation building it is important we not forget what might have been.

A year ago today I promised Solomon Islanders would have a better life, a safer life, a more prosperous life. I stand by that promise. With God's Blessing together we can - we are - making this happen.