



International Anti-Corruption Day address

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Just over five years ago the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands - RAMSI - came pledging to help Solomon Islanders rebuild and strengthen this nation. We pledged to work with you to help build a peaceful, stable and prosperous Solomon Islands. To do this RAMSI agreed to work in partnership with the government and people of Solomon Islands to help you get rid of the guns, to help restore law and order, re-establish good governance and to help you fight corruption.

Since then, much progress has been made - the guns are gone, the rule of law is being re-established - we could not stand here today if this was not the case but much remains to be done. Solomon Islands and its people still face major obstacles in your journey towards a peaceful and prosperous nation; chief amongst these obstacles is corruption.

To understand the threat corruption poses to this nation, we need only look at the very recent past to see how quickly corruption can undermine a country. It was only a few years ago that Solomon Islands economy all but collapsed and international assistance and foreign investment shrank dramatically. It was only a few years ago that teachers, nurses, and public servants in Solomon Islands were going unpaid, that clinics and classrooms were falling into disrepair because the government funds that should have been used for salaries and maintaining basic services to the people of this nation had literally been stolen. Sometimes this was done at gunpoint but on many occasions these funds were quietly and corruptly taken by those who should and did know better.

I am sure the memory of those terrible times and the role corruption played in nearly destroying your beloved Solomon Islands is one of the reasons many of you have turned out today in support of International Anti-Corruption Day. I too am very pleased to be here today to mark this important occasion. I'd like to acknowledge the hard work that TSI - Transparency Solomon Islands - has put into organizing this event and in their work raising awareness of corruption more generally. RAMSI is always happy to support these efforts as part of our partnership with the wider Solomon Islands community.

It would seem no accident that the world's largest anti-corruption network, Transparency International of which TSI is a member, has the word *transparency* in its name, as transparency - the condition that allows us all to see what is going on, what decisions and actions are being taken by our leaders - is absolutely crucial in the fight against corruption.

The good news is that transparency is not a new concept in Solomon Islands. Indeed it could be said that in its purest form Solomon Islands traditions support transparent and accountable leadership. For centuries Solomon Islanders appeared to have enjoyed a very transparent form of leadership. Indeed I can't imagine a more transparent leadership than the one found a century or two ago in a traditional Solomon Islands village in many parts of the country where the decisions and actions, good and bad, of a village chief and elders were there for all to see all day, everyday.

I think the challenge that has faced Solomon Islanders in more recent times and that we all continue to struggle with today is how to translate this transparency into something just as effective in the modern political system that now governs Solomon Islands. Solomon Islanders are no longer simply ruled by their chiefs. You have provincial and national leaders now who are responsible for large amount of national revenue; you are part of a modern economy and a global one at that. So the question is how can that the same level of transparency that occurs so naturally at the village level be achieved at the national level? For without truly transparent leadership, without accurate information about the actions and decisions, good and bad of your leaders, Solomon Islanders cannot call their leaders to account. And where, anywhere in the world, people cannot call their leaders to account, corruption will and does flourish.

More established nations have found that there are many aspects to establishing and maintaining good governance and transparent leadership. These include not only the firm establishment of the rule of law and an independent judiciary but also a robust and accurate media as well as a strong culture and institutions of accountability within the state.

This is where the work RAMSI is doing can have the most impact if Solomon Islands chooses to take up this unique opportunity to work together with us to build strong institutions of accountability; the institutions this country needs and the people of this country deserve. For without strong local leadership no amount of assistance and support from RAMSI is going to bring about a lasting result.

Police and Rule of Law

It should be said at this stage, that Solomon Islands is already ahead of many other countries in that you have been blessed with an independent judiciary and more recently with a functioning and increasing effective police force. RAMSI is proud of the work that has gone into rebuilding the country's justice sector and the great progress made towards the return of the rule of law in Solomon Islands. But there remains much more to be done.

Auditor Generals

One of the best examples of the difference strong local leadership can make in the fight against corruption is the work currently being done by the recently revived Office of the Auditor General. The OAG has done some extraordinary work in showing both the scale and cost of corruption in the public sector.

In a 2007 report entitled 'An Auditor-General's Insights into Corruption in Solomon Islands Government', the Auditor General found that the amounts foregone in lost revenue, or corruptly or fraudulently disbursed were some SBD \$433 million. This figure is an estimate and is in reality probably much higher.

The success of the Office of the Auditor General under the Late Augustine (Floyd) Fatai is well known. Floyd is sorely missed both personally and professionally by many of us. It is good to see that the work he started is being continued by his team, and it is a fine testament to Floyd's strong leadership.

RAMSI continues to provide good support to this institution. A review of the legislation under which the Office of the Auditor General operates has been conducted with a view to improving and strengthening the legislation. This will enhance both the national financial accountability framework and the independence and mandate of the Office.

An in-line RAMSI adviser, Mr Eric Muir, was sworn in as the acting Auditor General in August and has a team of four advisers supporting him to assist with building the capacity of Solomon Islanders within the OAG. It is this team of young, keen and incredibly hard working Solomon Islanders who will eventually carry forward the work of the Auditor Generals and it is exciting to watch this institution grow and flourish.

Further the recent television broadcasts of Parliament's Public Accounts Committee's hearings is but one example of the great leap in information now being provided to Solomon Islands about the affairs of state.

With RAMSI's assistance, the Leadership Code Commission now has a full contingent of commissioners. Under Chairman Emmanuel Kouhota, the Commission currently has 64 ongoing investigations and around 2,000 inquiries regarding the new Register of Leaders Interests. The LCC has a critical role to play in fighting corruption in Solomon Islands and there remains much work yet to be done. RAMSI will continue to support capacity building within the LCC to ensure that is an effective anti-corruption institution for Solomon Islands

Ombudsman's Office

The appointment of Mr Joe Porawai as Ombudsman will enable significant progress to be made within the Office of the Ombudsman. RAMSI is currently preparing to deploy an adviser to support the Ombudsman to build office capacity and help address the backlog of cases that has built up over the last eighteen months. RAMSI is also assisting with developing plans and costings for construction of a new building which will house both the Office of the Ombudsman and Leadership Code Commission.

Media Strengthening Project

Last Friday I launched RAMSI's new media assistance scheme, SOLMAS, which is designed to work with all elements of the media to help them in a number of ways and to provide a robust and effective scrutiny of all that is going on in this nation all of which contributes to greater transparency.

RAMSI remains committed to working closely with the Solomon Islands Government and its people to eliminate corruption. It has been very apparent to me during the course of the year that the CNURA Government has given much serious thought to how to deal with corruption. On taking office it announced it wanted to put in place greater accountability, transparency and integrity measures. It has announced its intention to introduce political party integrity reforms, designed to strengthen political stability via reducing the movement of MPs which can be encouraged by corrupt inducements.

Earlier in the year, RAMSI worked closely with Solomon Islands Government to undertake an 'anti-corruption legal diagnostic' study, which analysed a broad set of legislation relevant to fighting corruption and corruption-related offences and penalties. The study put forward a range of recommendation for addressing corruption in Solomon Islands, and it is pleasing to know that Solomon Islands Government is giving consideration to these issues.

There is still much to be done in the fight against corruption. The prosecution of corruption cases can often be hampered by the unwillingness of people to speak up and use the justice system that is now operating once again. We must draw on the strength of our friends in Transparency International across the globe – we must not let silence on corruption become the voice of anti-corruption. Corruption needs to be reported – reported to the police, reported to the accountability institutions and reported to the media to ensure effective action. Corruption must also be resisted – we must demand better from our public service, our government and our leaders. I emphasise better not more as we need to highlight a critical distinction. It's not a leader's responsibility to provide more to you; it's a leader's responsibility to ensure that the public service provides effective services to the public. The Solomon Islands public service is accountable to your leaders, who are in turn accountable to the voters – that is you. This is what good governance is all about. Both corruption and anti-corruption stops and starts with you the people of Solomon Islands. RAMSI is here to help you make the best choice for you and your nation.