



## **Commissioning of new sound system in Solomon Islands Parliament House**

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It is a great honour and privilege to be invited to speak today on the floor of this beautiful parliamentary chamber – a venue that has been witness to much lively debate over the years by you, the nation's leaders.

Indeed, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Government and the Opposition for their responsible approach to parliamentary debate and for the quality of their contributions to discussions on important issues affecting the future of this country. I would also like to congratulate Sir Peter for the outstanding job he does as Speaker of the House.

An effective working parliament, and public access to it, are cornerstones of a healthy democratic system. They are also important tools in the ongoing work of building a nation.

A good example is the current Foreign Relations Committee hearings on RAMSI. These hearings are taking parliament out of the chamber and into the provinces for the first time, and have already demonstrated the interest and enthusiasm that many people in Solomon Islands feel about the parliamentary process.

Solomon Islands has seen a number of positive initiatives in recent years which have served to improve the effectiveness of parliament and its accessibility to the public. The UNDP-managed Parliamentary Strengthening Project is one such initiative. I am pleased to confirm that RAMSI will continue to engage with this project until 2012 through active participation on the Project Oversight Committee. The use of new technology to increase access to information is another important recent initiative that has helped bring the parliament to the people.

The launch of the National Parliament website in 2007 has brought Hansard as well as Solomon Islands legislation and the profiles of current Members of Parliament to the fingertips of anyone with access to the internet. The commencement of One News television broadcasts of the sittings of parliament and the public accounts committee has brought parliament into the homes of people in Honiara and Auki.

I commend these initiatives and the hard work of the many people here who have made them possible.

However, as has already been remarked by the Speaker, anyone who has ever sat in the public gallery during parliament, listened to the time-honoured SIBC broadcasts or watched the television replay, will know that, in recent years, it has often been very hard to hear what is being said: mobile phones are heard over MPs' voices, more than one voice can regularly be heard at the one

time or, at worst, the old sound system would decide it had simply had enough and emit a loud screech of protest!

From the simple idea of assisting the Government to provide a clear broadcast system to the people of Solomon Islands, RAMSI has worked with the National Parliament Office to support the installation of a high-quality sound system which will last for many years to come. Today's launch of the sound system is a testament to the hard work of many and to the partnership that RAMSI's Machinery of Government program and the National Parliament Office have built since 2004. It also serves to highlight the priority that RAMSI gives to outcomes that are sustainable.

Ensuring access to information is central to people having a voice, central to accountable government and central to the challenge of nation-building. At the end of the day, the decisions being made, the laws being debated and voted on, the money being allocated and spent are all accountable to the people of Solomon Islands.

I am confident that this new sound system, which RAMSI has been happy to support, will bring benefits not just to the representatives elected to this house but to all Solomon Islanders interested in hearing their leaders debate the issues that will shape the nation's future.