



Opening of Auki Correctional Centre

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Auki, Malaita Province, Solomon Islands

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I am very proud to be here representing RAMSI and joining the Solomon Islands Government for the commissioning of the new Auki Correctional Centre.

Flying over today I couldn't help but think about how far we've all come since 2003 when Solomon Islands first invited the Regional Assistance Mission to help them re-establish law and order and rebuild the nation. As many of you here today would recall, six years ago, the community was not able to count on the rule of law to protect them; the courts were not sitting and there was no functioning prison in Auki.

RAMSI's partnership with Solomon Islands law and justice institutions is one of which we are very proud. One of the great success stories of this partnership and its efforts in capacity building is the incredible progress that the prison service - what is now known as Correctional Services Solomon Islands - has been able to make in the past six years.

Upon RAMSI's arrival in July 2003 it quickly became apparent that to get correctional services up and running, RAMSI would be required to provide personnel to fill virtually all positions from the Commissioner down and to physically restore what little correctional infrastructure remained.

It gives me great pleasure to see not only the high standard of the refurbished Rove Correctional Centre in Honiara but more importantly to witness CSSI very firmly in the hands of its Solomon Islands executive, under the excellent leadership of Commissioner Francis Haisoma and his deputy commissioner, Heinz Konga. Today's opening of the Auki Correctional Centre joins these achievements as another example of the great progress that the Solomon Islands Government and RAMSI Partnership have been able to achieve in the area of corrections.

I know that the site and size of the Auki Centre have been the cause for some discussion and some concern in the community. Indeed in March this year, Commissioner Haisoma and I were among those who convened a meeting with community leaders here in Auki, to air these concerns. Having done this and having spent considerable time looking at these issues I am

pleased to say that I share the confidence of Correctional Services that when all is said and done, the Auki Correctional Centre will serve this community and this province very well. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all of those who have worked so hard to make this happen including my colleagues in RAMSI's Law and Justice Program but also the Solomon Islands Government including the Ministry of Justice and CSSI as well as the contractors.

Although having a correctional centre that physically meets international standards is a milestone in itself, establishing and maintaining an effective Correctional Centre is about a lot more than just the bricks and mortar. Equally important and possibly more challenging to achieve is the capacity building behind the opening of this new facility that will be fully run and supervised by Solomon Islands Correctional Service staff.

The Centre has been designed to meet the particular needs of the people of Malaita. To help you as a community work with the Centre, its staff and inmates to achieve the best possible outcomes for all.

It means Malaitans prisoners can now serve their sentence and be rehabilitated in their own province. By housing prisoners in or near their homes, each individual prisoner's program can be tailored to their customs and local needs, benefitting both the prisoner, as well as the community to which they will eventually return.

It is the Centre's rehabilitation programs that will be undertaken within these walls that I believe is the most exciting element of its operations. They represent a breakthrough in the way Solomon Islands society is choosing to deal with those who have been convicted of a crime. That choice is to offer them the opportunity to repent, to reconcile and be rehabilitated during their time in the Correctional system. It is the impressive infrastructure that is being commissioned today that makes this possible.

The word 'rehabilitation' will no doubt be spoken many times within these walls. While we may hear it a lot; what rehabilitation means, in simple terms, is that if prisoners spend time here and the centre is operating openly and effectively, they should never need to come back. This centre should equip people to return to their normal lives, their families and to be able to make a contribution in their communities.

It is also a correctional centre that is designed for a correctional system that plans to work very closely with the community. There will be more than 15 different local organisations and government agencies providing specialist services to the centre and its inmates. These will focus on areas such as literacy and numeracy and vocational skills such as food preparation, wood and metal work and faith-based activities, all onsite here at Auki.

These local organisations can serve as the community's eye and ears and be able through their ongoing interaction with the Centre, its staff and inmates, to keep the community informed of the progress being made within.

It is hoped that the programs run by these organisations will help prisoners gain the motivation and means to make a fresh start in their lives, and will provide the community with a hard-working, committed and importantly, skilled workforce when they are eventually released. And if everyone plays its role in this process, the Government and the Corrections staff running this centre, the Auki community in supporting its objectives of reform and indeed the entire province, then, I believe, the people of Malaita, can be optimistic that those who become inmates will do so only once, and that all who complete their time here will leave this centre well equipped to lead productive lives within their communities once again.

I don't think a government, a police force or a community can ask for more of its correctional system than that. I think if together we have helped make this happen, we can all be very proud.