



Opening of Auki Magistrates' Court, Malaita

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Auki, Malaita Province, Solomon Islands

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I feel privileged and honoured to be present today to witness the commissioning of these new court house buildings. For what we are all participating in today is effectively the commissioning of a new home for justice in Malaita.

Because of this new home, civil, criminal and land cases can now all be heard here in Auki, whether it be a hearing of the Magistrates' Court or the High Court. Not only that, but these buildings will house offices for the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) and the Public Solicitor's Office (PSO), ensuring easier and more timely access to the nation's justice system for the people of Malaita.

In this sense, today's opening represents a milestone for the people of Malaita who should feel a sense of pride and confidence that their province can grow and prosper, as improved access to Solomon Islands law and justice systems is a vital part of good law and order. Without such access, investor and community confidence – and therefore livelihoods - cannot grow.

I have heard and read suggestions that, by building this new Court House and the Auki Correctional Centre, RAMSI and the Government are somehow targeting Malaitans. I would like to take this opportunity to assure everyone that this is simply not the case.

The improvements to the justice system in Malaita province have been undertaken ahead of other parts of Solomon Islands because this is the most densely populated area of the country outside of Honiara. And having completed these two projects, the attention of the Solomon Islands Government-RAMSI partnership in the Law and Justice sector will soon turn to Gizo, Western Province, the third most populated area of the country. This is part of RAMSI's work to assist the Government in rebuilding the justice system for the whole of Solomon Islands.

The Solomon Islands – RAMSI partnership recognises the fundamental importance of law and order to Solomon Islands development. An efficient, functioning justice system is central to this. All the work to improve services such as health and education, or to attract investment in this country, or in this province, will come to nothing if the foundations of law and justice are not laid firm and maintained.

Without a strong justice system, any efforts to improve the quality of life for those living in Malaita or anywhere else in this country, will inevitably come undone, as those of you who lived through the 'tensions' would well recall.

Today's opening of the Auki Court House is a cause for celebration and pride. Malaita is now leading the nation in the development of its law and justice sector. Already the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force here in Auki is achieving impressive results that are the envy of the country.

With the opening of this Court House, the police, suspects and victims involved will no longer have to wait months to have their cases heard.

Most importantly, the people of Malaita will no longer have to travel a great distance, and at great cost, to Honiara to properly access their country's justice system. Instead, they have in the centre of their own province's capital, these impressive new Court House buildings.

The completion of this project represents an enormous amount of work over the past two years by the National and Malaita Provincial Governments, together with the Solomon Islands judiciary and RAMSI's Law and Justice Program. I would like to congratulate all those who have worked so hard on this project.

Builder Paul Manepouri, himself a Malaitan, who, together with his team from MP Construction, have built the Court House, should also receive hearty congratulations for this achievement. I understand over 250 people have been employed on site during its construction. To each of the people here today who have worked on this building, I offer my sincere congratulations on a job truly well done.

Congratulations also must be given to the students and teachers of four schools: Auki Primary School, Alota'a Primary School, Auki Community High School and Aligegeo Provincial Secondary School whose artworks now hang proudly throughout this building, and who provided their interpretations of the themes of 'community', 'family', 'friendship' and 'peace' – themselves four of the cornerstones of this country and this province.

In that sense, the true legacy of the building, I believe, will be appreciated not just by all of you here today but by generations to come as your province develops and prospers. And this legacy will have come about because you - the people of Malaita – were able to build the foundations of a well functioning law and justice sector that enables you to uphold and protect your community, your family, your friendships and, most importantly, your precious peace.

With these few words, it is now my great pleasure to officially hand over the Auki Court House building to the Minister for Justice and Legal Affairs, Hon. Augustine Taneko.

Thank you.