



Opening of new Leadership Code Commission and Ombudsman's building, *Isaac Qoloni House*

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The national motto of Solomon Islands tells us that “to lead is to serve”. It is a simple and resounding reminder that in a democracy, the leaders – whether elected members or the officials who work under them – exercise government power.

They are not given that trust and power so they can serve themselves; they are given that trust and power so that they can serve the people they represent and the greater good of the nation. They must therefore be accountable to the people for how they use the significant powers and privileges given to them.

In a democratic system, the leaders, the ministries and their officials can be called to account in a number of ways - by the Parliament, by the media and by the so-called “accountability institutions”.

In Solomon Islands, these accountability institutions are the Auditor General's Office, the Ombudsman's Office and the Leadership Code Commission. Their strong, efficient and effective operation is a vital check on the conduct of Solomon Islands Government leaders and ministries. Effective operation of those institutions not only improves government administration and the conduct of its leaders, but also minimises the opportunity for corruption and increases the likelihood of corruption being uncovered.

When RAMSI first arrived in Solomon Islands, these three accountability institutions were not fulfilling their functions. Now, under the partnership between RAMSI and the Solomon Islands Government, enormous progress has been made in strengthening these institutions to ensure effective oversight of government and its leaders. In a few short years, this work has resulted in three strong agencies of accountability in Solomon Islands.

Although there is still some way to go, all three institutions have taken great strides forward that bear testament to the hard work of many people.

- Last year the **Auditor General** signed off on the national accounts within the statutory timeframe for the first time since the nation's independence;
- the **Ombudsman** has cleared 80 percent of the backlog of complaints to his office and, as well as investigating complaints, is undertaking an impressive program of self-initiated investigations into significant issues of public administrative practice;
- And the **Leadership Code Commission** is effectively administering and enforcing compliance with *The Register of Leaders' Interests*, and has formalised its hearing procedures to achieve more efficient and effective handling of misconduct matters.

A major part of the strengthening of the Leadership Code Commission and the Ombudsman's Office is the construction of this new building that I'm proud to be handing over to the Deputy Prime Minister today.

A few years ago, when the work of strengthening the key accountability institutions began, both the Government and RAMSI recognised that, for these institutions to function effectively, significant improvements to their actual workplaces were needed. For many years, both institutions were housed in buildings that were, at best, inadequate for holding hearings as important as those conducted by the Commission, and at worst, unfit for habitation.

Following a request from the Solomon Islands Government, and then more than two years of planning, development and construction, we are now standing in front of a building that clearly reflects the importance of these two institutions.

The new building provides office accommodation, facilities and equipment that create a professional working environment, one that is far more conducive to the effective and efficient discharge of the important official duties both institutions must carry out.

With a new hearing room, the Leadership Code Commission now has an impressive facility for conducting critically-important hearings, and conference facilities that ensure the work of the two institutions can be conducted with a strong sense of purpose in an appropriate environment.

Having the Leadership Code Commission and the Ombudsman's Office located together in this new building signals a strong new sense of strategic cooperation between the two institutions. As a result, there will be greater consultation and coordination as well as the sharing of skills and experience among staff. From the Solomon Islands public's point of view, this is now a 'one stop shop' for the community to raise concerns or complaints about government leaders and government processes.

To the team that has pushed the project forward and to all those who worked so tirelessly on the construction of this new building, I offer my sincere congratulations for your dedication and devotion to the task. This is an impressive building that now truly reflects the importance of the work undertaken by these accountability institutions.

To the Ombudsman and the Leadership Code Commission Chairman and your teams, I also extend my congratulations. You have a key role to play in ensuring that government leaders are answerable for their behaviour, in investigating and reporting on the actions and practices of government, and in fostering accountable, lawful, fair, transparent and responsive administration. I am confident that this building will provide you with the environment you need in order to do this work effectively and with confidence.

It is my great pleasure to officially hand over the new office complex to the Solomon Islands Government. Thank you.