



Remarks at opening of Lata Police Houses

RAMSI Special Coordinator, Nicholas Coppel
Lata, Temotu Province, Solomon Islands
26 May 2011

It is a great pleasure to be here in Lata today to celebrate the opening of these impressive new houses. Today marks a major milestone for the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, for RAMSI, for the National and Temotu Province Governments, and for policing in Temotu.

Recently, members of the RSIPF in Honiara were handed the keys to the first of 84 new houses for RSIPF officers and their families. Now, two months on, it is fantastic to be here to see these seventeen new houses handed over here in Lata.

These houses will, I have no doubt, change the lives of the police officers – and their families – that will soon move in to these new surroundings. They are impressive new homes, yes, but in many ways the bricks and mortar components are secondary to the role that these houses will play in tackling one of the biggest challenges facing the RSIPF.

With the addition of these seventeen new houses, the RSIPF will soon be able to post officers from across the country here in Lata. It means there will be more officers, on the ground here in Lata, all the time. Beyond this, however, being able to post officers from across the country to work here in Lata will help to prevent something that had contributed to the negative reputation of the Force in the past: officers in provincial areas who have been unwilling to properly police their own *wantok*. The new houses, will play a fundamental part of addressing this issue across the country.

And beyond today's celebration, this handover also provides us with an opportunity to look ahead to the next few years.

The PPF, in consultation with the RSIPF, have, in recent months, conducted a comprehensive review of all 13 provincial police posts that are supported by RAMSI officers. The conclusion of the review is that the time is now right for the RSIPF to step up and take the lead at the police posts that have, for the past nearly eight years, been supported by RAMSI.

As a result, over the next two years, we will be gradually withdrawing RAMSI personnel from each of these police posts, such as the one here in Lata, to allow the RSIPF to further take the lead. This process of the RSIPF taking a greater lead – this *transition* – is naturally a long-term process, and is about providing greater space for the RSIPF to step up.

RAMSI will not be in Solomon Islands, or Temotu Province, for ever. Nor should it be. If RAMSI remains here for too long, then the opportunity for the RSIPF to take that next crucial step and take the lead in law and order across Temotu will not be there. However, let me make this point clear: RAMSI will not be simply packing up and walking away, nor will it be leaving today, tomorrow, next week or next month. This will be a steady, measured process, designed to ensure RSIPF Officers have the space to lead, but also have the time to gain crucial community support to do their jobs.

I urge the community here in Temotu to provide strong support to their police force in the coming months. Impressive resources, strengthened confidence and improved leadership in the RSIPF also need support from the Temotu community, particularly community leaders and chiefs, to help the police prevent crime at the community level. Law and order is everyone's responsibility.