



Tomorrow's leaders...talk about the future of the Solomons.

Tomorrow's leaders talk transition

When a group dubbed “tomorrow's leaders” come together to talk about the future of their nation, they naturally command attention. **TOM PERRY** from RAMSI Public Affairs was there as 40 of Solomon Islands next generation of public service leaders came together to discuss their thoughts on RAMSI and the future of Solomon Islands.

Continuing a series of discussion forums with community, government and church leaders from across Solomon Islands, a recent *Wakabaot Toktok* was attended by over 40 of Solomon Islands' up-coming public servants, including representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs & External Trade, Finance & Treasury, the National Parliament Office and Prime Minister and Cabinet.

The group used the RAMSI-hosted *toktok* to share their views on the changes they had witnessed since RAMSI's arrival in 2003. Each participant brought their own perspective to the discussion, with almost everyone stressing the need to make the most of the opportunities created by progress achieved to date.

Hagai Arumae from the Ministry of Finance and Treasury said the processes for managing public money had significantly improved since 2003. The working environment for new businesses trying to establish themselves in Solomon Islands had also been streamlined, radically changing it for the better. Arumae added the ministry had also gone through a process of “cleansing all the ghosts from the government payroll” since 2003.

Stronger parliamentary processes and an invigorated sense of purpose were two key achievements identified by Lisi Vave, a human resources manager with the National Parliament Office; the work now being done by the Parliamentary Com-

mittee Secretaries was a good example of this.

An increased focus on people and their performance as public servants is a key change in the Ministry of Public Service, according to the newly-appointed Under Secretary, Nego Sisiolo.

This ministry is now focusing on strengthening discipline to make sure public servants are accountable for their actions as government employees. The time for Solomon Islanders to take the lead in shaping the future direction of their country was right now, Sisiolo told the *toktok*.

“Strengthening of people's capacity within the public service is critical,” he said. “This is where we have to make big changes, but we have to do it in a way that best suits our country's needs.”

Solomon Islands' current position was like that of a ship that needs good captaincy to lead it in the right direction: “We are our own captains, and we must make sure our ship is on course. We must be our country's leaders.”

With these comments in mind, representatives from RAMSI, the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) and Solomon Islands Government shared their own perspectives on the RAMSI-Solomon Islands partnership.

Paul Schofield, from RAMSI's Office of the Special Coordinator, spoke about some of the achievements under the Solomon Islands Government-RAMSI Partnership Framework in recent years, such as strong economic growth, the implementation of a Code of Conduct for

the public service and the completion of two-thirds of the trials related to the country's ethnic tension period.

Focus then turned to the issue of ‘transition’: the process of RAMSI stepping back so that more Solomon Islanders have space to take the lead in the business of running the nation.

“This process will be planned carefully and RAMSI will be there, helping you along the way,” Schofield said.

RAMSI Participating Police Force's (PPF) Darren Boyd-Skinner, said from a policing point of view, the process of transition would need to be managed in close consultation with the government, RSIPF and the community.

“The PPF will begin to reduce its presence in frontline policing as the RSIPF continues to strengthen and grow in confidence,” he explained. It will be up to the Solomon Islands government to find the right balance in funding for the RSIPF; what will work in this environment, and what is affordable for the country, long-term,” Boyd-Skinner told the *toktok*.

“I encourage you to think about what you want your police force to be, and we—the PPF—can help them get there.”

RSIPF Deputy Commissioner, Edmond Sikua said the police's strategic direction is shaped by three ideas: being capable, being trusted and being accountable.

“We will soon be launching a number of programmes which is a key to this idea of gaining the trust and respect of the community including the voluntary early retirement scheme and a process of reconciliation within the RSIPF.”

Sikua said a recently piloted Community Officer Programme, similar to the Area Constables that worked across the country in the years before and directly after independence, would likely play an important role in policing in the provinces.

After these briefings, the *toktok* participants split into groups to discuss the idea of ‘looking forward’, understanding the key issues Solomon Islands is facing, and how they believe these issues should be tackled, particularly with the idea of RAMSI's transition. **B**