

REBUILDING A NATION

Ten Years of the Solomon Islands - RAMSI Partnership





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Cover photos

Front: A young visitor to the RAMSI Outreach stall at the 2007 Auki Tradeshow,
Malaita, displays RAMSI's signature face paint design. (Qila Tuhanuku)

Back: The children of Nuhu village farewell a RAMSI Outreach team after a
Wakabaot Tok Tok in the Shortland Islands, March 2011. (Tom Perry)

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REBUILDING A NATION

Ten Years of the Solomon Islands - RAMSI Partnership

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Police officers from around the Pacific have worked closely with their Royal Solomon Islands counterparts over the past 10 years. Here they pose with the 15 flags of the Pacific Islands Forum nations that contribute personnel to RAMSI's Participating Police Force.

Foreword



On 24 July 2003 the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) came to Solomon Islands to restore law and order and to rebuild a devastated country.

The innovative and uniquely Pacific Biketawa Declaration provided the basis for the mission. Adopted by Pacific Island Forum Leaders at their annual meeting held in Kiribati in 2000, the declaration provides a mechanism for collective regional action in the event of a security crisis.

With the arrival of RAMSI, the declaration's principles were transformed into a practical vehicle for regional response, with the mission drawing on the support, expertise and resources of 15 Pacific neighbours.

These countries came together under the leadership of Australia to helpem fren because we all believe that the Pacific can, should and will be a region of peace, harmony, security and economic prosperity. We believe that all of the region's peoples should be free to lead worthwhile lives.

Solomon Islands is now a stable and secure country, open for business, and with its people living free from intimidation.

The rule of law has been restored, the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force is growing in confidence and capability, the country's finances are improving, national institutions are better at delivering services and the economy is growing.

These changes are the result of the Government and people of Solomon Islands working hard and in partnership with RAMSI to make their country a better, safer and more prosperous place. The changes are also the result of the strong Pacific commitment to RAMSI from the contributing countries of the Pacific Islands Forum.

RAMSI's regional nature has been the key to its success. The diversity of people, cultures and countries of the Pacific have combined to make a great contribution to the mission.

Throughout the life of RAMSI, the Pacific Islands Forum has played an important oversight role and has worked with both RAMSI and the Solomon Islands Government to ensure the relationship moves forward in a constructive and positive way.

RAMSI is the success story that all of the Pacific can be proud of. It is a model of regional cooperation for the world to follow.

This booklet is a tribute to the Government and people of Solomon Islands and to all of those people, from all Pacific Island countries, who have worked side by side with Solomon Islanders – as civilians, soldiers and police officers.

The photos and stories in this booklet allow us to remember what has been achieved over the first ten years of the mission, and also to reflect on what lies ahead.

RAMSI has brought Pacific Island countries closer and I look forward to us all working together for a better and brighter future for Solomon Islands, and the Pacific.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tuiloma Neroni Slade O.S.' The signature is stylized and fluid.

Tuiloma Neroni Slade O.S.
Secretary General
Pacific Islands Forum

Message from the Prime Minister



Ten years ago on 24 July 2003, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), came to our shores under a regional mandate to restore law and order after almost five years of disorder resulting from the ethnic strife that started on Guadalcanal.

Today, Solomon Islands stands tall in the Pacific as we celebrate a decade of regional triumph.

*RAMSI's **Helpem Fren** mission has undeniably turned the fortunes of a plummeting Solomon Islands to that of a thriving nation darting forward at an impressive pace towards economic prosperity, security stability and an orderly society.*

The supreme success of RAMSI is and must be attributed to the regional effort spearheaded by Australia and New Zealand since the birth of the mission. It proves that regionalism - although not a solution to all our problems - offers a workable choice, in the case of my country some ten years ago.

A decade on it is public knowledge that the return of law and order and the great economic strides that we have made are hugely indebted to the exceptional work of the mission. Life has returned to normal and many gains have been accomplished since July 24 2003.

The last 18 months best encapsulate the achievements we have made as we successfully hosted the Festival of Pacific Arts, the Oceania Football Confederation World Cup qualifiers, the 75th Anniversary of the Battle of Guadalcanal and the historic visit of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge. These events were happening against a backdrop of strong economic growth, recording almost 11 per cent in 2011.

As RAMSI changes pace and shifts gear we are also changing tack to accommodate the drawdown of RAMSI and work with those that will carry on with the mission. This is the most significant change since the mission arrived. My people over the months have discussed the effects of the withdrawal of the military component of RAMSI and are ready to move on without the presence of soldiers in their communities.

I would like to thank Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Tonga and Papua New Guinea who have contributed to the military component of RAMSI.

As a country, Solomon Islands has undergone many changes and challenges in the past ten years and the presence of RAMSI in our country has increased the visibility of Solomon Islands in the Pacific and globally.

Now that RAMSI has entered another phase, my country still needs the assistance of our regional friends to build on the gains and map out a new pathway for our partnership.

Unquestionably the mission has helped Solomon Islands to progress this far but I expect this same partnership will further advance this country forward especially in its economic growth, and in its improving law and order.

It is the dream of every Solomon Islander to live in a prosperous country, and have equal opportunity for jobs and a decent standard of living. As a Government we are committed to those goals and we hope to achieve them with the help of our regional friends and the international community.

As I have said many times - RAMSI's mission should be task bound not time bound.

In closing allow me to thank all Pacific Islands Forum members for their contribution to RAMSI. On behalf of all Solomon Islanders I thank you for changing the course of our beloved country.

I commend this booklet to all Solomon Islanders and RAMSI members as a record of a successful decade of regional cooperation that has established a firm foundation for the future of this nation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gordon Lilo'. The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a light-colored background.

*Hon Gordon Darcy Lilo
Prime Minister of Solomon Islands*

Message from the Special Coordinator



By universal acclaim, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands – RAMSI – has been a success. This success hasn't happened just by accident. Like the conflict itself, there have been underlying causes, contributing factors and key players that interacted and changed the country, this time for the better.

Without doubt the fact that the Mission was invited and welcomed is the most important factor that has contributed to the success of RAMSI when compared with other missions that have sought to bring an end to an internal conflict. RAMSI was invited to Solomon Islands through the unanimous support of the country's National Parliament through the passage of the Facilitation of International Assistance Act in 2003 and RAMSI has consistently had the support of around 85 per cent of the population.

Making RAMSI a partnership with the Solomon Islands Government also helped ensure the Government's ownership and endorsement of the Mission's activities. These became embodied in the Partnership Framework between the Solomon Islands Government and RAMSI which both parties concluded in April 2009.

The regional character of RAMSI has been critical to its success. RAMSI was endorsed by the Pacific Islands Forum under the Biketawa Declaration of 2000. The Forum continued to play an oversight role of RAMSI through regular reviews of the Mission and the work of the Enhanced Consultative Mechanism and the Forum Ministerial Standing Committee on RAMSI. The regional make-up of the Mission with people from every Pacific Island Forum country also improved RAMSI's understanding of, and ability to work with, the people and cultures of Solomon Islands.

The strong emphasis on internal, bilateral and regional consultation and coordination has also been one of the factors contributing to the success of RAMSI. The Mission's well-resourced and active community outreach program backed by a professionally staffed Public Affairs Unit also contributed to the success.

But the most important factor, just as it was during the dark days of the tensions, has been the role played by individuals. I wish to acknowledge here the people who have led various parts of the Mission. This includes all the Special Coordinators, Deputy Special Coordinators, Assistant Special Coordinators, Development Coordinators, Participating Police Force Commanders, Combined Task Force Commanders, and of course the many civilian advisers, police officers, military personnel, and those Solomon Islands officials with whom we have worked closely over the years. Through their individual and collective efforts they have contributed to the success of the Mission.

Today, law and order has been re-established in the communities with a rebuilt Royal Solomon Islands Police Force and effective law and justice institutions. The country now has functioning government systems and the economy continues to record annual growth. There will be challenges in the years ahead, but a return to militancy is unlikely to be one of them, because the majority of people do not want that. Books such as this, and the accompanying DVD, aim to remind us how much can be achieved economically and socially when governments, people and businesses can go about their lives without fear of intimidation. The development challenge facing the country is large and long-term, but it will be made achievable if law and order is maintained, property rights are respected and enforceable in impartial courts of law, politicians and citizens are honest, and leaders act in the national interest.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nicholas Coppel". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Nicholas Coppel
Special Coordinator
Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands



Standing before a clutch of international and local media, moments after their arrival on 24 July, 2003, newly appointed Special Coordinator, Nick Warner (centre), watched by the Commander of RAMSI's Participating Police Force, Ben McDevitt (left) pledges RAMSI will work in partnership with those Solomon Islanders who long to change the course of their nation's history after almost half a decade of civil disorder.

WHY RAMSI?

The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands came with a purpose, determined to assist a neighbour in need. Its arrival, shortly after the first rays of dawn struck the tarmac of Solomon Islands Henderson International Airport on Thursday 24 July 2003, was an event that has changed the course of a nation's history.

The soldiers, police and civilians from Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu who poured off the Hercules and other aircraft that day and in the days that followed, would eventually amass over 2000. In what was to become one of the most uniquely successful experiments in regional cooperation, RAMSI - the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands - had, through the commitment of Solomon Islands neighbours and friends, been brought into being.

Led by veteran Australian diplomat, Nick Warner, who a week earlier had been appointed the Mission's Special Coordinator, RAMSI personnel were greeted by thousands of enthusiastic Solomon Islanders who had flocked with their families to watch the help that they had been so desperately praying for, finally reach their shores.

“The atmosphere in Honiara at the time was one of desperateness. Ordinary Solomon Islanders were in a real jam. They didn't have access to running water in their homes, kids stopped going to school because teachers stopped going to teach. The whole society was grinding to a halt.”

Dorothy Wickham, Founding CEO, One Television

The problems facing Solomon Islands at the time were many and serious. The tensions, the expression now used to describe the period of violence and unfettered corruption that overtook Solomon Islands from 1998 to 2003, originally referred to the long simmering ethnic tensions between the populations of Guadalcanal and Malaita. Exploited by unscrupulous political and criminal elements, these led to a coup in 2000, the wide-scale destruction of property and ultimately to the deaths of more than 400 people, the virtual collapse of the economy and an almost complete breakdown in governance, law and order by the time of RAMSI's arrival in July 2003. After five years of civil unrest, the Government and its institutions had ceased to function effectively. Corruption was widespread. Public finances were in ruin and many of the most basic services such as health and education were not being delivered to the people.

In April 2003, the then Prime Minister of Solomon Islands, Sir Allan Kemakeza, repeated his earlier urgent request for assistance. This time the response from Australia was different. In June, Sir Allan was invited to Canberra to formally receive the answer to his request: an offer of significant assistance from the then Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, which would see Australia lead and fund a regional assistance mission.

Later John Howard was to say: “Because the request came yet again, I had developed the view in the lead up to our decision that we had probably made the wrong decision earlier (in declining to assist). I thought that provided other countries were involved, and that was the key to its success, nobody could say it was a bit of the old fashioned colonialism.”

Mission

To work together with the people and Government of Solomon Islands to build a secure, well-governed and prosperous nation.

Mandate

In 2003, the Solomon Islands Government and the countries of the Pacific Region, through the Pacific Islands Forum, agreed on a mandate for RAMSI to address civil unrest and lawlessness, economic decline and a dramatic drop in service delivery and government administrative standards.

The key elements of the mandate were to:

- restore civil order in Honiara and the throughout the rest of the country
- stabilise government finances and fight corruption
- promote longer-term economic recovery and revive business confidence
- rebuild the machinery of government.

In response the countries of the Pacific region, through the Pacific Islands Forum, agreed to support the formation of a regional assistance mission to be led and funded by Australia and New Zealand with membership being made up with personnel from all Forum countries. This initiative was endorsed under the Biketawa Declaration which Forum Leaders signed up to in 2000. The Declaration stipulates that such a mission could only be sent to a member country upon the request of the affected nation.

Together with the Solomon Islands Government, the Forum countries then agreed on a mandate to address civil unrest and lawlessness, economic decline, corruption and a dramatic drop in service delivery and government administrative standards.

On 22 July 2003, the Solomon Islands National Parliament unanimously passed the Facilitation of International Assistance Act 2003, which provided authority for the operation of the mission under Solomon Islands domestic law.

Sir Allan Kemakeza was to admit later: "I felt relieved because something positive was coming to address the situation in my country. If Australia didn't agree to come and help there would have been no future for Solomon Islands."

On the tarmac that day on 24 July 2003, Special Coordinator Nick Warner gave the first of what were to be many press conferences, telling the media that: "For too long this country has suffered at the hands of a small number of militants and criminals who have terrorised Solomon Islands society, brought the country to its knees, and done a disservice to the reputation of Solomon Islanders as a good and generous people.

"The men and women from around the Pacific who arrived on your shores today as part of the Regional Assistance Mission come at the invitation of the Solomon Islands Government, and as guests of the Solomon Islands people.

"We are calling our involvement here Operation Helpem Fren, because that is what we are here to do. We are here as friends, to work in partnership with you, to restore promise to your country, to restore hopes for a better life to you and your children."

RAMSI's security operations were police-led; the commander of the mission's 325-strong Participating Police Force, an Australian Federal Policeman, Ben McDevitt. Supporting the police was an 1800-strong military contingent, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel John Frewen of the Australian Defence Force and including 450 combat troops, as well as logistics, engineering and medical personnel.

Working closely with the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force with strong support from the community and Solomon Islands National Peace Council, RAMSI's Participating Police Force Police, supported by RAMSI's military contingent, moved quickly to re-establish peace and restore the rule of law. In early August a 21-day firearms amnesty was declared. Almost 4000 firearms were surrendered or confiscated and more than 3000 people arrested in the first few months of the Mission's life.



Although weapons were surrendered by communities throughout all nine provinces, the majority came from the militants on the two islands directly involved in the conflict, Malaita and Guadalcanal which hosts the national capital, Honiara.

After this initial stabilisation stage, Solomon Islands and RAMSI focused on working together to develop the capacity of the institutions of government, to build a sustainable economy and to preserve a stable and secure environment.

RAMSI's regional nature is its core underlying strength. Every Forum country participates in RAMSI and the Mission benefits from the diverse cultures and experience of the 15 contributing members. Over the past ten years, thousands of police, military and civilian personnel from across the region have served with RAMSI and worked side by side with Solomon Islanders. The individual efforts of those who have worked with RAMSI have combined to make a great contribution to the success of the Mission. The role of the Pacific Islands Forum in overseeing this partnership has been crucial to its success. It has helped the relationship move forward in a constructive and cooperative way.

The partnership forged that day between the people and Government of Solomon Islands and RAMSI has achieved much in the ten years since. Law and order has been restored, national institutions are being rebuilt and considerable progress has been made towards reforming and growing the economy. The scale and significance of what has been achieved by the Solomon Islands-RAMSI Partnership across the three pillars of RAMSI's activities: Law and Justice, Economic Governance and the Machinery of Government, provide a solid foundation of support and assistance on which to build. At the same time, both the Solomon Islands Government and RAMSI recognise that there is still much work to be done.

In mid-2013 RAMSI transitioned to a police-focused mission as the military contingent withdrew and RAMSI's development activities transferred to the Australian and New Zealand bilateral aid programs or to other donors.

Almost 4000 firearms were surrendered or confiscated in the first few months of the Mission's life. All of the weapons collected were destroyed, many in spectacular public ceremonies such as the one captured here in this photograph by AFP photographer Brian Hartigan, in August 2003 at Avu Avu on the Weathercoast of Guadalcanal.



Fiji

Fiji has played a significant role in RAMSI since it commenced in July 2003. Fijians serve within the police and civilian components of RAMSI, with the Fiji military also having previously served as part of the mission.



Kiribati

Kiribati has been an important contributor to RAMSI since it began with officers from the Kiribati Police Force serving as part of the RAMSI Participating Police Force from July 2003.



RAMSI Special Coordinators (L- R) Tim George, Nicholas Coppel, James Batley and Graeme Wilson with the Solomon Islands Prime Minister, Gordon Darcy Lilo at RAMSI, a history in pictures, photographic exhibition, Parliament House, Canberra, Australia, August 2012.

Partners Building the Peace

Paul Tovua



Partnerships

Much has been written about the challenges of political instability, corruption, violence and the breakdown of governance in Solomon Islands. Our neighbours and the international community have also offered their analysis of why Solomon Islands has been able to largely overcome the worst of these to witness in the past decade, the restoration of normal governance. However, very few external observers have recognised the pivotal role the concept of partnership has played in the process of returning peace to Solomon Islands.

To start with there is the partnership that was formed by our Pacific neighbours when they joined together in 2003 to create the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) which in turn then forged a direct partnership with the Government and people of Solomon Islands. But what has not really been explored is how within these broader alliances it is the many smaller partnerships that are the building blocks for the success of the larger partnerships. In some cases these have been made up of just two or three people or maybe a team leader and his or her small team, in others such as the highly effective partnership between the National

Peace Council and RAMSI's Participating Police Force that was responsible for the surrender and destruction of almost all firearms in the country at that time, it has been a matter of two very different organisations working together effectively in order to achieve a common goal. In all cases it has involved the coming together of the right people at the right time in the right place, allowing us to achieve great things.

The Tensions

In Solomon Islands as in many Pacific countries, community fractures occur when population pressure results in people moving between islands creating potential for misunderstanding due to different approaches and subtle cultural differences. This was one of the main reasons why some of the people of Guadalcanal (not all) and some (not all) the people of Malaita experienced problems that resulted in violence. Many people still speak of this, of the events that occurred between 1998 and 2003, as *the tensions*. Those problems arose however because of poor and ineffective leadership as well as other socio-economic factors, not simply because two groups of people disagreed on matters of land, as many people would have you believe.

It was a common desire to resolve *the tensions*, to bring to an end the violence, the disruption of government services, and the suffering of our people, that ultimately led to the formation of the partnerships that are now associated with the deployment of the region's first combined intervention force to our shores.

RAMSI's Arrival

In early 2003, responding to demands from community leaders, the Prime Minister, Sir Allan Kemakeza and his Government once again called on Australia to intervene in our country's ongoing crisis. By then the nation had been suffering for nearly five years but repeated calls to our nearest neighbours and the international community had fallen well short of what was needed to end the conflict and the escalating criminality that accompanied it.

Finally in May 2003, Canberra suddenly changed its tune and the Kemakeza Government was quietly told that such a request may well receive a more positive response if it was to be put once again. By the end of the month, the Prime Minister had been invited to bring a delegation to Canberra. I joined the delegation in my capacity as Chair of the National Peace Council, and on 5 June 2003 - three years to the very day of the 2000 coup – we sat down with the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard and his officials to discuss their proposal for Australia to fund and lead a regional mission that could not only intervene but would work with us to help us rebuild our economy, restart the machinery of government and restore the rule of law. It was this mission, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) which was to arrive on our shores just six weeks later.

On our way back from Canberra, Prime Minister Kemakeza asked me if I would be willing to head a bi-partisan committee that would prepare the ground for the intervention and the package of assistance that had been offered by Prime Minister Howard. This was later to become known as the Intervention Taskforce. Although there were risks involved including personal safety, for the sake of the country I said I was willing to take this on for it seemed the help we needed to put our nation back on the right track was finally on its way. The next six weeks were frenetic as we worked to explain to our people

what the intervention force would be doing, what its mandate was and encouraged them to have confidence in what was about to happen.

Working with RAMSI

Set up in 2000 to oversee the implementation of the Townsville Peace Agreement, the National Peace Council proved the ideal partner for RAMSI during its first year of operations, especially in the task RAMSI's Participating Police Force had set itself of removing all the firearms from the community. While the time was ripe for such a goal, a high level of cooperation from the community was required if Solomons was ever to be able to become a gun-free society, something the first Special Coordinator of RAMSI, Nick Warner constantly encouraged us to aspire to. While RAMSI had the advantage of being a well-armed and well-equipped neutral force, having just landed on our shores it had little knowledge of the community and no direct links at all.

By the time of RAMSI's deployment after five years of troubles, no police or government workers could or would venture into rural Guadalcanal or Malaita. Whereas the National Peace Council had by then built up their local networks after three years of on the ground experience. The council consisted of ten councillors representing each of the provinces plus one for Honiara city. These councillors in turn worked very closely with



“What we promised Solomon Islanders was a better life, a safer life and a more prosperous life. I think we met those key objectives. We met them because we had the right team, the right timing and the right approach. Part of that right approach was a partnership with the Government of Solomon Islands and just as importantly, with the people of Solomon Islands.”

Nick Warner RAMSI Special Coordinator, 2003 - 2004

87 peace monitors who covered the hot spots on Guadalcanal, Malaita and Western Provinces plus ten headquarter staff including one expatriate adviser funded by AusAID.

Under my guidance the monitoring posts and the peace monitors who maintained them developed a strong profile and high level of trust and acceptance in most rural areas enabling the council to develop an expertise in establishing and maintaining rural networks for law and order and peace.¹ The council and its monitors were trusted by the people because we had been working very closely with them. We monitored law and order as well as providing, through our radio communications network, some sense of security to communities.

From the moment RAMSI touched down, the Council worked very closely with the Special Coordinator, Nick Warner and the Commander of the Participating Police Force, Ben McDevitt, providing the mission with the vital link to the chiefs and people of Solomon Islands and with crucial context and intelligence upon arrival. We assisted them in the urgent task of identifying and establishing where police posts were most needed in the hot spots of Guadalcanal and Malaita. This partnership between the neutral, well-resourced intervention force and the local, known and trusted peace agency enabled our efforts to end the conflict and return the rule of law to the nation to move ahead very quickly indeed. From the day the mission deployed, weapons and ammunition began flowing into the Council on the understanding they would be handed

¹ Operating as a useful and productive team member is something I have always enjoyed, however my early days of solid training in rugby league football in Campbelltown, Australia has made luminous the real nature of team work. Nowhere else had my prosperity depended so much on team work, if one team member is down, the team is down, if the team achieved, everyone achieves. Individual responsibility was thus paramount for success. My rugby training not only made me more aware of other people's strengths and weakness, but also increased my own expectations of myself. I have carried this development through to the work place where working as a team member has led to a process of shared information, negotiation and worthwhile outcomes for all team members.



Special Coordinator's Award for Women

An untrained school teacher who founded a primary school, a senior police officer who had loyally served the force with integrity and determination for many years, a young woman community worker, a long time public officer and the Clerk to the National Parliament have been the recipients of the Special Coordinator's Award for Women since its inception in 2009.

The idea for such an award came up in 2008 when RAMSI was considering ways to highlight and celebrate the considerable achievements of women in Solomon Islands. The Special Coordinator's Award for Women is given out at the annual RAMSI Women's Breakfast which is held to mark International Women's Day in early March. The Award includes a monetary prize of \$2,000 to be used as the awardee chooses.

In 2009 the inaugural Special Coordinator's Award went to Ms Beverley Komasi for her extraordinary initiative in establishing the Mercy School in Burns Creek in East Honiara, for the children of the RANADI dump, followed in 2010 by Inspector Florence Taro of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force for her many years of dedicated professionalism, then in 2011 the community work of an outstanding young woman, Ms Maylin Sese was acknowledged, and in 2012 the award went to long-standing and feisty champion of transparency, accountability and excellence in the Solomon Islands Public Service, Ms Ruth Liloqula. In 2013 the silent achiever and Clerk to National Parliament, Mrs Taeasi Sanga was acknowledged for her many years providing efficient administration with dedication to the Parliament.

RAMSI hopes that the award has inspired women in Solomon Islands to celebrate each other's successes and to continue their individual contributions to the nation, whether this be in a high profile role or by quietly getting a job done in their community.



Community Outreach

Eighty per cent of Solomon Islanders live in rural communities. There are more than six thousand villages.

With the remoteness of some of the communities, the lack of reliable communication links, and the short reach of the traditional media, RAMSI made the decision at the outset that if the Mission was to be successful, it must make the effort to reach ordinary Solomon Islanders, to inform them of its work and equally important, hear what the people had to say about RAMSI.

The RAMSI Community Outreach Program was all about getting out into these village communities and meeting ordinary Solomon Islanders. The Outreach Program provided the face to face interaction between representatives of the Solomon Islands Government, the various programs of RAMSI and the people of Solomon Islands. People were able to get firsthand information about what RAMSI and the Solomon Islands Government were doing to improve their lives from the very people doing the work including the police and RAMSI civilian advisers.

Since the inception of the RAMSI Community Outreach Program in 2006, more than 1000 outreaches have been held throughout the provinces, in settlements in and around Honiara, in schools and around Honiara, as well as during national trade shows. In recent years RAMSI's stakeholders have been invited from time to time *Wakabot Toktoks*, a form of key stakeholder consultations.

No outreach session is the same. Each community session or meeting has its own set of concerns and issues. Discussions are always lively and active. People use the outreach as an opportunity to ask questions and hear answers straight away.

Left: RAMSI's Cultural and Community Outreach Coordinator, Chris Tarohimae answers questions from the students of Honiara's King George IV, National Secondary School at one of the mission's regular school forums held as part of the mission's Community Outreach Program 2006-2013.

The Community Outreach encouraged open, honest and truthful discussions by all parties. Besides the feedback provided to RAMSI and the Solomon Islands Government during the community outreach meetings, Solomon Islanders frequently used the occasion to thank RAMSI for the restoration of peace and normalcy in their communities.

The Community Outreach teams comprised of representatives of RAMSI's three pillars – civilian, police and military as well as their Solomon Islands counterparts.

Besides the opportunity to inform communities about the work of RAMSI and the Government and hearing feedback, the Community Outreach Program also gave the opportunity for the communities to experience the regional nature of the Mission. People from the villages, who may never have the opportunity to meet any one from another country, had the opportunity to hear stories from representatives of the various Pacific Island nations that make up RAMSI.

On the other hand, members of RAMSI had the opportunity to experience firsthand life in a rural community in Solomon Islands and appreciate the culture as well as the challenges faced by ordinary Solomon Islanders. RAMSI personnel also used the opportunity to try out their Solomon Islands pidgin, something which some of them take back to their home countries with them. RAMSI personnel usually experience why Solomon Islands is known as the "Hapi Isles" when participating in the Community Outreach program with the countless smiling faces they met in the villages.

The coordination of the Community Outreach Program was no easy task but the success of each of the meetings was due to the exceptional skills and commitment of the Solomon Islands former school principal, Chris Tarohimae who as RAMSI Culture and Community Outreach Coordinator led RAMSI's Outreach efforts since 2007.

over to RAMSI to be destroyed. The first of 17 police posts opening in Avu Avu on the Weathercoast as well as the negotiations which brought about the surrender of the Weathercoast rebel leader, Harold Keke all happening less than a month later.

Laying the Foundation for Peace, before RAMSI

The depth of these achievements and the extraordinary pace of the turn-around they brought about for the nation can only be appreciated in the context of the decline in security and standard of living that Solomon Islands experienced over the previous five years. In late 1998, following growing terror and harassment, a mass eviction of many Malaitans from rural Guadalcanal by Guale militants began and some Malaitans were killed. Malaitan patience ran out and in early 2000 a Malaitan group calling themselves the Malaita Eagle Force after the province's symbol, raided the police armoury at Auki and took those arms to Guadalcanal to use for protection and retaliation against the Isatabu Freedom Movement, as the Guadalcanal militants were calling themselves then. The armed conflict between these two groups became more intense over the next year, culminating in a coup on 5 June 2000 when the Malaita Eagle Force joined forces with the police paramilitary group and took control of the national armoury at the police headquarters in Honiara.

The conflict escalated further, claiming many lives. Bunkers were built at strategic positions on the outskirts of the national capital. There was a mass eviction of Guadalcanal people from Honiara to their respective villages, and some Guales were killed. Innocent women and their children from both sides were the worst affected. Women's groups and churches rallied to stop the killings and the conflict. But our police force was already divided and many of our leaders compromised. The normal instruments of the State established to protect its citizens were not capable, and in some cases even willing, to deal with the crisis.

Nevertheless throughout the conflict the Solomon Islands Government with assistance from international donors made various attempts to stop the fighting between the two parties and bring them to negotiate their differences in a peaceful

manner, the most significant of these being the Townsville Peace Talks held in the Australian city of Townsville in October 2000 which subsequently led to the signing of the Townsville Peace Agreement.

Bringing the militants from both sides to the negotiating table was crucial to the success of these talks. It would have been impossible to talk about peace without the actual involvement of the combatants. Although it did not end all our problems as hoped, the Townsville Peace Agreement did achieve one thing. It enabled the two warring sides to agree to a ceasefire, laying the foundation for the hoped-for peace process. Unfortunately the women's groups, churches and various non-government organisations who had all played such a crucial role in getting the combatants to this point were not represented at the Townsville negotiations and the subsequent peace agreement neglected to build in any ongoing role for them. As a result the peace process was not able to move forward as well as it should have once the challenging task of implementing the agreement began in earnest on the ground. The task of monitoring both sides' adherence to the terms of the agreement was assigned to a small, neutral but unarmed body staffed mostly by Australians and New Zealanders known as the International Peace Monitoring Team.

At the same time the National Peace Council was established to assist with building grassroots support in the community for the peace process. In the early phase of peace operations, the government identified people of standing who were willing to travel and consult widely and generally let the aggrieved parties know that there was a constituency to whom they could turn to air their grievances or at the very least to try and explain themselves.

More than anything the National Peace Council became a communication system – a system involving trusted people as the medium for communication. And the medium soon became the message as well. The leaders, staff and village contacts in the National Peace Council network were themselves the message that peace was possible, demonstrating that there were good people out there who could help, who could mediate, facilitate reconciliation

and generally cool things down and that most importantly communities did not have to deal with resolving the conflict alone. This was the foundation for peace that the Council had built when RAMSI arrived in July 2000.

Our experience at the National Peace Council showed that the majority of Solomon Islanders wanted peace and had rejected the culture of the gun. Because of this we had, in the three years before RAMSI arrived, been able to collect many firearms and ammunition as provided for under the Townsville Peace Agreement. But the tenure of the International Peace Monitoring Team - cut short due to increasing threats to the security of its unarmed members - had also shown that there was still a minority holding onto their guns who did not feel obliged to handover their weapons to an unarmed group. This all changed with the arrival of RAMSI's 2000 plus soldiers and police, and the conditions were now ripe to harvest the peace from the foundations we at the Council had carefully and patiently laid down in the preceding years.

Weapon Surrender – Weapons Free Village

A shining example of how this worked on the ground is the Weapons Free Village campaign, in which chiefs, women, men, children and church leaders were all intensely involved in bringing about the disarming of their own communities. It was very much the people's success and achievement. It is a serious business to have a village declared weapons free meaning that the community or village has surrendered all its weapons and its inhabitants have pledged to remain free of weapons in the future.

Following the declaration of the 2000 ceasefire, the National Peace Council and the International Peace Monitoring Team along with the media would usually travel out to the village in question to receive the arms being surrendered, award the declaration and witness the event. The community in turn was given the right to display a sign declaring its weapons free status.

With RAMSI's arrival and the guns flooding in, our goal expanded from individual weapon-free villages to a totally gun-free society. The mood at these occasions was always one of great optimism with everyone in no doubt that this was a new beginning, and a chance for Solomon Islanders to take back control of our country and our future. Often we would also witness the physical destruction of the guns being handed in and this could lead to some spectacular displays including huge bonfires consisting entirely of guns or mounds of weapons that would be cut up with grinders, showers of bright sparks flying out for all to see. In the end, the total number of weapons collected that first year was over 3700 as well as a large cache of ammunition. More than 51 per cent of these were collected and recorded by the National Peace Council.

Lessons Learned

RAMSI has been a worthwhile partner in the rebuilding of our nation and the long-term commitment of our regional neighbours who have made up the contributing countries of the mission have been an important part of this success. Without the support of RAMSI and its contributing countries, and all our donor partners, the people of Solomon Islands would not be experiencing the freedom of movement and peace and gradual rebuilding of the country's governance structures and institutions that we are today.

At the same time, after ten years of RAMSI operations there is a list of lessons learned which is quite significant. To pave the way for sustainable peace, the peacemakers need to know what happened in the past. The RAMSI model has been regarded by political leaders in Australia, New Zealand and the region as appropriate and suitable however for those of us who worked closely with it, it has been a cause at times for worry and even exasperation due to a lack of understanding on the behalf of individuals involved in RAMSI about how Solomon Islands society works, what is valued by our communities and what is not so important to us.

Sound political judgement - taking into account the views of many uncompromised community leaders - must be exercised as to when and where to locate the authority of the

intervention mission otherwise the result is that initiatives will be ignored or wished away. In my view any future intervention should be merged into the structures, processes and procedures of the government. And as each sectoral, program or project milestone is reached and our own people can manage, sustain and fund specific activities from our own budget, discrete inputs can be withdrawn.²

Better use should be made of the local capacity available immediately despite any apprehensions. For example while the purging of our police force was necessary, the RSIPF suffered grievously when virtually its entire upper echelon was wiped out in a clean sweep. There is also need to recognize that to restore the credibility of a police force, there must be some provision made for oversight by community leaders. Our police have been used and abused by politicians and criminals a number of times over the years and not just during *the tensions*. It is necessary to ensure the national community has ownership of the force and has some say in the oversight of the proper running of the force.

Civil society leaders, however strong or weak they are, need to be accorded an advisory position at the table of government and intervention forces. In other words, three groups - government, the intervention forces and representatives of civil society - must meet regularly to exchange views and listen to each other. Community leaders must be heard as they will present the apolitical 'lived' experience that any intervention must know about in order to be successful.

In our case, there seems to be here at home as well as in Australia, concern about sovereignty. There is no use being concerned about sovereignty issues when the helper is already

2 There is a good lesson to be learned from the experience in East Timor where a former Premier of Victoria, Australia, Steve Bracks was engaged by the President and Prime Minister to work alongside them. Resourced by an Australian entrepreneur, this was a private intervention that worked. Certainly East Timor appears to have done very well indeed.

on the ground trying to carry out necessary remedial work. Let us not beat around the bush. We need this assistance and we must give it every chance of succeeding.

At the same time, most people in the Solomons we are keen to observe this next transitional phase, as RAMSI hands back more of the responsibility for the institutions to our government and its people. I believe that we are seeing progress and in turn the growth in confidence of our people in all areas of industry and society and across all regions of our country. This is also a necessary test of the government's capacity to think and plan ahead.

If we do things well in Solomon Islands, our combined experience can be a model for a regional civil-military response to deal with emergencies that may arise in countries that do not have a military force. This should be explored because governance in the Pacific is becoming increasingly complicated and stressful. When we set out to become independent, many of us had less than half the populations we have today. We in Pacific Island countries must now share burdens, act together, share facilities and act in unison to help each other just as we did in *Helpem Fren*.

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Paul Tovua

From Huhula Village, Central Guadalcanal, Paul Tovua was the Prime Minister's designate secretary responsible for the Government's relationship with RAMSI from 2009 – 2012. The country's first indigenous Government Valuer, Tovua was a founding member of Solomon Islands National Parliament 1976 – 1993 during which time he held various Ministerial portfolios including Minister of Natural Resources, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Economic Planning. He then served two terms as Speaker of Parliament 1994 – 2001. As Chairman of the National Peace Council 2000-2006, he was heavily involved in the negotiations for the 2001 Townsville Peace Agreement. In 2003 he was also appointed Chairman of the Intervention Taskforce, responsible for the preparations for RAMSI's arrival. He was also one of several initiators of the recent Truth and Reconciliation Commission.



RAMSI's Law and Justice program has worked with the Solomon Islands justice institutions to help develop their capacity, including providing senior legal advisers from the UK, Australia and elsewhere in the region. Shown here (L-R) senior legal advisers from Australia, Mark Hobart and Edward FitzPatrick, from Papua New Guinea, Malaki Unagui and Nicholas Mirou and Solomon Islands senior legal officer now Principal Magistrate, Jim Botica Seuika.

Rebuilding Broken Walls

Justice Sir Albert Palmer



Solomon Islands joined the international community as an independent nation on the 7th of July 1978. Some of us were privileged to be present when the Union Jack was lowered for the last time and the blue, green and yellow flag of our independent Solomon Islands was raised. It was a proud moment for our young country with great ambitions to succeed and prosper in the community of nations worldwide, but were we ready for independence and what it entailed? This is the question many of us have asked ourselves since.

When the rule of law fails

The downward spiral to lawlessness now referred to as *the tensions* can be traced back many years but it was towards the end of 1998 and early 1999, that it became increasingly clear that crimes were being committed with impunity. Criminal activity was gathering momentum around the outskirts of the capital, Honiara and in communities across the island of Guadalcanal that was mostly targeting settlers from the island of Malaita. The warning signs were there and in part, it was the failure of the Government of the day to take these criminal

activities seriously and urgently ensure that the police were able to carry out their work effectively which contributed to the breakdown of the rule of law in the country.

An effective police force able to carry out its investigations without hindrance, able to make arrests and bring criminals before an efficient court process is crucial to the maintenance of the rule of law in any country. For when criminals and law breakers realise they will be swiftly dwelt with under an effective criminal justice system, they are bound to think twice about any criminal activities or plans that they have. When this process fails or slows down criminals will think that they can get away with taking the law into their hands. This is a sure sign that there is something wrong with the way in which the rule of law is being administered and signals the demise of law and order and peace and stability in a country. This was what happened in Solomon Islands in the ensuing months as the country approached 2000. When other countries were welcoming the new millennium, we were struggling to stay afloat.

The first raid on a police station was late in 1998, on a remote island at the Yandina Police Station in the Russell Islands group where police weapons were taken by armed and masked men. Attempts to conduct investigations and arrests were slow. The next raid planned was to target the police station on the former capital of the British Protectorate, Tulagi, in the Florida Islands group just across the sea from Honiara. However the Police were tipped off after the militants stole a boat and outboard motor from the Tambea Resort on Guadalcanal and intercepted the militants on Bungana Island not far from Tulgai. A confrontation ensued, shots were exchanged which resulted in one of the militants from the Weathercoast of Guadalcanal being killed. The rest were arrested, among them were those men who would later emerge as the main actors in the conflict that later took place.

What happened later when those key instigators were released on bail was quite unfortunate. For those very persons, including the Weathercoast warlord and leader, Harold Keke of the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (later to

be called by various other names, including Isatambu Freedom Movement or IFM) absconded on bail and blatantly renewed their criminal activities including intimidation, threatening behaviour, and committing serious crimes such as rape, arson and murder. At the height of *the tensions*, the rebellion included mass murder, attacks and burning of whole villages suspected of being in line with the Government forces or assisting the so-called enemy. Many of the murder cases that have come through the courts from this time dealt not just with the victims of a different ethnic origin from those accused, but many involved the deaths of people from the Weathercoast, people from neighbouring villages known to the accused or even related to them. Such is the tragic result of lawlessness and uncontrolled criminal activity, for when the rule of law fails, only the law of the jungle prevails.

One of the saddest consequences of this was the killing of members of the Melanesian Brotherhood sent to assist with the restoration of peace and law and order in the country. Some of their murderers have been tried, convicted and are now serving life sentences.

Lawlessness, rebellious activities and criminal behaviour form a vicious cycle. It goes around and comes back to haunt the perpetrator, and the cycle is simply repeated. It destroys people, communities and came very close to destroying our nation. Many of us who lived through these dark days sincerely hope that our people now have the eyes to see this and ensure that this cycle of violence and lawlessness is never allowed to start up again.

A society without walls

That period of lawlessness can be aptly described as a society without walls. The only boundaries were those fixed and determined by the strong and powerful, wielding power through the barrel of the gun. While there were still many good and noble people around, many others got sucked into the bottomless pit of greed, deceit and trickery, thinking they could get away with raiding the coffers of the Government



Ruth Liloqula

“The responsibility in keeping law and order is also ours. And we should not miss the opportunity that RAMSI has given us to set things straight while they are here.”

Treasury and Finances whenever they wished. No one was really in control and when anyone tried to stop these things happening they were threatened with the barrel of a gun.

What was laughable at the time, was the efforts by some to use these criminals, militants and rogue police officers to try to ‘keep’ the peace and maintain some semblance of law and order. Although many Government institutions continued to function after a fashion, it was touch and go for many because those who sought to do their jobs correctly and resist this wholesale looting of the state’s resources were invariably threatened and many beaten up; the expression popular for such treatment at the time was ‘panel beating’. Ultimately many public servants, as well as those employed in the private sector, chose to leave their places of work and escape from this senseless behaviour to the safety of their home villages in the provinces.

Trying to run Government in such an environment was near impossible as there were so few people around who could be relied on or trusted to do the work. But even those few often found their hands tied. Not even institutions such as our hospitals and medical clinics, normally respected as neutral safe havens for the sick and wounded, were immune.

As *the tensions* progressed, human rights and international obligations on the treatment of the wounded and injured went out the back door. In one of the worse instances of this kind, members of the Malaita Eagle Force forced their way into the country's main hospital, shooting dead two wounded militants from Guadalcanal as they lay in their hospital beds. The Government was paralysed and could no longer guarantee the safety and security of its citizens and property; the only safe place was with your own people. And so our people fled the national capital, deserting Honiara like a sinking ship.

This was the situation in Solomon Islands from 2000 to 2003. State institutions were dancing to the tune of hooligans and criminals; those who resisted were unable to discharge their duties freely and independently without fear or favour. While the courts remained physically untouched and our doors remained open to the public, everyone knew that the real test lay in the enforcement of the orders of the court. The most that could be done was to continue with the normal work of hearing and resolving disputes, including criminal trials, but the true test was enforcement. Over time it gradually became an accepted fact that even if you had won your case in court, you were unlikely to be able to enjoy the fruits of your victory unless the other party was willing to accept the decision of the court. If they refused there was little that could be done.

Even before the doors of our prisons were forced open and the inmates let go, the courts were granting bail to those alleged to have been involved in criminal activity simply because no one could guarantee their safety while in custody. Such was the level of harassment and threats the accused were receiving in prison, especially those from Guadalcanal.

It became obvious that there was no way the country could lift itself out of the mess it had gotten itself into without outside intervention. The ruling Government simply did not have the capacity to set the nation right; lawlessness had a stronghold over the affairs of our nation.

The intervention

The intervention on 24th July 2003 was an answer to the cry of the people of Solomon Islands. Many of us had been making the call for outside intervention to no avail. The response was always that it was an internal conflict and so no outside intervention could be endorsed within the framework of international armed force intervention, either by the United Nations or the Commonwealth of Nations, of which Solomon Islands is a member. Some of us had even hoped that in our hour of need the British Government might send a contingent of 'Gurkhas' to restore law and order in the country!

The news in June 2003 that a regional force was being considered came then as a most welcome surprise. The plan, we heard, was that Australia and New Zealand were willing to fund a contingent of military and police personnel as well as civilians that would be deployed to restore law and order and help us begin the work of rebuilding the nation. Great credit must be accorded to the Government of Sir Allan Kemakeza for the courageous decision taken to accept this offer and indeed invite what was to become known as the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, or RAMSI, into the country.

The intervention was the springboard for the process of rebuilding the nation and enabling us to get back on our feet. It was not without its critics, some of whom accused the then leaders of offering the nation up to be 're-colonised' by a foreign power, Australia. But time and history are always the best judge and have proven these critics wrong.

The aims of the intervention were noble, altruistic and clear from the outset; regional security. There was no hidden agenda other than a sincere concern that a close neighbour was fast becoming a failed state and spiralling towards destruction. A failed state is a vulnerable state. Desperate people can make desperate decisions, clasp at any rope of assistance thrown to them and the danger was that Solomon Islands might become aligned to 'suspect nations' and become a haven for undesirable activity within the region. I think

Australia and New Zealand and other Pacific Island nations were rightly concerned that Solomon Islands, if left to decline further, could ultimately destabilise the region.

Although some may not like the term 'failing state', I do not think there is any better term to describe our condition then. Guns were rampant, law and order was out of control, militants and criminals were committing crimes with impunity and state institutions were simply not functioning or operating at the barest minimum level. Some obviously benefited from this chaos and disorder, and enriched themselves almost overnight with ill-gotten gains. The majority of Solomon Islanders however were simply fed up with such irresponsible, senseless behaviour that was destroying people's lives as well as our nation.

RAMSI was welcomed with open arms by Solomon Islanders because it was seen as the catalyst the country needed to kick start our journey to recovery and restoration.

Rebuilding the broken walls

Our concern in the recovery stage was that to restore the rule of law, the intervention had to simultaneously address the parlous state of all five elements of the criminal justice system: the police, prosecutions and public defenders, the courts, corrections and the community. We realised that if only one part was strengthened, for example the courts, the others may not be able to cope and the desired result would not be achieved. We are grateful to RAMSI, for being very understanding, flexible and responsive to these concerns and ensuring that one of the three pillars or main areas of focus of its assistance was the restoration of law and order in the country including the rebuilding and strengthening of all elements of the criminal justice system. This decision and foresight paved the way for the assistance to be carried out in a systematic, methodical and holistic manner that to this day is having a long- lasting impact.

In the early days of the intervention a lot of decisions had to be made quickly and were taken by direct consultation amongst the Heads of Agencies in the Legal Sector, including

the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, James Remobatu, the Team Leader of RAMSI's Solomon Islands Law and Justice Sector Institutional Strengthening Program, Chris Cole, the General Manager of GRM International (the contractor engaged by RAMSI to facilitate the program), Brendan Crimmins, and myself, as Chief Justice. Because of the need to make decisions quickly to facilitate the progress of the assistance so that any works that needed to be done could be authorised and acted upon virtually immediately, a lot of decisions were taken verbally and after short discussions on a one-to-one basis.

The mission of the National Judiciary is to make justice visible, tangible and accessible to all. In 2003 after so many years of neglect during to *the tensions*, the court processes, systems, infrastructure, buildings and equipment all needed major work to improve and make justice available to all. We were also mindful that while this was being done and access was being improved, the quality of justice being delivered needed to be maintained. To achieve this quickly while at the same time building the capacity of our local staff, lawyers, magistrates and judges, we had to go outside of the country to bring in experienced, skilled and knowledgeable advisers to assist us. They were tasked with specific responsibilities and their roles carefully articulated so that while many would be involved in the normal day to day running and hearing of cases, there was an inbuilt requirement to develop the capacity of local personnel and improve systems and processes. We also needed to imbue work ethics, professionalism and court skills that would ensure that the institutional strengthening and capacity building were sustainable and would not fall over once the advisers eventually left and direct assistance was withdrawn.

We were very fortunate at the outset in being able to fast track the planning and decision making process as to how the assistance could best be matched to the work of the courts so that cases could be processed and disposed of in a timely fashion. For a start, we realised that with the RAMSI police re-establishing effective policing, there would be an upsurge in the number of cases the courts would have to deal so

The Trial of Harold Keke

All eyes were on the accused as they were led to their places in the dock behind thick bright blue iron bars, the smell of fresh paint still acrid in the newly refurbished courtroom, armed members of RAMSI's Participating Police Force standing guard. On the floor of the court expatriate lawyers mingled with local lawyers, foreign correspondents and the country's most senior journalists, as they waited for the Chief Justice to preside. Outside heavy security was also in place as hundreds gathered to catch a glimpse of the tall, gaunt man, half hidden behind his beard.

After all the stories, suffering, rumours and even his surrender to RAMSI more than a year earlier, many found it hard to believe that Harold Keke was finally standing trial, in this case for murder of the late Father Augustine Geve. Catholic priest and Member of Parliament for South Guadalcanal Minister, Geve, at the time of his death on 20 August 2002 at Haleatu Village on the Weathercoast of Guadalcanal, had been Minister for Youth, Women and Sport in the Kemakeza Government.

“Whether it was deserved or not, Harold Keke had come to symbolise everything that was wrong about the current state within the Solomon Islands.”

Ben McDevitt,
Commander,
Participating Police Force, 2003 - 2004

Facing charges of aiding and abetting each other in the murder of Fr Geve were Harold Keke, 34, Leader of the Guadalcanal Liberation Front (GLF); his second in command, Ronnie Cawa, 24; and Francis Lela, 22. All three men pleaded not guilty to the charges. Police had earlier told the court that soon after the murder Keke had radioed from the Weathercoast to the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation to announce that Geve was dead and that he was responsible.

When giving evidence, Keke claimed that Geve was misusing money meant for his constituents in the Weathercoast region. In court Keke claimed that it was his uncle and two other men who had killed Fr Geve but that they were now dead.

After a six-week trial involving 30 witnesses, Chief Justice Frank Kabui found Keke and his two associates, Cawa and Lela guilty of the murder of Fr Geve, sentencing all three to life in prison. It was the first of many cases that became known as the ‘tension trials’.



the courts' processes needed to be urgently strengthened and improved. For instance, at that stage the High Court only had one main courtroom (Court 1) catering largely for criminal cases, a small court room (Court 2), at the east wing for chambers hearings and small civil cases, and another court room (Court 3), which had been converted from an old Government building that had been used initially as the Parliament Office and then used later by the Passports Section of the Immigration Division. When we took over that building it was run down, dilapidated and in very poor condition. If it was to be used as a courtroom it would need major repair and renovation.

At the forefront of our minds was the issue of security for everyone: Judges, Counsels, witnesses and the public. Guns were still prevalent in the community and with the trauma of *the tensions* still fresh in our minds we decided that robust security measures had to be put in place if we did not wish to compromise the safety and well being of anyone during the hearing of some of the high profile trials of militants and their leaders. It was a conscious and deliberate decision therefore to have steel bars installed to separate prisoners and lawyers from the public as well and to have a separate confined place for witnesses to wait for their turn in court. It had come to our attention that intimidation was rife and that witnesses were being harassed and threatened and some had expressed real fears to the police.

It was also agreed that extra court rooms and judge's chambers with related offices for their executive personal secretaries and judges' associates were needed if we were to cope with the anticipated increase in our caseloads. With quick thinking and great understanding from the Permanent Secretary, James Remobatu, Brendan Crimmins, and the Program Architect Adviser, Alfonso Margarit and others, including the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Lands and Survey, the decision was made to give the land immediately in front of Kalala House and the Ministry Headquarters to the High Court for purposes of constructing extra court rooms and offices. I must thank them sincerely for their responsiveness and cooperation for that enabled us to build two extra court rooms (Court 4 and Court 5), three judge's chambers, a court conference room, two rooms for interviews for use by lawyers, separate conveniences and another leaf hut in which witnesses could wait to appear. We were also fortunate in that first year to be able to have access to the prefabricated buildings which RAMSI had used to house its troops, police officers and other personnel at its headquarters which were no longer needed as the military contingent was drawing down to a more modest size. This enabled the buildings to be put up in record time and fully furnished, including sound recording systems, computers, printers, photocopiers and fax machines all installed with funds provided by RAMSI.

RAMSI's strengthening program also enabled us to recruit two full time expatriate judges, a Commissioner of the High Court and corresponding support staff.



“It was a unique model for intervention, using the domestic tribunals of the country to address the law and order issues. And by strengthening the capacity of the courts to be able to deal with the large volume of cases, the people could see justice being done and being done fairly.”

Ken Averre, Public Solicitor, 2003 - 2008

At the same time we decided to re-organise the Registry and develop a separate corporate structure so that administration matters and finance could be administered by staff separate to the work of the Registrar. Before this, the Registrar of the High Court was also the top administrative and financial officer in the High Court. A separate Chief Executive Officer position, Chief Accountant and supporting staff positions were created. We also had a dedicated transcription unit set up to cater for the transcription of evidence in anticipation of expected appeals to the Court of Appeal, an Interpreters Unit and Case Support Unit. Expatriate Advisers were brought in to start these units off, provide training, mentoring and guidance. As the staff numbers expanded we realised we were also running short of office space so it was decided to include the construction of a new Registry as part of RAMSI's assistance to the High Court.

To cut a long story short, in total we now have three new court rooms, this includes Court 6, at the east end, (which formerly housed the Sheriff's Office), two extra judge's chambers and supporting offices that are also now regularly used by the Court of Appeal when it convenes twice a year.

To meet the increased number of court cases that were now in the pipeline, the new infrastructure, buildings and assets needed to be matched with the recruitment of a large number of appropriately trained personnel. Not only the High Court, but also the Central Magistrates' Court (Honiara) needed to be strengthened to cope with this anticipated increase in case load (as all criminal cases had to be processed through the Magistrates' Court for committal to the High Court). A large amount of the funding was dedicated to this purpose.

Apart from the courts, the justice agencies all needed strengthening. The Director of Public Prosecution Office and the Public Solicitor's Office both suffered from a lack of proper funding during *the tensions*. Both needed a massive input of personnel, including expatriate advisers, in particular lawyers to be able to cope with the legal work that was going to be required. A simple ratio of two prosecutor advisers and four public defender advisers to one judge was used as a

guideline. This ensured that cases were processed in a timely manner without compromising the quality of prosecution, representation and the justice being delivered. Some trials had multiple defendants and needed separate representation.

Over time, as all these improvements were put in place, one of the main achievements was the timely disposal of cases as a result of cases being able to be listed for hearing much more quickly than had been possible previously. As the waiting times for hearings reduced, the overall average time in remand also fell. Straight after RAMSI's arrival some remandees in custody were held waiting for their trials for up to four years; this was eventually reduced to two years and the current period is about twelve months. At the height of the assistance for instance, we were able to run three concurrent tension-related trials at any one time.

Apart from the focused assistance to the High Court, the Magistrates' Court was also at the forefront of our concerns. It was decided to provide much-needed assistance to the Central Magistrates' Court as part of the next stage of the development assistance, and to reach out to the District Centres. As part of our mission to make justice accessible to the people, the Magistrates' Court needed to be strengthened. It was essential that courts were able to sit on a regular basis so that criminal cases and disputes can be resolved in a timely manner. The Magistrates' Court had also been affected by *the tensions* and had slowed down in its work with courtrooms, buildings, residences, offices and equipment, becoming run down and neglected. The number of Principal Magistrates serving out in the district centers - Auki, Gizo and Kira Kira - had also been reduced and in some parts only Magistrates of the Class I jurisdiction were serving, in others there were none. Auki Magistrates' Court suffered most as all the Magistrates during the tension years had left for fear of their safety and security. An attempt to address this by having one of the court clerks sworn in as a lay magistrate did not work out when that person was charged and convicted for corrupt practice. Perhaps we were partly to blame for not providing the necessary support to mentor and provide that crucial support, guidance and advice when needed.

In addition to the efforts made to strengthen the Magistrates' Court in Honiara, we felt that the next District Centre to receive our immediate attention should be the Magistrates' Court in Auki, the capital of Malaita Province. We were able to secure funding for a new court complex after securing the land on which the old court building was situated. We were also able to identify land to build a suitable residence for a Principal Magistrate so that a resident Magistrate of Principal Magistrate jurisdiction could be securely housed in the province.

This project was done in conjunction with the construction of a new prison complex at Auki. This dedicated support also enabled us to have a new courtroom with three Magistrate chambers, a conference room, new registry and office space for the Local Court, Clerks and storage space for court records. This new facility is also now used to accommodate the High Court when it goes on circuit to Auki. The new complex includes office space for the Prosecution and Public Solicitor to be able to see their witnesses or clients while attending court. The challenge now is to have the Magistrates' positions filled.

Challenges

One of the ongoing challenges for the National Judiciary and other legal sector agencies is to maintain the level of support to the courts in the delivery of timely judicial services. Apart from ongoing issues with making the necessary funds available to the courts and court staff, poor work attitudes resulting in poor punctuality and absenteeism continue to plague the service which the courts and legal offices provide. As a consequence delay is a real issue in the hearing and disposal of cases. Rates of adjournments continue to be unnecessarily high and the rate of completed cases low as a consequence. Work output per judicial officer in the Magistrates' Court is relatively low.

Despite the big leap forward in the capacity of the courts in Honiara and Auki, the lack of Principal Magistrates resident in the district centres and provinces, meant quite inadequate judicial services were being provided to the provinces where

most of the country's population still reside. This led to the decision to increase court circuits and coordinate them using resources from Honiara. This, however, is costly and dependent on so many factors including the availability and willingness of officers to go on circuit as well as the uncertain nature of provincial travel. Conducting circuits across the Solomons archipelago is a slow process and visits can be infrequent. A common problem has been funds not being made available by the government in a timely fashion and as a consequence on many occasions circuits have had to be cancelled.

It has been our intention all along to have at least one Principal Magistrate, one Magistrate Class I and one Magistrate Class II resident in each of the district centres. Unfortunately, we have not been able to achieve this to date. This remains an ongoing challenge, for until we are able to fill all principal magistrate positions and other magistrate positions we will continue to rely heavily on court circuits coordinated from Honiara to deliver judicial services to the rural populace. This is less than satisfactory and we have been working on alternatives such as assigning the existing Principal Magistrates responsibility for separate Districts and coordinating circuits and sittings based on their availability. This has resulted in better and more regular circuits and services being more readily available but is costly to maintain in the long term.

One of the underlying challenges that we are currently working on seriously is the issue of appropriate remuneration for judicial officers, especially for the Magistracy. While the duty, responsibility and expectation placed upon magistrates is high, the reward to compensate them for the discharge of their judicial functions is currently not commensurate. The negative consequence of the current levels of remuneration is that we are unable to fill all magistrate positions with suitable personnel and are simply unable to attract suitable and qualified lawyers into these senior positions.

While the level of funding for court services is not often the problem, the provision of these funds in a timely fashion as needed, continues to hinder the smooth flow of the courts'

work. There are efforts being made to streamline accounting processes and looking at alternative approaches to make funds available as and when needed without compromising accounting requirements and the courts' accountability.

Another challenge has been the need to manage cases as they enter the court system from filing to completion. Our ability to capture the raw data needed continues to be an ongoing struggle and there is an urgent need to update and improve our database and information technology capacity. This will greatly assist us in managing cases, times for hearings and to be able to report on judicial performance, effectiveness and efficiency levels. This would also enable us to monitor individual cases, determine where the delays and causes are and be able to prioritise or allocate resources as needed.

Looking into the Future

Ten years after RAMSI first landed on our shores, the future is bright and rightly so because a window of opportunity was created for the country to get its act together again. One of the major achievements of the approach taken to strengthening the Law and Justice sector under RAMSI was the decision at the outset that it should be Solomon Islands own justice institutions that would be strengthened - in a very short amount of time - to deal with the legal matters that arose from the dark days of *the tensions*. This is no small achievement, when you look at other countries with similar experiences such as Rwanda and Cambodia, where even after a long period of time, an outside authority has had to be set up to deal with these sensitive issues. Instead, here in Solomon Islands, we have been supported to have complete ownership of delivering justice to our people and are now in a very good position to continue do so. To sustain this will require a concerted effort on the part of everyone. The burden cannot fall on the Judiciary alone. While our goal remains the timely delivery of quality justice to our people, we will always need the cooperation of all stakeholders and the community at large as well as the support of our government in recognising that we can only perform our vital role in maintaining law and order if we are adequately funded and resourced.

The Executive and the Legislature must all pull together, be driven by a common desire and goal to make and keep Solomon Islands a peaceful, safe and secure society for all to thrive in. Economic growth, development and prosperity do not occur in a vacuum. Constitutional and democratic governance cannot thrive in a disorderly, corrupt and lawless society. The harsh lessons of the past must not be forgotten so that we do not repeat the same mistakes. Those in positions of leadership, power and influence must lead by example and must always aspire to high ethical behaviour and conduct in the discharge of their duties. Solomon Islands can grow into a successful and prosperous democracy but it is the hard work, commitment and good actions of all of us, but especially our leaders, that is the price we must pay to secure our future as a nation.

Sir Albert R. Palmer CBE

Born in Munda, Western Province, Sir Albert graduated from Otago University, Dunedin, New Zealand with a BA/LLB in 1985. Admitted to the New Zealand Bar the same year, he worked on attachment in Wellington for a year before returning to join the Solomon Islands Magistracy in 1987, working in the Registrar General's Office in 1989, before taking up the post of Principal Magistrate in 1990. In August 1992 Sir Albert was appointed to the High Court Bench before being appointed Chief Justice in December 2003 after acting in the position for more than a year. Awarded the Commander of the British Empire (CBE) for service to the Solomon Islands Government and the Judiciary in 2000, Sir Albert was awarded the Knight Bachelor in 2004.



Corrections Solomon Islands

Like many other government-run agencies at the time of *the tensions*, the Solomon Islands Prison Service virtually stopped functioning. Cell doors were flung open and most inmates walked out the prison gates. Later prisoners serving life sentences would return to explain to authorities that it was not so much that they wanted to escape but with no one left running the prisons, providing meals or sanitation, they had had no choice but to leave.

In reality the dramatic emptying of cells in the early days of *the tensions* followed years of under funding and neglect of the country's prison service. The country's main prison, Rove, was severely run-down and poorly staffed. Auki Prison in Malaita had been deemed unfit for use and a number of other provincial prisons did not meet United Nations standards.

RAMSI's deployment created a sudden and urgent need for appropriate accommodation and detention facilities. Initially RAMSI brought in officers from overseas to run these centres but gradually plans were put in place to rebuild the Solomon Islands service, local officers were reappointed or recruited, training programs put in place and infrastructure restored or rebuilt. Extensive consultations with the community were carried out as part of the development of a new correctional services bill, paving the way for wide ranging reforms and a thorough modernisation of the service.

Left: Ten years after the tensions, Solomon Islanders once again lead all the country's justice institutions. Shown here outside the newly refurbished Rove Central Correctional Centre, members of the Corrections Service Solomon Islands leadership team (L-R) Commandant, Superintendent Robert Tome, Commissioner, Francis Haisoma, Deputy Commissioners Patrick Sale and Mactus Forau, Superintendent, John Yates, Chief Superintendent, Leah Alufo'oa and Executive Officer to the Commissioner, Inspector Catherine Kere.

Renamed Correctional Services Solomon Islands with the passing of the new act in 2007, the service now emphasises rehabilitation, not punishment. With RAMSI's assistance, programs have been introduced which provide inmates with work and life skills-focused training. These help inmates directly address their offending behaviour, strengthen relationships with family and build structured pre-release plans. This has already greatly reduced the number of repeat offenders.

New Correctional Centres have been built in Auki (2009) and in Gizo (under construction) and extensive refurbishments have also been undertaken at Rove, Tetere, Kirakira and Lata. This work has brought all these facilities up to UN standards, but importantly has also allowed many inmates to be accommodated and rehabilitated in their home province, a significant benefit to the long-term welfare of the inmates and their families. RAMSI advisers have also helped to develop long-term maintenance strategies to protect the sustainability of those improved facilities.

Much has been done to strengthen the service itself, making sure the workforce is shaped by a professional development strategy that supports current and emerging leaders. Since late 2008, Solomon Islander, Francis Haisoma has led the service as Commissioner. The Deputy Commissioner and the Commandants of nearly all centres throughout the country are also Solomon Islanders.

Today Correctional Service is a leading choice of employer for many young Solomon Islanders attracted by its outstanding training and accreditations programs for all its officers.



Governed by a new act and with newly established Human Resources capacity, Correction Services Solomon Islands has led the justice sector in gender reform, including conducting a landmark gender audit in 2012. Here female Corrections officers are seen marking International Women's Day, 2010 with the traditional march down the main street of Honiara. (L-R) Sergeant Anna Giano, Sergeant Janet Tonisi, Inspector Catherine Kere, and behind Corrections Officer, Justina Piokera.



Prime Minister Gordon Lilo Darcy inspects the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, newly trained and equipped Police Response Team who with assistance from RAMSI have been undergoing intensive training in public order management.

Resurrecting the RSIPF

Edmond Sikua



For most of modern Solomon Islands history, serving as a police officer has been an honourable call; the sight of a uniformed officer in the community signalling both authority and safety; the presence of police in our villages, one of the few tangible symbols of the connection between a government and its people.

From its early foundations in 1914, Solomon Islands police were well regarded in the South Western Pacific. Formally established in 1954, the British Solomon Islands Protectorate Armed Constabulary, with its strict discipline and high standards were a highly effective force, well respected if not feared by the community. Initially established as an armed constabulary primarily to protect the interests of the colonial administration and the traders, the force, as its name suggests, operated more in a paramilitary style, an approach necessitated by the tribal strife and inter-island conflicts that were common at that time.

A Good Track Record

During World War II, local police also played a vital role in the formation of a civilian corp, known as the Coastwatchers. Under the command of British officer and colonial

administrator, Martin Clemens, many police officers helped establish a highly effective intelligence gathering system, reporting on the positions and activities of the opposing Japanese forces. This task required the Coastwatchers to move behind enemy lines, disrupting enemy supplies and risking their lives. The work of the Coastwatchers contributed significantly to the success of the Allied Forces in the Guadalcanal Campaign, now recognised as a crucial turning point in the war, and the Allies' ultimate victory.

At the end of the Second World War, the police force was relocated from the site of the former capital, Tulagi in what is now Central Islands Province to the current site of our national capital, Honiara on Guadalcanal. Utilizing material remains from the war, a headquarters with basic communication facilities was established at Rove in west Honiara. The number of Solomon Islanders recruited to serve in the force began to increase and by the 1960s Solomon Islanders were holding positions in the non-commissioned and commissioned ranks. From this point onwards to the 1990s, the force developed into a well-respected and trusted police organisation both in Solomon Islands and more widely in the South Western Pacific.

In 1978 when Solomon Islands gained independence from Great Britain, only a handful of British officers remained in the force. It was during the parade on Independence Day that the Duke of Gloucester formally awarded the title 'Royal' and henceforth the force was known as the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF). Four years after independence in 1982, the late Fredrick Soaki became the first Solomon Islander to be appointed Commissioner of Police, replacing John Holloway, the last British officer to serve in the RSIPF. The RSIPF was now completely localised.

The Royal Solomon Islands Police Force continued to grow and maintain its integrity under the command of Soaki. It grew in numbers and formation and became an attractive employment opportunity for many Solomon Islanders. They enlisted in great numbers and were proud to serve in the force not only because of the job security but many were attracted by the

culture of discipline, the smart appearance in person and uniform, the comradeship and the heart that so many RSIPF officers displayed in their service to the community. Police officers were clearly distinguishable in crowds due to their neatness, behaviour and mannerism and their presence in communities helped create an environment of calm authority and security. They served proudly and in solidarity and in turn, they gained the trust and confidence of the community.

Demands of a Growing Nation

Towards the end of the 20th century, as Solomon Islands developed economically and socially, it became obvious that the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force was not keeping up with the demands of our rapidly growing nation. By the mid-1990s Sir Fred Soaki had been replaced as commissioner and the RSIPF was facing increasing challenges in maintaining professional standards. Levels of funding and therefore resourcing and training, were low. Indeed the RSIPF were struggling to provide adequate policing services throughout the nation. In addition, the development of the Bougainville secession crisis on our border with Papua New Guinea presented a whole new and difficult set of security concerns which, in the absence of a military force, the Government looked to the RSIPF to handle. This ultimately led to the formation of an armed paramilitary wing of the RSIPF, known

as the Police Field Force, tasked with protecting the nation's border communities that were increasingly coming under attack from members of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force as well as the Bougainville Resistance.

Meanwhile the constant high increase in the population, had led many rural dwellers to move into urban centres especially Honiara and other areas of Guadalcanal in search of employment and other economic opportunities. In the last decade of this century, the rapid increase in this migrant population on Guadalcanal increasingly became seen as a threat by the people of Guadalcanal to the survival of their own culture, grounded as it is in our links to the land. In 1998, a group of young *Guales* formed a militia group, launching an attack on the Yandina Police Armoury with the intention of obtaining arms for the purpose of forcefully removing settlers from Guadalcanal. Soon after the same militia group attempted to raid the Tulagi Police Armoury but by then, the RSIPF had mobilized, there was an exchange of gunfire and during the course of their arrest one member of the militia group was shot dead by the police. This tragic occurrence was not the norm for the RSIPF, the majority of whom remained unarmed. Those members of the militia arrested were processed in court where they were released on bail; they did



“The Solomon Islands police went through a very hard time during the tension period, many were corrupted but many stayed at their desk even though they hadn’t been paid. Some were shot or shot at. Their families were threatened and their houses burned because they wouldn’t crossover and become criminals.”

Tony Stafford, Detective Sergeant, Participating Police Force

not adhere to the bail conditions and did not reappear in court. The trust between the people of Guadalcanal and the State had broken down.

Escalating Tensions

In 1999 the militia activities on Guadalcanal continued to increase, escalating by mid-year to the point where settlers, particularly those originating from Malaita Province, were being forcefully removed by militants literally taking the law into their own hands. During this repatriation, homes and properties were torched. Those who resisted were frequently severely beaten and in many cases, ended up losing their lives. Under the Commissionership of Frank Short, the former British police officer appointed to the post in 1997, the RSIPF hoisted into full operation, the government eventually declaring a state of emergency. This enabled the RSIPF to operate as an emergency force in apprehending leaders of militia groups and those actively engaging in militia activities. During the conduct of the operation, police were involved in exchanging gunfire that resulted in loss of life on both sides. Sadly this only contributed further to the breakdown of trust and confidence in the Police.

Both the militia activities and the police operations deeply affected the RSIPF, particularly those officers from Guadalcanal and Malaita provinces. By January 2000, a group of Malaitans, distressed that the Government had not managed to resolve this ongoing crisis nor protect its own citizens, formed their own militia group known as the Malaita Eagle Force. This group announced its existence with a 'raid' on the RSIPF Armoury in Auki, the capital of Malaita. Those carrying out the raid used the RSIPF's newly acquired fast boats, which ironically had been purchased to facilitate police efforts to apprehend crime not to commit it. In truth officers' loyalties were severely strained, the solidarity of the force now rapidly crumbling, as trust among officers plummeted towards the point of extinction. Then in the biggest blow of all, in an action that stunned loyal officers as well as the majority of Solomon Islanders, factions of the RSIPF joined forces with the Malaita Eagle Force in

the early hours of 5 June 2000, to raid the armoury at Police Headquarters, Rove; an action that appeared aimed at erasing the RSIPF, as an effective law enforcement agency, from the face of the universe.

No End in Sight

In 2000, a senior Solomon Islands officer, Morton Sireheti was appointed Commissioner of the RSIPF. He was tasked with the challenging role of putting back together the pieces of an organisation that had been torn apart. The RSIPF as we had known it no longer existed. There was no one to trust anymore even among the senior ranks. For two solid years, Sireheti worked hard to try to repair the damage and begin the task of rebuilding the force but as *the tensions* grew and escalated, many officers were drawn further into the chaos while others continued to scatter to the safety of their home provinces. The task of resuscitating the RSIPF was becoming overwhelming. Eventually Morten Sireheti sought to make a dignified retreat, resigning from the force to which he had devoted all his professional life. Late in 2002, after repeated pleas to the international community for assistance had fallen on deaf ears, the European Union finally agreed to recruit and fund an external appointment to the post of Commissioner.

In January 2003, the European Union's successful candidate, a British policeman, arrived on our shores. William Morrell confessed that he hadn't been aware of the conflict engulfing Solomons when he applied for the post but by the time he deployed he was keen to continue with the efforts to 'put right' the RSIPF. A genuine man with little experience in such matters, he was also an outsider in a cesspool of distrust and disorder, a situation not conducive to major reform. Then on the evening of 10 February 2003, Sir Fredrick Soaki, now one of the National Peace Council's most respected Councillors, was in Auki, the capital of Malaita province, eating his dinner at a local motel, when he was assassinated with a single shot to the chest. As the nation mourned the loss of one of its brightest stars, an RSIPF officer, Edmund Sae was quickly arrested for this shocking crime. Brought to Honiara, charged

and remanded in custody, Sae just as soon escaped from Rove prison with the help of certain of his fellow officers, fleeing back to the mountains of Malaita where he remains to this day. But back then the message to Morrell was clear.

Intervention

The RSIPF and indeed the nation remained locked in this terrible downward spiral with seemingly no end in sight, until just a few months later, almost unbelievably, the news came without warning that Australia and the region had decided to form an intervention force that would step in and help us out of the crisis. Morrell was then able to turn his attention to assisting in the planning for the intervention. In July 2003, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) set foot in Solomon Islands and *Operation Helpem Fren* began. In the first deployment of 1800 troops there were also more than 300 police officers from Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu. More than 2000 firearms were recovered and more

than 3000 arrests made in that first year, mostly by members of RAMSI's Participating Police Force (PPF). Slowly the rule of law was restored. But for the RSIPF, the intervention was also a blessing in the opportunity it provided the force, not only to rebuild, but to regain its integrity and take back its mandate as the agency responsible for law enforcement in Solomon Islands.

The initial steps of rebuilding the RSIPF were not a straight forward affair, as it involved identifying and removing officers who had been involved in the *ethnic tensions* from those officers who remained loyal to the RSIPF. This in itself was a big challenge for a small police force where everyone knew each other and had loyally served together before the unrest split the force. This initial purge resulted in more than 200 officers leaving the force, through retirement and retrenchment as well as arrests. A number of officers were later convicted and imprisoned for offences committed during *the tensions*. For a force of just over a 1000 members, this represented a huge loss of manpower and experience, and



“RAMSI has provided a lot of opportunities for the RSIPF but gaining the respect of the public, that’s something we, as individual officers have to do every day. We are still yet to fully achieve this but I think as an organisation the RSIPF is heading in the right direction. We are trying to address law and order and trying to strengthen our own leadership, in providing a service, we are trying to make sure the community are satisfied with their police force.”

Selwyn Rotu, Assistant Commissioner, RSIPF

Black Tuesday

On Easter Tuesday, 18 April 2006, riots erupted in Honiara following the election of a new Prime Minister, Snyder Rini, amid allegations that his election by fellow MPs had been 'fixed' with funds provided by local Chinese business figures. Although no evidence was ever produced to substantiate these claims, over the next two days, wide-scale looting and burning of Chinese-owned businesses took place in Honiara, with almost 90 per cent of the town's colourful Chinatown district destroyed and many people of Chinese origin evacuated from the country.

A curfew was declared, and early the next morning, following a request from the new prime minister, an additional 120 soldiers and 45 police were flown in by Australia to assist in bringing the situation under control. By sunset on 19 April, as the embers still glowed in Chinatown, the nation's single most devastating public order crisis was over. While 25 RAMSI police officers had been seriously injured, no lives had been lost.

The significance of the country's extensive gun surrender just three years earlier was brought to the fore when it was realised that not a single shot had been fired nor had any firearms been sighted amongst the crowd who had mostly armed themselves with rocks.

In the days that followed a number of prominent personalities including two newly elected MPs were among those arrested by the police for instigating the riots. Under increasing pressure and facing a vote of no confidence, Snyder Rini resigned. He had been prime minister for just eight days.

In an unprecedented move, the Speaker granted the two MP's by then remanded in custody, permission to attend parliament to participate in the election

of a new prime minister. This time, a former prime minister who had last come to power following the 2000 coup, Manasseh Sogavare, was the MPs' choice to led the nation.

A Commission of Inquiry into the riots ordered by Prime Minister Sogavare eventually reported to his successor, after he was ousted in a motion of no confidence on 20 December 2007.

The Report of the Commission of Inquiry found that "the best explanation for the rioting and looting is that it was planned and organised by a group of criminals." The court cases against those alleged to have been behind the incident were eventually dismissed.

It also found that the April 2006 riots had involved mistakes in policing stating that: "senior officers ... failed to appreciate that their core business was the preservation of peace and the protection of life and property."

The RAMSI Participating Police Force and Military contingent did not have enough personnel available on the day to adequately deal with the threats that arose from the RSIPF's own lack of armed public order capability, the report said.

The riots, with their unfettered destruction and loss of property, were the first serious security challenge to be faced by the police since RAMSI's arrival three years earlier. Lessons learnt from the experience shaped the nature of much of the training that RAMSI has subsequently provided to the RSIPF, while Pidgin lessons were made compulsory for all members of RAMSI's Participating Police Force who were actively encouraged to rebuild relations with the community.



Much of Honiara's iconic Chinatown went up in flames after rioters, angry about the corruption of the country's politics, targeted Chinese-run business during the riot of 18 and 19 April, 2006.



ROYAL SOLOMON ISLANDS POLICE FORCE
POLICE
Isabel Provincial
Headquarters

The Police Accommodation Project funded by RAMSI's Participating Police Force will have delivered 134 houses and new or refurbished police headquarters in virtually every province by the time it concludes at the end 2013. Shown here RAMSI Chief of Staff, Justine Braithwaite, officially opening a new Provincial Police Headquarters for Isabel Province in 2012.

coming hard on the heels of *the tensions* it only increased the uncertainty for many about their careers as police officers. At the same time the whole culture of the force needed to be re-established from scratch. Recruitment, re-establishment of the police academy, a return to proper command and control, to proper systems and disciplined standards and most importantly the re-establishing of trust, not only of the community in the RSIPF but the officers' own trust in themselves, all lay ahead.

Planning for the Future

By 2005, the RSIPF was once again capable of determining its own strategic direction. With the assistance of the Participating Police Force, senior members of the RSIPF including assistant commissioners, provincial police commanders and directors gathered together at Police Headquarters to discuss what sort of organization they wanted the RSIPF to be, where they wanted it to be in the future and how they would get there. The one-week meeting concluded with the production of a Strategic Directions document outlining for the first time on paper the vision, mission, goals and values of the RSIPF. The meeting also produced a first Annual Business Plan for 2006. Under the Commissionship of the Australian Federal Agent who had been appointed that year, Shane Castles, the RSIPF National Management Team was established to ensure that the plan would be properly implemented and that provincial police commanders and directors understood it and were able to submit monthly reports on their own progress in implementing the plan. This management style particularly encouraged participation and ownership of the process by the provincial police commanders and directors and to this day the RSIPF continues to improve and build on this planning process the foundation of which was established in 2005.

The new Strategic Direction and the Annual Business Plan triggered the need for a full review of the organisational structure of the RSIPF. Working with the PPF, the National Management Team produced a revised structure aimed at enabling the force to deliver on the newly defined goals of the RSIPF.

With this clear strategic direction in place, the RSIPF was able to rebuild and develop systems and processes for human resources management, infrastructure development, internal discipline, community relations, and training. With the assistance of the PPF, the RSIPF developed merit-based selection processes for recruitment which captured the requirement for equal provincial representation as well as gender equity. Today, the RSIPF is among one of the most attractive employers in Solomon Islands, thousands of applications are received each year from young and capable Solomon Islanders applying to enlist. A merit-based selection process was also established for the promotion of officers providing an opportunity for positions to be advertised and a screening process and interviews to take place in support of a more accountable and transparent process for promotion.

The establishment of an RSIPF Property and Infrastructure Unit enabled the development of plans for the building of both office and residential accommodation for the RSIPF. With the assistance of the PPF through the Police Accommodation Project office buildings and residential accommodation were built in Lata, Kirakira, Auki, Malu'u, Atori, Tetere, Henderson, Rove, Munda, Noro, Gizo, and Taro. Office facilities at the Police Headquarters, Henderson, Buala, Noro and Gizo have also been constructed and current police stations in other locations have been renovated. The project, due to conclude at the end of 2013, will have delivered 134 new police houses to the RSIPF. The impact of the project is already being felt. New offices and refurbished stations have raised the status and professional profile of the RSIPF in these communities, boosting not only officers' morale but also the community's view of these men and women and the work they are doing. Similarly the knock-on effect of having decent police housing available throughout so many of the provinces has not only provided a big boost for our officers but provided the RSIPF with far greater mobility and the flexibility to post officers to provinces other than their own, something that for many years

Police Act 2013

In March 2013, the National Parliament of Solomon Islands unanimously approved a new Police Act with the aim of providing an updated legislative framework for modern policing in Solomon Islands.

The Police Act 2013 takes into account the major reforms and structural changes that the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) has undergone since RAMSI's arrival in 2003, setting out new laws to govern such areas as external relations, governance, employment, powers and duties, conduct and discipline of the RSIPF.

The Act is a crucial tool paving the way for the RSIPF to complete transition from RAMSI assistance to a fully self-functioning and sustainable force.

To develop the act, the Ministry of Police with assistance from RAMSI, undertook a major review of the Police Act 1972, including two years of nationwide consultation.

These consultations included more than 5,000 individuals. Some of the major areas that were identified as needing substantial reform included employment arrangements for members of the RSIPF; conduct, integrity and discipline; powers, duties and responsibilities; community partnerships and international relationships; and cooperative relationships between RSIPF, provincial Governments and other national Government Ministries.

The new Act is essential to assist the RSIPF to fulfil its mission of becoming an accountable, responsive and respected Force that works with communities to deliver a safe, peaceful and prosperous Solomon Islands.

It gives statutory recognition to the Police Maritime Division and the Fire and Rescue Services. It provides a list of their functions and ensures that they have sufficient powers to provide an important pro-active and preventative role.

Chairman of the Bills and Legislation Committee, former Prime Minister, Manasseh Sogavare described the legislation during the hearing by the Committee, "as the most outstanding Bill that came under the Committee's scrutiny."

Hon Sogavare said his Committee was very impressed with the consultation process that took place before the Bill was put together.

"Such consultation puts a clear picture of the seriousness (of the efforts) to strengthen the work of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force," he said.

was not possible due to the very poor or non-existent police housing in the provinces, forcing most local officers to provide their own.

As the RSIPF has grown, internal discipline systems and processes have also been strengthened to ensure that the organization maintains and can sustain its integrity and professionalism. The disciplinary system and processes ensure equal and fair treatment of officers breaching discipline regulations and timely resolution of disciplinary cases. The development of the disciplinary system and processes has contributed to building community confidence in the RSIPF, as reflected in the annual RAMSI People's Survey. Over the last five years, the Survey results indicated a steady growth in community confidence in the RSIPF.

Over the last ten years, the RSIPF has focused on training police officers on various aspects of core policing functions, leadership and management. To enable the organization to provide core policing services to the community, training on investigations, prosecutions and general police duties has been a priority. With the experiences from *the tensions* and the 2006 Honiara riots, public order management training has also been an important priority.

The PPF and RSIPF have also worked together over the past decade to help the organisation deal with the leadership and experience vacuum caused by the exit of so many officers at the supervisory and executive level following *the tensions* as well as through more recent voluntary retirement schemes. To ensure that the right people are placed in the right jobs, appropriate trainings course have been created. A partnership in the development of leadership was established between the RSIPF and the Australian Institute of Police Management. The courses offered through this arrangement have had a very positive impact on the RSIPF as is evident in the new generations of leaders that are emerging .

Transition

In the transition phase of RAMSI, the PPF continued to work closely with the RSIPF to implement outcomes under the Joint Transition Strategy 2011 – 2013. In particular, the PPF have focused on reducing its own security footprint and on increasing the RSIPF's institutional and personnel capacity. A key achievement for the program in 2012 was the drawdown of PPF's full-time presence in all but three provincial posts. Provincial Mentoring Programs and logistics support were put in place for the provincial police commanders, which allowed the RSIPF to take the lead in policing and increase its involvement with communities.

The RSIPF's capability continues to grow. This has enabled it to successfully make progress with: the arrest of high profile criminal Stanley Gitoa; management of civil unrest within Gizo in late 2012; and operations around major public events, such as the Festival of the Pacific Arts, Oceania Football Confederation Nations Cup and the Royal Visit by The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge. Well-planned RSIPF responses ensured major events were held without incident. This in turn has forged a greater level of public confidence in the RSIPF and improved community relations and their willingness to partner with us in keeping our communities safe and free from crime.

An extensive review of the *Police Act 1972* was carried out in 2011 and 2012, with the new *Police Act 2013* successfully passed through in Parliament in early 2013. The new Act is a major update of the legislation governing the operations and management of the RSIPF and provides a solid and sustainable foundation to support the force, strengthening their capacity to maintain law and order and to ensure community safety.

Train-the-trainer activities continued to build the capacity of local systems, giving the RSIPF the ability to independently take forward training introduced by the PPF. As a result of these courses, RSIPF trainers (supported by the PPF) have: trained 580 members in Operational Safety Training; 316 members in Public Order Management; and delivered three driver training courses. This has improved the RSIPF's capacity to respond to security incidents as set out in the Joint Transition Strategy 2011-2013.

The PPF has promoted gender equality within Solomon Islands and the RSIPF on a number of fronts. This has included advocacy on issues such as influence on laws and policies, social mobilization including community awareness, and behavioural change. Specific examples include:

- review of family violence policy in line with Family Violence Act;



“The new police buildings change the profile of the police in the community, especially in the provinces but they have also changed the attitude of the police themselves. Because of the big improvement in their working environment, police officers are really looking forward to their work each day.”

Gabriel Manelusi, Assistant Commissioner, RSIPF

- the Family Violence and Community Policing units have undertaken a number of community awareness programs on relevant legislation and policies;
- continued support to the Christian Care Centre (support centre for victims of crime);
- inclusion of the RSIPF in the World Vision Channels of Hope Project which uses community and faith leaders to tackle some of the origins of beliefs surrounding domestic violence, and the status of women.

The RSIPF has one of the highest rates of female participation across Solomon Islands Government agencies with females making up approximately 16 per cent of the RSIPF workforce. Women also occupy a number of senior positions, with the first female promoted to the rank of Assistant Commissioner in 2012. The PPF has also commenced a staged and sustainable approach to reducing the RSIPF's reliance on PPF resourcing and logistical support. This will be achieved through continued support to RSIPF Finance, to ensure the government is encouraged to increase its financial support to the RSIPF.

The joint PPF and RSIPF mobility project has seen the first use of shared deeds of funding. These have enabled the RSIPF to use government procurement and financial systems for the first time since the inception of RAMSI for the delivery of PPF projects and objectives. This has enabled the delivery of 25 vehicles and 10 short-range maritime vessels, which will help the RSIPF deliver policing services more effectively across Solomon Islands.

The RSIPF IT Infrastructure project has provided a local area network capability for buildings at Rove, Central Station, the Professional Standards and Internal Investigation department and Henderson Station to deliver an RSIPF networked IT environment. These locations will be interconnected via the Solomon Islands whole-of-government computer system. The Communications Upgrade project has also seen the installation of High Frequency data/voice networks to 16 provincial posts. This has given the RSIPF its first data transfer capability between Honiara and the provincial posts.

I have been fortunate to be part of the rebuilding of the RSIPF. It was a challenging and difficult task for both the RSIPF, the PPF and the communities in Solomon Islands but the results of the hard work are now beginning to be realised.

Challenges Ahead

The past ten years of RAMSI's intervention and capacity building have placed the RSIPF on a par with several other police forces within the South Pacific region. A lot of work has gone into getting the RSIPF where it is today. However major challenges, some of which have always been with us such as the demography of Solomon Islands, remain. These include the sustainability of operations, efficiency and effectiveness of logistical support to provincial frontline policing and consistency in the leadership of the RSIPF.



“There are no quick fixes in the nation-building business. You can’t talk in weeks, months or even years when you actually want to have a significant impact for our neighbours in the South Pacific.”

Ben McDevitt, Commander, Participating Police Force 2003 - 2004

The Solomon Islands are a collection of nearly one thousand islands, consisting of just 28,400 square kilometres of land, the rest, the wide blue sea. This is a never ending challenge for cost-effective policing. The majority of our islands are only accessible by sea, presenting great obstacles not only to a timely police response to any incident but even the provision of day to day policing services to the community. The challenge for the RSIPF will be to develop an appropriate strategy to ensure that policing activities can reach all communities in Solomon Islands.

Sustaining the operational capability of the RSIPF will continue to present challenges into the future. During the last ten years of RAMSI's presence, the RSIPF have been able to respond relatively swiftly to public order incidences. This was made possible by RAMSI who provided much logistical support for the RSIPF to use. The challenge in this transition period is for the Solomon Islands Government to start taking on the responsibility of supporting the RSIPF with adequate funding to ensure the force can continue to improve and sustain its operational capability.

The demographics of our country also mean the RSIPF will need to develop a strategy for supporting operations in the frontline and provincial policing. Having to depend on commercial shipping and airline services is unlikely to allow the RSIPF to meet the demands for time-sensitive policing services and will certainly not lead to any improvement in the efficiency and effectiveness of police operations.

Achieving consistency in the leadership of the RSIPF is also a challenge now looming not just for the force but for the nation. Over the last ten years, the position of the Commissioner has changed hands five times and furthermore, none of these five Commissioners have been Solomon Islanders. This has brought both neutrality and expertise to the post but it has also brought inconsistency, and at times frustration as well as a lack of vision at the helm of the RSIPF. It is now time for Solomon Islands to take responsibility for the security and sovereignty of our country.

Finally, all the issues usually associated with urbanization: a rapidly increasing population, and with it increasing numbers of unemployed, issues of ownership of land and squatter settlements are all challenges that will demand more of the RSIPF in the years ahead. Above all the RSIPF must be vigilant and develop an effective partnership with the community, including intelligence mechanisms to ensure we work closely with our stakeholders to avoid the worst while being prepared for the inevitable public order management challenges that will occur. The challenge for Solomon Islanders in the RSIPF is to prove to the people of Solomon Islands that they are able to lead the police force without fear or favour.

In conclusion, over the past ten years, RAMSI has helped Solomon Islands return to peace and the rule of law; it has helped us rebuild the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force. The onus is now on Solomon Islands to maintain, develop and sustain policing activities and so fulfil the words of the Solomon Islands national anthem to endow our nation with joy, peace, progress and prosperity. The future will come with its challenges but I believe that all Solomon Islanders can work together to make these islands truly the Happy Isles.

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**Edmond Sikua,
Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Police,
National Security and Correctional Services**

Edmond (Eddie) Sikua, born at Kulu school, on North East Guadalcanal, has been Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Police, National Security and Correctional Services since May 2012. A career police officer, Sikua joined the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force in 1980. Undergoing training in various aspects of policing in Australia, New Zealand and the United States, he rose through the ranks holding senior positions in different branches of the RSIPF before being promoted to Deputy Commissioner of Police (National Security and Operations Support) in early 2011, a position he held until he became Permanent Secretary.



Solomon Islands' capital, Honiara, the country's major centre for economic activity, is blessed with a large harbour, as this aerial photograph shows.

Solomon Islands economic performance: 2003-2012

Colin Johnson and Katherine Tuck



Introduction

There has been a substantial recovery in the Solomon Islands economy and public finances since 2003. This has been facilitated by the restoration of law and order, successive governments displaying fiscal discipline and control and a commitment to economic and financial reforms, and the support of development partners.

Over the past decade, the economy has grown steadily and by over 80 per cent in real terms, interrupted only by the effects of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) in 2009. Government revenue, which had been severely constrained, has recovered strongly and Government expenditure has grown and become more controlled. The Government has delivered mainly balanced or surplus budgets over the past decade. This fiscal discipline, combined with debt workouts and agreements in the early period of RAMSI and no new borrowing over the past decade, has seen an impressive turnaround in the public sector's debt position. This has positioned the Government to be able to undertake limited new borrowing again for high quality infrastructure and social investments.

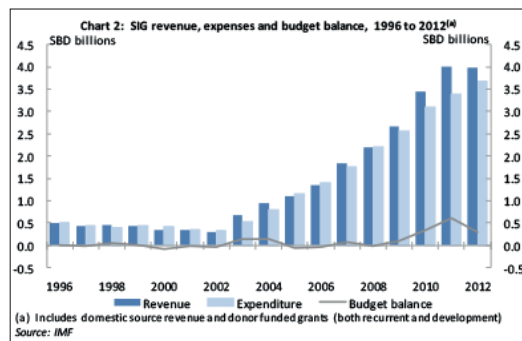
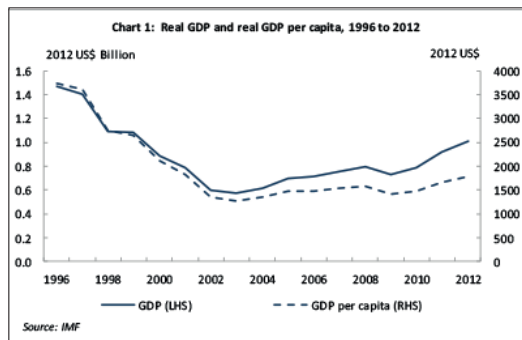
The stability over the past decade has provided an environment in which investment and trade have been able to grow. This has helped the private sector, generating increased employment and other opportunities for Solomon Islanders to support themselves and to contribute productively to society. Economic reforms that have been introduced have helped to reduce costs and stimulate growth.

While good progress has been made in relation to economic and public finance outcomes over the last decade, future progress will depend upon continuing fiscal policy discipline and reforms being cemented and enhanced. The 2009 GFC period demonstrated how vulnerable and fragile the economy is to shocks. In an environment where logging has been occurring at an unsustainable rate and is expected to fall away sharply over the medium-term, this adds to risks around macroeconomic stability and growth.

Economic and Financial Collapse: 1998 to 2003

The achievements over the past decade need to be viewed in the context of the events over the five years or so prior to RAMSI's arrival on 24 July 2003. Between 1998 and 2003, the economy and public finances of Solomon Islands experienced a massive collapse - real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) fell by around 50 per cent and the decline in real GDP per capita was even greater as the population continued to grow (see Chart 1). (GDP is the value of all goods and services produced in Solomon Islands in a year.)

Between 1996 and 2002, domestic sourced revenue fell further from an already low base (see Chart 2). In 2002, domestic sourced revenue was estimated at around 16 per cent of GDP, and total revenue and grants were just under 19 per cent of GDP. By comparison, total revenue and grants in 1996 were around 30 per cent of GDP. Government expenditure also fell, reducing essential basic community services. Between 1996 and 2002, five Budget deficits were recorded—the largest, in 2000, was an estimated 4 per cent of GDP.

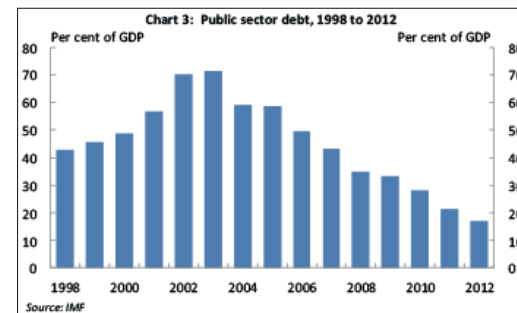


The Government could not meet repayments on its domestic or international debt obligations and public debt ballooned. In 2003, the total extent of the debt problem was largely unknown (especially in relation to trade creditor arrears which were later estimated at just over 7 per cent of GDP), with estimates of total public debt exceeding 70 per cent of GDP (see Chart 3). The build-up in arrears saw International Financial Institutions (such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank) stop lending to Solomon Islands and local suppliers would not deal readily with Government.

Government operations had reached a state of near-collapse and many public servants had fled Honiara due to the decline in law and order. Telephones in Government Ministries were disconnected due to the non-payment of accounts and the

Government's payroll payments had slipped a few months behind. For many months during the worse period of *the tensions* public servants and their dependents anticipated each Government payday with trepidation, there being no certainty that the government would have the cash at hand to cover that fortnight's payroll.

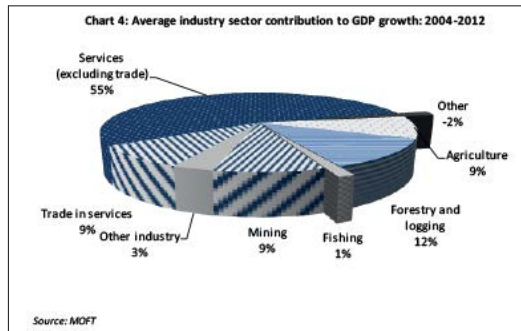
The stability of the currency and the sovereignty of Government finances were threatened. In 2002, the Solomon Islands High Court ordered that domestic bondholders (banks and the National Provident Fund) were to be given first call over the Government's consolidated fund. The state of Government finances was very poor.



Economic Recovery: 2003 to 2012

With the exception of the effects of the GFC in 2009 (which highlighted the vulnerability of the economy to shocks), robust to strong economic growth has been sustained over the last decade, with real GDP increasing by over 80 per cent from a very low base. While this represents a significant achievement, real GDP remains well below its peak pre-*tension* levels, and strong population growth means that the recovery in real GDP per capita (which is a better measure of average living standards) of around 45 per cent over the last decade has been more subdued.

The largest contributor to economic growth since 2003 has been in the service sector—which includes the effect of significant increases in Government expenditure. The agriculture, forestry and mining (more recently) sectors have all been major contributors to growth (see Chart 4)—around 30 per cent in total. Other industries such as fishing and the small manufacturing sector have made small contributions to growth.



RAMSI's arrival helped to stabilise Government finances. A strong emphasis on improving taxation administration and compliance (assisted by a taxation amnesty and by efforts to encourage the private sector to meet its tax obligations) saw revenue collections begin to recover. This was supported later by measures to improve taxation policy.

On the expenditure side of the budget, there were efforts to tighten up on expenditure discipline and control, while more normal budgeting processes were restored over time. As domestic revenue grew strongly and donors re-engaged, this supported higher Government expenditure (see Chart 2). Over recent years, growth in domestically sourced revenue has been such that the Government has been able to contribute, alongside donors, to development projects and investments for the future. This contribution has been growing over time.

The turnaround in Government finances and improvement over the last decade represents a significant achievement.

Stabilising public debt was one of the highest early priorities following RAMSI's arrival. A negotiated debt agreement with domestic bond holders resulted in a lifting of the High Court order over the consolidated fund, more affordable debt servicing costs for Government, and a resumption of interest income for the bond holders (which made up most of the financial sector) and a strengthening of their balance sheets. The payment of Solomon Islands arrears (financed by the Australian Government) to the international financial institutions quickly led to their active engagement and support for Government.

A very high priority was also placed on eliminating Government payroll arrears and then on verifying local trade creditor arrears. In order to help strengthen the private sector



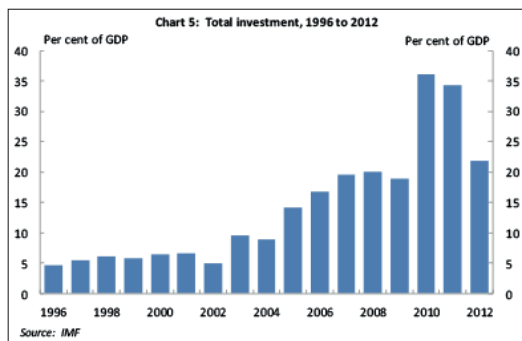
Dorothy Wickham

“The 20 to 30 year olds are now looking for opportunities to make money, to keep themselves busy. They actually have an aim and direction. These are the kind of people we need. Their attitude is: “We’re not going to sit down and complain. We’re going to get out there and do something.”

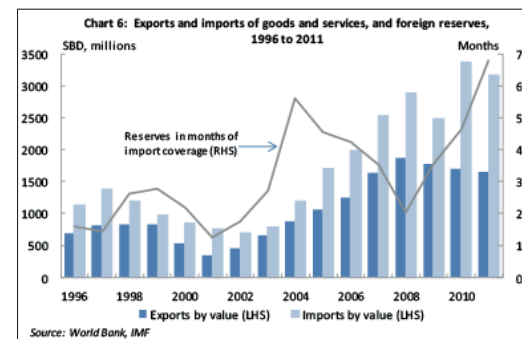
and to help regain its confidence, trade creditor arrears were repaid in a number of tranches as quickly as Government finances would allow. Attention then turned to dealing with other international debt obligations and the Honiara Club arrangements were put in place in 2005. This resulted in some debt forgiveness and an agreement to no new Government borrowing until such time as it would be prudent to do so, and this all resulted in the stabilisation of the Government's external debt situation.

These developments, combined with the fiscal discipline displayed by the Government over the past decade, have resulted in a remarkable reduction in Solomon Islands public debt (see Chart 3). Backed by a prudent debt management strategy introduced in 2012, the Government is well placed to resume prudent borrowing for high value infrastructure and social policy investments.

The stability and reforms over the past decade have provided a more conducive investment environment, from donor, Government and private sector sources. The reduction in sovereign risk combined with reduced complexity and cost of doing business has helped to attract new investment spending, with significant growth in real terms (see Chart 5). In 1996, total investment was around 4.5 per cent of GDP. Since 2005, investment has averaged around 20 per cent of GDP per year. Some of this investment has included the capital



needed to restart the Guadalcanal Plains Palm Oil Plantations operations and the Gold Ridge Mine, and new investments in the telecommunications network as well as logging activity. The strong performance in 2010 largely reflected foreign direct investment associated with reopening of the Gold Ridge Mine, as well the new entrant in the telecommunications sector. Total investment over the past decade or so also included donor funded investment, for example infrastructure projects funded by the Asian Development Bank.



While available data on formal employment is scant, data from the National Provident Fund (NPF) suggest significant growth in formal employment over recent years. At the beginning of 2007, there were around 36,500 active contributors to the NPF. The CBSI reports that by the end of 2012 this had increased by almost a third to just over 48,000 active contributors. While these numbers do not represent a large proportion of the adult population, information obtained from the 2006 Household Income and Expenditure Survey and the RAMSI People's Survey suggest that each person in formal employment supports many others in the community.

The value of exports and imports both declined sharply from the late 1990s (see Chart 6). As the economy contracted, imports fell, reflecting the reduced ability to pay for them, and the value of exports collapsed in a manner consistent with the wider overall decline in the economy.

Since RAMSI's arrival, export and import values have both grown substantially. Improved export performance has largely been the result of: strong prices for Solomon Islands' export commodities over the last decade; a ramp up in unsustainable logging activity; increased palm oil production; and more recently, mining exports .. The performance of exports over more recent years has been mixed. The value of a number of Solomon Islands exports were affected by the slump in demand following the GFC. In 2009, copra and coconut oil exports fell by around 70 per cent; timber exports declined by just under 25 per cent; and palm oil and kernel exports fell by just under 20 per cent, according to the Central Bank of Solomon Islands. However, more recently, the Central Bank reported a merchandise trade surplus of \$360 million for 2012.

Goods imported into Solomon Islands reflect demand for essential items such as fuel, foods, machinery and materials not produced locally, given the limited manufacturing capacity. Over recent years, capital imports associated with key investments have seen a ramp up in imports.

In the few years prior to 2003, international reserves fell to dangerously low levels, making it difficult to ensure payment for essential imports. Prior to and following 2003, international reserves started to recover and grew to more comfortable levels, aided by a stronger merchandise trade performance and flows of donor funds. However, a period of widening trade deficits as imports grew more strongly (as oil and food prices rose to very high levels) than exports, and then the impact of the GFC saw international reserves decline to cover only around two months of imports. This led to a standby facility with the International Monetary Fund being arranged and an associated program that was supported by donor partners forming the Core Economic Working Group. International reserves subsequently recovered following the 2009 GFC, and stood at the equivalent of around eight months of imports at the end of 2012. The GFC period and very high oil and food prices in the lead up to it, highlighted how vulnerable Solomon Islands remains to shocks like these.



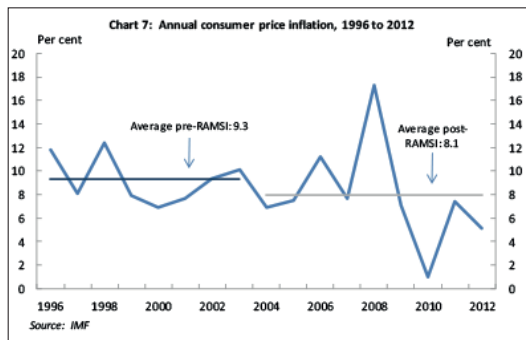
Mobile Phone Revolution

There have been rapid improvements in mobile phone communications in Solomon Islands since the Government awarded a second mobile phone licence in 2009, breaking the decades-long monopoly held by Solomon Telekom Company Limited, Our Telekom.

As competition cut costs to the consumer and saw a rapid spread of services to even the most remote outer islands, demand increased substantially. This pushed the telecommunications sector forward in the past several years at a pace that no other sector has seen in the country's 35 years of independence. The policy changes that made this possible were developed with the assistance of RAMSI advisers in the Ministry of Finance and Treasury's Economic Reform Unit.

With Bemobile commencing operations in August 2010, both it and Our Telekom attracted customers by reducing their prices, increasing their coverage areas and providing new services. The mobile penetration rate soared from a single figure to more than 50 per cent of the Solomon Islands' population. The RAMSI People's Survey conducted throughout the country in 2011 found that 75 per cent of the nearly 5,000 survey respondents said they had access to a mobile phone compared with 23 per cent in 2009.

As part of improving its services, Our Telekom launched its 3G network in 2010, enabling data access for its subscribers. It has also introduced a mobile internet service, whereby internet can be accessed using the 3G network through internet capable mobile phones or via a laptop. Both Bemobile and Our Telekom continue to improve on their infrastructure, rolling out more mobile sites throughout the country.



As shown in Chart 7, inflation averaged around 9.3 per cent in the years prior to 2003 and has averaged around 8.1 per cent since. Inflation spiked in the period prior to the GFC when oil and food prices were rising rapidly and then unwound over the next two years. This period highlights Solomon Islands’ exposure to the international economy for critical imports and exports and their prices, which can have a big impact.

Economic Reforms

Since 2003, economic and financial reforms have helped to strengthen the Solomon Islands economy, and the gradual improvement in average living standards.

Economic reforms since 2003 have focused broadly on removing direct impediments to growth and helping to make Solomon Islands an easier and more reliable place to do business. This includes improvement in the regulations and laws that affect business directly, as well as the way that Government itself does business—that is, in public administration reform.

Key economic and public finance reforms include:

- A sustained program of economic reform that has focused on improving the environment in which the private sector operates and in reducing operating business costs. This has resulted in the average time it takes to start a business reducing from 56 to 9 days.
- The Foreign Investment Act, which reduced processing times for foreign investment applications, and reduced restrictions on areas in which foreigners could invest.
- A reduction in tariff rates, which reduced the cost of imported business inputs.



“When RAMSI came there was this sense of security. Things returned to normal. The government is more stable now. This allows for more planning on the part of businesses. Before that we were just taking one day at a time.”

Nanette Tutua, Public Service Commissioner

- Introduction of competition reforms for key sectors such as aviation and telecommunications, leading to more competition and reduced prices.
- Streamlining processes for work and residency permits to enable business to more quickly engage skilled labour.
- Business law reforms that modernised the legal environment for business and streamlined its administrative processes, including the new Companies Act, the new Companies Registry and the Secured Transactions Act, which made it easier for lenders to record their interest in collateral used to secure loans.
- Reforms to both tax policy and administration to improve the fairness and efficiency of the tax system, so that businesses and individuals pay an appropriate amount of tax and share the tax burden more fairly across the community, including:
 - The Customs Valuation Act 2009;
 - Taxpayer education and outreach by the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise Divisions;
 - The determined value schedule for round log exports, to ensure that export duties reflect a fair return for the community;
 - Reforms to arrangements for applying for exemptions from tax and duties;
 - Work on a resource tax framework, to provide certainty and a fair return for the community and businesses on the extraction of natural resources;
 - The adoption of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, which promotes resource revenue transparency, and improved accountability and governance. Solomon Islands is now an EITI candidate country.

Land

One of the country's most bountiful and yet largely unrealised resources, land, is at the centre of all cultural and most social issues in Solomon Islands. Certainly it is universally acknowledged that one of the 'root causes' of *the tensions* that brought the country to its knees and ultimately led to RAMSI's deployment, was the issue of land.

Land also impacts on politics and politics on land as was seen during *the tensions* when the concerns of people in Guadalcanal over their customary land were openly exploited for political purposes with devastating consequences for the entire nation. Less well recognised is the role that customary land also played in creating an environment ripe for conflict, in the constraint it had placed on development in Guadalcanal, Malaita and elsewhere in the country, restricting the potential growth in jobs and other economic opportunities available to Solomon Islanders in the decades leading up to *the tensions*.

There are currently two land tenure systems in Solomon Islands. One is the alienated land system, which is land that has been acquired and alienated during the colonial period. This makes up 15 per cent of the land in Solomon Islands. The other 85 per cent of the land in the country is subject to a customary land tenure system where land is owned communally by the tribe and not any individual.

The land under this customary land tenure system has been the subject of numerous disputes over the years and because of that, the majority of Solomon Islands land mass has remained unavailable for active development.

The Government's current policy is to address land issues in order to have land secured for economic development. A Land Reform Unit has been established in the Office of the Prime Minister to implement the Government's policy. Work of the Unit is first, to codify land boundaries, tribal leadership, tribal membership and have that information nationally recorded.

The target of the policy is to have up to 500,000 hectares of land available for development either by the Government, local and/or foreign investors under a tenure system that is more secure. This is in addition to 15 per cent of the land mass in Solomon Islands that has already been secured and registered by the colonial Government under the alienated land tenure system.

There is a lot of land in Solomon Islands that is currently not economically productive and the Government believes that having land areas placed under a secured land tenure system is critical to the economic progress of the country.



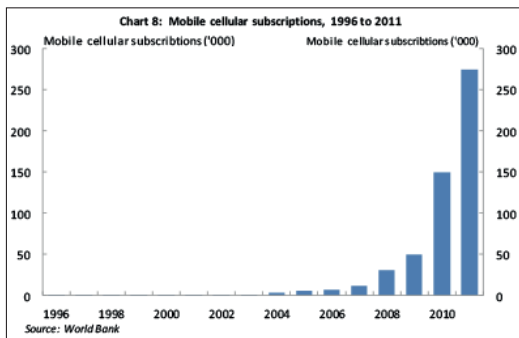
- Reforms to state owned enterprises, to improve their financial management and governance, to reduce the financial risk they pose to the Government and also to improve their service standards. Two State Owned Enterprises – Home Finance Limited and Sasape Marina - have been privatised.
- The implementation of the Honiara Club Agreement and subsequently the Debt Management Strategy, to reduce the fiscal risks around sovereign debt, improve fiscal and macroeconomic stability and avoid the impact of the debt burden on future generations.
- Improved Budget expenditure controls and financial management systems, to better control payroll spending, and prevent spending in excess of budgeted levels, a new chart of accounts and a new budget execution system. This provides greater levels of control and assists in obtaining fiscal stability.
- Reforms to the Budget processes, with better stakeholder consultation, including inside and outside Government and in the provinces, to guide service delivery, and make sure that the services most needed by Solomon Islanders are delivered.

Telecommunications Reform

Since 2003, one area of significant reform has been in the telecommunications industry.

Since the telecommunications monopoly was removed in 2009, there has been spectacular growth in mobile phone subscriptions and coverage (see Chart 8). Competition resulted in the price of mobile communications falling drastically, reducing an important cost for business and consumers.

Left: Copra remains a key export commodity for Solomon Islands, with communities throughout the archipelago engaged in its production. Here workers do the heavy lifting of loading sacks of copra at Honiara's main wharf.



Since 2003, the number of fixed broadband connections has also increased steadily. When the service became available in 2004 there were 200 subscriptions. By 2011, this had grown to just under 2,500 subscriptions. While this does not distinguish between private and business connections and does not include broadband access through the mobile network, it is a further positive indicator. In 2012, the Government worked with the private sector, the Asian Development Bank and private lenders to facilitate bringing an undersea fiber-optic cable to Solomon Islands. If this project proceeds, it will help deliver high speed and more affordable broadband access to many Solomon Islanders.

Future Challenges

It will be important for the Government to maintain fiscal discipline and control and to provide political and policy certainty going forward in order to maintain an environment in which the private sector can continue to flourish and grow. Existing reforms will need to be consolidated and the reform agenda progressed.

One of the main economic challenges over the medium-term will be dealing with the expected decline of the logging industry. The forestry industry has been the single most important foreign exchange earner and a significant contributor to economic growth, employment and budget revenue.

Timber extraction has been occurring at unsustainable levels over recent years which has created a bring-forward of future growth. Unless some other activities can take logging's place, economic growth and stability, export earnings and budget revenue growth will all be negatively affected as logging activity declines. While the reopening of the Gold Ridge mine has contributed to export earnings over recent years, the remaining life of the mine is around 10 years. These issues represent potential risks to macroeconomic stability.

A key challenge going forward will therefore be the need to continue broadening and expanding the economic base. In particular, ways of bolstering the external balance of payments position will need to be found, by replacing exports and/or reducing imports. Other sources of growth are likely to be required to provide employment opportunities and support Government revenue collections.

Colin Johnson and Katherine Tuck

Colin Johnson and Katherine Tuck are both Australian Treasury officers who have worked under RAMSI's Economic Governance Program supporting the Ministry of Finance and Treasury. Colin was an Undersecretary in the Ministry and the initial team leader of the RAMSI advisers assisting the Ministry in the first year of RAMSI, from July 2003 until the end of 2004. He returned in March 2012 to take up the team leader's position once again. Katherine was an economic adviser in the Ministry during 2005 and 2006 and returned in November 2011 to take up the position of Senior Adviser to the Ministry's Economic Reform Unit.



As much as guns once undermined Solomon Islanders' ability to govern their nation, corruption continues to take its toll. Here members of the public carry the flags of RAMSI's contributing countries as they march in support of International Anti-Corruption Day, December 2008.

Governance before and after RAMSI

Josés Tuhānuku



.....

Most think it was the guns that undid our country but the violence that cast such a shadow over our days during the tensions was really only the latest and most diabolical manifestation of the decades of steady decline in the capacity of Solomon Islanders and their leaders to stick to the rules and do the right thing by each other and our nation.

Fitim Solomons, Spoilem Solomons

If it is possible to identify any single cause of *the tensions*, it is this *'fitim Solomon'* approach to national life; our collective willingness to tolerate - even to admire - from the bottom to the top, those at the highest level ignoring, bending and ultimately breaking the rules.¹ More than anything else it is this haphazard, self-serving approach to national life that led us to fail so miserably at managing our own affairs. For it is this that first allowed the seeds of corruption to take root and flourish in our young nation, that then facilitated, less than 30 years after Independence, that same corruption getting

¹ The undisputed champion of the *fitim Solomon* approach was none other than the country's most colourful prime minister, the late Solomon Mamaloni; his disciples and admirers, who still occupy the top echelons of our nation, and are still hard at work trying to imitate their founder!

a stranglehold on the very institutions meant to guide and protect us. So that as the twentieth century was drawing to a close, instead of flourishing, our people were missing out on the natural economic opportunities that should have been theirs in a healthy developing nation. So that by the time of RAMSI's arrival in 2003, it could be said that it was us, and only ourselves, that had almost totally destroyed our young nation.

Governance

Put at its simplest governance is all about compliance (or non-compliance) with the rule of law, with the mechanisms designed to ensure accountable and transparent policy-making and effective implementation through the systems established to deliver adequate and efficient services to a country's citizens. In a democracy, good governance is when the rule of law is upheld and the services to the citizens of the country are discharged in the most effective and efficient manner as intended according to established laws, regulations and precedent. On the other hand, when we speak of poor governance it is a reference to the situation whereby the rule of law is not strictly adhered to and the administration of services is not done according to the appropriate regulations, so the ability to deliver services efficiently and effectively is greatly undermined.

Poor governance can be caused by sheer lack of capacity, technical expertise, and effectiveness and efficiency on the part of the bureaucracy, or incompetence or plain unwillingness by a country's political leadership or administrators to comply. The worst scenario is when the main cause of poor governance is corruption. That is the kind of corruption that occurs when politicians, officials or other agents of the State use their positions for personal gain at the expense of the well-being of the nation.

How Corruption Seeped into the Institutions of Solomon Islands

When Solomon Islands attained its political independence from the British colonial powers, it inherited four young but functioning institutions: the Parliament whose members make the law, the Public Service who enact the law, the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) who enforce the law and the Judiciary who interpret the law. If one thing can be said for our colonial masters, up to Independence Day, 7 July 1978, three out of these four institutions, the public service, the police and the judiciary, were quite robust and practiced in playing their role in delivering good governance in Solomon Islands.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about the parliamentary and political systems that were hastily constructed near the end of colonial rule. While we were bequeathed a Westminster system of government from the British Colonial administration, this was done in such haste – Independence coming less than a decade after our first general election in 1970, and only two years after internal self-government – that, unsurprisingly, the model it produced was quite crude and its practitioners, our political leaders, still raw and inexperienced. There were no established political parties, no voter education and no real idea amongst the majority of citizens just how this new system was supposed to work, let alone what their rights and responsibilities might be.

The lack of established political parties meant that most of the members of parliament that took the country to Independence were independent members in that they did not belong to a political party with a defined set of policies or publically articulated ideals. Not only did this mean that there was no way for the worst instincts of these members to at least be subjected to party discipline but they themselves did not even have to know what they stood for! This situation was further compounded by the decision of those drafting the new Constitution to recognise these independent members as a formal group within Parliament. This effectively created a third group in Parliament in addition to the Government and the official Opposition, virtually enshrining the ongoing fracturing of our parliament and with it the chronic political instability that has so plagued Solomon Islands in the decades since.

Another aspect of the country's new political arrangements that has severely undermined both the representative and accountable nature of our governance was the provision for members of parliament to elect the prime minister in a secret ballot. The drafters of the constitution at the time no doubt thought this was a good compromise if, given the absence of established parties in Solomon Islands, the more common Westminster convention was not available, that is where the head of the party that holds the majority in the ruling house automatically assumes the prime ministership. However, what this provision effectively means in practice is that the choice of who leads the nation has been taken away from the ordinary voter and placed in the hands of a very few.



“From the mid-nineties onwards the group of people that came in had a very different take on how to govern the country and from that point on it was all about personal gain rather than trying to develop the country.”

John Taupongi, former Constitutional Law & Parliamentary Practice Specialist,
National Parliament

It did not take long after Independence for the flaws in our new political system to emerge. Within the life of the first parliament elected after Independence, the government led by the first Prime Minister of the country, Sir Peter Kenilorea, collapsed as a good number of ministers and backbenchers of the government decided to join forces with the Opposition and form a new government led by Solomon Mamaloni. While this change of government in 1981, unlike others to come later, was not the work of those who later would deliberately manipulate the system and corrupt our MPs to serve their own agenda, it was the beginning of a culture of repeated motions of no confidence against sitting prime ministers; a syndrome which has seen the business of successive parliaments and the tenure of most of our governments - with very few exceptions - constantly held to ransom by the machinations and conspiracies that inevitably accompany motions of no confidence.

The Rise of Political Corruption

This propensity for political instability took a whole new diabolical twist however in the late 1980s and early 1990s when forces outside our borders began to actively capitalise not only on the weakness in our systems set up to provide for accountable and transparent governance but also on our leaders' vanity, greed and willingness to put their own - and others - interests ahead of the nation's. In particular the advent of a large logging industry not only caused untold damage to our then pristine forests, but it facilitated a level of corruption in our parliament and in our public service unprecedented in the short history of our nation. Over time it became apparent that government ministers as well as public servants had become involved in corrupt practices such as receiving bribes from logging companies and other corporate bodies so as to illegally facilitate such requirements as logging concessions, logging licences, work permits, residential permits, fishing licences, and tax remissions. The entry of such systematic corruption into our political institutions and the public service led not only to the compromising of political leaders and bureaucrats, it undermined our already weakening governance systems. While the syphoning off of large amounts of the

nation's wealth to individuals and foreign interests not only reduced the economic opportunities available to the people of Solomon Islands but it also severely reduced the capacity of the government to deliver basic services to our ever-growing number of citizens.

A good case study of how and when corruption started to infiltrate and seriously undermine the highest political institutions of the country, is the sad tale behind the downfall of the Billy Hilly Government in 1994. Led by Francis Billy Hilly, this government when elected the previous year had immediately embarked on a reform agenda, including a clean-up of the by now notorious logging industry. This angered the logging companies who had been used to unfettered access to the nation's primary natural resource under the previous Mamaloni Government. Considering the Hilly Government's reforms nothing more than a threat to their commercial interests, they worked to derail them. Consequently, these corrupt loggers used their financial resources to bribe a good number of the ministers and back benchers of the government to join the Opposition, to oust the Hilly government and form a new government under the leadership of Mamaloni. So once again they could enjoy unfettered access to the nation's natural resources. This blatantly corrupt practice of manipulating our political processes continues to this day. But the loggers and other foreign commercial and other interests that seek to influence who leads our country could not do it if virtually all our MPs were not so willing to auction themselves off to the highest bidder every time an opportunity for a motion of no confidence presents itself.

It did not take long for corruption to spread to the country's nine provinces with the logging industry operating in many provinces and Solomon Islands own centralised system of government providing the perfect conduit for corruption down to our grass roots. When the central government and its administration become corrupt, these practices immediately transfer like the tentacles of a giant octopus to the provincial administrations. With even fewer economic opportunities available to them, our provincial leaders and administrators have taken to corrupt practices like a fish to water and so the

institutions responsible for the delivery of such key services as health and education across the country have been greatly compromised.

Within two decades of our Independence, as the 1990s were coming to a close, our country's governance was already severely undermined; our leaders hijacked by vested interests, our political and administrative systems manipulated by foreigners and a good slice of our national wealth routinely shipped offshore to make chopsticks! All this led to a decline not only in government services but in the genuine economic opportunities available to our people, which when combined with our growing population meant a very real and rapid decline in the standard of living; a condition ripe for discontent.

In hindsight it should have been no surprise that the long-held grievances of the people of Guadalcanal were, in 1998, available to be manipulated by those politicians and criminals opposed to the Ulufa'alu Government, which like the Hilly Government had come to office the previous year intent on reform. However what took many in the nation by surprise was how this early trouble-making quickly snowballed out of control, as young men intoxicated with the power of the gun embroiled the entire nation in their dispute, sucking in and almost destroying our police force, and ultimately grinding our governance – good or bad – to a halt during what has now become known as *the tensions*.

RAMSI and Governance

This was the state of affairs when RAMSI arrived on our shores in July 2003. Although RAMSI did not immediately attempt to address the many challenges of building good governance during the first few months of the mission, this initial stabilisation period automatically led to a rapid and significant improvement in the conditions for governing the country. This was due equally to the much improved security environment as well as RAMSI's simultaneous efforts to stabilise the Government's finances; restoring the pay roll and injecting funds into the system to enable the delivery of services to flourish once again. Once these two crucial elements were in place,

RAMSI turned its attention more specifically to matters of good governance through what came to be known as the mission's Machinery of Government pillar. As the name suggests, the goal of this pillar was to ensure the various wheels and cogs that make up the mechanisms that drive the governance of the nation were reconnected and slotted back in, well-oiled and running smoothly. It is a nice metaphor that does no justice at all to the complex chaos that is the reality of Solomon Islands governance to this day.

Of all the areas RAMSI has attempted to strengthen, it is governance that has undoubtedly proved the most challenging and real progress, the most elusive. A decade after RAMSI's arrival, governance in Solomon Islands is still not on solid ground. Many of the issues that needed to be urgently addressed ten years ago today present even greater and more urgent challenges to our nation. Three areas stand out as a priority for reform if we are ever going to achieve a representative, transparent, accountable and effective system of governance. If we are going to have any chance of moving the country forward, we need to look for ways to radically change the current culture and chronic non-performance of much of the public service. We need to work out how we can best contain if not combat corruption, and how we can better elect our leaders - members of parliament as well as our prime ministers – so that those who attain office are genuinely committed to serving this nation, and not simply seeking their turn at the trough, plundering what they can from our national wealth for themselves and their foreign cronies.

These areas of reform, particularly of the public sector and combating corruption, have always been high on RAMSI's agenda, recognised as important planks of the mission's oft-stated goal of helping Solomon Islanders build a peaceful, prosperous and well-run nation. So what has happened that a decade later, we have not made as much progress in these areas as we had hoped? This is an important question as without major improvements in the quality of our governance, much of the very significant progress Solomon Islands has been able to achieve with RAMSI's assistance is at risk.

Parliamentary Strengthening Program

Members of Solomon Islands National Parliament as well as the average voter now have a better understanding of how Parliament works, thanks to the Parliamentary Strengthening Program.

Delivered through a partnership between RAMSI and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) since 2006, the Parliamentary Strengthening Program is aimed at building the capacity of Parliament to function efficiently including the timely processing and drafting of bills.

One of the major achievements of the Parliamentary Strengthening Program is the work it has done to help Parliament develop its committee system. These committees play a key role in the scrutiny of key parliamentary matters including legislation, public expenditure, foreign relations issues and parliamentary processes but had not really been utilised much since Independence in 1978. The project helped Parliament develop a committee operations manual and adopt new standing orders to govern the committees' activities as well as assisting the committees to engage more closely with constituencies through Provincial Committee meetings.

As a result Parliamentary Committee hearings have shot up from seven in 2004 to 133 in 2009, including the first outside Honiara, with 40 public hearings across all nine provinces.

One of the program's aims is to make the proceedings of parliament more accessible to the public through

the broadcasting and webcasting of parliamentary debates and the timely publication of Hansard and other parliamentary records including on a National Parliament website.

The program has also helped the National Parliament Office put in place professional induction programs held for all MPs following national elections as well as strengthening the corporate planning and budgeting of the National Parliament Office.

Another aim of the program is to improve the community understanding of the work of Parliament to ensure that people are more aware of their MPs' responsibilities.

The procedural support services for the Speaker, Clerk and MPs have also been strengthened and there have been upgrades and improvements in the library, research and IT facilities available to all MPs.

An AUD \$400,000 sound system has been set up in the parliamentary chambers significantly improving the quality of radio and television broadcasts of parliamentary sittings as well as key Committees.

The public also get the chance to learn about the history and functions of the National Parliament through the establishment of an annual Open Day which has proved a popular event with attendance of over 7,000 people each year.

The Parliamentary Strengthening Program worked to help the National Parliament, of which the main chamber is pictured here, enhance the conduct of its business.





People's Survey

Every year since 2007 more than 4,000 Solomon Islanders have volunteered their time to answer questions about their country. The answers to these questions make up the results of the annual People's Survey.

A unique exercise in tapping the views of a nation, specially trained Solomon Islands enumerators collect the data from communities throughout the country, often travelling by boat or foot to reach the most isolated populations.

Originally developed as a tool for RAMSI to monitor the progress of the Solomon Islands-RAMSI partnership against its goal of building a peaceful, prosperous and well governed nation, a pilot survey was first conducted in 2006.

As the results were collated it was quickly realised that there were many other agencies including other donor partners as well as the Solomon Islands Government which could benefit from access to such up-to-date findings collected from a national sample with consideration for age, education, gender, income level and geographic location.

The first full survey was conducted in 2007 and has been repeated every year since then.

With enumerators recruited to match the areas under survey, questions are put in pidgin or in the local languages wherever possible. Questions not only about the work of RAMSI but also a great variety of other areas, including living conditions, the delivery of services, the work of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, security in the communities, leadership, and accountability.

The most recent surveys have included Focus group discussions organised around the same topics in various parts of the country. Public servants have also been encouraged to send written responses to the discussion topics. The views gathered covers such issues as perceptions of security, governance, access to services and economic confidence. The Survey has been coordinated by the Australian National University Enterprise which has recently changed its name to ANUedge. The 2013 People's Survey was done in collaboration with the University of the South Pacific in Suva, Fiji.

Public Sector Reform

The Public Service had, by the time of RAMSI's arrival, already moved far from the institutional culture and disciplined approach seen during the colonial period and immediately after independence when it was a highly professional institution. Public servants were appointed, promoted and deployed based on personal and professional merit. However, not long after independence a slackness started to come into the system, corners began to be cut and worst of all the practice of political appointments was introduced for the most senior positions. Political considerations rather than precedent and proper process now guided most of those at the very top.

At the same time the *fitim Solomon* approach to letting things go, near enough is good enough, never following up and never holding oneself or anyone else accountable for their actions, gradually eroded the very good start our public service had been given. Years of poor planning, weak training and squandered resources all took their toll so that by the time RAMSI arrived, the paralysis of the public service caused by *the tensions* was actually the culmination of more than two decades of decline. The public service had slumped so far that by the time the first RAMSI advisers arrived the following year to begin the task of rebuilding the public service, not a single intact copy of the General Orders, the collection of rules and regulations that govern the functions of the public service, could be found in the entire country! So the very first thing the advisers did was cobble together from various bit and pieces the document that should have been the bible for our public servants, a copy in every draw.

In reality the problem was even greater than this, for it soon became apparent that the General Orders had not just fallen apart physically but had been systematically unpicked, largely by the architect of much of the country's mal-administration and poor governance, Solomon Mamaloni, who apart from his clever politicking had, over time managed to remove, manipulate or undermine many of the mechanisms and even regulations designed to ensure transparent and accountable processes in our public service.

Despite this parlous state of affairs RAMSI's efforts in public sector reform were slow to get off the ground, although some good work was done in small batches prior to 2009 when RAMSI's Public Service Improvement Program finally got going. Since then the program has put in a substantial amount of work building the capacity of the Ministry of Public Service especially in the area of Human Resources or management of its people, and there have been some positive achievements in the public service with RAMSI's assistance. Among them is the introduction of a new payroll-human resources data system that has the capacity, once fully operational, to provide the information needed for much stronger and more systematic controls for managing each ministry's wages bill. Another is the rejuvenation of the country's Institute of Public Administration and Management which reopened in 2007 and is still being supported to run in-house induction and training programs for public servants, something that had fallen by the wayside by the time of the *the tensions*. More recently RAMSI has begun working with the Public Service Commission, assisting with the introduction of new performance-based contracts for all permanent secretaries.

However, Public Service improvement is a large and long-term task. Unfortunately, the culture of 'non-compliance' is still entrenched in our public service, perhaps because there appears to be little or no consequence when the rules are not followed. This means that it is likely to be some time before more visible and practical issues such as improving performance, addressing absenteeism, speeding up recruitment, and strengthening the system of merit-based appointments are adequately, if ever, addressed. Real reform would require many more years of support from donors but more importantly, a much stronger commitment by the Solomon Islands Government than has been evident to date.

The Accountability Institutions

By the time of RAMSI's arrival, our three main accountability institutions, the Leadership Code Commission, the Ombudsman Office and the Office of the Auditor General, had all suffered such a long and deliberate denial of resources to be tantamount to direct political interference by those



Ruth Liloqula

“Young people should not keep quiet; it is their future that these leaders are playing with. They must speak up.”

politicians whose interests were best served by a lack of accountability. Not one had the capacity to carry out their functions effectively. In the case of the Office of the Auditor General, long before *the tensions*, it had ceased to perform its role, presenting its last audited report to parliament in 1989. When RAMSI arrived most of the national accounts for many years previous were still awaiting audit. But blessed with a genuine champion of reform in the then incumbent Auditor General, the late Augustine Fatai, this agency was destined to flourish once RAMSI was able to pump resources back in. Within the first year of assistance from RAMSI, more than 20 new staff were recruited, both expatriates and locals, including a raft of bright young graduates. The Office of the Auditor General embarked on an ambitious audit catch up. Some accounts such as those of provincial governments were out-sourced to private auditors so that the Auditor General's staff could conduct a series of special audits targeting areas such as fisheries where corruption and mismanagement was known to be rife. However once again the limitations of a program of reform that is not supported at the highest levels of government become apparent. And great disappointment has followed. While the Office of the Auditor General has done its job brilliantly, government audits are up to date and reports uncovering fraud and corrupt schemes have been repeatedly presented to parliament, little or no action has been taken;

line Ministries do not appear to be willing to act decisively in dealing with the issues raised in the audits due to the incompetence and corruption within the administration.

Similar efforts were made by RAMSI in the other two state accountability institutions, the Ombudsman and the Leadership Code Commission. This was on a smaller scale, for without the local champions to drive these agencies forward, the progress has been less dramatic although the Office of the Ombudsman has cleared a major backlog of cases and worked to improve the public's understanding of its role.

Corruption – the Missed Opportunity

Corruption was identified in the Solomon Islands-RAMSI Partnership Framework as a cross-cutting issue. In terms of the survival of Solomon Islands as a nation it would be better described as a matter of life or death, as it is corruption which more than anything else undermines the quality of governance in this country and poses the greatest risk to sustaining the progress Solomon Islands has made with RAMSI's assistance in the past ten years.

In terms of combating corruption through institutional strengthening there is still a long way to go; it seems for every step forward, there is another one to make. For instance the great strides made in cleaning up the Solomon Islands Customs Service, which at times has resulted in big increases in revenue collection, still remains under threat from those who have the most to lose from a clean and transparent system.

In hindsight it would appear that for many of the country's top politicians and bureaucrats the real issue when they agreed to RAMSI's intervention was not so much a return to the rule of law as their own security! For during *the tensions*, the thugs with the guns took away the monopoly of top political leaders and senior public servants to break the law at will to enhance their personal interests. Of course if the law-makers are also the law breakers, support for a wholesale crackdown on corruption was never going to be fully supported by the Government.

The best chance to move on those who were corrupt existed at the outset of RAMSI's deployment, just as the opportunity to deal with the militants and take back the guns received huge support from the public, so too would the public have supported a crack-down, particularly on the 'big fish'. RAMSI's Participating Police Force and the RSIPF did manage to net some of these but while there have been some high profile arrests and even some successful convictions, far greater resources needed to have been aimed at this target, as many more investigations, and particularly more convictions were needed to set the example to others which could have acted as a real deterrent.

Electoral Reform

With RAMSI's support, a modest electoral reform was affected with the introduction of the single ballot box for the 2006 general election. This eliminated a silly arrangement bequeathed to us by the British which required voters to literally hide while they cast their vote in one of a multiple



“The people who really matter are the people in Government, in politics in public life in Honiara and in Solomon Islands. If they want the clean, open democratic state that they said back in 2003 that they wanted, well they have responsibilities; there is only so much RAMSI can do.”

John Howard, Australian Prime Minister, 1996 - 2007

of ballot boxes adorned with the symbols of the various candidates (thus giving ample opportunity to either retain one's ballot or indeed post the ballots bought from other voters).

Although further electoral reform was an obvious opportunity to improve how we elect our leaders and reduce the opportunity for corruption in our political system, the lack of interest from successive Solomon Islands Governments in pursuing this saw RAMSI focus its support on strengthening the capacity of the Electoral Commission and in particular on making sure the conduct of the 2010 elections was carried out in an orderly and peaceful fashion.

Today there are plans for our electoral roll to be completely redone using biometric identification. While quite a technical and logistical challenge to achieve, if successful this new roll should have far greater integrity than the merry-go-round of deceased and deceitful multiple voters that have occupied electoral rolls in the past. If this could then be followed up with a reform of our voting system the country could be in the position to expect better outcomes from future elections. Such changes that could be considered would be to introduce a limited preferential system of up to three votes, allowing for most Solomon Islanders' votes to actually count towards a final result rather than be relegated to the floor of the polling booth by our first-past-the-post system. A new provision in the Electoral Act stipulating that the winning candidate in every constituency must secure at least 50% of the total vote cast could also significantly boost the representative nature of our parliaments. To achieve significant reforms such as these would require, however, both leadership at the Government level and an education of our citizens about the potential for change to the electoral system to enhance the representative nature of our democracy.

A Long Way to Go

Ten years after RAMSI's arrival there has definitely been an improvement in some aspects of how we govern our country. But the radical far-reaching change that many of us hoped for, that might have sustained these reforms, and guaranteed us a brighter future, have hardly even been commenced. In

hindsight this is not all that surprising given that almost all issues of governance lie close to the sovereign heart of our nation; in truth what RAMSI lacked, and what Solomon Islands still needs, are effective local champions willing to stick their necks out, reject the way most of us 'do business' in this country and lead the push for real change.

Solomon Islanders need to recognise that the only people who can secure our future are Solomon Islanders ourselves. The real responsibility for change lies with us. Whatever improvements that may have been put in place with RAMSI's assistance in the technical aspects of our laws, political system and the public service over the past ten years won't really count for much so long as the deeply-rooted culture of corruption and non-compliance continues to flourish in Solomon Islands society. Instead good governance, and with it better services and standard of living, will continue to elude us and Solomon Islands shall forever remain a third rate nation; a failing if not completely failed state.

Joses Tuhonuku

Born on the island of Bellona, Joses Tuhonuku has been a considered if outspoken advocate for ordinary Solomon Islanders with over 30 years' experience in governance, anti-corruption and sustainable development initiatives. In the late 1970s, he helped to found the country's first private sector trade union, the Solomon Islands National Union of Workers. In 1988 he established the Solomon Islands Labour Party. Serving three terms as a member of the National Parliament, including as the Leader of Opposition, Tuhonuku as a cabinet minister was at the forefront of efforts to clean up the country's forestry industry in the mid-1990s. Completing his Masters of Development Administration at Australian National University in 2000, he returned to re-enter parliament and become Deputy Chair of the Intervention Taskforce set up to facilitate RAMSI's deployment. More recently he worked on the RAMSI-led strengthening of the RSIPF. He continues to advocate and work for good governance reforms in Solomon Islands.



Solomon Islands Permanent Secretary for RAMSI, Paul Tovua and RAMSI assistant Special Coordinator, Masi Lomaloma who led the reconciliation talks after the fatal shooting of Harry Lolonga in August 2010, conclude a traditional Titi Ulu ceremony, shaking hands with an elder of Perochekuri village on the Weathercoast of Guadalcanal.

Healing a nation

Mataiasi Masi Lomaloma



Introduction

Solomon Islands went through a period of civil unrest between 1998 and 2003 that caused the collapse of law and order, basic services and ultimately the economy. In the area of human suffering, numerous human rights violations were committed resulting in loss of lives and properties, displacement of people, and broken relationships. These experiences brought sadness, frustrations, bitterness, trauma and often anger to many Solomon Islanders.

The arrival of RAMSI in July 2003 halted the violence and brought about immediate improvements in law and order. This enabled long-term programs to be put in place aimed at rebuilding the economy, strengthening the rule of law, and improving the accountability of government. The improved security situation and RAMSI's continued presence on the ground also created a safe environment in which it was hoped Solomon Islanders would move to reconcile with each other. All of these – the return to the rule of law, the rebuilding of the economy and subsequent economic growth, improved governance and the laying to rest of the hurts and grievances of the recent past – were seen as prerequisites for the full recovery of the nation.

Milestones

Ten years after *the tensions*, significant progress has been achieved in rebuilding the economy, strengthening the rule of law and improving the accountability of government. However the only significant milestone achieved in the area of peace and reconciliation has been the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. At the grassroots, in the area of communal reconciliation, between and within communities, the progress has been very slow in spite of the efforts of many organizations and individuals to keep the momentum going.

Chief Erastus of Auna village, Koloula, South Guadalcanal best described this lack of progress in effecting reconciliation when he said in 2012: “Solomon Islands has been waiting to harvest the fruits of peace; reconciliation and rehabilitation. Not only is the fruit not harvested, it is not even ripe. I wonder if the peace tree is still standing or if it has withered and died?”

This chief's comments reflect the fact that many Solomon Islanders, both victims and perpetrators, are still carrying their burdens of hurt, loss and guilt. Reconciliation is the process that can bring some relief to the victims and perpetrators of *the tensions*. In a meeting between senior officers of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) and communities of Mbambanakira, on the Weathercoast of Guadalcanal in November 2012, a chief from Marasa area said: “We, in this area, are pleading to you to hear us. We want to live a normal life and we want to see the faces of all those who were responsible for the destruction of our houses, our livelihoods and our lives. We have been wounded because of what they did and we are still carrying those unhealed wounds in our hearts. If they were men enough to kill our sons, burn our houses and chase us out, then they should be men enough to come and face us and say sorry.”

The plea of this chief is a common plea of so many individuals and communities who were victims of the atrocities and crimes committed during *the tensions*. They want to reconcile

with those who committed acts of violence against them, to experience the liberation of forgiveness and be able to move on with their lives without hatred and pain.

What is Reconciliation?

The term reconciliation is often used without a full understanding of its meaning. Because of the violence of the past, relations between adversaries are based on antagonism, distrust, disrespect, hurt and hatred: hardly a recipe for peace. So there is a pressing need to address such a negative relationship. Not to force the parties to the conflict to love each other, by any means, but to engender a minimum basis of trust so that there can be a degree of cooperation and mutual reliance between them. To achieve this, they need to examine and address their previous relationship and their violent past. Reconciliation is the process for doing exactly that.

Therefore, reconciliation describes a process of coming together as well as an event or ceremony. As a process, it can involve mediation, compensation or reparation, healing and finally the ceremony of reconciliation.

Mediation is the first process to help disputing parties to agree that the reconciliation process needs to be started. It involves talking to both parties to find out the issues that are dividing them or issues of differences, and the need for them to settle their differences. During this process the issues of compensation or reparation are discussed and the aim is to get

the parties to agree on the process and methods for retributive and restorative justice as traditionally practiced within the particular community or area. This is a very delicate process and it is important that appropriately trained and experienced people should do the mediation. An important outcome of the process of reconciliation is the healing in which parties take responsibility for what they have done, by admitting their wrongs and asking for forgiveness. The onus is not only on the perpetrators to admit their wrongs, it also focuses on the victims' ability to respond positively to the admission of the offence committed against them. It should go without saying that truth and justice are essential elements to the process of healing and reconciliation.

The final stage is the cultural ceremony where the offending party publicly admits the wrong committed, seeks forgiveness and promises to repent. In return the victims forgive the offenders. Because of the communal nature of much of Solomon Islands society, a reconciliation ceremony usually also involves the communities of both parties. Gifts of food and cultural items like shell money are exchanged between the two parties, which are then shared by all the members of the two communities.

Reconciliation is a complex process that is time-consuming and cannot be rushed, imposed or forced upon people. Forcing and rushing the reconciliation will not result in true healing. Reconciliation involves both the offender and the victim who need to deal with delicate and emotional issues connected



“For reconciliation to work correctly regardless of whether the current police were involved, that uniform needs to stand up and say: ‘I’m sorry for what took place in the past’ and if they did that the community might learn to trust them.”

Denis McDermott, Commander, Participating Police Force 2007 -2009

with the offence. Some issues are material and others are non-material. Some issues, which the parties will have to deal with, are individual and internal and some are relational and external. Reconciliation is not about closure but the beginning of transformation. It transforms lives through healing, it transforms communities relationally, it transforms nations by allowing peaceful co-existence.

Reconciliation for the purpose of restoring relationships within and between communities has been part of Solomon Islands traditional cultures since before the arrival of the early European settlers and missionaries. It was necessary for security because different communities were living within the confines of islands and harmony with close neighbors was the best assurance of peaceful coexistence. In this context reconciliation can be seen as one of the earliest strategies for communal risk management.

Challenges of Reconciliation

One of the challenges of reconciliation in Solomon Islands is brought about by the organisation of its communities where traditional leaders may feel able to speak and act on behalf of individuals. This has led to instances where forgiveness has been granted by community leaders without the consent of the actual victims. This is very common in cases where women or children are victims. This challenge is equally applicable to perpetrators where “shadow” perpetrators come and seek forgiveness on behalf of the real offenders. Unsurprisingly this rarely results in effective and lasting reconciliation between the actual parties involved.

Another challenge is the lack of reconciliation assessment tools in terms of criteria, and performance indicators. This poses another difficult question: how does one assess the degree of healing other than just the words of forgiveness and repentance by the parties involved? This is one of the factors that make reconciliation a very complex process.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission was officially launched in April 2009, the Solomon Islands National Parliament having passed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act the previous August. Established after many years of lobbying by civil society groups, led by the Solomon Islands Christian Association and the Civil Society Network, the Commission did not, however, officially commence operations until January 2010. Public support for the Commission’s mandate was clearly evident when thousands of Solomon Islanders attended the public launch by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the Chairman of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, who spoke of the need for forgiveness if the nation was to achieve long term sustainable peace. As required by the Act, the Commission’s final report was handed to the Government in February 2012.

The Commission’s objective was to promote national unity and reconciliation. Its mandate included:

- Examining the truth about human rights violations and abuses which occurred between 1 January 1998 and 23 July 2003, examining the antecedents, root causes and responsibility for them. This examination was to include analysis of the impact of the crisis on particular sectors, particularly health, education and the judiciary;
- Promoting reconciliation, by providing the opportunity for victims to give an account of human rights violations and perpetrators to relate their experiences, with special attention given to sexual abuses and to the experiences of children;
- Helping restore the dignity of victims; and
- Submitting a report at the end of its work, stating its findings and making recommendations concerning reforms and other measures, with the objective of providing an impartial historical record, helping to prevent the repetition of the violations and abuses; addressing impunity; responding to the needs of victims; and promoting healing and reconciliations.

Five Commissioners were appointed to the Commission following the recommendations of a National Selection Committee. Two were international commissioners and the remaining three, Solomon Islanders. In line with their mandate, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission conducted extensive consultations, investigations and research, holding both public and closed hearings throughout the country, receiving statements and conducting exhumations as required.

Under the Act, the Prime Minister is required to table the Commission’s report in parliament when it then becomes a public document. However, in April 2013, more than 12 months after the report had been formally presented to the Government, the editor of the report, Bishop Terry Brown, announced that he was releasing the report in the public interest.



Titinge Reconciliation

After seven years of operations, in August 2012, the Solomon Islands-RAMSI Partnership suddenly faced the tragedy it had always hoped would never happen; the death of a Solomon Islander killed by a member of the mission operating in the line of duty. How this was subsequently dealt with was a firsthand lesson for RAMSI in the power and strength of Solomon Islands' traditions of reconciliation.

In the early hours of 12 August 2010, members of RAMSI's Tongan military contingent on patrol with members of the Participating Police Force and the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force had been called to deal with an incident at Titinge Village on the outskirts of Honiara where a post-election drinking party had got out of control and rocks had started to be thrown. For more than two hours, the police and military struggled to bring the situation under control police vehicles were badly damaged and eventually warning shots were fired. When the crowd dispersed, a young Weathercoast man, Harry Lolonga, was found to have been shot dead.

Prime Minister Derek Sikua was immediately informed and a few hours later called a press conference where the Police Commissioner and senior RAMSI personnel provided details of the incident to the media. The then RAMSI Special Coordinator, Graeme Wilson expressed his deepest regret at the tragic incident and extended the mission's heartfelt condolences to the family of the deceased, a former policeman. Behind the scenes Wilson also asked the mission's Assistant Special Coordinator, Masi Lomaloma, to speak with the grieving community and its leaders to establish the appropriate avenues for RAMSI and the Government to seek reconciliation.

Special Coordinator, Graeme Wilson explains to the father of the late Harry Lolonga, RAMSI's contribution to the reconciliation settlement negotiated after the death of his son.

The following day, the Special Coordinator, accompanied by the Commanders of RAMSI's Police and Military contingents, senior civilian officials, and Solomon Islands Government representatives presented traditional gifts or *chupu* to the family of the late Lolonga. The *chupu* included traditional shell money, a pig, traditional root crops and other foodstuffs. This was to affect the Guadalcanal tradition of *Lakasia Namate*, a ceremony which allows two parties to agree to cease a conflict and find a peaceful resolution to their problems.

This process continued with the Permanent Secretary for RAMSI, Paul Tovua, representing the Solomon Islands Government and RAMSI officials working with the family of the deceased towards a suitable resolution. This culminated in March 2011 in a *Titi Ulu* or traditional reconciliation ceremony with the family of the late Lolonga in his home village of Peochekuri on the Weathercoast of Guadalcanal. Both the Solomon Islands Government and RAMSI joined together to take part. The Government presenting \$50,000 in cash and \$50,000 worth of traditional wealth or *chupu* in the form of pigs, root crops, betel nut and traditional shell money. RAMSI at the ceremony committed the Mission to providing the late Lolonga's father with \$50,000 worth of building materials for a house and pledged a further \$50,000 in funds for the education of the Lolonga's six children who were still of schooling age. Honiara's Tongan community also presented a contribution in the form of building materials.

The then Deputy Commissioner of Police, Eddie Sikua, said the reconciliation opened the way for the RSIPF's re-engagement with the community. While the eldest sister of the late Lolonga, Ellen Leni, said that following the ceremony her heart was now at peace: "After my brother's death, I really felt the burden of caring for my father and for caring for my late brother's children, now the Government and RAMSI have lifted that burden from my shoulders and it is being shared by us all."

Soon after RAMSI's arrival and the rapid disarmament of the community, a lot of organisations became involved in the reconciliation process. With so many organisations active in this area, coordination became a challenge for the Government. Most organisations and communities acted independently not notifying let alone coordinating their initiatives with the Ministry of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace. This resulted in a lot of time and resource wasting, duplication and overlapping of responsibilities.

A lack of understanding of the complexity of *the tensions* can also be added to the list of challenges to effective reconciliation. Many people made their assessment on what had happened during *the tensions* on what they observed or heard reported from Honiara. However what happened in Honiara was totally different to what took place in the Weathercoast for instance. Not only was there a difference in what happened; the issues were different as were the people involved. Reconciliation in Honiara would mainly be between Malaitans and Guadalcanal people, whereas on the Weathercoast it needs to be affected between Guadalcanal communities and other Guadalcanal communities who then may wish in turn to reconcile with Malaitans and the police.

The Causes for the Delay

In a *Tok Stori* held in Alite Island in November 2005, the chiefs of Guadalcanal produced an outcome statement which in part said: "We recognize that reconciliation cannot be forced upon us as the need for reconciliation must come from the hearts and minds within and between our families, villages, churches and communities. However we believe that our willingness to move forward towards reconciliation is constrained by our lack of resources and capacity that are necessary to conduct reconciliation ceremonies." The lack of resources and capacity within the tension-affected communities is a challenge and one of the reasons for the slow progress of reconciliation.

Another reason for the delay is because many victims insist that reconciliation must follow justice and compensation. In terms of compensation, what is lacking at the moment is a clear policy guideline on how the issue of compensation is to be handled. Until a compensation policy is formulated, taking into account the precedents set as well as outstanding claims, this issue will remain a sticking point. The policy would also need to set a new formula on compensation for losses and be based on some universally accepted criteria.

Other factors include a lack of commitment and effort to deal with the issue in a more pragmatic way. It is a fact that all are aware that reconciliation is a pre-condition for peace in Solomon Islands and as such, priority must be allocated for the conduct of reconciliation, especially in the Weathercoast where most of the more serious human rights abuses were committed.

Reconciliation Facilitators

Although the progress of reconciliation has been slow, credit must be accorded to some organisations such as the churches and some NGOs such as the National Peace Council and the Sycamore Tree Project, as well as Provincial Governments and the National Government through the Ministry of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace.

Prior to RAMSI arriving, the National Peace Council had been working very hard with the communities to start the healing process through reconciliation. The Council was an independent body, formed by government to monitor the terms of the Townsville Peace Agreement. The National Peace Council was very successful for two reasons:

- It was independent from government and they had the trust and confidence of the people. As a result of the Joint Operation conducted in the Weathercoast, communities there were very suspicious of the government. (Some communities that suffered from the Joint Operation are still suspicious of government and in particular the police.)

- Its structure allowed it to select peace monitors directly from the communities it was working with. These monitors were trained and used to lay the groundwork for reconciliation and judge when the time was truly ripe for a reconciliation ceremony to take place.

One of the Council’s biggest achievements was the gun-free village project and the collection of weapons from the communities, for destruction by RAMSI. Unfortunately for Solomon Islands, the Council was disbanded in late 2006 and with it went the peace monitors who were acting as a vital link between the communities and the government.

This caused a major setback for the program of reconciliation, the repercussions of which are still being felt to this day. As one Guadalcanal MP, Hon Silas Chekana has said: “The greatest lesson Solomon Islands has learned is, we never learn from history”.

Another organisation that merits mentioning for its work on reconciliation is the ‘Sycamore Tree Program’. This grew from the Solomon Islands Prisons Fellowship and has been instrumental in organising reconciliations within the prison

walls between former rivals, offenders and victims. Outside of the prisons they have conducted reconciliations between the members of the communities and the ex-combatants. Unlike most other programs of reconciliation in Solomon Islands, the Sycamore Tree model of reconciliation relies solely on spiritual healing in which material compensation is not expected nor paid.

The Ministry of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace has also worked very hard to facilitate reconciliations with limited resources and under trying conditions, managing competing interests and juggling local politics connected with reconciliations.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission

In 2010 and 2011, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission conducted hearings throughout the country. The Government has been studying the Commission’s report since it was handed to it in February 2012. Since it was released by its editor in April 2013, the Prime Minister, Hon. Gordon Darcy Lilo has indicated that he will still go ahead with formally tabling the report in parliament, providing the opportunity for the report and its detailed recommendation to be debated. He also pledged his government would act positively in response to the report, saying: “Let us embrace it and reflect on it as another stepping stone for the country to move forward.”

Why Reconciliation is Important for the Future of Solomon Islands.

Reconciliation is the foundation on which lasting and sustainable peace is built. In order for Solomon Islands to achieve peace, there is a need to heal the wounds and divisions from *the tensions* and this can be achieved through reconciliation. Unfortunately, there is no ready-made template or shortcut to lasting peace.

A big challenge for every Solomon Islander is how to get the adversaries of *the tensions* to trust and understand each other. Difficult as it may be, it is vital that the painful past



Bishop
Terry Brown

“I am convinced that the Truth and Reconciliation Report, as an exercise in truth telling, painful as the recollection may sometimes be, will help bring about the lasting justice, peace, reconciliation and unity that Solomon Islands so badly needs.”

be examined and confronted, to avoid a recurrence of *the tensions*. This is the bottom line as to why reconciliation is important for the future of Solomon Islands.

Where To From Here?

With the release of the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and as the nation celebrates ten years since the end of *the tensions*, it would appear to be an opportune time for all people who love Solomon Islands to reflect on these hard questions:

- What is the new Solomon Islands you wish to gift to the next generation and to the region? Can you conceive and craft a new Solomon Islands, which is based on a common vision founded on genuine love for your nation and for humanity. Can you build a nation that you can be proud to be a member of, a Solomon Islands where you can live and experience “peace progress and prosperity” as expressed in your national anthem?
- What can I contribute? Can you challenge yourselves to make your own contribution to your nation? To the leaders who are advocating and sowing seeds of division and separation, ask yourself whether you want to be part of the solution or part of the problem? This nation deserves better.
 - In this process of crafting a new Solomon Islands, there are no spectators; all Solomon Islanders are players. This is an inclusive exercise and involves everyone. The time for pointing fingers and blaming one another is over.

The issues that brought Solomon Islands to its knees remain unresolved and the strategies used over the past ten years to promote harmony and peace, have been focusing mainly on treating the symptoms. Now that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has worked to uncover the truth and identify the causes, they need to be frankly discussed and long lasting solutions found. Unfortunately there is no easy way, but it can be done.

This is the time to move forward to a new Solomon Islands. A Solomon Islands with shared values and a common vision where every citizen should try to understand each other, and see the humanity in every person, a nation where its citizens learn to get along or at least live in peace with one another.

Wea nao bae umi start? The Truth and Reconciliation Commission report is a good starting point for the road to sustainable peace. The road will be long and difficult, there will be hills to climb as well as valleys to descend, and rivers to be ford; but be assured that with God in you, you can do all things. If there is a will there is way.

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Mataiasi Lomaloma

Born in Vatu Village on Fiji’s Vanua Levu Island, Mataiasi ‘Masi’ Lomaloma has been Assistant Special Coordinator of RAMSI since July 2005, responsible for peace building and reconciliation. Currently on secondment from the Fiji’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Lomaloma commenced his career as an officer of the then Royal Fiji Military Forces, after graduating from the Australian Officer Cadet Training School, Portsea. Serving in a number of peacekeeping operations in the Middle East, including The Multi National Observer Force (MFO) Sinai as well as with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) as the Battalion Commander of the Fiji Battalion, Lomaloma is a graduate of the Malaysian Armed Forces Staff College. Leaving the military in 1990 to join the Fiji Civil Service Lomaloma has held various positions with the Ministries of Finance, Regional Development and Multi-Ethnic Affairs, Home Affairs and Fijian Affairs.



Founder of the Mercy School, Beverly Komasi with some of the children of the Burns Creek settlement to whom she has given the gift of education, and a chance for a better future.

Causes that challenges us

Dr Phillip Tagini



Introduction

The period 1998 to 2003 is often referred to as the tensions. During that time, there was a total breakdown of law and order. Guns ruled the streets of Honiara and criminal elements used the opportunity to terrorize helpless citizens for their own economic, social and political gain.

The country was on a downward spiral to total chaos. Several ceasefire agreements were signed by the warring parties and in 2000, the Townsville Peace Agreement was signed to stop aggression. Despite these truces, the violence continued, pushing the state apparatus to the brink of collapse. In 2003, at the invitation of the Solomon Islands Government, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) was sanctioned by the Pacific Islands Forum. Led by Australia, RAMSI arrested the downward spiral, restored law and order and re-built the basic capacity of the national institutions. It was an initiative celebrated widely in the region and internationally. Whether Solomon Islands will continue to uphold the peace that was restored remains to be seen. As RAMSI celebrates its tenth anniversary and transits - except for the support to the police - into bilateral arrangements, many

people question whether the Solomon Islands Government and people will sustain the peace that was restored and more importantly, build a stronger Solomon Islands. In this short essay, I point out some fundamental contexts which individually might be insufficient to explain the onset of conflict, but collectively, may provide a useful explanation to *the tensions* the country experienced. Some immediate challenges facing nation-building after RAMSI exits are also highlighted.

The Solomon Islands Context

Every country has a specific context and Solomon Islands is no different. Studying the country's context can be quite useful when one seeks to understand the country's past, present and future. Change is inevitable, a product of the interaction between institutions and the organic cultures within the community. Sometimes it leads to great advances in human conditions and other times it undermines it. In that regard, change is neutral. It is neither positive nor negative. Yet for most Solomon Islanders, the period 1998 to 2003 referred to as *the tensions* was a period of change considered 'dark'. Other than World War II, no event has changed the basic fabric of Solomon Islands society more than the so-called *ethnic tensions*. In order to contemplate what lies ahead, it is worthwhile to highlight some important features of Solomon Islands as a nation.

A Nation Conceived but Never Born

Solomon Islands gained political independence from Great Britain in 1978. When the state was formally established however, the arena was already crowded with clans, tribes, language groupings and other constituents. Many of these are semi-autonomous groups exercising their own rules and authority over their territories and constituents.

Since then, the state has attempted to exert positive control over these groups with limited success. The emerging country became what the late Prime Minister Solomon Mamaloni described as 'a nation conceived but was neverborn'. This

remains a fundamental character of Solomon Islands society today as it was at independence and will continue to be in the near future.

In the 1990s, the term ‘failed states’, ‘arc of instability’ and other similar terms entered the international political discourse, referring essentially to weak states unable to control or manage their affairs. More specifically, states that are at risk of terrorist influence or penetration. Although the terminology describing the situation may have changed, the fundamental reality remains Mamaloni’s unborn state. In this context state legitimacy, national consciousness, national solidarity and even national development become major challenges.

Narrow Economic Base

Today, just as Charles Woodford observed in 1893 prior to the islands being declared a British Protectorate, Solomon Islands has a narrow economic base. At that time, Mr Woodford thought that plantations would form the mainstay of the economy. Consequently, plantations were developed and became the staple of the economy up to independence. Indeed, today the Solomon Islands has one of the largest plantation estates in Russell Islands and Guadalcanal, developed by Levers Solomons Ltd but now under the control of the Russell Islands Plantations Estates Limited (RIPEL).

In the 1980s and early 1990s logging emerged as Solomon Islands’ economic base. Logging became popular because of easy access to cash often brought in by Asian loggers. The low capital outlay and the quick return on investment made it a lucrative choice not only for the entrepreneurs but also their local promoters and partners. Successive governments have attempted to diversify into agriculture, mining, fisheries and manufacturing, but to this day, logging is still a major contributor to the country’s export earnings.

The Misfit of Institutions

There is a misfit between the introduced Westminster system of government administration and those that existed traditionally in Solomon Islands. A contest exists between formal institutions and informal institutions, and between the power structures of these institutions. Professor Corrin-Care described this as akin to fitting a ‘square peg into a round hole’. Although the Constitution provides the basic governing framework and there are laws in the books which purport to regulate the affairs of the community, most communities exist beyond the reach of government regulation and controls. The contest that exists between these power structures is quite significant.



“It very much depends on us Solomon Islanders to decide. If we want to have stability, if we want to have a strong society, if we want to have a nation that you know is actually moving forward, you cannot rely on others to come and do that for us.”

Derrick Manuari, Assistant Secretary responsible for RAMSI

Geographical Dispersion

The Solomon Islands chain is located just southeast of Bougainville and north of Vanuatu. It is an incomplete archipelago, made up of a series of high, rugged islands grouped along a north-west/north-east fault system extending over a large expanse of ocean.

From the north-west direction, the large islands are Choiseul, New Georgia, Kolombangara, Santa Isabel, Russell, Ngella, Guadalcanal, Malaita, Makira and Rennell. There are many atolls in the group. The geographical dispersion of the major islands makes it expensive to develop infrastructure and transport people and goods. This also contributes to the feeling of disconnection the provinces have towards Honiara, the political capital.

Unbalanced Development

The Solomon Islands is made up of a series of islands with various sizes and resource endowments. Guadalcanal and the Western Provinces can be considered resource rich whilst it is Malaita and Guadalcanal that have populations capable of supporting medium-scale industrial activity. After World War II many people from other provinces migrated to Guadalcanal and the Russell Islands in search of employment in the plantations. Many of them made their lives there right up until *the tensions*. Because of the availability of resources and population movements, development concentrated in a few provinces, particularly Guadalcanal, the Western Province and the Russell Islands in Central Province. This has created widely differing levels of development across the country.

Ethnic and Cultural Differences

Solomon Islands is made up of about eighty different language groups and a diversity of cultural and ethnic practices. Indeed, Solomon Islands is one of the most diverse countries in Melanesia. The Constitution and laws recognize linguistic, religious and cultural diversity and for the most time Solomon Islands celebrates this rich diversity of cultures. The recent



Sebastian Ilala,
Manager,
Direct Management Ltd

“Small businesses are the key - it is what in the future will run this country but the government needs to do its part so we can get to that stage.”

11th Festival of Pacific Arts held in Honiara in 2012 testifies to the beauty and wonder of such cultural and ethnic diversity. At times however, differences in practices and perceptions can also create resentment, distrust and even hatred. Certain cultural practices by larger groups imposed on smaller groups may be interpreted as overbearing and may be resented by other groups.

The Outbreak of Violence

The interplay of the above features of Solomon Islands society created the environment for the violence that began in 1998. Metaphorically, the petrol was on the floor waiting for a spark to start the fire that exploded in 1998. The spark was the burning of villages and eviction of Malaitans and other Solomon Islanders from the Weathercoast and other parts of Guadalcanal. After some time and without any effective intervention by the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, Malaitans retaliated and so began the period of open conflict. Much of this history has been published in other works and this article does not attempt to add anything new. Suffice to repeat that whilst ethnicity played an important role in the philosophy underlying the cause as well as the course of



the conflict, ethnicity alone is an insufficient explanation of what unfolded. It may have been the catalyst, but many more factors contributed to the making of the conflict.

Enter RAMSI

Even after the Townsville Peace Agreement of 2000 and several ceasefire agreements, there did not seem to be an improvement in law and order. In fact, there was a rise in criminal activities after the Townsville Peace Agreement. The ethnic rivalries took the form of micro-level ethnic conflicts amongst language groups even within Malaita and Guadalcanal provinces. The situation was spiraling into chaos and the government and state instruments were totally incapable of upholding the rule of law. Against this backdrop, the Solomon Islands people through Prime Minister Alan Kemakeza invited Australia to intervene in what is now the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI). It was a creative arrangement involving countries of the region under the leadership of Australia. It was a Pacific Islands Forum - sanctioned initiative, the first of its kind. To enable its entry, the Solomon Islands Parliament passed the Facilitation of International Assistance Act which laid down the framework for its operation.

RAMSI's Mandate and Performance

The primary mandate of RAMSI was to restore law and order and to create an environment that would allow Solomon Islanders to get on with their day-to-day business without fear or intimidation. Its longer term objectives were to strengthen law and justice institutions as well as create the conditions for economic activity and growth. Many of the fundamental issues affecting society such as land, the use of resources and

Left: Force for Good: Royal Solomon Islands Police Force graduate, Gabriel Ngodoro is one of hundreds of new police recruits that have graduated since the reopening of the Police Academy and strengthening of the RSIPF's internal training capacity.

institutional reformation were left to Solomon Islanders to decide and run. In as far as law and order were concerned, RAMSI has succeeded in its mission.

Challenges Facing Solomon Islands Post RAMSI Nation Building

The nation building project which began in 1978 continues to face the same challenges it faced at independence. The period of social tensions should have provided individuals and groups an opportunity to see each other's needs and concerns and create frameworks which address these concerns within the bounds of the law. This may not necessarily be the case. Whilst individuals may use the period of social and ethnic strife as an opportunity to improve national governance, tribes and clans and other institutions may not be in a place to absorb and learn these lessons. Whilst to many people this is an event not to repeat, to some, it is political speak, which can be used again whenever justified. Without a professional and strong law enforcement agency, peace could be at risk following RAMSI's departure.

Maintaining Law and Order

Whilst law and order has been restored to a level that our nation is capable of handling large-scale civil disorder, its ability to curb petty crime over an extended period of time to ensure sustainable peace remains questionable. There are

many police officers and RAMSI senior managers within the force and the justice sector who discharge their duties to the highest professional standards, but at present, the few that are below par operate below the radar of their superiors. As senior RAMSI personnel and advisers withdraw and reduce in number in the police and Ministry of Justice, this cover may be entirely eroded leaving gaps within the systems ripe for mediocrity and even blatant disregard of professional standards.

Unemployment

Unemployment and lack of gainful engagement of a large proportion of our population, especially males, is a pressing problem. Over the years, many people have left secondary schools and tertiary institutions in search of gainful employment. Only a handful of them find employment. Opportunities for enterprise are also limited due to lack of or inadequate access to capital, land and other factors of production. This is increasingly evident on the streets of Honiara. More and more young people are roaming the streets every year without any purpose or useful economic engagement. These youth often opt into criminal activities such as illegal sale of "kwaso" and marijuana to sustain their livelihood. For a similar purpose, they are also engaged in petty theft and burglary. Criminal activities and violence are also caused by unemployed youths who have much time on their hands and energy to spare.



“While RAMSI has done its part, these problems are ours. I believe there is a chance we can fix them, it might not happen in our lifetime but everyone still has a duty to contribute whatever you can, whether it be in your professional or personal capacity, then slowly change will come.”

John Taupongi , former Constitutional Law & Parliamentary Practice Specialist,
National Parliament

Eliminating Inefficiencies and Corruption in Government Systems

Government systems and the public sector must not only operate fairly and efficiently, but also be seen to do so. With weak accountability systems and procedures to illuminate and assess decision making that affects the public, the perception of corruption in government will be perpetuated, further eroding any attempts at establishing government legitimacy. At present, the Leadership Code Commission, Ombudsman, Auditor General's Office and the media are playing this role but much more is needed to check decisions in a timely manner and to ensure that decisions that are erroneous or corrupt are identified and exposed early. A system of monitoring performance of public officers and placing decision making of public officials and bodies in the limelight is needed.

Availability of Community Resources for Economic Development

Much of the country's resources, whether in terms of forestry, minerals, water or others are located on customary land which are bound by customary tenure rules. At present, there are moves to access customary lands and resources through the Land Recording Act but it will require further time for large pieces of customary land to be made available. The Customary Land Management Unit within the Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet is attempting to make large tracts of land accessible for development but this has been slow. Even the development of public utilities such as roads, airports, hydro power stations and wharfs suffer as a result of unavailable land. Where landowners have allowed such infrastructure to be developed, renewed and competing claims for rent continue to obstruct the use and maintenance of this infrastructure or its further development. The unavailability of land and resources for development has serious implications for national employment and economic activity. Without access to land as a factor of production, it will continue to be very difficult for economic activity to occur at the national level.

Conclusion

The Solomon Islands is comprised of many language, ethnic, social and island groups. These have systems of governance that operated long before the advent of British colonial rule in the late nineteenth century. From this time onwards, the attempts to establish central government have only been partially successful. These traditional entities continue to play an important role today. The continued operation of these systems was partly responsible for the breakdown of law and order during *the tensions* period. The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands has successfully restored law and order and helped build systems to sustain the peace. These systems have been restored but it is unclear whether they are strong enough to sustain the peace into the future. Solomon Islanders must grab hold of the opportunity and take over from where RAMSI has left to build a Solomon Islands that will enjoy peace in the future.

Dr Phillip Tagini

Currently the Special Secretary to the Prime Minister, Dr Tagini is head of the Political Branch within the Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. A lawyer by profession, previously working as a solicitor and barrister in the High Court and Court of Appeal of the Solomon Islands, Tagini has worked in the fields of forestry, fisheries, mining, commercial, corporate and constitutional law. Holding a Bachelor of Law and Masters in Law, he recently completed a doctoral thesis from Monash University in Melbourne, Australia. The thesis examined the policy and regulatory framework for mining in Solomon Islands. Dr Tagini believes that development, if directed properly, can be a powerful tool for nation building and growth. He continues to work with local landowners, provincial governments, foreign investors and the national government to find how best these stakeholders can partner in the project of nation building.

Economic Growth: Constraints and Opportunities in the Next Ten Years

Economic growth in Solomon Islands over the past ten years has come from a rapid expansion in the forestry sector, the reopening of the Gold Ridge mine and large increases in international aid flows. None of these are likely to be sources of new growth in the future. Growth in the forestry sector has been at an unsustainable level, and the sector is likely to decline in the medium term. The deposit at Gold Ridge mine is small by world standards, and the mine is currently only expected to have a ten year life. Solomon Islands currently receives a very high level of aid per person, and it is unlikely that there will be further significant increases in aid funding.

What, then, will be the main drivers of economic growth over the next ten years? The Solomon Islands Government identified this as an important question and asked the World Bank to investigate future growth prospects. The World Bank published their findings in 2010 (*Solomon Islands Growth Prospects: Constraints and Policy Priorities*, Discussion Note, October 2010). The analysis below is based largely on the World Bank's findings.

Constraints on Growth

The geography of Solomon Islands is a major constraint on growth. Solomon Islands is on average 8,500 kilometres from its three main international markets – the People's Republic of China, the European Union, and Thailand. Solomon Islands is close only to the relatively small markets of Australia and New Zealand. The population of Solomon Islands is scattered with an average of only 18 people living on each square kilometre. People in Solomon Islands live on average 200 kilometres from Honiara and only 17 per cent of the population lives in towns - fewer than in any other major Pacific Island country.

The dispersion of the population and the low level of urbanisation add to domestic transport costs and limit the development of local markets and businesses. Internal transport costs are a major burden on local exporters. Population dispersal increases the costs of providing infrastructure and private and public services, and contributes to some of the poorest infrastructure coverage and quality across small island states. High costs of providing transport connections prevent people moving easily to where the best employment opportunities are. The scattered population erodes links between local communities, and public institutions and policy makers.

In the rest of the world, urbanisation and growth in manufacturing have accompanied economic development. Countries that have grown have moved from agricultural production in rural areas to manufacturing and services in urban areas. No country has ever achieved sustained economic growth without urbanisation.

However, urbanisation in Solomon Islands, as elsewhere, presents particular challenges and where land, urban services and security are not dealt with in ways acceptable to new and existing urban residents, urbanisation can be a source of social discord. In larger and richer countries, growth occurs as production becomes concentrated in certain areas. In these countries, the concentration of population and production enables firms to:

- More easily access markets, enabling economies of scale
- Specialise, with the ability to outsource easily upwards and downwards
- Innovate faster by observing the practice of other firms and having access to a pool of workers with experience in different firms and industries.

The concentration of population also reduces the costs of infrastructure and delivering services. However, Solomon Islands faces major challenges in terms of these enablers of growth: it has a small population size, a low population density and is remote from major markets.

Sources of Growth

Set against this analysis of the constraints to economic growth, the World Bank paper identified the principal sources of growth. It also discussed several policies that would increase the economic benefits from the identified sources of growth and ensure that the largest possible number of Solomon Islanders were able to access these benefits.

– A vibrant smallholder agriculture sector

Around 80 per cent of Solomon Islanders live in villages and semi-subsistence agriculture is their primary source of livelihood. In the next ten years most Solomon Islanders will remain in areas with few employment prospects and they will continue to rely on smallholder agriculture. The smallholder cash economy is a buffer against the external economic shocks that can affect Solomon Islands and other small countries that are reliant on natural resource exports.

Improving the economic performance of the smallholder agriculture sector is a good way to strengthen the livelihoods of a large number of Solomon Islanders. Ways to do this include improving domestic and export marketing infrastructure, reviving agricultural research and extension services, and promoting agriculture opportunity areas.

Better broadcasting services and better telecommunications coverage would help strengthen the provision of information on production techniques, market conditions and postharvest handling and processing of produce. Improved transport links between centres of high agricultural productivity and urban economic centres would also be helpful to the smallholder agriculture sector.

– Natural resource industries

Solomon Islands is well endowed with natural resources, including forests, fisheries, minerals and tourism potential. With the right policy and regulatory frameworks, large scale natural resource investments have the potential to create income for employees and landowners and generate significant revenues for local and central government. But it is not easy to get benefits from natural resources and many countries have failed to equitably manage natural resource endowments. Reliance on natural resources for government revenues can distort incentives for good fiscal management, and crowd out growth in other sectors. Contests over ownership and access to natural resources can lead to conflict and corruption.

Sudden changes in the policy and regulatory environment, including tax policy, and political instability and conflict are the enemies of investment in natural resource industries. Foreign investment looks for a stable, predictable and transparent environment – that is, a less risky environment – when considering where to invest.

Policy actions to improve the regulatory and policy environment for natural resource and tourism developments are vital to attracting investment, ensuring domestic economic benefits and avoiding conflict.

– An internationally mobile workforce

Growth in the local private sector is unlikely to provide jobs for all the 10,000 Solomon Islanders entering the workforce every year. Opportunities for well paid, productive employment will need to be found overseas. The short-term regional labour schemes of Australia and New Zealand generate remittances and skills acquisition that benefit the local economy. Improved education opportunities for people living in the poorer parts of the country would improve their chances of participating in international labour schemes.

- Aid flows

Aid will continue to play a vital role in addressing shortfalls in fiscal resources and capacity across public administration, security, infrastructure and social services. Aid in these areas will be necessary for the foreseeable future to realise the potential benefits from other sources of growth.

How to Increase the Benefits from the Sources of Economic Growth

Over the next ten years, it is inevitable that economic growth, and the benefits and opportunities that come from growth, will not be evenly distributed across all parts of the country. The benefits and opportunities will occur where agricultural productivity is highest, where natural resource potential exists, where the families of seasonal workers live and in Honiara where aid money is disproportionately spent.

A key challenge for Solomon Islands is to maximise the benefits of the concentration of population and production, while mitigating the potential social and economic costs. This can be achieved by improving connection between key economic areas and by managing urbanisation through the provision of expanded and better services.

- Transport and communications infrastructure investment

The benefits from the sources of growth will be maximised if the cost of movement of people, goods and services are reduced. This will enable people to take up employment opportunities, or to set up businesses supplying ancillary goods and services to growth industries. If goods and people can flow freely, growth in urban areas can benefit rural areas through increasing demand for agricultural and other rural produce. Good communication links can provide people with information on opportunities and demand in other parts of the country.

Geographical constraints mean that investments must be prioritised. Under any conceivable pace of economic growth, reliable and regular transport links between every village in Solomon Islands will remain unaffordable. Transport and communications infrastructure investments need to be

strategically targeted to provide linkages between centres of production, and to link production centres to surrounding population centres. Such linkages will help suppliers in certain areas to meet demand created in others, and allow people to take advantage of changing employment and economic opportunities.

- Urbanisation management

Urbanisation is synonymous with economic growth and it is inevitable that urbanisation will gain pace in Solomon Islands. If well managed, urbanisation could provide major benefits in terms of improved business productivity and reduced costs of expanding the quality and coverage of services and infrastructure. Growth in urban areas can also enable government to generate revenue to finance services and thereby help to correct disparities in services across the country.

At the present time, urban areas are not well managed and this is both a constraint on business and a potential source of social discontent. Improvements in urban land administration and power and water supply will reduce the cost of doing business and maximise the opportunities and benefits from the movement of people from rural areas to Honiara.

The inevitable increase in urbanisation can provide major benefits in terms of improved business productivity and reduced costs of expanding quality and coverage of services and infrastructure. Growth prospects will be enhanced, and the social costs of urbanisation will be kept to a minimum if:

- Economic infrastructure is sufficient to allow expansion in economic opportunities through the development of businesses supplying ancillary goods and services
- High quality public services are ensured for growing populations through adequate human and financial resources and
- Land administration is improved to ensure that housing is available to migrant populations and that real estate is allocated to its most efficient use.

Source: World Bank



About RAMSI

RAMSI is made up of personnel drawn from all 15 of Solomon Islands neighbours which are members of the Pacific Islands Forum. The regional nature of RAMSI has long be recognised one of its key strengths.

In June 2003, following the urgent request for assistance from the Prime Minister of Solomon Islands, Sir Allan Kemakeza, the Foreign ministers of most South Pacific Forum countries met in Sydney, Australia to discuss the possibility of forming a regional assistance mission. It was agreed that the mission, to be led and funded by Australia and New Zealand, would be formed under the auspices of the Forum. All members, including Solomon Islands, agreed that the mission's mandate should not be limited to addressing the nation's parlous security situation but that it would be a long-term effort, aimed at helping Solomon Islanders rebuild their troubled nation.

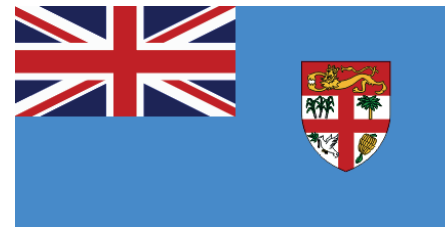
Three years earlier, in October 2000, following coups in Fiji and Solomon Islands, Forum leaders at their annual Heads of Government meeting in Kiribati, looked for a way they could be mandated to offer assistance to any member in crisis. The result was the *Biketawa Declaration*, named after the tiny atoll upon which it was adopted during the traditional Forum Leaders Retreat. The Declaration laid down for the first time a framework for regional cooperation in security, under which the Forum could initiate offers of assistance to any member in need. Throughout the life of RAMSI, the Forum has continued to play an important oversight role, carrying out two reviews of the Mission in 2005 and 2007 while all 15 member countries continue to contribute personnel to the mission.

Photo: RAMSI's mandate was determined by the Pacific Islands Forum and enshrined in the 'RAMSI Treaty' which was signed at the Royal Australian Air force Base in Townsville, Australia on 24 July 2003. Seated (L-R) Prime Minister of Australia John Howard; Prime Minister of Fiji Larsenia Qarase; Prime Minister of New Zealand Helen Clark; Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea Sir Michael Somare; Solomon Islands High Commissioner to Australia HE, Mr Milner Tozaka; Samoan High Commissioner to Australia, HE Dr Kilifoti Etueati; and Prime Minister of Tonga Prince Ulukalala Lavaka Ata.



Australia

Australia has provided military, police and civilian personnel to the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands since it began in July 2003. Australia plays a lead role in RAMSI, providing a senior Australian diplomat to head the Mission as Special Coordinator.



Fiji

Fiji has played a significant role in RAMSI since it commenced in July 2003 including filling the position of Assistant Special Coordinator. Fijians serve within the police and civilian components of RAMSI, with the Fiji military also having previously served as part of the Mission.



Cook Islands

Cook Islands is a founding and valued member of the Mission. The Cook Islands Police Service has deployed officers as part of RAMSI's Participating Police Force since it commenced in July 2003.



Federated States of Micronesia

The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) joined RAMSI in March 2006, providing officers from the FSM National Police to serve proudly and effectively as a part of the RAMSI Participating Police Force.



Kiribati

Kiribati has been an important contributor to RAMSI since it began, with officers from the Kiribati Police Force serving as part of the RAMSI Participating Police Force from July 2003.



Nauru

From the time Nauru joined RAMSI in 2004, officers from the Nauru Police Force have provided a valuable support to the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force.



Marshall Islands

Marshall Islands plays an important role in the strengthening of Solomon Islands, with officers from the Marshall Islands Police Force having served with RAMSI's Participating Police Force since May 2006.



New Zealand

New Zealand is the second-largest contributor to RAMSI, with civilians, military and police from across New Zealand serving in all facets of RAMSI since it began in July 2003. The position of Deputy Special Coordinator is always held by a senior public servant from New Zealand.



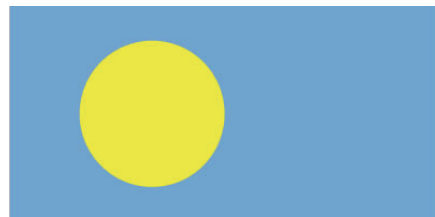
Niue

One of the smallest Pacific Island nations to join RAMSI which it did in 2006, Niue posts two of its 16 police officers to RAMSI, a proportionately strong commitment to supporting the Mission and Solomon Islands.



Papua New Guinea

Solomon Islands nearest neighbour of Papua New Guinea plays an integral role in the strengthening of Solomon Islands through RAMSI. Military, police and civilians from PNG have worked across the many facets of RAMSI since it began in July 2003. PNG currently provides a senior police officer as Commander of the Participating Police Force's Pacific Islands Contingent.



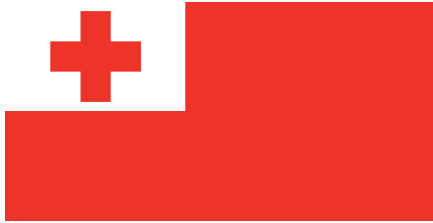
Palau

Palau joined RAMSI in May 2006, with officers from the Palau National Police Force playing an important role in the RAMSI Participating Police Force.



Samoa

Samoa has played a key role in RAMSI since it began in July 2003, with Samoans working in policing and civilian roles to help with the long-term strengthening of Solomon Islands.



Tonga

Tonga has been an integral part of RAMSI since it began in July 2003. Tongan police, military and civilians work across RAMSI's many facets to help provide support to their friends and regional neighbours from Solomon Islands.



Vanuatu

Vanuatu close neighbour Solomon Islands of has played an integral role in RAMSI since it began in July 2003. Police from the Vanuatu Police Force provide valuable support to the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force.



Tuvalu

The small island nation of Tuvalu has been an important contributor to RAMSI since December 2004. Officers from Tuvalu Police Force provide support and advice to their colleagues in the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force.



2011 – 2013
Nicholas Coppel

RAMSI's transition is both a happy and sad times. The happiness comes from seeing the progress that Solomon Islands has made in the restoration of law and order, government finances, the economy and a functioning public service. The sadness comes from bringing to a close many of the successful components of RAMSI. Many civilian advisers have gone, now replaced by trained and qualified Solomon Islanders. The advisers will be missed, but the links between government institutions in Honiara and in Canberra and Wellington as well as the rest of the region will live on.

The end of internal conflict has meant that the military personnel from Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Tonga also have gone home, safe in the knowledge that they have fully accomplished what they set out to achieve. Much progress has been made in rebuilding the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, enabling RAMSI to step back from day-to-day policing and to withdraw from most of its Provincial police posts. But RAMSI is not leaving entirely, and the next phase of RAMSI 2013 -2017 will be focused on further development of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force which continues to need support in certain areas. That now is the task.



2009 – 2011
Graeme Wilson

At the heart of RAMSI's success has been the Mission's partnership with the Government and people of Solomon Islands. I was proud to see that partnership flourish during my time as Special Coordinator, a period in which peaceful elections were held and RAMSI's engagement was never stronger with ordinary Solomon Islanders who are the backbone of the country.

To coach Solomon Islands boys and girls in Australian Rules football was a joy and I am thrilled that some have gone on to represent South Pacific teams and play in Australia. Initiating the photographic exhibition "RAMSI: A history in pictures" enabled us to tell the story of how the nations of the Pacific joined hands to help a neighbour in need.

RAMSI has been a wonderful example of regional cooperation. I am confident that RAMSI's legacy will be a Solomon Islands that is more secure, stronger economically and more confident in itself.



2006 – 2008
Tim George

RAMSI for me showed two powerful forces at work. Firstly, the people of Solomon Islands, when given the chance, overwhelmingly rejected violence and extremism, and embraced the partnership with RAMSI to build a better life for themselves and their children. It is never easy for a government or people to accept foreign missions on their soil. History will show Solomon Islands did so with grace and maturity.

Secondly, the unconditional backing of the 15 regional member countries gave RAMSI unique cohesion, credibility, and acceptance. The exemplary way members of the mission conducted themselves was critical to making the partnership work.

Strong and ethical institutions are vital for the Solomon Islands' future success. Solomon Islanders are resilient and talented people, with the capacity to make their country truly prosperous and just. My heartfelt best wishes, and thanks, go to all Solomon Islanders.



2004 - 2006
James Batley

One of the best days of my time as Special Coordinator was the day, in 2006, when the last of the Pacific Islands countries joined RAMSI bringing all 15 of Solomon Islands' Forum neighbours into the mission's fold. This underlined in a very real way that RAMSI was a regional initiative – perhaps the most extensive and successful regional initiative undertaken by members of the Pacific Islands Forum in its history. This is an achievement of which our region can truly be proud. The rest of the world still looks in admiration at the way in which we came together to help our neighbour.

There were tears as well as happiness. I remember being deeply moved by the tears of Solomon Islands women as they told us of the hardships they faced during the tensions and the changes in their lives that RAMSI's work had brought about. And RAMSI shed tears too, for our colleagues Adam Dunning and Jamie Clark, young men who tragically lost their lives serving RAMSI, and serving the people of Solomon Islands.

Most of all I'd like to thank the people of Solomon Islands – for welcoming us to your country, for the warmth and the hospitality you showed towards us and for working enthusiastically alongside us to set your country back on the road to a brighter future. It's your country, and it's your future. It's in your hands.



2003 – 2004
Nick Warner

It was intense, it was exhilarating and I will never forget it. We were there by invitation and we had the complete support of the Government and importantly of the people of Solomon Islands. People had suffered terribly; this was a people whose successive governments had let them down, whose police force had let them down. They reached out to us on 24 July 2003 when we arrived, they embraced us. And we were able to say to them: things are changing from today and from today things will be better. The success of RAMSI in that first year of operation lay as much in this openness and willingness of Solomon Islanders to embrace our mission and its mandate, as in the region's commitment to do the right thing by them.

I was very lucky to have some excellent colleagues to work with, some excellent and senior Solomon Islanders who partnered with us in getting the back the guns, in stabilising the government's finances and most importantly giving their country and their people a reason to hope once again.



2012-2013
Wayne Higgs

As the incumbent Deputy Special Coordinator I feel especially fortunate to be here at such an important and momentous time for the mission. RAMSI is in transition and changing to meet the needs and requirements of a Solomon Islands that is back on its feet and ready to do business. I have very much enjoyed my job over the past two years. Working with the Solomon Islands Government, its agencies and its people has been both enlightening and rewarding. The industry and dedication shown by my predecessors, along with the commitment shown by all who have both served with and worked with RAMSI over the past ten years, have laid a solid foundation for transition. RAMSI has shown that the Pacific can come together to effectively manage its problems and find inclusive solutions.



2011 -2012
Mary Thurston

He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tangata, he tangata, he tangata.
What is the greatest thing in the world? It is people, people, people.

Having observed RAMSI's work from the outside as New Zealand's Deputy High Commissioner in Solomon Islands for two years, then been involved on the inside as Deputy Special Coordinator for several months I can say that RAMSI is all about the people – and their communities; the people of Solomon Islands, and also the people from the Pacific who have travelled across our shared ocean to share their experience, and their own community custom. Anyone who has taken part in the many forms of RAMSI outreach will recall the opportunity to stori lelebet and sing sing with communities from one end of Solomon Islands to the other. We all take these experiences home with us, to our communities around the Pacific, and in this way we understand our shared world better.



2009 – 2011
Justin Fepuleai

From the outset, I was a strong supporter of RAMSI and its aim of bringing peace and security to Solomon Islands. What made me particularly proud to serve with RAMSI is that it is a truly regional mission. This is what has made RAMSI a success. All countries in the region, no matter how big or small, have contributed positively and enthusiastically to RAMSI. Its regional composition and character has always been important; this is what gives RAMSI its strength and legitimacy. But more importantly, the fact RAMSI personnel come from all parts of the Pacific is a very simple and tangible demonstration to Solomon Islanders that RAMSI really is about the region looking after one of its own in its time of need. As a region, we can all be proud of RAMSI's accomplishments.



2007-2009
Jonathan Austin

For me what made RAMSI unique was that not only was it the first time we in the Pacific had worked so comprehensively together to assist one of our fellow Pacific nations but also we were there at the invitation of the Solomon Islands Government. I really felt we were working together in a spirit of genuine partnership to overcome some fears and suspicions as well as significant security and development challenges. It was a privilege to meet so many wonderful Solomon Islanders and to discovering the beauty and diversity of the country – a process greatly helped by our extended family in and from the Western Province. It is great to hear of the progress the Solomon Islands is continuing to make. I'm looking forward to coming back to see it for myself.

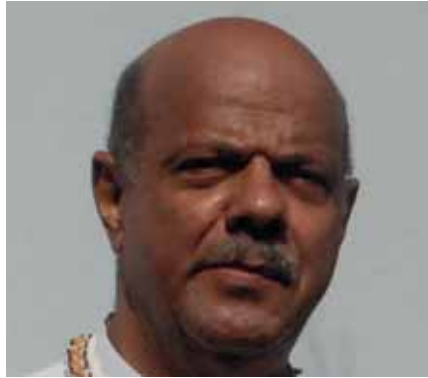


2005-2007
Paul Ash

Serving in RAMSI was an experience I treasure. It was a privilege to serve the people and government of Solomon Islands as they worked to rebuild their country. It was a privilege to serve alongside colleagues from across the Pacific Islands Forum. And it was a privilege for me and my family to learn from and get to know Solomon Islanders from all walks of life. Our work together was by turns exciting, exhilarating and challenging. It was sometimes frustrating and occasionally exhausting. But it was always purposeful, and deeply worthwhile. Each visit to a community recovering from conflict – whether rural or urban – demonstrated the importance of making a difference. I'm still inspired by seeing how Solomon Islanders, step by step, are taking the opportunities created by RAMSI, and thankful to have been able to share a little of that journey.

assistant special coordinators

Fiji



2003-2005
Sekove Naqiolevu

We live in a global village and need each other. The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands – RAMSI - is living proof of this, responding as a region to one of its own in their hour of need. There has been a dramatic change in Solomon Islands. For Solomon Islanders life has changed a lot since RAMSI arrived in 2003, putting an end to the unrest and restoring the rule of law. Economically too, the fact that things are improving and moving ahead is directly a result of the intervention. It has been a fascinating experiment in terms of development especially for those of us who had the privilege of serving in the mission. I certainly enjoyed my time in Solomons, especially as after two years as Assistant Special Coordinator, I had the opportunity to serve on the bench of the High Court of Solomon Islands hearing many of *the tension* trials as the cases that had come to court directly as a result of RAMSI's intervention came to be known.



2005-2013
Mataiasi Masi Lomaloma

To see Solomon Islanders who have been adversaries for so many years come together in reconciliation ceremonies is something I will never forget. Their feelings expressed in words, tears, laughter, hugs and handshakes clearly show their genuine desire to learn from their past and move forward with new hopes for a better future. All these experiences give me the greatest satisfaction that as part of RAMSI I am also contributing to the healing process of Solomon Islanders by providing the space and a secure environment for people to talk about their differences and come to common understanding on the way forward. I hope and pray that Solomon Islands can see reconciliation not as closure but the beginning of their transformation.



REBUILDING A NATION

Ten Years of the Solomon Islands - RAMSI Partnership





2012 - 2013
Jane Lake



2007 - 2010
Paul Kelly



2006 - 2007
Blair Exel



2004 - 2006
Catherine Walker



2003
Margret Thomas

PPF commanders



2011 - 2013
Paul Osborne



2009 - 2011
Wayne Buchhorn



2007 - 2009
Denis McDermott



2005 - 2007
Will Jamieson



2004 - 2005
Sandi Peisley



2003 - 2004
Ben McDevitt

RAMSI's Military Contingent has been an important part of the mission's operations, particularly in the early days of deployment. Headed by an Australian commander, and a New Zealand deputy Commander the contingent was originally made up of troops from Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Tonga.

LTCOL John Frewen
24-Jul-03 – 19-Nov-03

MAJ Rohan Jayawardena
20-Nov-05 – 18-Mar-06

LTCOL Glen Weir
23-Jul-08 – 7-Dec-08

LTCOL Quentin Flowers
13-Nov-03 – 27-Mar-04

LTCOL Andrew Gallaway
19-Apr-06 – 10-Jun-06

LTCOL Russell Lowes
28-Nov-08 – 4-Apr-09

LTCOL John Hutcheson
20-Mar-04 – 26-Aug-04

LTCOL Jeffrey Quirk
8-Jun-06 – 17-Dec-06

LTCOL Neil Grimes
27-Mar-09 – 8-Aug-09

MAJ Michel Gallegos
20-Jul-04 – 4-Dec-04

LTCOL Rowan Martin
12-Dec-06 – 11-Apr-07

LTCOL David Thompson
31-Jul-09 – 23-Aug-10

MAJ Martin May
18-Nov-04 – 17-Mar-05

LTCOL Peter Connor
5-Apr-07 – 17-Aug-07

LTCOL Paul Landford
23-Jul-10 – 4-Aug-11

MAJ Darren Wright
14-Mar-05 – 26-Jul-05

LTCOL Ian Upjohn
5-Aug-07 – 12-Dec-07

LTCOL Cambell Smith
29-Jul-11 – 3-Aug-12

MAJ Jonathon Heap
17-Jul-05 – 22-Nov-05

LTCOL Stephen Coggin
2-Dec-07 – 7-Apr-08

LTCOL Brenton Gasteen
6-Jul-12 – 31-Aug-13

LTCOL Mark Flanagan
27-Mar-08 – 4-Aug-08

Wing Commander
Robert Clarke
24-Jul-03 – 27-Oct-03

Acting Wing Commander
Mark Cook
21-Oct-03 – 29-Jan-04

Wing Commander
Stephen Goodman
26-Jan-04 – 8-May-04

Wing Commander
Stuart Browlie
3-May-13 – 25-Jul-04

MAJ Andrew Brown
23-Apr-06 – 6-Jul-06

MAJ Andrew Fortune
8-Jul-06 – 30-Nov-08

MAJ Nigel Gattsche
5-Dec-06 – 4-Apr-07

MAJ Tausia Tarsau
5-Apr-07 – 22-Jul-07

MAJ Sholto Stevens
24-Jul-07 – 29-Nov-07

MAJ Grent Watts
21-Mar-08 – 16-Jul-08

MAJ Bede Fahey
17-Jul-08 – 20-Nov-08

MAJ Joe Dowrick
21-Nov-08 – 1-Apr-09

MAJ Richard Palmer
2-Apr-09 – 20-Jul-09

MAJ Stuart Brown
22-Jul-09 – 12-Feb-10

MAJ Ian Piercy
13-Feb-10 – 18-Oct-10

MAJ Adam Gordon
19-Oct-10 – 7-May-11

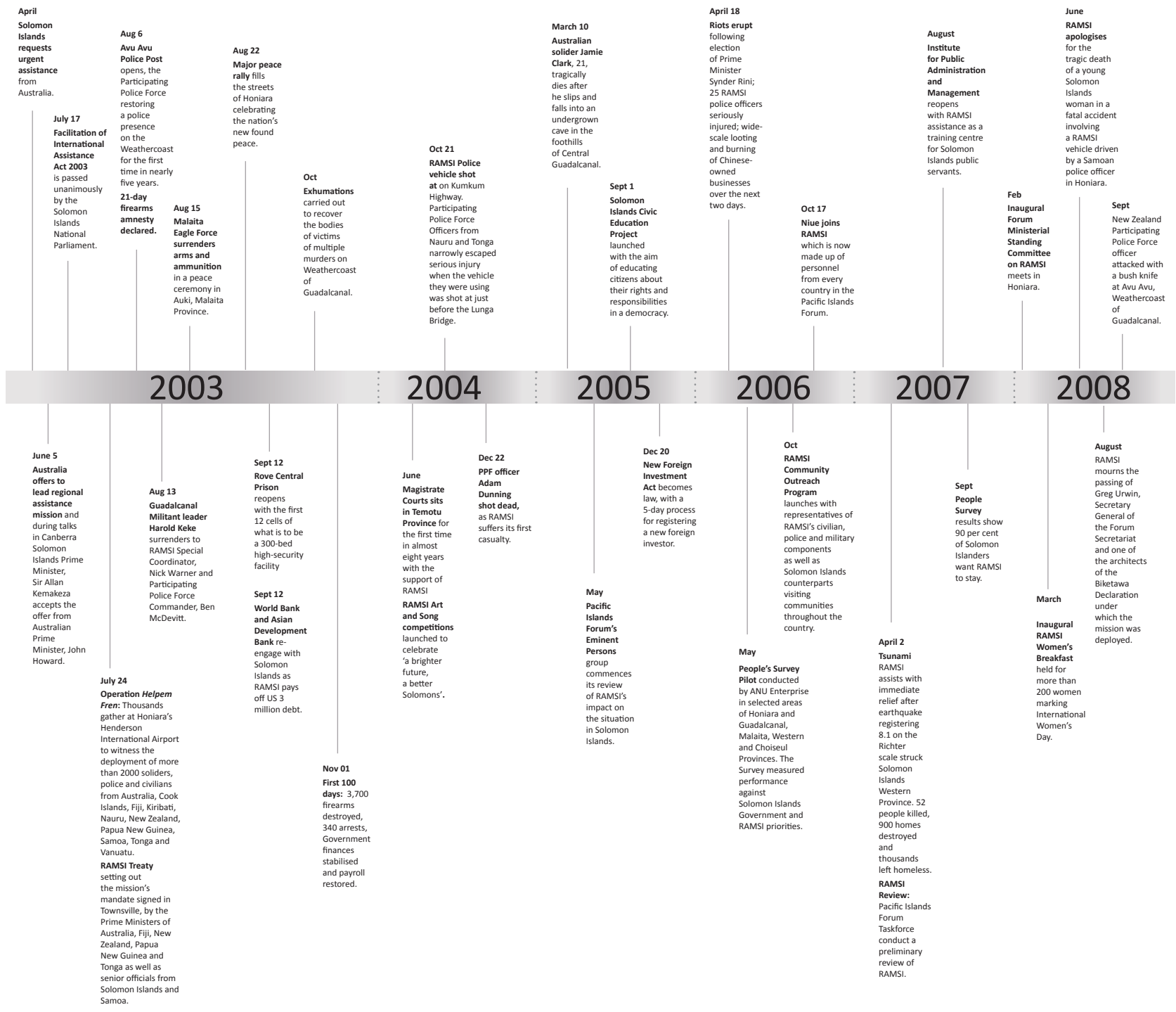
MAJ Alistair Mitchell
8-May-11 – 21-Nov-11

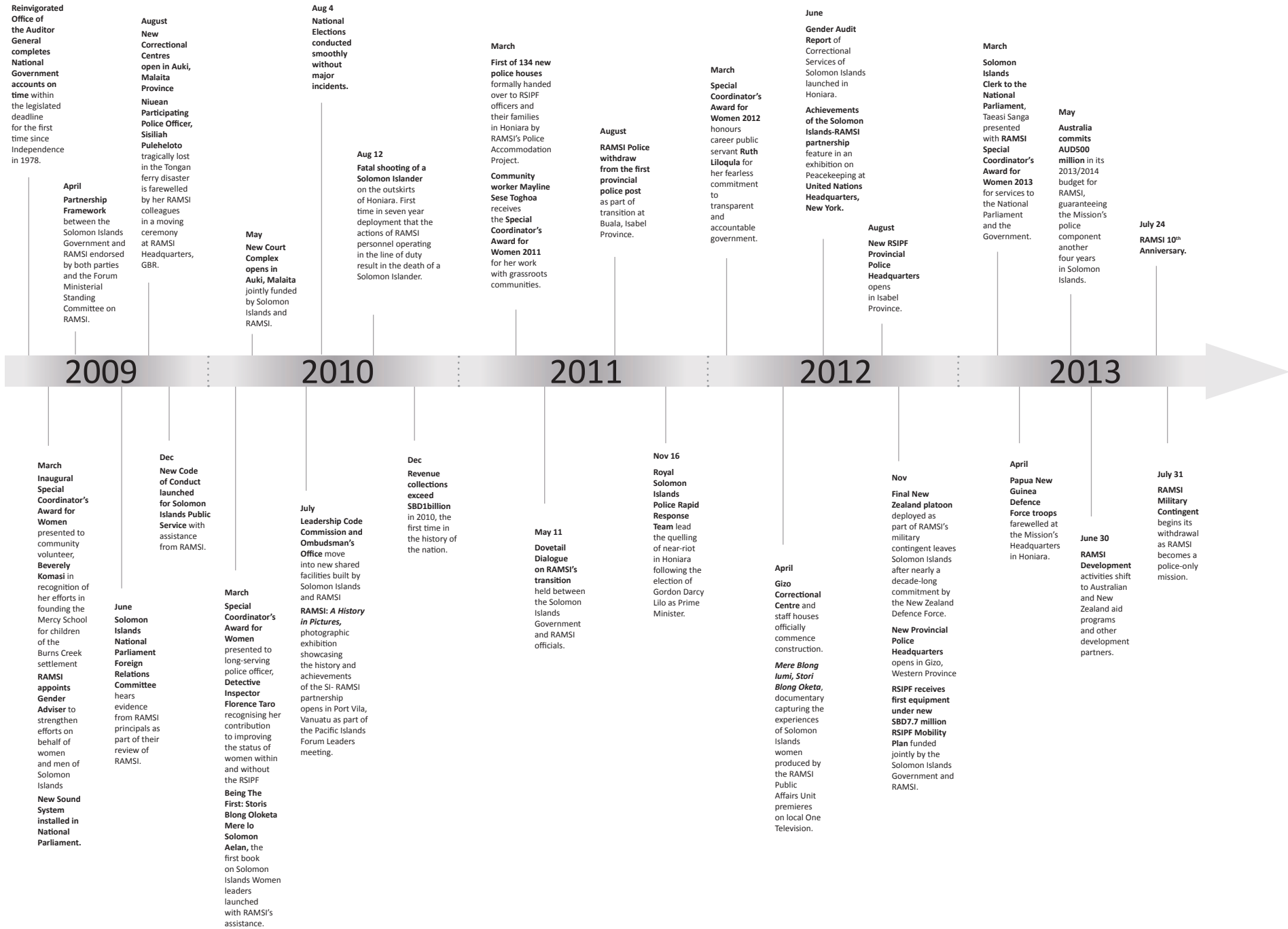
MAJ Michael Chivers
22-Nov-11 – 28-May-12

MAJ Syd Dewes
29-May-12 – 19-Dec-12

MAJ Patrick Beath
21-Dec-12 – 21-Aug-13

timeline





Reinvigorated Office of the Auditor General completes National Government accounts on time within the legislated deadline for the first time since Independence in 1978.

April
Partnership Framework between the Solomon Islands Government and RAMSI endorsed by both parties and the Forum Ministerial Standing Committee on RAMSI.

August
New Correctional Centres open in Auki, Malaita Province
Niuean Participating Police Officer, Silihah Puleheloto tragically lost in the Tongan ferry disaster is farewelled by her RAMSI colleagues in a moving ceremony at RAMSI Headquarters, GBR.

May
New Court Complex opens in Auki, Malaita jointly funded by Solomon Islands and RAMSI.

Aug 4
National Elections conducted smoothly without major incidents.

Aug 12
Fatal shooting of a Solomon Islander on the outskirts of Honiara. First time in seven year deployment that the actions of RAMSI personnel operating in the line of duty result in the death of a Solomon Islander.

March
First of 134 new police houses formally handed over to RSIPF officers and their families in Honiara by RAMSI's Police Accommodation Project.
Community worker Mayline Sese Toghoa receives the Special Coordinator's Award for Women 2011 for her work with grassroots communities.

August
RAMSI Police withdraw from the first provincial police post as part of transition at Buala, Isabel Province.

March
Special Coordinator's Award for Women 2012 honours career public servant Ruth Liloqula for her fearless commitment to transparent and accountable government.

June
Gender Audit Report of Correctional Services of Solomon Islands launched in Honiara.
Achievements of the Solomon Islands-RAMSI partnership feature in an exhibition on Peacekeeping at United Nations Headquarters, New York.

August
New RSIPF Provincial Police Headquarters opens in Isabel Province.

March
Solomon Islands Clerk to the National Parliament, Taeaasi Sanga presented with RAMSI Special Coordinator's Award for Women 2013 for services to the National Parliament and the Government.

May
Australia commits AUD500 million in its 2013/2014 budget for RAMSI, guaranteeing the Mission's police component another four years in Solomon Islands.

July 24
RAMSI 10th Anniversary.

2009

2010

2011

2012

2013

March
Inaugural Special Coordinator's Award for Women presented to community volunteer, Beverly Komasi in recognition of her efforts in founding the Mercy School for children of the Burns Creek settlement
RAMSI appoints Gender Adviser to strengthen efforts on behalf of women and men of Solomon Islands
New Sound System installed in National Parliament.

June
Solomon Islands National Parliament Foreign Relations Committee hears evidence from RAMSI principals as part of their review of RAMSI.

Dec
New Code of Conduct launched for Solomon Islands Public Service with assistance from RAMSI.

March
Special Coordinator's Award for Women presented to long-serving police officer, Detective Inspector Florence Taro recognising her contribution to improving the status of women within and without the RSIPF
Being The First: Storis Blong Oloketa Mere lo Solomon Aelan, the first book on Solomon Islands Women leaders launched with RAMSI's assistance.

July
Leadership Code Commission and Ombudsman's Office move into new shared facilities built by Solomon Islands and RAMSI
RAMSI: A History in Pictures, photographic exhibition showcasing the history and achievements of the SI- RAMSI partnership opens in Port Vila, Vanuatu as part of the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders meeting.

Dec
Revenue collections exceed SBD1billion in 2010, the first time in the history of the nation.

May 11
Dovetail Dialogue on RAMSI's transition held between the Solomon Islands Government and RAMSI officials.

Nov 16
Royal Solomon Islands Police Rapid Response Team lead the quelling of near-riot in Honiara following the election of Gordon Darcy Lilo as Prime Minister.

April
Gizo Correctional Centre and staff houses officially commence construction.
Mere Blong lumi, Stori Blong Oketa, documentary capturing the experiences of Solomon Islands women produced by the RAMSI Public Affairs Unit premieres on local One Television.

Nov
Final New Zealand platoon deployed as part of RAMSI's military contingent leaves Solomon Islands after nearly a decade-long commitment by the New Zealand Defence Force.
New Provincial Police Headquarters opens in Gizo, Western Province
RSIPF receives first equipment under new SBD7.7 million RSIPF Mobility Plan funded jointly by the Solomon Islands Government and RAMSI.

April
Papua New Guinea Defence Force troops farewelled at the Mission's Headquarters in Honiara.

June 30
RAMSI Development activities shift to Australian and New Zealand aid programs and other development partners.

July 31
RAMSI Military Contingent begins its withdrawal as RAMSI becomes a police-only mission.



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