

Special Coordinator's Remarks to the 6th AUSTRALIA SOLOMON ISLANDS
BUSINESS FORUM: BRISBANE: FRIDAY 22 AUGUST 2014

Gudfulla morning and tagio tumas for the opportunity to speak to the Sixth Australia Solomon Islands Business Forum. Can I begin by acknowledging the (name/s of senior SIG rep and other reps from the SIG Business community).

It's a genuine pleasure to be here today to address this group. I know my predecessors in the Special Coordinator's role prioritised attendance at this Forum and I am pleased to be able to talk to you about the role RAMSI plays in Solomon Islands and our objectives.

We are, justifiably I think, proud of the mission and the progress that has been made during the more than eleven years that RAMSI has been in existence. When we take a moment to reflect on the position the country was in when RAMSI arrived and compare that to today, I think the progress is plain to see and should be acknowledged.

I'd like to briefly introduce myself and explain the role of the Special Coordinator plays in the mission. The Special Coordinator is the Civilian Head of RAMSI. In this capacity, I set the strategic direction for the mission in discussion with the Solomon Islands Government and our regional partners. I engage closely with our stakeholders in SIG as well as the 15 Pacific countries that make our regional mission so unique. I also oversee our reporting to the Pacific Islands Forum, the body that oversees and guides our mission in Solomon Islands.

Australia continues to lead RAMSI and contributes ninety-five per cent of the mission's funding, with the remainder provided by the New Zealand Government. I know Australia is proud of the contribution it is making to stability and peace in Solomon Islands through RAMSI. It values highly the close relationship it enjoys with Pacific Islands contributing nations.

In turn, other RAMSI participating countries are also rightly proud of their ongoing contribution. RAMSI's police personnel come from all over the Pacific, with representatives from all Pacific Island Forum members participating in the mission from time to time. The diversity of cultures and professional experience within RAMSI's Participating Police Force is rich and varied. To this day, our regional character remains the mission's greatest strength.

I think it's also important to note what we don't do; RAMSI is not the Police Force in Solomon Islands and we no longer undertake front line policing roles. We are in-country to build the capacity of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) and to support local officers in the maintenance of law and order in their own country. So we're here to assist, but the SIG controls and runs its own police force and manages day to day policing on the ground.

Eleven years and Counting

RAMSI last month celebrated its 11th anniversary. Solomon Islands has come a long way in this time in terms of stability, economic growth and development. International, business and investor confidence in the country continues to grow, and once again, the Hapi Isles are perceived as a safe and vibrant place to live, work, visit and do business.

There is still much to be done for Solomon Islands to achieve its full potential. But the peace fostered by RAMSI has provided the enabling environment needed for Solomon Islanders to go about their daily lives free of menace or intimidation and to pursue their own life goals and opportunities. In this sense, we have provided the space for businesses, and the private sector to emerge and grow, and helped create confidence in the country as a stable and attractive investment location.

RAMSI too, has evolved in recognition of the changing landscape around it. In its early years, the mission focused on arresting militants, on removing

weapons from communities, and on restoring law and order. In its following stabilisation phase, RAMSI worked with SIG to get government and the public service functioning again, to build the economy, to improve service delivery.

One year ago, RAMSI completed its transition process. As part of this process, in 2013 the Mission's military component left Solomon Islands and RAMSI's civilian development programs in economic and public sector governance, and law and justice shifted to the Australian aid program and to other aid donors.

This brings us to the **new shape of RAMSI**, which today is a regional police mission focused on strengthening the RSIPF.

RAMSI's role is to provide strategic capacity development support to the RSIPF. Our goal is to help the RSIPF modernize and professionalise, so as to become a fully sovereign and independent police force which has the full confidence and support of all Solomon Islanders.

We see the development of the RSIPF as a cornerstone of the Solomon Islands. It is already recognized as a key state institution which binds the sometimes disparate parts of the country together.

But with this reach, and heightened levels of community expectation, comes significant responsibility. Community expectations of the RSIPF are indeed high. I suspect that if local media was monitored for content, comment on the RSIPF would feature far more regularly than any other apparatus of the state. Our challenge will continue to be helping the Solomon Islands Government build the RSIPF up to meet those expectations as an organisation which can be relied upon by Government, and trusted by citizens.

Communities and the private sector rightly expect their police force to be responsive, accountable and disciplined. The RSIPF has made significant strides in these areas over the years. But the force is still a developing entity for all intensive purposes, and its responsiveness in particular has been

hampered by challenges particularly with respect to leadership, mobility and logistics.

So when I brief members of the business community in Solomon Islands on the RSIPF I ask them to have reasonable expectations. We all know that Solomon Islands is an extremely difficult environment to deliver any kind of services – with around 1000 islands, a dispersed population across provinces and many people living in isolated locations. Like most organisations the RSIPF has limited resources and must prioritise the people and assets that it has.

When RAMSI began work with the RSIPF in 2003, it was a deeply compromised force. But today almost seventy percent of the force has been recruited in the era post-2003, while significant numbers of officers have left, retired or been removed. This makes for a significant re-building project.

Strengthening public confidence in the force after the Tensions we recognize is also a generational project. But each occasion the RSIPF engages positively with communities, businesses, and individuals, this improves perceptions of its effectiveness. But at the end of the day, the force will only be effective if it has the support of all sections of the Solomon Islands community.

In fact, the RSIPF has been greatly tested this year and has stepped up to the challenge on a number of occasions. Last month, it successfully investigated the particularly nasty heist of an ANZ ATM, arresting the suspects involved. It also responded professionally and capably to the devastating April floods, particularly on the search and rescue front, and dealt effectively with two major public disturbances this year. During a riot in East Honiara in May, RSIPF officers, supported by RAMSI police, dispersed a large and angry crowd armed with machetes while rocks were thrown at them. None of us should forget that being a police officer takes courage.

Leadership has been a key challenge for the RSIPF and ongoing instability within the upper ranks of the force has hampered progress. That is why RAMSI has welcomed the Solomon Islands Government's appointment of Australian Federal Police Assistant Commissioner Prendergast as the new RSIPF Commissioner.

Assistant Commissioner Prendergast has a long history of engagement with Solomon Islands and a deep knowledge and understanding of its people, history and culture. For the term of his appointment, A/C Prendergast has said he intends to focus, in particular, on developing and mentoring the next generation of RSIPF leaders. I am confident he will be a great asset for the RSIPF.

Looking to the future.

As we all know, RAMSI cannot and should not be in Solomon Islands forever. In preparation for the eventuality that one day, the Mission will conclude its time in Solomon Islands, the mission's Participating Police Force, in consultation with the RSIPF and other key stakeholders, has developed a Drawdown Strategy covering the training and support that RAMSI will provide the RSIPF up until 2017.

Under the Drawdown Strategy, the mission's key priorities till 2017 are capacity development of the RSIPF, preparing the RSIPF for limited rearmament, helping the RSIPF plan for upcoming national elections, and to respond effectively to family violence.

RAMSI's capacity development plan for RSIPF to 2017 has been jointly agreed with the force and the Ministry of Police, ensuring our assistance remains targeted to areas of greatest need. It is both ambitious, and comprehensive.

The areas of our support address the key themes of leadership training and development; community policing; mobility, infrastructure and logistics;

national emergency and disaster response; accountability and discipline; corporate and financial management; policy and governance; and improved national security capabilities.

The limited rearmament of the RSIPF is part of the drawdown strategy. Last year, the Solomon Islands Government requested that RAMSI start preparing the RSIPF for limited rearmament. The RSIPF currently is not able to perform many key policing functions as it has no firearms.

Limited rearmament means not all RSIPF officers will be armed – only a small proportion will have access to firearms to protect members of the community from the threat of death or serious injury, or for self-defence.

RAMSI has developed a limited rearmament program with Solomon Islands Government which is providing rigorous assessment and training of officers, development of policy, accountability and governance arrangements, construction of armories for securing of firearms, and community consultations.

We are very conscious of the sensitivities surrounding the issue of limited rearmament of the RSIPF. For that reason the highest standard of training and oversight will be accorded to those officers involved in the rearmament program.

We see public engagement as a critical part of the process and in this regard we welcome the Solomon Islands Government's commitment to consult widely with broadest cross section of the Solomon Islands communities.

Another priority area of our support to RSIPF is the **upcoming national election**. The election will be a vital and essential component of the democratic process and a chance for the people of Solomon Islands to choose their next leaders. In this regard we are fully engaged with the RSIPF in supporting the Government's efforts to see a free, fair and peaceful general election at the end of this year. We're also conscious of the message that a

peaceful elections sends to investors, and the potential negative impact effect on local and international business confidence if we were to see problems.

The RSIPF now have the skills needed to manage election operations and for the first time since the Tensions will be taking the lead in ensuring security in the lead up to, and aftermath of, polling day. They will be taking a tough stance against anyone found to be inciting violence or engaging in criminal behaviour during the election period.

And RAMSI will be here to support them with a range of election-related assistance, including additional training, advisory, logistical and operational planning support.

Conclusions

Everyone with a stake in the future growth and prosperity of the Solomon Islands has a key role in laying the groundwork for the country's development. RAMSI continues to support the RSIPF to do its job in ensuring a stable and peaceful environment, conducive to further private sector development, investment, and tourism.

If there was a message would like to leave you with today, it's that the RSIPF is firmly in the lead in terms of guaranteeing law and order in Solomon Islands. While there is still a lot of work to be done, the force continues to make steady capacity gains and is progressively advancing towards becoming a modern, professional and disciplined Pacific police force. And in some areas it is already taking the lead: for example, the RSIPF probably now has one of the best public order management capabilities in the region.

I have been in country for more than three years now and I see signs of progress and development in Solomon Islands every day. To ensure this continues, RAMSI, led by Australia, is committed to supporting the RSIPF and Solomon Islands Government as we work together to support a peaceful and prosperous future for all Solomon Islanders. TANGIU TUMAS