



**STATEMENT TO THE
UNITED NATIONS PEACEBUILDING COMMISSION**

7th June 2017

Hon. Manasseh D Sogavare

PRIME MINISTER

SOLOMON ISLANDS

United Nations Secretariat
New York

Thank you Your Excellency.

Chair, first, let me convey to you and members of the Commission, greetings from my Government and the people of Solomon Islands. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to present to you the case of our country, Solomon Islands.

I have travelled three days to come to New York, in order to have this audience with you, and to reaffirm my Government and our people's commitment to build and maintain peace, both at home and globally.

This is particularly poignant given the recent violence in London and Manchester in Great Britain. The people of Solomon Islands join peace-loving citizens of our global community in condemning such violence. We reiterate our commitment to peace.

Chair, Solomon Islands has experienced conflicts. Given that experience, we are committed to ensuring that our country does not slide back into conflict. As Prime Minister, I am personally committed to this.

I am aware that countries, such as Solomon Islands, that have had violent conflicts, continue to suffer from the impacts long after the conflict is 'officially' over. This is because conflicts weaken, and in some cases destroy, institutions, infrastructure, and relationships.

Consequently, conflicts reduce opportunities and retard development, contributing to poverty and weakening the country's ability to recover.

As a result, the task of rebuilding communities and nation-states after conflicts is daunting because of the combination of institutional, infrastructural, social and economic factors that need to be taken into consideration. Post-conflict development is financially expensive, socially sensitive, and relies on a fragile peace that could easily degenerate into conflict. It is therefore not surprising that post-conflict societies often experience a recurrence of violence not long after the initial conflict has been resolved.

Solomon Islands commitment to maintain peace is shared by our neighboring Pacific Island Countries, especially the members of the Pacific Islands Forum. This is demonstrated by the fact that they responded to our call for assistance by deploying the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, fondly known as RAMSI, in July 2003. Since the RAMSI intervention, Solomon Islands has achieved a lot in post-conflict rehabilitation. But, there are still many challenges ahead.

Chair, I am aware that, traditionally, the Pacific Islands region has not been the focus of the UN Peace Building Commission (PBC). But, I would like to propose a partnership between your Commission and the Solomon Islands Government, in helping us

continue to build and strengthen our efforts to achieve sustainable peace. The UN PBC has a wealth of knowledge and experience that can help Solomon Islands in its peace building efforts.

Chair, Solomon Islands is a nation-state with a population of about 650,000. We are a multi-ethnic country and we speak more than 87 different languages. It is an archipelago of six major islands and over 900 smaller islands scattered over 1,707 nautical miles in the southwestern Pacific Ocean.

Between late 1998 and mid-2003, Solomon Islands experienced internal conflicts. It was the result of a complex set of inter-related issues that include land, rapid rural-urban migration, increasing squatter settlements in major urban centers (especially, the national capital, Honiara), a fast growing population, slow economic growth, unemployment and weak state institutions.

The conflicts resulted in the death of about 200 people; the displacement of over 20,000 people from their settlements and work places; the deterioration of law and order; the weakening of state institutions; and the near collapse of our national economy. The Government was nearly unable to deliver essential public services, keep up with public sector investments and service debts.

Realizing our inability to address the situation alone, the Solomon Islands Government sought the help of Pacific Islands Forum

Countries. In July 2003 the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) arrived in our country. It was led by the Australia and New Zealand and sanctioned by the Pacific Islands Forum.

Its aim was to restore law and order, rebuild and strengthen state institutions, stabilize Government finances, and improve the government's ability to manage the national economy and deliver much-needed public services as well as provide security to citizens.

RAMSI has been in the country for 14 years. My Government and the people of Solomon Islands will forever be grateful to our neighboring Pacific Island Countries, especially the Governments of Australia and New Zealand for their leadership and in providing resources that sustained RAMSI. Our Pacific Island neighbors, through the Pacific Islands Forum, have stood by us during our times of greatest need.

RAMSI is a successful model of intervention. It provides a lesson for our global response to conflicts. Its focus was on rebuilding and strengthening the state, especially on (i) law and justice, (ii) economic governance, and (iii) the machineries of government.

With RAMSI's assistance, Solomon Islands has restored law and order. The Royal Solomon Islands Police Force was rebuilt and strengthened, restoring public confidence in the force. This is

illustrated by the fact that five of our Police Officers currently participate in the UN Peacekeeping Mission in Dafur, Sudan.

We have nominated another eight Police Officers to be considered for peacekeeping duties. This is important to our peacebuilding effort, particularly in sharing of experiences and lessons learned when our Police Officers are on assignment, or when returned to duty at home.

Chair, I cannot emphasize enough that, whilst RAMSI has been very successful, the process of post-conflict rebuilding cannot stop with the departure of RAMSI. Like other countries in post-conflict situations, Solomon Islands will continue to face many challenges.

By the end of this month, the assistance under the RAMSI framework will end.

Over the last few years, I have listened to peoples' views, as we prepare for RAMSI's departure. I can sense that there is uncertainty and anxiety about the future of Solomon Islands without RAMSI. This underlines the need to do more to address our post-conflict challenges.

Chair, RAMSI has prepared the Solomon Islands Government well in the past 14 years to make the transition from conflict to sustainable peace. We now have a relatively strong public service, a

disciplined police force, and an economy that is in a better shape than it was at the time of the conflict.

But, while RAMSI has been successful in rebuilding and strengthening State institutions, we are yet to achieve true sustainable peace by facilitating reconciliations between individuals, families, communities and provinces. We need to ensure that the State can provide and guarantee security, and provide adequate and quality public services.

Sustainable peace, for our citizens who live in urban centers as well as those in the far-flung villages of our island nation, will require more than just effective policing or a functioning public service. It will require social and economic development initiatives that address the underlying causes of the conflict.

Such initiatives must empower our people, and give them greater and better opportunities to build meaningful livelihoods. This should be inclusive of women and youth, who are sometimes marginalized in our development efforts.

Chair, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Peace Building Fund and the United Nations for your timely support. The UN Peace Building Programme assists my Government in its efforts to build sustainable peace. For example, the Programme assisted in the process of drafting a reparation framework. The UN Peace

Building Programme has also facilitated peace dialogues in a number of our provinces.

The Programme will also be facilitating a National Dialogue, which I will host, on the 19th–20th of this month to consolidate the issues that are priority to our people in our peacebuilding efforts. The outcome of this National Dialogue will help my Government prioritize and implement the recommendations by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that was established in 2008 and submitted its report in 2012.

Chair and members of the Commission, the road ahead in our country's transition towards sustainable peace will be challenging. We need to address the underlying causes of the conflict. As stated earlier, these include governance and socio-economic development issues.

A major challenge, for example, is making land accessible to economic development while at the same time protecting our people's traditional rights to land. It is also about ensuring that people receive fair returns from developments on their land.

This is challenging especially given that about 87% of land in Solomon Islands is customary land, regulated by customary systems of tenure. We need to find the best way to integrate customary systems of tenure with the demands of modern economic

development. This is important because land has been a central factor in conflicts in Solomon Islands.

Another factor that impedes economic development and the effective delivery of services, and therefore increasing opportunities for conflict, is corruption. My Government has responded to this by drafting an Anti-Corruption bill, accompanied by a National Anti-Corruption Strategy. The bill will be tabled in parliament in the near future.

Climate change is another issue that could potentially trigger conflicts. Solomon Islands, like other Pacific Island countries, is at the forefront of the impacts of climate change. So far, we have already lost five islands as a result of sea level rise. We now have the burden of relocating people to other parts of country, mostly in and around urban centers that are already crowded.

Such relocations could cause conflicts as people compete for land and other resources. We have developed and implement adaptation programmes to mitigate the impact of climate change and natural disasters.

But, we acknowledge that climate change is a global challenge that will also require global solutions. Solomon Islands is therefore committed to the Paris Agreement. Climate change is not just an

environmental issue. It is also an economic, political, cultural and legal issue that has implications for sustainable peace.

This week, during the Ocean Conference, you will hear from our colleagues from other Pacific Island countries about the significance of the Ocean to our countries. The vast Pacific Ocean is a source of revenue, food, security and identity for our island countries.

It defines, connects and feeds us. We therefore need to conserve, maintain and sustainably use the ocean, and its resources in line with SDG 14. Failure to recognize the significance of the Ocean to Pacific Island Countries, including Solomon Islands, will have significant negative impact on our wellbeing.

Chair and members of the Commission, as you can see, the challenges facing my country are daunting. It is precisely for this reason that I have requested an audience with you. The United Nations is uniquely positioned to support my country's post-conflict transition and we need the UN Peace Building Commission and the UN Peace Building Fund to assist my Government in this transition. My people and Government want you to help make Solomon Islands a model of success in building sustainable peace.

Thank you Chair.