



SOLOMON ISLANDS

STATEMENT BY

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OF SOLOMON ISLANDS

AT THE

SIXTY-SECOND SESSION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

New York, 1st October 2007

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Mr President,

I am privileged to stand before you today, in the place of Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare, to renew the firm commitment of the Government and people of Solomon Islands to the principles, ideals and values that gather us together here annually for no greater purpose than their re-examination and reaffirmation. The privilege of membership of the United Nations allows my country to sit amongst you and stand up for, as well as against, decisions on issues which unite and divide us. Belonging to this organization for almost half the time it has existed is a proud feat for a country that is barely 30 years old. The experience of nearly 3 decades of sovereign statehood has taught Solomon Islands many lessons that we can share with the rest of the world to highlight the fragility of our independence as a nation of peoples whose survival is both threatened and guaranteed by our inter-dependence on the international community represented at this Assembly.

Mr President,

Representing my Prime Minister and addressing this Assembly on behalf of more than half a million people of Solomon Islands, let me begin by congratulating you on your recent election as President of our 62nd Session. Both you and Secretary General Ban Ki Moon (who we are also able to officially felicitate on this occasion) are selected by fate to pledge your devotion to duty in a cause challenged only by humanity's survival. We trust you to do what is right to attain the best for the rest of us. Your distinguished predecessors have paved pathways for the progress of this organization along many routes which you must now travel to fulfill our Charter's promises to us and those we are fortunate to represent.

Mr President,

Much has happened in Solomon Islands since my Prime Minister's address to this Assembly in September last year. Turning firstly to cataclysmic events, just six months ago a series of earthquakes and tsunamis terrorized, devastated and swallowed up some of our islands, their inhabitants, homes, gardens, pets, animals and worldly possessions. From that catastrophe alone we suffered the loss of more than 50 lives and injury to countless more, the total destruction of over 3,240 homes and severe damage to another 3,000 homes. The damage bill is estimated to exceed US\$ 100 million. Thanks to instantly televised news coverage of the resulting devastation, the entire world was shown graphic evidence of the sinking of some of our islands, the elevation of submerged reefs 3 metres above the sea surface and the submersion of many coastal lands. What was not visible at the time were the immediate and future effects of nature's "structural adjustments" on the daily livelihood of Solomon Islanders. Traditional fishing grounds have shifted. Agricultural activity had to be relocated. The debris is slowly being cleared. Water supply is being restored. Roads, wharves and bridges are being rebuilt. Hospitals, clinics, schools and houses are being repaired and reconstructed. Entire villages will need to be relocated and rebuilt. Life can no longer be the same for the vast majority of our rural-dwelling population who depend on fishing and subsistence agriculture for their daily survival. A slight tremor or any vibration causes them to flee to higher ground in panic. The emotional and psychological effects of nature's non-negotiable terrors are what our people have to struggle with for the rest of their natural lives.

Mr President,

My snapshot of the April earthquakes/tsunamis and their aftermath would not be complete if I did not acknowledge and record the eternal gratitude of Solomon Islands to all those Governments, international organizations and peoples who offered sympathy, prayer and a helping hand with the humanitarian relief that was despatched to our affected areas. Without the assistance and involvement of all those who volunteered their time and resources and the generosity of those who donated emergency relief funds, supplies and provisions, my Government would not have progressed to the rehabilitation phase of the disaster recovery program as fast as we have. It is at the time of our suffering and need that we appreciate the true value of human compassion and sacrifice.

With the increasing incidence of disasters all over the world, we must bolster the resources and capacity of the United Nations' humanitarian relief program to respond rapidly and effectively to such crises to alleviate human suffering. As much as we appreciate the quantum of funds pledged by sympathetic individuals, institutions and nation states, we are left to wonder whether the filtering of donor financial assistance through national charitable organizations is calculated to whittle down its value by the consumption of largesse in aid administration and delivery. Respecting the generosity and altruism of those who give and the desperation of those who need requires us to enshrine principles of efficiency and effectiveness to guide humanitarian relief efforts across international borders. Human charity and human suffering are done a disservice when disasters create feeding frenzies for non-governmental charitable organizations. The recent experience of Solomon Islands mirrors what many other nations have also undergone and underlines the need for concerted international action to regulate humanitarian aid collection and delivery.

Mr President,

Dealing with effects rather than causes of environmental catastrophes only takes us half as far as we ought to go. The proceedings of last week's High Level Meeting on Climate Change have emboldened Small Island Developing States to rally together in demanding the intensification of international efforts to curb global environmental recklessness. It appears that the fragility of states like Solomon Islands has less to do with the quality of our governance machinery and more to do with our ecological vulnerability. My Government wonders what is so virtuous about foreign aid when billions of Australian dollars can be spent on improving the governance structures of an economy that derives its export income from the destruction of tropical forests when just a fraction of that expense is all that is needed to preserve our forests and finance our annual national budgets. Solomon Islands believes that the protection of our global environment is a matter of international responsibility and can be capably addressed by the enunciation of principles that dictate reciprocal undertakings for the continued grant and receipt of foreign aid.

Mr President,

Turning next to the ongoing contestations which affect the future occupation of Solomon Islands by the Australian-led Visiting Contingent, my Government has initiated a parliamentary review of the legislative basis for the continued presence of the occupying police, military and civilian personnel from our neighbouring countries. Credit must be given to the visiting forces deployed in 2003 for the restoration of law and order in Solomon Islands following many preceding years of ethnic rivalry and violence. Policing a crisis for four years has contained it at a surface level without addressing the underlying socio-cultural roots of dissension. My Government is determined to delve deeper into the historic causes of the friction between our peoples and do what is necessary to resolve the disputes which prevent their reconciliation. The Commission of Inquiry into the April 2006 Civil Unrest in Honiara, whose establishment was announced by the Prime Minister during his last address to this Assembly, finally became functional this year after the failure of externally-orchestrated manoeuvres to derail it. The Commission of Inquiry's interim reports have exposed major flaws in our national security operations. My Government appreciates the financial assistance pledged by Papua New Guinea in manning the Commission of Inquiry. The final report and recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry should be available in the next few months.

Mr President,

Our peoples' gratitude to Australia and New Zealand for financing the deployment of their nationals to police our crisis with the help of a small contingent of personnel from neighbouring Pacific Islands nations is oft-expressed and genuine. However, as our fellow Pacific Islands states can readily appreciate, our sovereign right to determine the terms on which the Government of Solomon Islands will permit our continued occupation by the Visiting Contingent cannot be undermined by any member of the United Nations. The long neglect of our internal problem by the UN followed by the hasty conclusion of the regionally-based multilateral agreement which led to the despatch of the initial Visiting Contingent of Australian, New Zealand and other Pacific Islands forces brings ongoing controversies concerning their continued existence and eventual exit back to the UN's doorsteps. Viewed from the perspective of Chapter 8 of the UN Charter, the nature of the arrangements and activities embraced by the 2003 agreement as well as their practical application and operation since then appear to transgress Article 52 on the basis of apparent inconsistencies with Articles 1 and 2 of our Charter.

Howsoever dressed and rationalized, intervention and occupation allow "assisting" nations to spend and earn substantial revenue for their supporting businesses and industries. Mine is too nationalistic a Government to become captive to the fortunes which justify our perpetual retention under siege. My Prime Minister, fellow Government Ministers and Parliamentarians as well as our Attorney General remain unmoved by Australian resistance to our attempts to reclaim our sovereignty and independence. Consistent with our obligations under Article 54, we shall keep the Security Council fully informed of the activities undertaken under the 2003 agreement and seek its assistance in reducing the financial burdens which Australia and New Zealand needlessly bear under the current arrangements.

As members of this Assembly know only too well, those who pay the piper call the tune. Our experience of the Australian-designed "co-operative intervention" package demonstrates the need for greater UN involvement in the leadership of future regional peace-keeping operations.

Mr President,

The impetus for Australia's involvement in our internal unrest was a dramatic change of focus and heart about the protection of its strategic interests in the Pacific Islands region. The threat of terrorist penetration through porous frontiers is sufficient cause for international anxiety, insecurity and paranoia. Despite global condemnation of terrorism, the struggle for consensus on an acceptable definition of terrorism retards the progress of multilateral initiatives in formulating a Comprehensive Anti-terrorism Convention.

Illustrative of terrorism's over-reactive potential is the indignity I had to suffer, as the Foreign Minister of Solomon Islands, when my multiple entry visitor visa to Australia was suddenly cancelled last year. The written explanation for that decision identified me as a risk to the health, safety and good order of the Australian community under Section 116(1)(e) of its Immigration Act. One would have to admit that is an incredible justification for excluding democratically elected leaders of neighbouring countries unknown for breeding terrorists. Just over a century ago, many of our ancestors were kidnapped and forcibly taken to work as labourers in a country which is now quick to regard their descendants as terrorists. Defining terrorism has proved to be more difficult than deploring it.

Mr President,

Moving from the preoccupations of the past year to our perennial protestations, Solomon Islands is compelled by principle, rather than pragmatism, to ventilate again our peoples' concerns arising from the non-representation of the Government and people of Taiwan at this Assembly. Our recent attempts to channel Taiwan's admission application through the established gateways was resisted without any regard for the legitimate quest of 23 million Taiwanese people for self-determination by fellow member states committed to uphold a peremptory rule of international law also enshrined in Article 1 of the UN Charter. Organized international hypocrisy is the only basis for explaining the indignity which Taiwanese people must suffer at the hands of a powerful constellation of states interested only in the protection of trade and investment rather than any humanitarian concerns.

Mr President,

China's assertion of sovereignty over Taiwan must be the pretence that it invariably is when most of its major trading partners have also forged and maintain bilateral relations with Taiwan which are ultimately predicated on its politico-juridical autonomy. Solomon Islanders have a native empathy for all people who are struggling to reclaim what is rightfully due to them under international law. Our support for their struggles stems from our convictions about what is right and just. Our sovereign conscience is not a tradable commodity. Our rejection of regular approaches for the reconsideration of our existing allegiances to Taiwan is premised on our preference, ideally, to recognize both China and Taiwan on a realistic rather than an imaginary politico-juridical footing.

This Assembly is the forum where mutual respect and goodwill prevail to enable us to implore China, as one of the oldest civilizations of our world, to pledge its non-resort to force in settling the disputed question of its sovereignty over Taiwan.

Mr President,

As one of Taiwan's long-standing diplomatic allies and undeterred by the result recently engineered by international political pragmatism, Solomon Islands cannot shirk its Charter obligations under Article 35, paragraph 1 to bring to the attention of this Assembly the situation currently prevailing between Taiwan and China. The situation is clearly of the nature requiring investigation by the Security Council, pursuant to Article 34, on the basis that it "might lead to international friction or give rise to a dispute." The Security Council is obliged to investigate the situation "in order to determine whether the continuance" thereof "is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security." Having now brought the situation to the attention of this Assembly, Solomon Islands expects that we will follow the stipulations of Article 11, paragraph 2 in discussing "any questions relating to the maintenance of international peace and security" and making the necessary "recommendations" or taking the requisite "action" this Assembly is empowered to make and take under the applicable provisions of the Charter. A full, frank and fair discussion of the situation is the least this Assembly can undertake to affirm our faithful obedience to our Charter's creed and satisfy ourselves of the existence of grounds for our further proactive involvement.

Mr President,

Led by Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare, my Government belongs to a constituency of states for whom the UN represents the promise of hope for civilizations condemned by circumstance to eternal misery. The effective representation of our hope, voice and vision in this organization can only be achieved by the reform of its governance structures to reflect the changing configurations of geo-political power and influence. Solomon Islands supports the proposal for enlargement of the Security Council. We also believe India and Japan must be allocated permanent seats on the Council.

The attainment of the Millennium Development Goals will remain elusive for many nations unless innovative strategies for debt conversion and cancellation are devised and adopted to fast-track the poor's exit from poverty. We look forward to exploring this prospect at the forthcoming meeting on Financing for Development in Doha.

Mr President,

Solomon Islands has reason to register its disappointment with the UN's Department of the Law of the Sea for its tardy action in releasing funds which are payable to us from the Trust Fund to defray the costs and expenses of establishing our sovereign claims to continental shelf areas registrable under Article 76 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. We are concerned that any further delay in accessing those funds might affect our registration entitlements due to non-compliance with time restrictions.

Time deprives us of the opportunity to chronicle many grievances which we needlessly experience in securing the benefits accorded us by virtue of our membership of this organization. The appointment of the UNDP's Deputy Resident Representative stationed in Solomon Islands is a welcome sign of your interest in my country's problems and permits us to interact more closely with the UN in prioritizing the remedial action we need to undertake for betterment of the lives of our rural populace. With a visible presence in our midst and on our shores, the UN will no longer be remote from the consciousness of the people it exists to serve.

Mr President,

We are nearing the time when I must yield this rostrum to the next speaker and I am happy to do so by extending to Secretary General Ban Ki Moon my Prime Minister's invitation to visit our shores during his tenure in office. We sincerely hope His Excellency will honour the Government and people of Solomon Islands by becoming the first Secretary General to venture to my country.

Mr President, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you for your kind attention.