



# ALIGECEO PROVINCIAL SECONDARY SCHOOL

AUKI, MALAITA PROVINCE

Phone: 40074

Date: / /

04th September 2008,

The Secretary to the Foreign Relations Committee  
National Parliament Office  
P. O. Box G19  
Honiara  
Solomon Islands.

Dear Sir,

**RE: SUBMISSION TO THE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE.**

Enclosed please find my submission on the "Inquiry into the facilitation of International Assistance Notice" which is currently reviewed by the above Committee.

I hope my observation shade some light on the notice which provides for the presence of RAMSI in Solomon Islands.

Yours Faithfully,

**JEZREEL IROFANUA**  
Form 6 Tutor



## The Facilitation of International Assistance Notice – 2003.

“Praise the Lord! Hallelujah! Amen!”, so said the late Hon. B. Ulufa’alu former MP for Aoke Langalanga Constituency and former Prime Minister whose SIAC Government was ousted in the June 5, 2000 coup. The Late Hon. Ulufa’alu was making his opening remarks during the Parliamentary debate on the “Facilitation of Assistance Bill” on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2003. The Bill was unanimously passed by the 42 MP’s present in the house the same day. Six days later, on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2003, an the Australian led “Intervention Force” as it was then called, was welcomed with open arms by a relieved and bemused SI populace.

The goal of the “Intervention Force” was in the first instance to restore Law and Order and Security in Solomon Islands which was until then controlled by thugs. Without reading the full text of the “Facilitation of International Assistance Notice” I will submit my responses to the three questions as follows:

### **(1). Which Countries contribute to RAMSI?**

**Response:** All 15 member countries of the South Pacific Forum are involved in the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI). I have no qualms about the membership of RAMSI. As a matter of fact all members of the Forum have shown their willingness to help Solomon Islands get over her problems through their participation in RAMSI. Most of them have their own internal problems, but have decided to help their fellow brothers and sisters in Solomon Islands first. This is indeed the spirit of the “Pacific Way”. Section 2 (b) of the Notices states. “The assistance will be provided by a contingent of person (the visiting contingent’) from assisting countries or other countries”.

“Assisting Countries” is taken to mean the Forum Island Countries plus Australia and New Zealand. The “or other countries” may in my view refer to countries which are not members of the Forum, but may have vested interest in Solomon Islands and the problems she faces which in this case was the ethnic tension and its after math. Japan is such a country and already she has shown interest in giving assistance to RAMSI.

Being a regional institution RAMSI may be restricted to Forum member countries only. However, the “..... Other countries” phrase in the notices should accommodate any non – Forum member country which is willing to assist Solomon Islands through RAMSI. The “Facilitation of International Assistance Notice” was approved by Parliament. To have it repealed, amended or continued, it is the Parliament of Solomon Islands that has the power to do it. I therefore feel Solomon Islands Parliament should have the final say in accepting or rejecting any “other countries” that may wish to assist through RAMSI.

Reading from what appears through the media both locally and regionally, it seems all participating countries are willing to help Solomon Islands through RAMSI so long as the Government and people of Solomon Islands are willing to have them in the country.

### **2. What is the Public Purpose of RAMSI’s presence in Solomon Islands?**

Publicly stated by Australia the aim of the “Intervention Force” now RAMSI was to prevent Solomon Islands becoming a breeding ground for terrorism, drug trafficking and money laundering. In other words Australian, territorial, security and trade interests were threatened by a politically unstable Solomon Islands. These factors forced Australia to

reverse her Policy of “non – interference” to “active involvement”, in the Solomon Islands crises.

- Trade saw Australian exports slumped from \$99 million to \$55 million in 2002 (Islands Business, March 2003,). Australia was keen on maintaining the status quo in Solomon Islands whose security was threatened by the law and order crises, It was also a move to protect Australia’s borders against the remote possibility of Solomon Islanders who may escape persecution flooding into Australia.
- To Solomon Islanders, the arrival of RAMSI in Solomon Islands was a welcomed relief as the country was then gradually slipping into anarchy. Indeed Solomon Islands was rescued by RAMSI.
- Since its change of name from the “Intervention Force” to the “Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands” (RAMSI), its terms of reference were also extended to cover good governance, corruption, restoration of the economy, poverty alleviation and capacity building.
- RAMSI has been a success story in regional Co-operation. Its achievements in the restoration of law and order are second to none.

In my view, most of what could be seen as the “public purpose of RAMSI’s presence in Solomon Islands” are covered in the “Report of the Pacific Islands Forum Eminent Persons Group” (May 2005). These are clearly outlined in chapter three paragraph 90, parts (i) – (xxv) pages 23 – 28 while I admire and accept all the recommendations put forward, I find difficulty with recommendation (xvii) which espouses the establishment of a “Great Council of Chiefs”. I can guess where this concept originated, while this idea may work elsewhere due to the social stratification of those societies, it is too ambitious to expect its relevance for Solomon Islands. In a country where corruption is a threat to its institutions, Solomon Islands will do well to avoid setting up a body which can easily become a ‘great council of thieves.

### **3. How long should RAMSI be in Solomon Islands?**

The “Facilitation of Assistance Bill” was unanimously supported by all 42 MP’s present in Parliament on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2003. Making any moves to have RAMSI leave Solomon Islands must also have the unanimous support of all 50 members of Parliament.

The “Eminent persons Group” observed in their report in 2005 that Solomon Islands is still a fragile community where provincialism remains entrenched and there are still strong animosities, particularly between people of Malaita and Guadalcanal”.

This is the truth and nothing but the truth. The recent ethnic tension has destroyed the spirit of unity, respect, love and trust both island groups have in each other. Today, as this statement is read, what every Guadalcanal man, woman and child wants to occur at the earliest possible date is for all Malaitans to leave Guadalcanal Soil. Nothing more and nothing less.

Today, there are more Malaitans in Honiara than there were prior to the recent ethnic tensions. There is lack of development in Malaita to attract a bulk of its large population to remain at home. So far successive governments have played lip-service to the development of Bina Harbour, the Auluta Palm Oil Project and now the Suava Bay Project. These Projects have been used by those who aspire leadership of the government to lure support from Malaita members in Parliament. In short, these projects are political gimmicks.

I reject the observations made by the Eminent Persons group that the Townsville Peace Agreement was “unrealistic and concluded under duress” and the TPA and Marau Peace Agreements had expired’.

Two factors need to be noted about both agreements. First and foremost both agreements were signed by the Militant leaders of both the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF) and Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM). These were the “fieldworkers” as it were in the ethnic crises. They represented the grassroots views and feelings. The time frame for both agreements may have expired but the spirit of the agreements remain unaltered, as expressed through PART Four of the TPA, section (5) (a) and (d), Page 15 & 16, (TPA 2000).

It had taken Australia three years to decide to alter the course of her diplomatic policy of “non-interference” to “active involvement” in the Solomon Islands crises. On June 8, 2000 Australia evacuated all her citizens from Solomon Islands, despite requests being earlier made to Canberra for assistance, by the former Primer Minister, the Late B. Ulufa’alu.

Led by Australia and New Zealand all participating countries in RAMSI agreed that RAMSI would remain in the country as long as the government and people of Solomon Islands wanted them to be.

As LT. Colonel John Frewen, the Commander of the “Intervention Force” pointed out, they came here not knowing what to expect and despite the achievements a lot was still to be achieved. The army officer’s observation underpinned RAMSI’s long term presence in Solomon Islands.

I personally wonder whether Australia’s move to lead the “Intervention Force” into the Solomon Islands crises had not been a mistake in the first place. Now Australia and other participating countries cannot pull out unilaterally from Solomon Islands without the approval of the government and people of Solomon Islands. RAMSI would be accused of leaving unfinished business should Solomon Islands slip back into trouble after its departure. Being conscious of its political survival, the Solomon Islands government would tread carefully in its handling of RAMSI’s departure from our shores.

Solomon Islands comprises nine provinces with multi-racial, multi – cultural, multi – lingual and multi – tribal communities scattered over the archipelago. The recent ethnic tension had exposed these diversities to the detriment of the country’s unity.

The recent ethnic tension was a renewal of Islandism (Island localism) – a backlash against cultural, economic, political and social integration currently sweeping across the country. Islandism is a protective response against the exploitation of natural resources in some islands and the unequal distribution of the financial benefits. This is reflected

through the ethnic tension sparked by the repatriation of Malaitans from Guadalcanal as a result of the IFM activities (1998 – 2001).

The people's current support and the government's commitment to introducing federalism in Solomon Islands is another factor. To introduce federalism in an already fragmented society is encouraging secession and Islandism leading to tribalism and disunity amongst different tribes. Federalism will become a catalyst in local, state and national disunity.

Tribal Localism and Islandism will be major issues under federalism in the future. The ethnic tension may have ceased but the bitter feelings of animosities between Guadalcanal people and Malaitans will remain in their blood forever. These will flare up in different forms should RAMSI leave.

Solomon Islands had collapsed as a nation with its government and economy saturated with corruption, nepotism and favoritism. The country is weak with a narrow economic base, low level of education, unstable government, lack of national consciousness and high population growth rate. Traditional loyalties super cede national consciousness. The country faces long term problems which need long term solutions. RAMSI's presence in Solomon Islands had to be on a long term basis rather than as a "circuit breaker".

#### **4. Are there any downsides of RAMSI?**

After 5 years in the country RAMSI has become an isolated island of foreign culture amongst the natives. Today it has employed a self – righteous attitude about its presence and work in Solomon Islands.

Australia and New Zealand view Solomon Islanders as children with little sophistication and lack the ability to see through Canberra and Wellington's foreign policies in the South Pacific. As Solomon Islands is amongst the poorest Island countries in the region, she should accept bribes.

The law and order crises was orchestrated as a smoke screen for political expediency by Canberra and Wellington. When Solomon Islands sought assistance from Canberra in 2000, it fell on deaf ears. Instead Australian Citizens and foreign nationals were evacuated from the country on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2000. It had taken Australia three years (June 5, 2000 to July 2003) to make up her mind to adopting the "active involvement" stand.

Prior to the arrival of RAMSI in Solomon Islands, Australia had been carrying out a smearing campaign against the Solomon's in the media. Solomon Islands had been equated with Afghanistan and Iraq in the local media (star, 10 March 2003).

The "Intervention Force" (now RAMSI) landed on Solomon Islands soil on 24<sup>th</sup> July, 2003 with self – congratulatory superiority complex feelings amongst its rank and file who viewed Solomon Islanders with disdain, as citizens of a "failed" state. As a matter of fact RAMSI's arrival in Solomon Islands on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2003 was a little too late, having to walk over the dead bodies of the victims of the ethnic tension so as to restore, peace, law and order.

RAMSI's regional nature complicates its operations, with Europeans, Melanesians, Polynesians and Micronesians with each racial group having its own views of the problems faced by Solomon Islands. All the Pacific Islands Countries were former colonial territories of Australia, Britain, France and New Zealand. Australia and New Zealand were former colonial powers, who are calling the shots in the operations of RAMSI.

The presence of RAMSI here has inflated the housing market in Honiara, giving locals minimal chances to rent houses in the city. In Honiara, Solomon Islanders employed in the public and private sectors earn about \$1,400.00 (SBD) per fortnight (with tax) whilst their foreign advisers and experts get \$20,000.00 (SBD) per fortnight and above, (tax – free). Today the cost of living has sky rocketed through the roof with the price of rice, flour and Kerosene getting beyond the affordability of people in the villages.

RAMSI only deals with the elites in Government, private sector, NGOS, the churches and communities. They do not deal directly with the former militants who had participated in the ethnic tension. They hunt them down with hand cuffs, instead of finding out their reasons for involvement in the tension.

The local elites are committed to European values dictated by their Western education which forces them to form an expensive façade in a country whose development is stagnant. They become the “local expatriates” who believe in rather apply pressure on foreign institutions which control and direct development in the country. The ethnic tension had been the out come of perceived stagnance in a country where the “local expatriates” have failed to deliver the “goods”. The tension was a grass-roots protest against the lineal and euro-centric development path persued by the Government.

The coming of the “Intervention Force” into Solomon Islands had been forced down the country's throat. At the directive of Canberra a bill was passed by the SI Parliament signed by the Governor-General seeking Australia's help. This was revealed to Sir Allan Kemakeza during his trip to Canberra on June 5, 2000.

In what RAMSI referred to as “active policing”, the former Governor General of Solomon Islands could be searched at the airport upon returning from his home province (star, 19<sup>th</sup> November 2003). And a female could be arrested without any respect by PPF Officers (Talking Truth Programme November 01<sup>st</sup> 2003). The Solomon Islands Parliament was forced by Australia to amend the “Police Act” on 26<sup>th</sup> July, 2005 to accommodate two deputy commissioners of Police within the RSIP.

The refusal of the Solomon Islands Governor General to administer the oath of office to the Canberra appointed Deputy Commissioner of Police upset Australia so much that the then Prime Minister, Sir Allan Kemakeza had to write a letter of apology on behalf of the Governor General. An action which was both unconstitutional and ill – conceived.

The beating up of Youths in Manakwai Village by Tongan soldiers and the ordering of some Tobaita Chiefs to sit in the hot sun with their hands held behind their backs at Bit'a'ama by RAMSI Police revealed the Mission's questionable behaviour at the village level. To crown RAMSI's five years operations in the country, the death of a young nurse at the hands of a drunken PPF officer in June 2008.



The events alluded to above occurred since RAMSI's arrival in the country in 2003. In addition to being a proto-type institution, it is a human organization which must necessarily encounter human short comings. What ever happened in the past 5 years, we must not allow history to pull us down. RAMSI has become a necessary evil whose long term presence in the country Solomon Islanders will do well to cope with for our survival's sake.

### Recommendations.

Having been inspired by the "Forum Eminent Person Group's Report" of 2005, I wish to recommend the following:

- i. That RAMSI funds a 'Peace Studies Programme' to be offered and run at the 'Solomon Islands College of Higher Education' (SICHE).
- ii. A separate report should be made on the former Militants and their involvement in the recent ethnic tension.
- iii. The Royal Solomon Islands Police Force be re-armed to be effective in carrying out their duties.
- iv. RAMSI Work in partnership with the Solomon Islands government to address the following key issues:
  - High population growth rate.
  - Unemployment.
  - Inadequate and unequal access to education.
  - Land issues.

  
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[04/09/2008].