

Dear Sir,

I enclose a number of articles I have written about RAMSI both before and after they arrived. I believe many of the points I raised in these are still valid and worthy of consideration by your committee. I have not been able to write publicly for the last 3 years as I took on a consultancy funded by EU under whose rules I cannot make public political statements except through my employers. I hope, however, these older articles as well as the submission below will be of some help to your committee.

Let me say first that I strongly support the concept of bringing RAMSI here and think that in many ways they have done an excellent job in bringing order to the country. My articles all addressed ways by which I think the role of RAMSI could be made even more effective.

The main point I was trying to make in these articles is that RAMSI came here to help us maintain and uphold the rule of law, but this raises the questions. What laws? and Whose laws? I was interested to hear the Prime Minister raise a similar point in his submission to the commission – the need to respect Solomon Islands customs and traditions, as well as the more formally written laws.

One of the origins of the 'tension' is the existence of two sets of laws in Solomon Islands which are often in conflict. There are written laws enshrined in the constitution and inherited from Britain, and there are unwritten laws based on Melanesian and Polynesian customs and traditions. In talking about the rule of law RAMSI usually means upholding the written and constitutional laws, as these are 'the laws of Solomon Islands'. It is true that these laws have been accepted by representatives of Solomon Islands negotiating for independence and sitting in Parliament, but these people constitute mainly an educated elite strongly influenced by 'western' education and ideas. In many cases they are not accepted by the majority of the population who still believe that their own customary laws should be followed. Remember also that, apart from the written constitution, Solomon Islands at independence accepted the British legal system which is based on British custom and tradition in the form of 'case laws', because Britain itself has no written constitution. At independence we accepted that all laws of Britain should become laws of Solomon Islands unless specifically changed by parliament.

In talking about upholding the 'rule of law', therefore, we are accepting many laws which have never been accepted or discussed by Parliament or Solomon Islanders, and we are accepting laws which are based on the values and traditions of Britain rather than those of Solomon Islands. It is easy for many Australian and New Zealand members of RAMSI to accept these laws, as they themselves come from countries where 'western' concepts and traditions form the basis of the law, mainly because the majority of the people in those countries are of 'western' or 'European' origin themselves.

I believe this conflict between two sets of laws, and the underlying values and concepts on which they are based, is one of the basic causes of the tension itself. The written laws of Solomon Islands about land are based on the 'western' concept that land is a commodity which can be bought and sold, and once it changes hands through the payment of money the new owner has a 'freehold' right to do what he or she likes with it, including selling it to others and passing it on to their children. In Melanesian 'law', however, land is not a commodity which can be bought and sold. People can be given certain rights to use the land, either by gift or the payment of money, but the people who have occupied it for generations and whose ancestors are buried there are still the legal 'owners' of the land, and can demand that it be returned to them at any time.

Much of the origin of the tension was based on outsiders, especially but not only Malaitans, who followed the 'rule of law', that is the written 'western-based' laws of Solomon Islands. They paid money for pieces of land to people of Guadalcanal and then claimed that they were the owners in perpetuity according to 'western' customs and laws. The people of Guadalcanal, following Melanesian laws, said 'NO', this is still our land and we now want it returned, so you have to leave. Interestingly I believe one of the reasons why

there was so little bloodshed, and the people who had settled in Guadalcanal left so peacefully, was that they themselves, being Melanesians, recognised the truth of what the 'landowners' were saying and left peacefully. Conflict mainly came later, when those who had left wanted to take Melanesian custom further and demand compensation for what they had given up, and this was refused.

I remember attending a press conference in 2000 and an Australia journalist asked a prominent Malaita politician why the Malaitans had left 'their' land in Guadalcanal so peacefully. He replied that it was because they recognised that, according to Melanesian custom, it was not 'their' land, and the original owners had the right to claim it back. He said, 'If there were Guadalcanal settlers in Malaita we would have done the same thing.'

It is no good, therefore, for RAMSI to say that the written law is the law of the country and it is their job to carry out the rule of law by sticking to it. It must be recognised that there are two sets of laws – the written laws originally brought from outside, and the largely unwritten customary laws which were here in the first place. The job of RAMSI must be to help us merge these two sets of laws, not to try to impose one set above the other.

One of the most frightening stories I have heard came from the former Anglican Bishop of Malaita. He said he was standing in Malaita with an Australian RAMSI officer and the officer turned to him and said 'The only trouble with people here is their customs. If they could get rid of these, they would be ok.' This shows such a fundamentally wrong attitude that you begin to wonder if RAMSI officers receive any training in cultural sensitivity at all. However, it simply reflects the attitude that 'we are here to uphold the law' and the only law is the written 'western-based' law. However, it is even more arrogant and racist in presuming that Australian customs and values are automatically superior to Solomon Islands customs and traditions and the job of RAMSI is to make Solomon Islanders into little Australians.

I am sure that many RAMSI personnel, including those from Australia, would be equally horrified by this attitude, but I believe the same attitude has been reflected in two incidents recently. RAMSI officers have justified the arrest of the parents of a 'wanted' man by saying that they broke 'the law' by helping him to avoid arrest. It is true that they did break the written 'western-based' law. This is based on that concept of absolute justice which I mentioned in another of my articles enclosed here. What would Melanesian custom say, however? Melanesians value the family and community before everything else. In Melanesian law the first duty of parents would be towards their children, not towards some abstract concept of the 'rule of law'. By ignoring this, therefore, RAMSI is putting this 'western' concept of law before the Melanesian laws and customs based on the value given to family life. We can argue which is the better system, but if RAMSI ignores the existence of the other set of laws and automatically assumes that their concept of law is the only correct one they will not succeed in their task.

In another recent incident the former Deputy Prime Minister was assaulted by his son, who was taken to court. However, by the time the case came up, the family, using Melanesian laws and customs, had sorted the matter out in a traditional way. Instead of recognising this good example of the workings of traditional laws and customs the magistrate insisted in continuing the case and sentencing the boy to prison. Again there is an automatic assumption that the written 'western' laws are superior and more important than Melanesian customary ways of solving disputes. In a similar case a former student of mine got drunk, drove a truck and killed a small boy. It so happened that the boy was a relative of his, so the matter was solved in a customary way by reconciliation and the payment of compensation. Again, however, the police refused to recognise this custom and took the man to court and sentenced him to prison.

It is this failure to recognise that there are two parallel systems of law and justice which makes it so sad that we are only just now beginning to set up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which should have been done long ago. Until now RAMSI have adopted the western concept of justice, involving taking people to

court, proving crimes against them and putting them into prison. This ignores the whole traditional Melanesian and Polynesian tradition of restorative justice, in favour of the western system of punitive justice, which does not always work, even in the western world.

The system adopted has meant huge sums being spent on lawyers and police investigations, immense delays of months or years, and a system of justice which often means that the winner is the one who can afford to employ the most skilful lawyer rather than finding the truth. The result is often that people who are known to have committed offences during the tension are getting away with it because of lack of sufficient evidence. Where people are put in prison, the people against whom the crime was committed are not satisfied according to their view of justice, as they have not received compensation or had a chance of reconciliation with the person. Later the person will come out of prison without that compensation or reconciliation having taken place, and the source of conflict may still be there.

A Truth and Reconciliation process, which recognises the traditional concepts of compensation and reconciliation, may be much more productive in solving the underlying problems more permanently. It relies on telling the truth and forgiveness rather than searching for evidence and absolute proof and then punishing the person concerned. In a conflict such as ours, which is largely social and political in origin, the truth is more likely to come out through such a process where people are not being threatened with prison, than in the legal system relying on searching for evidence and absolute proof which may be almost impossible to find, and which people will conceal if they are frightened of prison.

I believe that a much greater recognition of the strong points of Melanesian laws, customs and traditions, rather than an arrogant assumption that the 'western' concept of law and justice is the only valid one, would enable RAMSI to do their job much more effectively. This means training RAMSI personnel, especially those who are not from a Polynesian or Melanesian background, in these concepts before they arrive here.

Julian Treadaway,
Secondary Curriculum Advisor, Ministry of Education
formerly
Director, USP Centre; Head of School of Humanities and Science, SICHE. etc.

Solstar@solomon.com.sb

RAMSI and Melanesian Culture

Although there has quite rightly been widespread support for the success of RAMSI in bringing peace and justice to the country, I have also begun to hear some criticisms of the way this justice is carried out. I would like to make some personal observations on the role and methods of RAMSI in relation to Melanesian culture, in the hope that they may help both sides to understand each other better. I believe we are facing a genuine problem in that RAMSI, at least in its dominant Australian component, brings together two very different cultures and it is beginning to show both the strengths and weaknesses of each of these cultures.

Most people are very happy when RAMSI collects arms or arrests known or suspected criminals, but at the same time I begin to hear words like 'arrogance' and 'aggressive' in connection with the way members of RAMSI work. A RAMSI vehicle has an accident with a local bus and inevitably a crowd gathers. RAMSI officers aggressively clear the crowd away, saying it is nothing to do with them, and I hear Solomon Islanders complain of their 'arrogance'. The local people in the village of a wanted man complain that they will not cooperate with RAMSI because of the aggressive way in which they approached the wanted man's parents. People rejoice at the arrest of ex-militants, but are still not willing to give evidence themselves which might lead to the arrest of others. RAMSI uses force to break into the compound of a wanted man, saying that this is the normal way of policing, but I hear people saying, "Not in the Solomons, it isn't."

I believe these kinds of incidents show a real conflict of cultures. Last year Radio Australia interviewed a woman whose father was a 'white' Australian and whose mother was a Melanesian from PNG. She was asked what she learnt from her father and her mother. She said she learnt 'justice' from her Australian father and 'compassion and forgiveness' from her Melanesian mother. I think this sums up an important difference between the cultures, which perhaps partly explains both the need for us to call in Australian assistance and our worry about some of their methods.

Australians are taught to put justice first, even above compassion and forgiveness, and even above personal relationships. If someone does something wrong they should be duly punished, even if they are your close relative or friend. The ideal is never to show favoritism in the administration of justice. Melanesians tend to look at the circumstances and their relationship to the person concerned before they decide whether to bring someone to justice. This is more than just the reluctance to report or punish your relatives or wantoks, although that is important. There is also a general reluctance to break personal relationships with anyone through confrontation. This leads to a tendency to look

for extenuating circumstances, and ways to forgive and forget, rather than punish.

It was interesting to hear a report of a case in which two RAMSI officers were involved – one Australian and one an islander. The Australian was distinctly aggressive and wanted to make an arrest straight away. The islander hesitated and wanted to investigate further and find out more of the background before making any arrest.

As the woman interviewed on Radio Australia said, both sets of values are important. We do need to bring people to justice and to punish wrong doers. It is perhaps a weakness of Pacific island societies, probably because they are so small, that personal relationships become so important in nearly every situation that it is difficult to confront people. It is difficult to have impersonal justice when nearly everyone knows everyone else on a personal level. The best way to keep peace in such small societies as we have is to avoid confrontation. People, therefore, get away with all kinds of ill discipline, or even criminal activity. This may be partly why RAMSI had to be brought in, and why so many people are happy to see what they are doing. They are doing the work of bringing people to justice, and bringing justice to the society, which many Solomon Islanders are reluctant to do.

The emphasis on personal relationships, compassion and forgiveness^{HOWEVER} are enormous strengths in Solomon Islands society and Australian law enforcers and others might learn a lot from this. Perhaps there is too much confrontation and aggression in Australian society. On the other hand, here in Solomon Islands we no longer live in small, closely knit village communities. If we want to run modern institutions, from schools to government, we need to put more emphasis on discipline, justice and punishment than we traditionally did. Perhaps we need to be more willing to confront people with their weaknesses or crimes. In our schools, teachers fail to attend lessons, teachers arrive at school weeks late at the beginning of terms or walk off with school tools and equipment at the end of term and nothing is done – there is no punishment, no justice and it is the students who suffer. This lack of discipline and unwillingness to enforce discipline or challenge corruption is duplicated throughout society. Too often people who should be disciplined or sacked are promoted, or sent overseas for further training. Hence the need to bring in RAMSI, to enforce the discipline we are unwilling to enforce ourselves. It is only when we have a RAMSI to hide behind that we confront those who use guns to intimidate the treasury, or start to question the misuse of RCDF funds.

But what will happen when there is no longer a RAMSI to back us up? Will they stay long enough to teach us the importance of a degree of self-discipline and justice? If not, will we need another RAMSI a few years after the present one finishes? Or do we need a permanent RAMSI to help us keep control?

I have no answer to those questions but I think it is important to ask them, and to realise that RAMSI is addressing not just a temporary breakdown of law and order but a structural weakness in our society. How can we increase discipline, while retaining the compassion, forgiveness and emphasis on good personal relationships which is traditional? How did the woman who was interviewed on Radio Australia reconcile the sense of justice of her Australian father with the compassion and forgiveness of her Melanesian mother? We certainly need both. The question is how can we achieve the right balance? Is the 'western' model of impartial justice through the courts and prison the best route to achieve the justice we want, or does it leave out compassion and forgiveness? Even if we put all the ex-militants and corrupt officials and politicians in prison for a few years will that solve our problems? Would a Truth and Reconciliation process, which we have been promised but have not yet seen, be closer to the Melanesian ideas of justice? This would emphasise admitting one's crimes, confronting the victims, and a process of reconciliation, perhaps including genuine compensation by the perpetrators to the victims. It would not preclude prison for the more severe crimes. It would involve whole communities, not just individuals, recognising that traditionally everyone is seen as part of a community not just an individual. Would such a system be closer to the Melanesian concept of justice based on compassion and forgiveness? Would such a process achieve the balance we need, better than relying on courts and prison alone? Perhaps other readers would like to suggest the answer.

Julian Treadaway.

St Stephens Community College, Pamua.

PRIVATE VIEW

by a concerned observer

HOW CULTURALLY INSENSITIVE CAN YOU GET?

RAMSI came to Solomon Islands with excellent motives: to help restore law and order and thereby increase economic prosperity. In many ways they have succeeded, perhaps faster than many would have expected. However from the very beginning there were signs that the way some of the Australian members of RAMSI carried out their functions would antagonise many Solomon Islanders. Some of the leaders of RAMSI may have had an understanding of Solomon Islands society, but unfortunately they did not pass this on to the ordinary policemen or soldiers, who acted as they would in the very different society back in Australia.

Many of their actions were seen by Solomon Islanders as aggressive and arrogant. Methods of arresting people or carrying out other police duties which may be acceptable in Australia are not acceptable here. In Solomon Islands three values are fundamental; respect for other people, avoidance of bringing 'shame' on others and the desire to maintain smooth inter-personal relations. This is necessary in a small society where nearly everyone knows or is related to everyone else. Even an arrest by a Solomon Islands policeman will usually reflect these values by being non-aggressive and even friendly and apologetic. Confrontation tends to be avoided at all costs. In contrast arrests by many Australians are aggressive and seem to presume the accused person is guilty even before this is proved.

This contrast in attitudes seems to have been brought to a head by the latest incident at the Prime Ministers office. If the eye witness account of Paul Belande is true, the Australian RAMSI came in with this aggressive and even violent attitude to do the simple job of finding and taking away a fax machine. The Solomon Islands way would have been to approach the Acting Prime Minister or another member of the Prime Ministers office and ask for the machine. It is quite likely that they would have been allowed to take it. If not they could have asked their superiors to request it. Instead of that, they apparently came in with a search warrant, which is immediately an applied accusation that someone in the office is guilty of something –again following the idea of guilty until proved innocent rather than the other way round. It seems they came in with an attitude of accusation rather than just a simple request.

Up until now I have been worried by the Prime Ministers threat to review the Australian presence in RAMSI. In spite of their lack of cultural sensitivity I believe their presence is still essential to the security of the country. I have been confident that, if it came to a Parliamentary vote, the majority of Members would still support their presence. After this incident, however, I believe many Members will change their mind and I am beginning to wonder whether I still fully support Australian RAMSI myself. It is not just the incident itself but the fact that it shows so clearly how totally culturally insensitive they can be. Anyone with an understanding of Melanesian culture and attitudes could have told them that it is not acceptable to enter the Prime Ministers office like this. To a Melanesian the Prime Minister, for all the faults he may have, remains the symbol of the country's sovereignty. Why did none of the RAMSI advisors tell them this? Even in Australia I wonder how Australians would react to a group of people from another country entering the Prime Ministers office like this, even if they had official authorisation to do so.

Any group of people coming to enforce law and order in another country needs to have cultural sensitivity training in the differences between the two cultures and customs. I do not believe this has ever been given. Policemen and soldiers have been sent here with the assumption that they can act the same as they do in Australia. Unfortunately this stems partly from the arrogance of many Australians, including the present Foreign Minister, that their way is right and everyone else's way is wrong. Underlying this is often a racial arrogance reflected in the way many treat the black people in their own country. Some of the soldiers here

have been heard to equate Solomon Islanders with 'Abos', the only black people they are used to and for whom they often have contempt.

Part of this training should be learning the language - Pijin. How can people possibly carry out Community Policing when they cannot communicate to people in their own language? I am surprised that the RAMSI coordinator has not done something about this when he speaks such excellent Pijin himself, and when Pijin is such an easy language for English speaking people to learn.

The difference in cultural attitudes was summed up for me in a BBC interview with Joyce, a woman whose Father was a 'white' Australian and whose Mother was a Melanesian. When asked what she learnt from here Father and Mother she said she learnt 'justice' from her Father and 'compassion and forgiveness' from her Mother. Australian RAMSIs have come here with the idea of impartial justice. Whoever has committed an offence, or is even suspected, whether they are your friend, relative, neighbour or wantok should face justice. This is an admirable and necessary concept in some ways. But it is sometimes in conflict with the Melanesian emphasis on compassion and justice. One may lead to the aggressive attitude noticed in RAMSI. The other may lead to excessive lenience on the part of Solomon Islanders. But at least members of RAMSI should be made aware of this difference of approach.

It is interesting to watch two members of RAMSI working together in a village - one Australian and one from the Pacific islands. The Australian wants to make an immediate arrest on the available evidence. The islander wants to look into the matter further and find out the circumstances and personal background of the people concerned. The Australian attitude stems from a large society in which it is easy for justice to be impersonal because the people concerned do not usually know each other on a personal level. The Melanesian attitude stems from a small society where almost everyone is either related to you, married into your family, at school with you or at least related to someone else you know. Justice cannot be impersonal when almost everyone has a personal relationship with everyone else.

The only way to keep the peace in such a small society is to avoid public confrontation as you will have to live with each other at the end of the day. The most important thing is not absolute justice but maintaining good inter-personal relationships within the society - hence the emphasis on compassion and forgiveness which Joyce learnt from her Mother. This is also perhaps the origin of the idea of compensation rather than punishment which lies at the heart of the Melanesian justice system. It means you can still live with the person who committed the crime.

This is also why the Prime Minister's announcement of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission is welcome - as long as it is not just a way for him to allow certain of his friends out of prison. This may be a way of combining the Melanesian compassion and forgiveness with the Australian concept of justice. Both are needed. The problem with compassion, forgiveness and lack of confrontation is that no-one gets blamed for anything and there is no discipline. Teachers don't teach, public servants don't turn up for work, people use public money for themselves or even take it by force and no-one does anything. Frequently people who should be disciplined or sacked are promoted or sent overseas for further training, just to get rid of them in their present positions. It is partly this lack of discipline which has led to the need to call in RAMSI with their sense of impartial justice.

We do still need RAMSI, therefore, but a RAMSI which shows sensitivity to cultural differences rather than thinking they can act exactly as they would in Australia. We need to review RAMSI and discuss their problems instead of being told by Mr Downer that RAMSI is indivisible and non-negotiable and we must take it all as it is or leave it. We need a RAMSI which is taught to be culturally sensitive, to act in ways which are acceptable to Solomon Islanders and to speak our language. We do not need Australian teenagers walking around in full battle dress with machine guns over their shoulders telling our youths that they must live in a

gun free society. RAMSI should be taught that they are coming to a basically peaceful society not into a war zone, which one of the Fijian members told me they had been led to expect.

We need a RAMSI which combines the impartial justice which Joyce learnt from her Father with the compassion and forgiveness she learnt from her Mother. I believe this is still possible but it needs Australian RAMSI to listen to Solomon Islanders and RAMSI members from other countries, and to be willing to change their approaches, rather than listen to their Foreign Minister telling them that the Australian way is the only one. A very popular change would be for New Zealanders, who have a reputation for much greater cultural sensitivity, to take the leading roles from Australia.

What we need now is cool and sensible negotiations between both sides, not the kind of emotional rhetoric being exchanged at present between Mr Downer and Mr Sogavare. It was good to see Mr Howard taking a much more reasoned view of the situation than his Foreign Minister, and there are members of the Solomon Islands government who could take an equally reasoned view. If both sides refrain from any more provocative actions all is not lost.

PRIVATE VIEW

RAMSI - PLEASE SAVE OUR COMMUNITIES

I have recently returned from Tikopia, thanks to the help of the Police Commissioner, 3 weeks late to start teaching. 30 students and teachers, who were still there and in Anuta when I left, eventually returned one month late for school, and others late for work. No ship called there from November to mid-February, no ships except relief ships called last year and the previous year there was no ship for 9 months. All this is a direct result of the disastrous government policy of the privatisation of shipping, as ships now go only where they can make the maximum profit. I believe this amounts to discrimination against students and employed people on these islands, but this is only an extreme case of a problem which affects all our more isolated communities, including all the outer islands of Temotu, Rennel, Bellona, Ontong Java and Sikaiana but also the weather coasts of Makira and Guadalcanal.

If our RAMSI advisors are serious about addressing the underlying causes of ethnic tension they should consider the case of shipping which I believe may contribute to future tensions. If an area has no regular shipping service people, especially the young, will begin to migrate to other areas, especially where their wantoks have already settled. There will be a build up of settlers in places like Nukufero, Nukukaisi, Red Beach, the Russell Islands, East Makira and elsewhere. This may create resentment from the local population and exactly the kind of land problems which led to the ethnic tension: neglect of social services and economic development in the outlying areas causing a build-up of migration to the more 'developed' areas. This causes resentment in both the neglected areas, as it did on the weather coast of Guadalcanal and in parts of Malaita, and in the areas of in-migration, as it did on the Guadalcanal plains.

If there are no regular ships, students and employed people cannot go home for holidays and the people who remain behind will regularly run out of the 'essentials' of modern village life: kerosene, salt, sugar, tobacco etc., as well as supplies for health services and schools. Any form of development to provide a cash income by selling produce will be impossible.

Slowly, therefore, these communities will start to die, or be left with only old people. In the past at Christmas Tikopia was full of young people and others on holiday and was an exciting and lively place. This year very few risked being caught there without return shipping, and those who did complained of boredom and were then late for return. Many will not go back again. What educated young people will return to an island faced with constant shortages and no possibility of cash income?

The problem of West Makira and the Guadalcanal weather coast is similar. Few ships go there, as they say it is not profitable. That is why some people are so desperate they are willing to accept the risks associated with toxic waste, or they turn to militancy in order to gain the services and income they feel they need.

In privatising shipping we are following a worldwide trend encouraged by many of our aid donors and the World Bank and IMF. These people preach that economics is the only criterion for judging anything. Nothing is good unless it makes a profit and, since private companies are often better at making profits than government bodies, everything should be run by private companies for profit. No consideration is made of the social affects of these policies on the communities concerned. Our government, therefore, sold all the government ships to private companies and they only run ships to places where they will make a profit.

So now the MV Temotu spends most of its time in the Western Province while the people of Temotu suffer. The Kaona runs weekly between Kira Kira and Honiara but hardly ever goes to West Makira.

If we are to avoid further tension I believe we must reverse this trend and change our thinking, even if it means rejecting the policies of some of our outside advisors. Outside advice and policies must be adjusted to suit our particular circumstances, not just swallowed without question. Since RAMSI is here to deal with social as well as economic problems, perhaps they can realise that in this country shipping must be seen as an essential service to be provided by the government, even if it does not make a profit, just like roads, bridges, wharves, health services and education.

Shipping is the lifeblood of our islands and without regular shipping no other forms of social or economic development can take place. If, as RAMSI has said, their brief includes infrastructure such as roads it should also include subsidised shipping services to the outer islands. Shipping services are the roads of these areas, just as important and just as impossible to leave to private enterprise as the roads of Honiara or Malaita.

Think back to the days of the National Shipping service. It may have had problems and may not have made money but every island and area knew that a ship would call at least once a month. Every night we could listen to the shipping news and find out when the next ship would be coming to our area. People could plan to sell their produce, including marine products, and students and employed people could always go home for holidays. The outer islands and weather coasts were becoming vibrant places with real prospects of using their resources to contribute to development. Privatisation has brought a decline in these areas and a concentration of development which could prove disastrous in a few years.

We need a return to a government shipping line whose mandate would be to service the people of the islands not just to make a profit. If, however, government ships were also allowed to service the more profitable routes, rather than leaving these to the business people to make their profits, they might make profits as well. Alternatively we need a fleet of small government ships, like those built in Malaita, which link places like the outer islands of Temotu and the weather coasts to the main shipping routes. If we still insist on privatisation the government must subsidise the private companies in an accountable and transparent way to serve the less profitable routes.

Without such a change of policy I believe that Tikopia along with other areas will start to lose population and die, and this will not only cause economic and social problems but lead to a loss of some of our most valuable cultural heritage. RAMSI, please help.

Julian Treadaway,
St Stephens Community College,
Pamua.

Worry-over scale of intervention

BY JULIAN TREADAWAY
PAMULA SECONDARY
SCHOOLMAKIRA

WHILE I welcome the proposed foreign intervention in terms of increased security and the disarming of those still holding illegal weapons, I am worried about the scale of the proposed intervention and the idea that we are a 'failed state' that need rescuing from itself.

I believe this may increase the culture of dependence which 'already one of the problems of Solomon Islands.

Too many Solomon Islanders lack self confidence and still believe in their hearts that the culture, the ideas and the people overseas are superior to our own ideas, culture and people.

As soon as there is a problem we bring in outside 'experts' and believe what the experts say rather than what our own people say.

We should have confidence in our own 'experts', who often know far more about the situation and are therefore wiser than the overseas experts.

I account for the same problem in teaching every day. My students are very willing to be taught but much less willing to learn for themselves.

They are very happy to listen for hours to the teacher - listening to the 'expert' giving out knowledge from outside.

But if I ask them to do something for themselves - to discuss something, express their own ideas or

bring their own knowledge and experience to the lesson - the majority keep quiet and refuse to participate.

They do not have the confidence that their own ideas, opinions and experiences may be as good as those of the teacher or the text book.

In many schools even in staff meetings one or two expatriates still dominate discussions while the Solomon Islanders keep quiet.

This lack of self confidence will only be strengthened by the nonsense that we are a 'failed state'.

I have lived in part of Africa which could have been called a failed state and I can assure you that Solomon Islands is nothing like one.

"We have problems of corruption, mis management and occasional violence but to bracket us with Liberia, Sierra Leone, or even Uganda when I was there, is ridiculous.

What is remarkable here is the resilience with which people have coped with the problems during our period of tension and the extent that life has continued as normal.

The remarkable thing is not the amount of violence but the restraint and lack of violence.

Where else have 20,000 people been chased away from their homes with so little bloodshed?

In most places this would have resulted in massacres, not the peaceful movement of people back to their place of origin which we experienced.

Even the later conflicts were on a very small scale compared to the almost

monthly violence in PNG, which has much more corruption and mis-management and violence than we have but is not called a failed state.

There seems to be a strong element of paternalism and racism in this label.

Big brother Australia is telling the Solomon Islands 'children' that they are unable to look after themselves and must ask for help. As if there is no corruption and mis-management in Australia itself.

The scale of this intervention will only increase this culture of dependence.

We do not need to bring in a large number of outsiders to solve our problems. We need to recognise that our problems are largely of our own making and must also be solved by ourselves.

The problems are a result of the way Solomon Islanders themselves have acted since independence and at the same time there are a large number of Solomon Islanders perfectly capable of solving these problems if given the chance.

The problem is not lack of skilled, honest and non-corrupt Solomon Islanders but the fact that we have

allowed many of the leadership positions to be filled by less skilled, less honest and more corrupt people.

What is needed is a change in the thinking and attitude both of the leaders themselves and in the way people think about their leaders.

I do not believe this change will be achieved by the kind of intervention which treats us as a failed state.

The danger is that, once the intervention is over, the same people with the same attitudes will take

over again and in a few years time we will be asking for another intervention!

What is needed is not so much outside intervention but an internal revolution within Solomon Islands society.

This might be assisted by some small scale outside help but not by intervention that takes over most of the arms of government and reinforces the idea that Solomon Islanders cannot govern themselves.

This culture of dependence is already shown in our reliance on outside aid.

One example of this can be seen from where I

write. The EU last year finished 'rebuilding' the road from Kira Kira along this coast.

Since then almost no maintenance has been done on it and it is already disintegrating and looks like collapsing altogether in a few years time.

When that happens we will probably ask for another aid project to rebuild it again.

The alternative would be for us to take responsibility for the road by each village being responsible for maintaining the stretch which passes through it so that it last for ever.

In the same way if we ask for intervention, and fail to change our ways of thinking and fail to maintain the changes which may come about through the intervention - Solomon Islands society will disintegrate again and we will need another foreign intervention in a few years time.

We need to put in place 'maintenance' procedures so that if corruption is decreased it does not increase again.

This means strengthening bodies such as the Leadership Code Commission, the Ombudsman and Transparency International which can deal with possible corruption.

Even more important is to address the issues which caused the tension in the first place.

I am alarmed that the intervention seems to make no mention of tackling issues such as the land problems of Guadalcanal, migration and the unequal distribution of resources and money between different areas and between the rich and the poor, the lack

of benefit to local people from foreign investment and many other issues.

Unless these problems are tackled any outside intervention will be worthless.

I have already put forward the idea of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission which would look into the causes of the tension and force us to confront our own problems and past mis-deeds and recognise that Solomon Islanders themselves have created the situation which the country finds itself in.

Such self searching and hopefully reconciliation is much more useful than asking others to try to solve our problems.

There is an element of the old 'cargo cult' mentality in this idea of intervention - not acting, or produce things for ourselves and solve our own problems but sitting back and waiting for something to come from outside.

It is this cargo cult mentality which needs to be overcome by realizing that in the long run it is only our own hard work and initiative which will change us from this culture of dependence to a successfully independent nation.

I hope, therefore, that we will realise the need to work hard with the intervention, which is now coming whether we like it or not.

If we do this it might help to change society in the way that is needed.

If we just sit back and let others do things for us we will learn nothing and eventually find ourselves back where we started.

"What is remarkable here is the resilience with which people have coped with the problems during our period of tension and the extent that life has continued as normal"