

**SUBMISSION OF HON. PATRICK VASUNI, PREMIER OF CENTRAL ISLANDS PROVINCE, TO THE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE IN THEIR INQUIRY INTO AND REVIEW OF THE FACILITATION OF INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE NOTICE 2003.**

Chairman and Members of the Foreign Relations Committee, may I at the outset thank you for inviting me to appear before you in this hearing. This hearing is an opportunity for my government to present the general views of my government and the 25,000 or so people of the Central Islands Province on the work and effectiveness of RAMSI and specific issues of concern for my Province.

It is common knowledge that RAMSI came into our shores at the request of our government made on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2003 to the assisting countries such as the governments of Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu to "HELPEM FREN". This request was made at the time when our Country was going through the darkest hours in the history of our country. There was law and order problems and the government machinery was at stand still. Delivery of services to our people was not functioning.

To facilitate RAMSI entering our shores, the National Government passed "The Facilitation of International Assistance Act 2003". After the passage, certain notices were made by His Excellency, the Governor General, namely, Legal Notice No. 61 – THE FACILITATION OF INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE NOTICE 2003; Legal Notice No. 67 – THE FACILITATION OF INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE (WEAPONS SURRENDER) NOTICE 2003; Legal Notice No. 75 – THE FACILITATION OF INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE (WEAPONS SURRENDER) NOTICE 2003

According to Section 2 of the Act "the public purpose' for which RAMSI came to our shores include:-

- Ensuring security and safety of persons and property,
- Maintaining supplies and services essential to the life of the community,
- Preventing and suppressing violence, intimidation and crime,
- Maintaining law and order,
- Supporting administration of justice,
- Supporting and developing Solomon Islands institutions, and
- Responding to natural catastrophic events.

Perhaps the main question should be " **Has RAMSI done what it is here to do?**"

Generally speaking, my government and the people of Central Islands Province wish to take this opportunity to commend the work of RAMSI since it step on our shores. RAMSI has done a great job in restoring law and order, assisted in capacity building, set in motion a road map to economic recovery, etc. Solomon Islands and its people should be grateful for what RAMSI has done for us and should thank the Almighty God for allowing a generous heart to be instilled in the minds of the assisting countries to help us.

For the purposes of this hearing I will focus only on the following:-

**(1) RAMSI SUPPORT TO SOLOMON ISLAND POLICE FORCE IN THE CENTRAL ISLANDS PROVINCE** include the following:-

- Capacity Development – on the job training for the SIPF.
- Presence of RAMSI police build community confidence.
- Logistic support available – for example, fuel to touring and communication facility such as facsimile.
- Community Awareness – education talk on the work of RAMSI
- Operational planning
- Patrol
- Quick response to complaints

**Areas of concern**

- Why the withdrawal of RAMSI police from Yandina?
- It appears that RAMSI assistance is been reduced. Initially assistance is readily available.

**(2) RAMSI EXIT?**

This is a much talked about topic. The truth is that RAMSI will leave the shores of Solomon Islands only when the Solomon Islands Government decide RAMSI to leave our shores. This decision must be made on reasoned and sound judgement. There must be proper research into relevant matters and issues. A review of the work of RAMSI must be done annually and this review must take the views of the Provincial Governments and the people at large. This may also include perhaps a National Referendum to hear the views of the people whether RAMSI should leave the country or not.

### **(3) WEAPONS SURRENDER AND ITS IMPACT**

THE FACILITATION OF INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE (WEAPONS SURRENDER) NOTICE 2003 and Section 21 of the FACILITATION OF INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE ACT 2003 had caused 3000 or so licensed gun holders in the country to surrender their guns. Licensed gun holders have in the past used their guns to kill pigs, birds and crocodiles. In Ngella and Russells, the population of crocodiles have grown and they are now a threat to the people. More than 10 people had been killed by crocodiles. In Ngella due to logging, pigs have gone hungry and so are left to eat people's produce in their gardens. People do not have guns to kill or threaten the pigs to leave their gardens. The impact is that our own people will go hungry.

### **(4) PROPER LEGAL CONSTRUCTION IS NECESSARY ON THE FACILITATION OF INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE (WEAPONS SURRENDER) NOTICE 2003 – LEGAL NOTICE NO. 75**

My layman's reading of this Notice especially paragraph 2 and 3 meant that the following persons are allowed to possess weapons in the weapons surrender area:-

1. Members of RAMSI
2. Solomon Islands Police authorized by the Commissioner of Police to possess weapons in the course of their duties
3. those with current and valid firearms licence issued under Section 6 of the Firearms and Ammunition Act

If the above construction is correct, then it is considered that the surrendering of licensed guns maybe wrong and that those who have surrendered their licensed guns need to be compensated. It is noteworthy that in the recent Parliament Meeting, Parliament had passed the Supplementary Appropriation Bill, which included a budget of SBD\$3 million to pay compensation to licensed gun holders who surrendered their guns.

### **(5) SUPPORTING ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE**

RAMSI had done an excellent job in the law and justice sector. Improvements had been seen markedly in Honiara especially in the High Court and the Magistrate Court. Court hearings are now happening in the Provinces. However, sad to say, Central Islands Province has no proper court building. Court circuits are heard in the Provincial Building and the Tulagi Police Hall. Our humble request is for RAMSI assistance in building a court house and office at Tulagi and a court house at Yandina and further a residence for a Resident Magistrate at Tulagi.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In concluding I make the following recommendations:-

1. Maintain the 2003 Notice as it is and that RAMSI needs to be reviewed annually. The review may include a “ National Referendum” to hear the views of the people as to whether RAMSI should or should not stay.
2. Administration of Justice support must reach out to the Provinces especially in infrastructure, ie, Court houses and residence
3. Need to control the population of crocodiles with the use of guns to minimize the threat to people.

## **SUBMISSION BY:-**

HON. PATRICK VASUNI  
PREMIER  
TULAGI  
CENTRAL ISLANDS PROVINCE

Ph: (677) 32120