

SUBMISSION TO THE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE'S ENQUIRY INTO THE INTERNATIONAL FACILITATION NOTICE

HON. JACKSON KILOE- CHOISEUL
(September 10, 2008)

Chairman, and all honourable members of your esteemed committee, I am indeed honoured and privileged to be given this opportunity to make my submission to you on this important matter. May I point out that the views expressed in this submission are based on my personal observations and may not necessarily reflect the views of the provincial assembly. I do hope that our assembly members and our rural people are given an opportunity to express their views on this review later.

At the outset, may I thank RAMSI for their assistance in restoring order in our nation. Those of us who witnessed the cease fire negotiations leading up to the eventual signing of the TPA (placing ourselves under certain level of risks at times) could say that RAMSI was a blessing.

May I also acknowledge the prayers of all our people and the wisdom of our political leadership then who provided the legislative arrangements to allow RAMSI into our country to assist us.

MANDATE, FUNCTIONS AND ROLES OF RAMSI

Prior to the arrival of RAMSI some 5 years ago, things were just chaotic in this country. One of the greatest freedoms that we have enjoyed and taken for granted over the years- "the freedom from fear" was taken away from us. All our people, especially our women and children, even from provinces far from Honiara experienced this fear.

Ramsi came into this country under those circumstances. Their roles were defined and dictated by the situation then. Their immediate task was to restore some form of order.

Judged against that initial role, RAMSI was a resounding success. They have assisted us in restoring law and order. May I point out though that "Restoring" law and order is one thing, "maintaining" that order is quite another. Ramsi have succeeded in restoring Law and order, Maintaining law and order is the responsibility of the Solomon Islands government and every Solomon islands citizen. But we can appreciate that this is not going to be easy given our economic situation. We need encouragement and assistance. I feel that Ramsi has a role here. Perhaps a starting point would be to encourage Ramsi to utilize locally available goods and services.

Their role could also be expanded to ensure Ramsi moves into assisting us with some infrastructural developments to boost economic activities in the rural areas. Engaging our people in economic activities does not only act as a deterrent to unlawful behaviours but also allows us to improve our economic situation to generate much needed resources required to sustain Law and order, (and provide basic services) which is not cheap.

Failing this, the resources and good efforts expended into restoring law and order by RAMSI may be in vain, because we could not afford to sustain it.

OPERATIONS OF RAMSI

Two Ramsi PPF officers are posted to Taro, our provincial centre at any given time. Initially there appears to be some confusion amongst the RSIP officers as to who should head the police. The PPC or the RAMSI PPF officer? Even the public appear to have this confusion.

At the first arrival of RAMSI 5 years ago, there appears to be a lot of respect given to RAMSI officers, this came about because the officers then were very active in arresting people, even drunkards misbehaving in public, and the general fear of the perceived powers RAMSI were said to possess.

Sadly, over the years this respect and fear of Ramsi has somehow diminished, and the respect given to policing in general has dropped.

This may be so because of many reasons:

1. Offenders, especially drunkards, and Kwaso producers appear to be given light punishments, if at all.
2. RAMSI officers are based in the Provincial Centre and are rarely seen in the villages. This goes for RSIP officers as well.
3. People's expectation of what RAMSI would do did not appear to be so in action.

There are also evident of some communication barriers as very few RAMSI PPF officers posted to the province attempt to learn and speak pidgin fluently.

Having highlighted those challenges, the success stories are overwhelming.

1. Law and order was generally restored, especially the criminal elements taking advantage of the breakdown of law and order around the year 2000 up to 2003 are no longer there.
2. Criminal elements involving individuals from neighbouring Bougainville have virtually disappeared. The border has become more peaceful.

3. Certain PPF officers were very supportive in community activities, eg in market clean up campaigns, fundraising drives and church activities. This of course depends on Individual PPF officers.

EXPECTATION OF RAMSI

People's expectations of RAMSI are not necessarily limited to the mandate given to RAMSI under the Facilitation notice. We may have expected much more than what RAMSI is legally allowed to do. This has resulted in disappointments (when RAMSI appears to be doing little) which contribute to the general drop in respect for RAMSI.

We seem to have this misconception that RAMSI would assist the provinces in its infrastructural developments, rather than being confined to policing roles alone.

It would be of great assistance to our province if RAMSI's role could be broadened to assist in provincial capacity building.

DURATION OF RAMSI'S STAY.

I do not think a time frame could possibly be set for RAMSI's withdrawal from Solomon Islands. An exit strategy must be based on and linked to the achievement of set goals (rather than time) which include:

1. All reconciliation ceremonies amongst all parties are done
2. The confidence of the people on RSIP to maintain Law and order is restored
3. The root causes of the ethnic tension are identified, and dealt with.
4. All crisis victims are acknowledged and given appropriate support.

These can only be achieved if RAMSI works in partnership with the government and relevant stake holders.

Perhaps we should also seriously consider engaging RAMSI to assist us on the peace process.

RELATIONSHIP WITH RSIP

Initially, there appeared to be some confusion amongst local police officers as to who should be the head of police in the province. The PPC or the RAMSI PPF officer?

This has since improved, when RAMSI officers now appear to concentrate more on their advisory roles. This of course varies depending on individual PPF officers as well.

It is apparent that RSIP officers are somewhat inactive or reluctant in carrying out duties- especially the arrest of misbehaving drunks when RAMSI PPF officers are not around. This may breed our dependency on RAMSI, and poses a very big question on the Local officers' ability or willingness to maintain law and order once RAMSI pulls out of the province. It is unclear whether this is a RAMSI and RSIP relationship issue or the bad effect of the wantok system. Or perhaps certain RSIP police officers have been in our province for far too long and may need to be posted elsewhere.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Chairman and all honourable members of your committee, thank you so much for giving me time to present my submission. In closing, may I make some observations on the review in general.

It appears Sir, that we are focussing our attention on what RAMSI has done, what it can do and what it should do, or should not do.

I firmly believe Sir that we should be focussing more on what we, as a government and as a nation should do to ensure this partnership works. Let us not forget that RAMSI came into this country because of our own shortcomings. Let us not forget the untold sufferings endured by our people, especially by our women and children as a result of the dark events of 1998 to 2003. Nothing hurts more than seeing an innocent child cry.

In those dark years let us acknowledge the strength of the rural subsistence economy that held this country together.

It is my humble appeal sir that,

Whatever we do in this review; whatever partnership framework we may decide on, it must be for the ultimate aim of empowering our people politically, economically, socially and academically to take control of our destiny to avoid a repeat of those sad events.

I believe Sir, that RAMSI have done their part. They have assisted us in wiping the fears and tears of our children. It is now your duty and my responsibility to bring the smiles back to the faces of our children, so that we can truly call this nation "the happy isles" once more. I believe we can all face up to the challenge.