

Transparency Solomon Islands

Statement in support of TSI's submission to RAMSI review

1. Honourable members of the Foreign Relations Committee, thank you for inviting Transparency Solomon Islands to make a submission to the Review of RAMSI. We are honoured to be given this opportunity to present our views to you. My name is Jean Tafoa, I am the executive officer of Transparency Solomon Islands and with me today is Bob Pollard, Chair of the Board and Primo Afeau, Member of the Board.
2. Transparency Solomon Islands (TSI) is a local NGO, registered as a charitable trust in 2002. It is affiliated to Transparency International, the international anti corruption NGO which has chapters in over 90 countries around the world. As a local NGO we have individual, organisational and corporate members.
3. The general objective of TSI is to encourage and facilitate activities to reduce corruption and promote good-governance. TSI does not side with any political party but is an impartial advocate of good governance. TSI defines corruption as "the misuse of entrusted power for personal gain".
4. Firstly, TSI would like to congratulate the Solomon Islands Government on facilitating this review of RAMSI. Particularly in the transparent manner in which the review is being conducted. TSI recognises that RAMSI is a regional mission and as such a review must engage all stakeholders, both within Solomon Islands but also the regional parties to the mission.
5. The assistance that RAMSI is providing to Solomon Islands is unique in the region and presents Solomon Islands with a wonderful opportunity to rebuild and strengthen the nation. The support that RAMSI is able to provide is a window of opportunity that must be utilised fully. This generation will be condemned by future generations if we do not make the best of this opportunity. TSI commends the leadership of former Prime Minister Sir Allan Kemakeza, along with the former Governor General, Sir Father John Ini Lapli and Right Honourable Sir Peter Kenilorea in taking the initiative in inviting RAMSI to Solomon Islands.
6. Our contention is that the single most important factor that will determine the success, or otherwise of RAMSI, is Solomon Island leadership – as guiding custodians, working in partnership with RAMSI. It is the partnership between Solomon Islands governing bodies and RAMSI that will create effective and sustainable change. An absence of effective Solomon Island leadership involvement will lead to RAMSI proving ineffective and unsustainable. It is essential that both Solomon Island leaders and the regional partners of RAMSI recognise and accept this reality.

7. Solomon Island leaders cannot escape from the responsibility of making sure that the RAMSI partnership is a success. The primary reason that Solomon Islands found itself in the position of needing RAMSI was because of the poor SI leadership. The RAMSI partnership cannot be expected to succeed when the SI leader partners are behaving corruptly and not in the best interests of the nation.
8. An example of this partnership working successfully is the collaboration between the late Augustine Floyd Fatai, Auditor General and the support that RAMSI provided to the office of the Auditor General.
9. Regional partners must support, facilitate and encourage SI leadership. This is a difficult dynamic because RAMSI comes to the partnership table with resources, expertise and experience that will almost always overwhelm the Solomon Islands counterparts. One of the greatest risks for RAMSI in this regard to ensure that advisors do not fall into the trap of “we know best”. It is easy for “experts” to gain a superficial knowledge of Solomon Islands and thus become insensitive to Solomon Islanders. It requires particular skill and sensitivity on the part of Regional partners not to overpower SI leaders. Local understanding, knowledge and ownership can only be provided by SI leadership.
10. Solomon Islands faces many challenges from the impact of the conflict and also the underlying issues such as population growth, limited capacity and poor state of institutions and social services. It is clear that Solomon Islands faces a daunting challenge to build a viable future as a nation. The key to successfully facing this challenge is to strengthen and improve the current poor leadership and governance of this country, an area currently requiring drastic attention.
11. A classic example of this poor leadership is reflected in the legislation and management of our forest industries. The Solomon Islands are well endowed with natural resources, but our management of these resources, particularly our forests, has not been acceptable. Our Members of Parliament know that our limited forest resources have been over harvested, under declared and undervalued to the extent that the country has lost hundreds of millions of dollars that should have been returned to resource owners and government. This blatant mismanagement and poor leadership has directly deprived the Solomon Islands of much needed revenue.
12. It is clear that the logging industry is fraught with corruption, facilitated in some instances by Ministers of the Crown, some of which have vested interests in logging businesses.
13. TSI is deeply concerned that the quality of leadership being demonstrated by our current parliamentary leaders is not satisfactory. The level of spending on Parliamentarians from public funds is inappropriate. This is evident in a number of aspects that essentially conform to the definition of corruption:

- a. The level of financial benefits that MPs have awarded themselves in the form of parliamentary entitlements is excessive,
 - b. The composition of the parliamentary entitlements committee, dominated by MPs constitutes a conflict of interest.
 - c. The level and growth of funds that are at the personal discretion of MPs, including the Rural Constituency Development Fund are disproportionate, appear to lack accountability and are certainly subject to significant corruption.
 - d. The level of per diems that Ministers are paid while travelling on Government business is unreasonably high and relatively extravagant.
 - e. The appointment of MPs to Statutory boards and Government owned companies with full salary packages and entitlements in addition to their parliamentary salaries is inappropriate and can be viewed as a form of corruption and such an appointment also contravenes section 15(1) of the Leadership Code Act if prior approval is not sought (by the leader) from the Commission.
14. Corruption has the potential to completely undermine Solomon Islands nation building efforts. Since the arrival of RAMSI there has been positive change however. In 2002 Members of Parliament publicly denied the existence of corruption in this nation, yet in 2008 the government is taking responsibility for corruption from within its own workings and the courts have recently sentenced two ministers on corruption related charges.
15. The public also now understands and is aware of the presence of corruption in our society and recognises the serious impact this has on our nation. This change in attitude and awareness has been due in part to the efforts of RAMSI, in partnership with key SI leaders and institutions including the Auditor General's office. It is imperative that much more is done to prosecute those involved in corruption or else the many implicated in the many reports and not prosecuted will create the impression that corrupt acts can go unpunished.
16. TSI calls on RAMSI to further assist with the implementation of corruption prevention measures, in particular the strengthening and capacity building of the Auditor General's Office, the Ombudsman's Office and the Leadership Code Commission. For example TSI is greatly concerned that the good work of the Auditor General's office, in producing the volumes of Audit reports has not achieved maximum impact as many of the recommendations have not been implemented or prosecuted. After the tragic passing away of the late Auditor General it is imperative that RAMSI continues to support and strengthen the work of the Office of the Auditor General.
17. In the same way that TSI calls on the SIG to be transparent and oppose corruption, it is important that RAMSI be transparent and vigilant against

corruption within its own ranks and issues like exorbitant entitlements needs to be resisted.

18. TSI believes that with sound and effective operations of the Office of the Ombudsman, Leadership Code Commission, Office of the Auditor General, Courts, Public Prosecutions Office, Solomon Islands Royal Police and the Public Service, we can improve the prospects of attaining prosperity, security and stability. With the eventual appointment of a new Ombudsman, Mr Joe Poraiwai, TSI commends the support that RAMSI is providing. In particular the need for the Ombudsman office to be properly housed. The work at the Leadership Code Commission needs to continue with RAMSI assistance to ensure accountability of our leaders.
19. The Solomon Islands Police Force, working with RAMSI Technical Advisers has greatly improved its capacity and professionalism. They have improved the police academy and created regionally recognised recruitment training programmes. Corruption has been dramatically reduced and discipline reinstated within the Police Force. It is important that the Solomon Islands Royal Police Force continue to work with RAMSI to rebuild its integrity and capacity.
20. TSI commends RAMSI's efforts in supporting the country's judicial system to operate effectively, openly and fairly. They have provided support to a lot of officers in their roles in the Public Prosecution and the Magistrate. RAMSI assistance helped to clear backlog of high court trials related to the tensions period.
21. However, the picture of justice is very different at the rural level. Apart from a few high profile cases where RAMSI has applied special effort, the police are still rarely seen on patrol or anywhere outside of their police stations. The local courts and magistrate courts are not functioning anywhere near as effectively as they once did. The enforcement of law & order and administration of justice in rural areas is still far behind ^{what} it used to be in the 1980s. There is still substantial ground to be covered in restoring law and justice outside of the urban centres.
22. TSI notes that the suspected murderer of a former Police Commissioner is still at large and eluding arrest. This demonstrates that, particularly outside of the urban centres, considerable progress still needs to be made in establishing the rule of law.
23. TSI recognises that with the assistance of RAMSI significant achievements have been made including:
 - a. Law and order has been restored, and the use of firearms is no longer prevalent in our society.
 - b. Seven classes of police officers and 70 new prison officers have been recruited and trained.

- c. Over one thousand public servants have received training in the re-established Institute of Public Administration and Management.
- d. The economy has been recovering strongly. New sectors are starting to open up or previous sectors are being re-established.
- e. Government revenue has almost tripled, from SI\$258 million in 2002, to SI\$688 million in 2006.

24. TSI strongly holds the view that RAMSI should remain in the Solomon Islands to continue the good work that they have begun. Corruption is rife in Solomon Islands and we need RAMSI to work alongside the government to help strengthen all the national integrity institutions. There will come a time when RAMSI will leave, but that time will be evident by our prosperity, peace and stability.

25. In conclusion, TSI is of the view that RAMSI has achieved significant success in its first 5 years. Much more needs to be done to reduce corruption and the onus is primarily on our Solomon Islands leaders to make the most of the opportunity that RAMSI provides.