



Statement by Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade, Honourable Milner Tozaka

Solomon Islands 2nd Cycle Review
24th session of the UPR Working Group, Geneva 25 January 2016

Check Against Delivery

Salutations

Bon jour

President

Excellencies

Members of the Diplomatic Missions

Ladies and Gentlemen

Introduction

1. On behalf of the Government and people of Solomon Islands, may I take this time to express gratitude and pleasure to once again participate in this Second Cycle of the UPR peer review.
2. My delegation and I have traveled far from the much warmer tropics in the South Pacific Islands over some 30 hours to be welcomed by a winter wonderland of snow here in Switzerland. In spite of the distance travelled, my delegation presence in Geneva shows our commitment as a State in this UPR process.

3. Mr President, in opening may I take this time to briefly introduce my delegation. I have with me senior official representatives from various Ministries such as:

1. **Mr Joseph Ma'ahanua**, Acting Permanent Secretary, Foreign Affairs and External Trade
2. **Ambassador Moses Kouni Mose**, Solomon Islands Ambassador to the Kingdom of Belgium and the European Union;
3. **Mr Barratt Salato**, Minister Counselor and Charge de' Affaire, to Solomon Islands Mission here in Geneva;
4. **Mrs Ethel Sigimanu**, Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWCYFA);
5. **Mr Karl Kuper**, Under Secretary to the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs;
6. **Mrs Elsie Taloafiri**, Coordinator of the Community Based Rehabilitation Division under the Ministry of Health and Medical Services;
7. **Mrs Mirriam Lidimani**, Legal Adviser, Foreign Affairs & External Trade and;
8. **Ms Jolina Tausinga**, Senior Desk Officer, UN and Americas Branch, Foreign Affairs & External Trade.

4. Mr President, a lot of significant progress have been made to date since the first cycle of reporting.

5. Solomon Islands now has a population of almost 600,000 to date with 80% located in the rural areas.
6. As a small island developing state, we are faced with many challenges. These vary from geographical setting of islands located further from the capital, frequent natural disasters and unpredicted weather conditions, transportation and communication difficulties to name a few.
7. Nonetheless, we pride ourselves in the little efforts and steps taken to advance the country in terms of human rights promotion, protection and advancement.
8. The present government have achieved quite significantly implementations of the recommendations.
9. The National Development Strategy (NDS) is the national framework for government priorities. The implementation of the recommendations from the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) are aligned to the NDS key priority areas that includes *'Taking better care of all people, improving livelihoods, creating and maintaining the enabling environment and linking effecting implementation'*.
10. Similarly, the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals have also been addressed under our NDS.

11. Integration of the Development partnership framework and Monitoring and Evaluation Framework are two important features of the NDS currently under review. These features are vital to monitoring progress of the UPR recommendations and for support by development partners in this process.

12. Many government actions since the first reporting cycle, have been a result of successive governments taking a positive progressive step to addressing commonly faced issues, nationally, regionally and globally.

Before sharing with you our achievements, let me briefly highlight some of the key challenges we face in implementing the recommendations from the first reporting cycle.

13. Mr President, topography in reaching our rural populace with service delivery in many ways than one is a challenge. Our experience of having successive governments over a short time resulted in insufficient time to fully implement policies, and in this respect, shifting priorities and budgetary issues and a high turnover of staff.

14. Consequently, consistency and continuity in the area of Treaty and Conventions implementation not only in the areas of human rights but other development areas are also affected. Mr President, resource capacity and financial

constraints to drive stakeholder's consultations to cover our rural populace remains a key challenge to addressing our human rights issues.

15. These are but only some of the challenges faced. Of equal importance is cultural diversity, lack of understanding and sensitivity to human rights issues which has resulted in delays in progressing the recommendations.

Mr President, allow me now to highlight our significant achievements made reference to at the outset.

Achievements

(1) Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands

16. The country was brought to its knees in the years of 1998 to 2003 with the experience of the civil unrest that affected the rule of law, service delivery, development and economic activities to name a few. The civil unrest was a set back in many areas affecting basic human rights.

17. Normalcy of active livelihood, business ventures and investment has returned to the country following the deployment of the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands 2003.

18. Our government recognizes the achievements and contribution of RAMSI to restoring law and order and delivery of basic economic and social services.

(2) Law and Justice Reform

19. The current Government has been in office for over a year since 2014. The government has taken an extensive law reform which will see almost more Bills ready to be taken to Parliament during its tenure.

20. Huge achievements under this sector includes enactment of the Family Protection Act 2014, the Political Parties Integrity Act, the Police Act and the Correctional Service Act.

21. Eight (8) Bills will be taken to Parliament in the first sessional sitting this year. Of significance to mention is the Child and Family Welfare Bill; the Whistle Blower Bill and an Anti-Corruption Bill that may lead to establishing an Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC).

22. Institutional strengthening capacity for the work of the courts to enable efforts in access to justice in the rural areas has seen housing provision for lawyers in four furthest Provinces to the capital; new and refurbished court houses; lawyers being posted and magistrates that help out in regular court sittings.

23. A new juvenile and family court is also refurbished in the capital that is user-friendly for young persons and family members during court hearings.

24. In 2014, the Law Reform Commission now has a permanent Chair. Now the government is confident that all delayed reference papers can be progressed to legislating drafting.

25. The government acknowledges support received from Australia and the Commonwealth Secretariat in legal drafting that contributes to development of many legislative Bills.

(3) National Human Rights Institution

26. Broader scope of human rights are considered in the latest 2014 Draft Federal Constitution that may go to Parliament soon. There is also proposal for a human rights commission under this draft.

27. Currently the government is exploring the expansion of the Ombudsman's office to have a division responsible for human rights issues. This option is to expand its mandate to enable human rights complaints or issues brought before it.

28. Areas to explore includes human resource capacity, data on human rights complaints and how this will work within this existing institution. Discussions will continue this year, whilst

also looking at the provision for a human rights commission under the proposed Federal Constitution.

29. Other mechanisms the government has already in place that has assisted successive governments in the reporting human rights conventions and treaties include stakeholders committees such as the Solomon Islands National Advisory Committee on CEDAW, National Advisory and Action Committee on Children and also a National UPR Working Committee having an oversight for the UPR cycles.

(4) Independence of the Judiciary

30. Solomon Islands Judiciary strides to maintain a vibrant justice system by upholding the rule of law, promote and provide access to justice for those seeking it.

31. Training and in-service support for the judiciary and the magistracy offered through the Law and Justice Sector programs, adds value to professionalism maintained by judges and magistrates. The government also continues to maintain court tours to provinces to ensure higher court cases can also be held for convenience of rural populace.

32. The government acknowledges our partners like Commonwealth and our bilateral partners in support of human resource capacity for the judiciary and also the

magistracy to sustain and maintain these services over the years.

33. The government welcomes further assistance in this area.

(5) Adequate standard of living

Rural Wash, Sanitation and Hygiene (R-WASH)

34. The government has a Strategic Plan on R-WASH 2015-2020 with a vision for all to have easy access to sufficient quality and safe water, appropriate sanitation in safe and hygiene environment by 2024.

35. The government recognises that at present only 35% – 40% of the R-WASH infrastructure are available in the rural areas and this is owing to the challenges highlighted earlier.

36. Nevertheless, the government's strategy plan aims to roll out from 2015 onwards with future projection of a 100% R-WASH access by 2024.

37. The government is grateful to both Japan and the European Union for their continuous assistance in the areas of water, sanitation and hygiene.

38. The government undertakes an inclusive approach in terms of rolling out these services in both rural and urban areas.

39. Our fast population growth and urban drift has placed pressure on resources one of which is land and housing for the working populace in urban Honiara. Temporary Occupancy Licenses (TOL) have been reviewed to cater for this expanding urban population.

40. Mr President, with regards to the health sector, the government is in process of completing its second Health Demographic Survey in Solomon Islands. This will set the basis for showing trends and improvement in health services delivery.

41. Notwithstanding this, there is progress made in terms of infant mortality that has been reduced from 550 per one thousand live births in 1992 to less than 100 by 2015. This is huge improvement due to increased access to health facilities and skilled attendance at birth which is now at 95%.

42. In terms of health facility types, in 2012 statistics, there are 187 nurse aid posts, 102 Rural heal clinics, 38 Area Health care centres and 7 Provincial Hospitals. The government is committed to ensuring improving inclusive access to health for all.

43. In the past decade, deaths in children under five years have reduced and the number of children receiving immunization

has increased although challenges remain to reduce child mortality.

44. There is also improvement in access to sexual and reproductive health services including pre and post-natal care with more than 80% deliveries in health facilities with services of skilled personnel.

45. Malaria, the leading cause of death has been dramatically reduced over the years as a result of scaled up prevention and control interventions.

(6) Education

46. Mr President, in terms of Education, the government aims to achieve universal education for all. In this respect, an Education Bill has been developed.

47. The government has also developed an Inclusive Education Policy to address equal opportunities for children with disabilities to access education, gives opportunities for pregnant students to return to the classroom after giving birth, abolish corporal punishment and more emphasis on the fee free policy for schools.

48. Currently there are four schools for children with special needs that cater for both primary and secondary levels that

receive grant assistance from the government and faith based organisations.

49. Access to sex disaggregated education statistics has increased significantly.

(7) International Obligations

50. The government through support of the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights is working on a concept framework to enable the government monitor, report and make follow-ups on international treaty obligations.

51. It is envisioned, that the concept framework will help Solomon Islands to fast track its commitments to its reporting obligations under treaties and conventions.

52. A Common Core document is in draft form and need updating before it can be submitted later this year.

(8) Cooperation with special procedures

53. Mr President, in terms of cooperation with special procedures, the government in the first cycle made standing invitation for special procedures mandate holders.

54. To date, we have had two visits from the Independent Expert on the effects of Foreign Debt and also on the Special Rapporteur on violence against Women.

55. Due to inadequate coverage of water and sanitation throughout the country, the government welcomes a standing invitation in relation to water and sanitation.

(9) Non-discrimination

56. Mr President, at present Solomon Islands does not have a stand-alone non-discrimination legislation. However, governments have taken piecemeal steps to advocate for specific areas of rights for women, children and persons with disability.

57. There is consideration under the proposed federal constitution, that the bill of rights provisions is comparably more progressive according to human rights standards.

