

**Opening Statement by Mr Collin Beck, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, on presenting the Third Cycle of Solomon Islands National Human Rights Report under the Universal Periodic Process, Honiara, Solomon Islands, 10 May 2021**

*Check against delivery.*

Madam President,

Thank you for giving me the floor.

I have the honour to present Solomon Islands Third Cycle of its National Human Rights Report under the Universal Periodic Review process. We thank countries who have registered to speak at this Session, and we look forward to hearing from you, and hope to respond to the issues raised in your respective interventions.

Solomon Islands subscribes itself with the spirit and purpose of the UPR process, on having the country’s human rights score card placed before the international community to be scrutinized in the name of good governance, transparency, and accountability. We have done so in 2011 and 2016 respectively for the first and second report cycles.

We believe, as outlined in the UNGA Resolution 60/251, when establishing this Council back in 2016, all human rights are universal, indivisible, interrelated, interdependent, mutually reinforcing and all rights are to be treated in a fair and equal manner with the same footing and emphasis.

Solomon Islands as a democratic state, is supportive of the work of the Council in promoting the respect of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Madam President,

Solomon Islands constitution, which is the supreme law of the land, protects the rights of all Solomon Islanders. This is complimented by various Acts of Parliament, legislations, and regulations in ensuring human rights are protected and promoted. This covers our people’s right to access justice and their right to a better quality of life.

Strengthening the rule of law is a duty and commitment of every state including Solomon Islands. The Rule of law advances human security and prosperity. Development and security are two sides of the same coin. Rule of law guarantees for Solomon Islands its unity and stability especially coming from a richly diverse country.

You will note from the report that we have reviewed a number of laws, established policies and programs and over time, continued to review these domestic frameworks to ensure the full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms are respected. There is still so much to be done, but we feel we are on a progressive track as we keep investing in policies, programmes and laws, in safeguarding the well-being of our people- in particular the vulnerable.

Madam President,

We are also domesticating a number of human rights conventions and Protocols we have yet to sign or ratify. This is in reply to some of the questions posed on where we are on signing or ratifying selected conventions and protocols.

Solomon Islands in this regard remains committed in participating in all relevant multilateral conventions. We are also building internal structures, capacity and equipping our national authorities to promote and translate Convention and Protocol obligations domestically. In other words, we are acting as though we have signed on to the unsigned Conventions.

Madam President,

As you are aware Solomon Islands is a Least Developed Country that is due to graduate from its Least Developed Country status in January 2024. We are also a Small Islands Developing State that requires special sustainable development attention, given our unique and particular vulnerabilities as a Small Island Developing state.

Our special character includes our remoteness from external markets, high energy, transportation, and communication costs, smallness, our vulnerability to environmental degradation, growing impact of climate change, susceptibility to economic shocks and our limited access to finance, technology transfer and capacity building.

Solomon Islands is culturally diverse, it has a population of more than 700,000 people, speaking more than 80 different indigenous languages. Ethnic Melanesian make up the largest portion of the population, followed by indigenous Polynesians and others including Micronesians and fellow Asians and Europeans. Solomon Islands is a culturally diverse country that is going through its nation building process. We have emerged from an ethnic conflict more than two decades ago. Currently we are enjoying stability, progress, and peace. Unity and solidarity of the country remains a national priority. We continue to invest in national infrastructure projects that binds and connects our scattered people together. This has been possible through partnerships we have with our development partners. I take this time to thank Australia, New Zealand, Japan, China, Indonesia, World Bank and ADB.

Madam President,

We remain a Christian country and define marriage in the traditional sense between a male and female. In this regard I pause and call on countries on questions relating to LGBTQ to refer to the UNGA Resolution 60/251 to take into consideration the cultural and religious background of states and not to impose.

We are parties to four of nine Human Rights conventions, namely Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Convention Economic Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), Convention on the Elimination of all forms Racial Discrimination (CERD) and Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

On CRC Protocols, Solomon Islands has not ratified two of the three Protocols but have established a National Advisory Committee on Children made up of government, non-government organization and civil society representatives. The Committee is looking at the costs of localizing the Protocols. The Lead Ministry on Children is the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children Affairs.

Work on acceding to and ratifying other Human Rights Treaties is still work in progress. Relevant Ministries of the Government are leading training and slowly equipping themselves to take on leadership roles in coordinating obligations under these Conventions and Protocols.

On the question of sexual exploitation of children, child trafficking and child marriage, Solomon Islands Immigration Act 2012 has provisions that addresses human trafficking and the Penal Code (Amendment) (Sexual offence) Act 2016, which criminalize all forms of sexual violence including force marriage and child prostitution.

On the Islanders Marriage Act, we will be launching national processes to increase the legal age of marriage for women.

Whilst we have not ratified the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, we have adopted legislation, established a National Security Strategy and remain committed in working with INTEPOL and other enforcement agencies in tackling transnational crime. regionally we have the following frameworks that deals with transnational crimes and cooperation amongst Pacific States:

1. 1992 Honiara Declaration on Law Enforcement Cooperation
2. 1997 Aitutaki Declaration on Regional Security cooperation, set out guiding principles for regional security cooperation.
3. 2000 Biketawa Declaration - a Responsibility to Protect concept. Addressing root causes of conflict and providing a regional mechanism for dealing with crisis whilst respecting sovereignty and the principle of non-interferences.
4. 2002 Nasonini Declaration - Threat of terrorism
5. 2019 Boe Declaration - Broadened definition of security.

On the question of disability, we have a draft national Disability Inclusive Development Policy 2020-2024. As we speak, training at provincial levels is happening to improve the lives of persons with disabilities (PWD). We have limited special schools for disabilities, our goal is to have regular schools equipped to integrate disabled children.

On the question of compulsory education, education is offered free for students attending years 1-9, we have done so to improve access of all children right up to junior secondary school. We have gone further and offered second chance education for students dropping out of education at higher levels of education.

Madam President,

As a Small Islands Developing State, the adverse impact of climate change and the lack of ambitious global climate action under the Paris Agreement has a negative impact on the enjoyment of full and effective rights under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and human rights instruments. For our populations living on low laying islands, it is an existential threat as we as a nation constantly deal with food and water security issues.

Solomon Islands continues to lose islands, sea level rise in triggering informal internal migration. We fear that the warm war against climate change could turn hot as land use of relocated populations gets over-crowded and becomes infertile, encroachment by settlers on their neighbor’s land could trigger sparks conflict especially in the light of 80% of land in the country is tribal owned and undocumented.

It’s time for the international community to take a serious look at the plight of climate refugees. Taking stronger climate actions that puts us on a 1.5 degrees pathway is what is needed. Under current commitments we are heading for more than a 3.7 degrees world.

The world’s commitment on achieving SDGs and the 2030 Agenda is a matter of life and death, failure is not an option after all global temperature has already increased to 1.1 degrees Celsius above preindustrial period. The science on climate change is non-negotiable, urgent action is needed to keep our ocean and planet blue.

Madam President,

On COVID-19 pandemic, Solomon Islands has responded decisively and firmly in protecting our people from COVID-19. So far we have no active cases but in the last nine months imported 20 cases all picked up at the border and confined within our quarantine stations. Economic Growth has been revised downwards; budgets of government reduced. The pandemic no doubt has implications on Solomon Islands LDC graduation transmission period. With our state of emergency, we have restricted rights of movement and entry into the country.

Madam President,

Setting up of the National Human Rights Institution remains on our radar screen. We are exploring suggestions of having established watch dogs to perform the role. Increasing the mandates of the Leadership Code Commission and the Ombudsman’s Office are being proposed. Having said this tracking and monitoring Human Rights progress is done on an ad hoc basis. Ministries come together to go through the recommendations.

On supporting women in leadership position, under the Parties Political Integrity Act 2014, a quota of 10% is reserved for women. So far, we have seen 4 women elected to our national parliament. Two are serving in the Executive arm of the Government. Women are increasing their representation in the work force. The largest employer is the Government employing some 19,000 public servants. The Ministry of Public Service has a “women in leadership’’ mentoring program that provides for equal opportunities for male and female in the public service.

As a post conflict country, Solomon Islands has set up a Ministry to deal with recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It is the standing position of the government to strengthen its legal system. Ratifying the Rome Statute is not an immediate priority. You will note from the reports that court infrastructures are being established in our provinces. This is our effort to increase people’s access to justice.

In dealing with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Report, the government has established the Ministry of Traditional Governance, Peace and Ecclesiastical Affairs to deal with the issue.

Following ethnic conflict more two decades ago, we were assisted by our Pacific neighbours led by Australia and supported by New Zealand from 2003 - 2017 under the Pacific Islands Forum, composed of the then sixteen Pacific SIDS. The Mission to Solomon Islands was known as the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, it was made up of military, police, and civilians. Multilaterally speaking it was the equivalent to DPKO, PBC and DPA all rolled into one.

Today we have a well-trained unarmed Police Force. Solomon Islands is a signatory to the 1985 Nuclear Free Pacific that prohibit the testing, dumping or storage of nuclear weapons or materials. Solomon Islands supports conventions on total elimination of weapons of mass destruction.

Solomon Islands does not trade in arms and notes the request to consider signing onto the Arms Trade Treaty. This will be kept under active consideration, though we are worried about small arms getting into the wrong hands. UXO remains an issue of Solomon Islands, World War II ammunition remains an issue and continues to claim lives.

Press Freedom is protected by Solomon Islands constitution. Legislation to have mobile users register their SIM Cards is before the Parliament. We are also getting a Cyber Legislation in place to protect our nationals from cyber-crime.

Madam President,

On gender, there is a national strategy to improve the economic status of women, 116 financial savings clubs are in place. Solomon Islands Central Bank has provided support to sustain the Savings Clubs. The National Provident Fund has a “You Save” initiative as well launched in 2018. The number of women participating in the Labour Mobility scheme has also increased.

On combating gender violence, the Family Protection Act 2014, Penal Code (Amendment) (Sexual Offence) Act 2016 and Child and Family Welfare Act 2017 all have key provisions that aims to protect women and children against violence. SAFENET Referral Network established in 2013 is set up to provide support to victims and survivors of gender violence. This service is now available in four provinces, roll out to the remaining five provinces is expected to be done this year.

Madam President,

I have spent some time to respond to some of the advance questions we have received. My colleagues during the interactive sessions, will make interventions on the right to development, climate change, human rights related legal framework, child and disability matters as well as looking at our challenges and opportunities in promoting human rights in Solomon Islands.

Madam President

Rest assured of my delegation’s support and cooperation as you lead us through our Session. I now yield the floor back to you.

Madam President,

Let me thank all speakers for their constructive interventions, we found the session useful. I thank you for the manner you guided us through.

Let me make a few comments on some of the interventions made.

My delegation will consider recommendations shared and in the usual process of engagement.