

THE 2010 PREMIERS' CONFERENCE

THE BUALA COMMUNIQUÉ

Preamble

Whereas:

- The Premier or Deputy Premier of each of the nine provinces of Solomon Islands and the Deputy Mayor of Honiara City Council (the “Premiers”) convened in this conference in Buala, Isabel Province, from the 18th to the 22nd October 2010
- The Conference theme was “**Unity, Harmony and Progress**”, where the Premiers and the resource personnel were invited to make presentations relevant to the theme to assist the Premiers in their deliberations and decisions

Statement of Guiding Principles

The Premiers humbly acknowledge the Honourable Minister’s statement emphasizing that the Communiqué must contain issues of substance, which are achievable and in line with the overall national development plans of the Government of the day.

Having regard to the Preamble and the Statement of Guiding Principles, the Premiers hereby resolve that:

1. A Premiers' Council be established by law

The Premiers urge action on the request detailed in the Tulagi and Lata Communiqués for the formal and legal establishment of a Premiers' Council. The Premiers' Council will facilitate not only the Premiers' Conference, but also advocate for responses to the issues raised at the Premiers' Conference. The establishment of a Premiers' Council ought to be endorsed in a Premiers' Council Bill and tabled before Parliament in its next sitting in March 2011.

The Premiers also call upon the Honourable Minister to take this Communiqué to Cabinet with recommendations and to table it before Parliament alongside the National Government's response to this Communiqué. Further, the Premiers request the establishment of a Premiers' Taskforce to assist the Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening to establish the Premiers' Council as well as to assist in analysis and response to this Communiqué.

2. Revise section 25 of the *Provincial Government Act 1997* to enable salaries and allowances of Speaker and Clerk of each Provincial Assembly to be paid out of the Consolidated Fund

The Premiers request the amendment of section 25 of the *Provincial Government Act 1997* to enable the salaries and allowances of the Provincial Assembly Speaker and Clerk to be paid out of the Consolidated Fund. This amendment will ensure the proportionality of salaries and allowances of all Provincial Assembly members.

3. Revise the provisions of the *Provincial Government Act 1997* relating to the formation of the Provincial Executive

Stability of Provincial Governments is an important issue for all Provinces. The current system does not adequately provide mechanisms for a stable Provincial Government. Under section 19 of the *Provincial Government Act 1997*, the Provincial Government Executive is made up of the Premier, the Deputy Premier, and all the Provincial Ministers - the total number of which must not be more than half of the total Provincial Assembly. The Premiers request that this section is revised so that the Provincial

Government Executive is at least half plus one of the total members of the Provincial Assembly. This would therefore reflect an absolute majority.

4. Review of the provisions of the *Lands and Titles Act* relating to the acquisition of the Customary Land

The holding in trust of land in perpetuity by customary owners is an important part of the social fabric of Solomon Islands. The *Land and Titles Act* makes provision for the registration of customary land and, in certain circumstances, the purchase or lease by the National or Provincial Governments of customary land. These provisions facilitate the development of resources in the Provinces. The Premiers request the Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening to formally request the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Surveying to review the *Lands and Titles Act*. The Premiers request that the review determine if the system can be made simpler to clearly apply when Provincial Governments wish to assist commercial entities to acquire access to land in the Provinces for development.

5. Amend *Mines and Minerals Act* and prepare Solomon Islands for mining and consequential impact

This request from the Premiers is two-fold. Firstly, under the current *Mines and Minerals Act*, mineral wealth is vested in the people and the State. The Premiers request that the *Mines and Minerals Act* be amended to vest the ownership of mineral wealth in customary land solely in the tribes of clans. Secondly, the Premiers request help for the people of Solomon Islands to maximise any benefit provided through mining by for example, providing financial literacy training.

6. Federal system implementation

The Premiers request the quick implementation of the proposed federal system of Government and request the National Government to allocate funding for the immediate conclusion on ‘hot spot’ maritime boundaries, as well as facilitate other necessary requirements for the quick attainment of statehood.

Further, after the implementation of the proposed federal system of Government, there will be an influx of people moving back to the Provinces and therefore putting added strain on an already stretched housing

market. Therefore, the Premiers request the building of additional housing for public servants after the introduction of the federal system of Government.

7. National development be decentralized

At present, national development is taking place in a few Provinces only based on the grounds of economic efficiency. However, the Premiers acknowledge that the new NCRA Government policy will address this with the formation of Economic Growth Centres and through which Solomon Islands' people will be encouraged to remain in rural areas and thereby discourage urban drift. Further, the establishment of rural Economic Growth Centres is crucial to advance the idea of creating infrastructure for the development of wharves, roads, bridges, et cetera to support the transportation and marketing of produce to major market outlets.

8. To maintain the policy goals and implementation framework of the Coalition for National Unity and Rural Advancement (“CNURA”) alongside the new policy statement of National Coalition for Reform and Advancement (NCRA)

The Premiers endorse the NCRA policy statement and encourage clarification through the development of an implementation framework. However, the Premiers hope to maintain the two goals developed by CNURA of:

1. removing any existing barriers to fulfillment of Provincial Government policy goals; and
2. Enhancing prosperity, well-being and participation of the community by providing integrated, efficient, and affordable infrastructure and transport systems supported by ethical, professional, proficient and valued staff.

9. National Government must support and facilitate Provincial Investment Initiatives

While Provinces are ‘agents’ of the National Government for the advancement of Provinces, Premiers request the National Government to support their Provincial Investment Initiatives as well as any potential areas of investment.

10. Consultation with host Province on major national development projects

It is absolutely necessary that proper consultations be pursued with host Provinces on any major national development projects. The Premiers request that the affected Province be consulted on any major national development project.

11. The National Government facilitates the collection of basic rates and rent from seconded public officers

Each Province has in place a Provincial Ordinance requiring the payments of a 'basic rate' by persons employed in the Province. There is an additional arrangement where rent is to be deducted from the wages of National Government and state-owned enterprises staff. However, the National Government and state-owned enterprises are not presently complying with their obligations under these Provincial Ordinances, nor the rent arrangement. The Premiers request that basic rates and rent from employees of the National Government and state-owned enterprises be deducted from employees' fortnightly wages and paid directly into the Provincial Fund of the relevant Provincial Government.

12. National Government to facilitate discussion between Guadalcanal Province and Honiara City Council to resolve outstanding issues, such as a share to Guadalcanal Province of revenue generated from Honiara City

The Premiers acknowledge that this issue has been addressed and that it is now a matter of discussion between Guadalcanal Province, Honiara City Council and the National Government.

13. Devise new strategy to charge resource fees

In order to help resource owners and Provinces to benefit directly through the provisions of the utilization of their resources, the Premiers request that a new strategy be devised to charge resource fees, rather than a charging of lump sum fees.

14. Ward Development Profiles

Ward Development Profiles are important mechanisms for the participatory planning process in the Provincial Governments. These will help the Provincial Governments identify potential priority development aspirations in the rural areas/wards as it would be seen to be strengthening the capacities and improving the livelihoods of Solomon Islands' rural populace. The Premiers acknowledge that UNDP's Provincial Government Strengthening Project has already started work on Ward Development Profiles, and therefore request the Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening to ensure that this work continues.

15. Negotiations with National Government three months prior to formation of National Budget

The provincial budget allocation (representing 85% of the population) through the National Budget is around \$45 million per annum from a \$1.5 billion total.¹ The Premiers request that the Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening convene a meeting with the Premiers, Provincial Secretaries and Provincial Treasurers at least three months prior to the formation of the National Budget. This will enable Provinces to prepare and provide submissions to be included in the National Budget.

16. Increasing Provincial Government direct employees' salaries

The Premiers request an increase in salaries of direct employees to correspond with the increase in Public Service Grants for Provincial Governments. This is to enable them to meet the incremental cost of maintaining Provincial Government direct employees.

17. Salaries, entitlements and travel costs of teachers

Currently the National Government pays for the salaries and assists to meet the other entitlements, including travel costs of teachers. The Premiers request that the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development pay the salaries, entitlements and travel costs of teachers out of the Consolidated Fund.

¹ These figures have been provided by the Premier of Western Province.

18. The Ministry of Education review the status of agriculture in the education syllabus

Agriculture is the future of Solomon Islands, and is also the main focus of most provincial communities. The Premiers request the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development to review the education syllabus for Forms 4 and 5, to ensure that agriculture is made a compulsory subject.

19. Premiers and their Provincial Secretaries included in the National Government delegations to the annual meetings of the Melanesian Spearhead Group and the Pacific Forum

The Melanesian Spearhead Group and Pacific Forum facilitate trade discussions between many countries in the region. As Provinces play a key role in trade in Solomon Islands, and as Premiers have valuable insights to contribute to these meetings, the Premiers strongly urge that they and their Provincial Secretaries be included in the delegations to these annual meetings.

The Premiers acknowledge that the auspices of foreign relations fall under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade and therefore request the aforementioned Ministry extend invitation to such meetings to the Provinces. Furthermore, if permission is sought, the Premiers request the opportunity to develop selection criteria to be used to determine which Province(s) is/are represented.

20. The Premiers, and their Provincial Secretaries, be included in the multi-agency group working on the climate change issue

The Premiers request that Premiers, and their Provincial Secretaries, be included in the multi-agency group consisting of central ministry representatives and donor agencies working on the climate change issue. This is to ensure that provincial interests are best represented.

The Premiers acknowledge that the auspices of climate change fall under the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Meteorology, therefore the Premiers request the aforementioned Ministry to extend the invitation to any climate change meetings to the Premiers and their Provincial Secretaries.

21. The Provinces to be invited to annual donors' talks

The development of, and the alleviation of need in, the Provinces is a primary focus of many international donors. Therefore, the Premiers are in a unique position to assist the National Government and donors to understand the basic needs of the Provinces, and further to assist with the planning for the future of Solomon Islands. The Premiers request the Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening to work with the Ministry of Development Planning and Aid Coordination to ensure that the Premiers and their Provincial Secretaries are invited to annual donors' talks.

22. Transfer of perpetual estate title to Provinces for major developments

In recognition of the need to facilitate major developments in Provinces, especially tourism development, the Premiers request the Commissioner of Lands to transfer perpetual estate title to Provincial Governments.

23. The Commission of Inquiry into abandoned lands on Guadalcanal report made available as soon as possible

The Premiers acknowledge that the Commission of Inquiry is close to completing its report. The Premiers request that once the report is completed, it must be made available to Guadalcanal Provincial Government to enable it to track the status of the abandoned lands in Guadalcanal Province.

24. Invite Donors to future Premiers' Conferences

The Premiers request that representatives for aid donors are invited to attend and participate in the planning of future Premiers' Conferences, and if possible, for the Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening to request funding for the Premiers' Conference from donors.

25. Preparation for future Premiers' Conferences

The Premiers express their gratitude to the Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening for the preparation and running of the Premiers' Conference. The Premiers, aware that priorities can change over time, request that they be consulted in relation to the form and content of the

next Premiers' Conference. Further, the Premiers request that there be a Senior Officials' meeting in Honiara at least two months prior to the Premiers' Conference taking place to provide a forum to set the theme for the Conference, and perhaps the Guidelines for resources required for the Conference. Furthermore still, the Premiers request the establishment of a Premiers' Conference Committee at least one month prior to the Premiers' Conference taking place to make preparations for the Conference, including to form an advance party to the host Province one-week prior to the Premiers' Conference proper to begin on the ground preparations.

We signify our assent and commitment to the content of this Communiqué this 22nd day of October 2010:

<i>Premier/Deputy Premier</i>	<i>Province</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Hon. Patrick Vasuni, MPA	Central	_____
Hon. Jackson Kiloe, MPA	Choiseul	_____
Hon. Steven Panga, MPA	Guadalcanal	_____
Hon. Rueben Doto, MPA	Isabel	_____
Hon. Thomas Weape, MPA	Makira Ulawa	_____
Hon. Richard Irosaea	Malaita	_____
Hon. Timothy Johnston	Rennell Bellona	_____
Hon. Noel Keniano	Temotu	_____
Hon. George Solingi Lilo	Western	_____
Cr. Zachary Tuzakana, Deputy Mayor	Honiara City Council	_____

I hereby confirm my receipt of this Communiqué this 22nd day of October 2010:

 Hon. Bradley Tovosia, Minister for Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening