

2008 PROVINCIAL PREMIERS' CONFERENCE

THE LATA COMMUNIQUE

Preamble

Whereas:

1. The Premiers of the nine Provinces of Solomon Islands and the Lord Mayor of Honiara City Council ("The Premiers") convened in this Conference at Lata from 15th to 20th September 2008.
2. From time immemorial, clan and tribal communities exercised dominion over people, land and resources of Solomon Islands according to ancestral customs and traditions.
3. Those communities are the heart of the provinces and together form one united Solomon Islands.
4. Recognising that the union of communities forms our sovereign nation, the Premiers met under the theme "Common Vision for Common Destiny".
5. In sharing a common vision the Premiers, respectful of local custom and tradition, acknowledging faith in God, and driven by a shared desire for increase in the peace and prosperity of Solomon Islands, discussed many topics of heartfelt concern with the earnest desire to facilitate the achievement of Solomon Islands' glorious destiny.

Statement of Guiding Principles

- Reconciliation and rehabilitation are prerequisites to economic progress, social harmony and unity of Solomon Islands. All persons, groups, tribes, peoples and governments must join together with humility to support the reconciliation process.
- The Government of Solomon Islands reflects the realities of a nation built on island communities – a central Government to bind the islands together, provincial governments to govern the people in the provinces.
- Constitutional reform of the institutions of government is a matter of great importance to the nation of Solomon Islands. The ongoing process of consultation is commended, as is the National Government's commitment to and timetable for change.

- The strengthening of provincial government is an essential part of the process of transition towards a federal government system.
- The aim of the National and Provincial Governments in transition is to strengthen, equip and position provincial government administration for the effective delivery of quality service to the people and the nation of Solomon Islands.
- Core to enabling provincial governments to better lead and serve the people of Solomon Islands is the establishment of a fair, just and equitable sharing of the economic bounty of Solomon Islands.
- The Provincial Governments look forward to the fulfillment of the National Government's promise that by 2010 it will determine an appropriate formula for revenue sharing between the National Government and the provinces, so that each province can truly govern in its own right to the fullest extent.
- The principles and priorities identified in the Lake Tegano Communiqué remain in force.

Having Regard To The Preamble And Statement Of Guiding Principles, It Is Hereby Resolved That:

1. A Provincial Premiers' Council be established by an Act of Parliament.

The act should provide for the establishment and funding of the Council, its membership (to include the Lord Mayor of Honiara City Council), the holding and funding of an annual Joint Budget/Policy Development meeting between the Council and the National Government and the holding and funding of an annual Premiers' Conference to be chaired by the Minister responsible for provincial government.

Matters to be provided for in the act include the power of the Premiers to make business rules for the conduct of the conference (including the mechanism for the creation of an agenda), the functions and powers of Premiers at the conference (including the preparation of a communiqué), status of the communiqué, tabling of the communiqué in Parliament at the first meeting of Parliament after the conclusion of the conference, the process for the National Government to consider and provide responses to the communiqué (for example three months and six months after tabling in Parliament), and the process for the National Government to communicate a detailed written response to

each matter raised in the communiqué at least six weeks prior to the next Premiers' Conference.

Given the importance of the Premiers' Conference, unless circumstances otherwise dictate, only senior officials (Under Secretary or above) should make presentations on behalf of the Ministries at the conference.

2. In recognition of the complexity of the reconciliation process, the Premiers humbly request that the National Government commit itself to the ongoing formal refinement of the process.

3. The speaker of each Provincial Assembly be funded by the National Government.

Expenses incurred under section 22 of the *Provincial Government Act* in relation to the speaker of each Provincial Assembly should be paid out of the Consolidated Fund, and the salary and allowances for the speaker should be determined in accordance with the procedure under section 25 of the *Provincial Government Act*.

4. A legal officer be employed in the Ministry responsible for Provincial Government.

The role of the legal officer is to assist in the development of a uniform approach in the provinces to the drafting and enforcement of ordinances and licenses, preparation of contracts and in the conduct of litigation on behalf of the Province, where appropriate.

Such legal officer will also assist individual provinces unable to obtain legal advice due to the difficult process of filling of legal posts in the provinces.

5. Provincial Service Grants be subject to immediate formal review.

Provincial Service Grants remain grossly inadequate and do not reflect the cost of providing basic services let alone a full range of devolved functions. Provincial Service Grants should be calculated having regard to the genuine cost of provision of services in the provinces. A clearly defined formula for the allocation of Provincial Services Grants should be published and provided to the Premiers for ongoing debate, discussion and refinement.

6. A new system or systems be established for the administration of the Millennium Fund and the Livelihood Fund.

The systems must be founded on respect for local decision making. They should involve those responsible for provincial government planning, and utilise the expertise and local knowledge of provincial government line ministries, in conjunction with their parent ministry.

In light of these principles the funding should be allocated to the Ministry responsible for provincial government. Policy decisions should be made and coordinated through local systems established by each provincial government. Funds, once allocated, should be delivered through the provincial government line ministries.

Accountability must be paramount in decision-making, allocation and use of funds and in the assessment of medium to long term viability of any supported project.

7. A percentage of export duty initially set at 10% but to increase over time be remitted to the Province or City Council of origin.

This is in recognition that it is by the local production of goods that export revenue is earned for the whole Solomon Islands.

8. Revenue collected through the goods sales tax be remitted to the Province or City Council under which jurisdiction the sale took place.

9. The National Government should prioritise the planned upgrade of rural and provincial shipping infrastructure.

This upgrade must occur alongside the development of a National Shipping Policy accommodating the need to subsidize the provision of shipping services on non-economical routes. This will assist in creation of cohesion between the Provinces, the development of local economies and the provision of essential social services.

10. Rural price subsidies for basic commodities should be revisited and revitalized to past levels as a practical and achievable means of immediately boosting rural economies.

Rural price subsidies facilitate, encourage and enable the development of viable and sustainable rural economies.

11. Each Province be permitted to establish with external donors relations of a financial assistance nature.

This should be subject only to obtaining approval in principle from the Minister responsible for provincial government. Such relations may involve seeking the assistance of Governments, NGOs and other donors. The *Provincial Government Act* should be amended to remove any existing impediment.

12. The involvement of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum be extended to the Provinces.

The National Government is requested to endorse and facilitate the provinces in obtaining technical assistance for capacity building (finance, revenue base, infrastructure and corporate services) through the Commonwealth Local Government Forum.

13. The Premiers endorse the Constituencies Boundaries Commission review of National and Provincial boundaries.

This review needs to identify and alleviate any anomalies in the current boundaries, in particular to ensure proper appreciation of language groupings, cultural and other distinguishing features.

14. The Premiers be afforded the opportunity to work with the Government and RAMSI in the review of RAMSI's partnership framework document.

A true partnership relationship exists between the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) and the people of Solomon Islands. The positive influence of RAMSI in establishing the peace and security of Solomon Islands is wholeheartedly recognized.

The role of the Foreign Relations Committee in reviewing the Mission is acknowledged.

The Premiers strongly support the continued presence of RAMSI in the provinces, and in particular support an ongoing shift in focus to capacity, governance, and economic development.

15. Seconded officers must be primarily accountable to the Government of the province to which they are posted.

To facilitate this, a clear and transparent disciplinary system should be introduced whereby the disciplinary powers delegated by the Public Service Commission to the Permanent Secretaries are transferred to the Provincial Secretaries. Further, given manpower requirements,

recruitment and employment policies and practices for Provincial government must be reviewed.

As such there should be an immediate review of all relevant Public Service General Orders, policies and directions so that any necessary changes can occur prior to the next Premiers' Conference.

Areas of particular concern are the level and status of provincial secretaries, the number of Deputy Provincial Secretary posts and the involvement of provincial secretaries in the recruitment of seconded officers.

16. Premiers ought to be consulted in the development of important National Policies and legislative reform.

The Premiers commend the Government's current process of consultation and involvement of Premiers in various reviews of legislation and policies particularly the Facilitation Act, Political Integrity process and the National Disaster Council Act. On-going consultation is encouraged, preferably through a Premiers' Council.

17. The National Government must strongly pursue capital and infrastructure development projects in the provinces.

The Premiers acknowledge the National Government's initial work in relation to the Provincial Capacity Development Fund project.

A system should be developed involving consultation between Provincial Governments and appropriate Ministries. Such a system must facilitate the creation of "carbon-copy" ministries in the Provinces to enable true partnership in development between the National Government and each Province.

18. The National Government honour and expedite the tsunami reconstruction work in Western and Choiseul provinces.

19. The National Government provide for greater provincial involvement in educational planning and management.

Acknowledging that quality education must be available to all children at all levels, the Premiers endorse the proposal for the National Government to establish National schools in the Provinces. As greater coordination and understanding of stakeholder responsibility is required, clear guidelines detailing supervision of staff and financial responsibilities should be prepared by the National Board.

20. The Ministry responsible for Tourism should assist each province in the professional creation of a tourism website.

Tourism presents each Province with an opportunity for sustainable development. Recognising the importance of the internet as a source of information for overseas visitors, technical assistance and funding is required to assist the provinces in developing this resource.

21. The Premiers endorse the National Government's review of the National Disaster Council Act.

The review should encompass the National Disaster Plan, the role of the National Disaster Management Office and the potential to restructure and to decentralize relevant functions to the provinces.

22. The National Government support and assist Guadalcanal Province in its efforts to reacquire and if necessary to compulsorily acquire the Old GP Headquarters Land.

23. The boundaries of Honiara be clearly defined.

This can be achieved by amending Schedule 1 of the Provincial Government Act so that the boundaries of Honiara are clearly stated in the definition of the Provincial boundary of Guadalcanal. The Commissioner of Lands should be tasked to co-ordinate the necessary survey work.

24. The National Government fully fund and otherwise enable the Land Reform Unit in the performance of its vital task.

25. The National Government complete the return of alienated lands to provincial governments as custodians for original landowners.



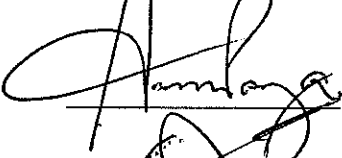
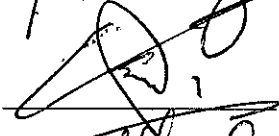
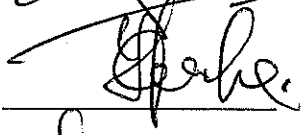
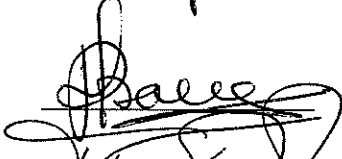
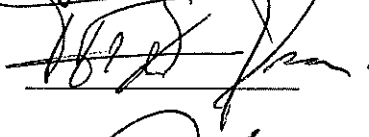


26. The National Government, recognizing the importance of Provincial Government headquarters, commit itself to the return of perpetual estates of headquarter land or urban centers to the provincial governments, and commit itself to the development of each Provincial Government headquarter to an appropriate standard.

27. The Premiers endorse the Commission of Inquiry into Abandoned Lands on Guadalcanal. The National Government to do everything possible to expedite the Inquiry. The Inquiry's Terms of Reference should be finalised in consultation with the Premiers.

28. The National Government prioritise the assessment of the adequacy of existing aviation infrastructure.

In light of the National Government's focus on civil aviation reform, the Premiers encourage the National Government to prioritise the assessment of the adequacy of existing aviation infrastructure and identify the need for future infrastructure development.

We signify our assent and commitment to the content of this Communiqué this 20th day of September 2008:

<u>Premier/Deputy Premier</u>	<u>Province</u>	<u>Signature</u>
Hon. Patrick Vasuni, MPA	Central	
Hon. Jackson Kiloe, MPA	Choisuel	
Hon. Steven Panga, MPA	Guadalcanal	
Hon. Lonsdale Manase, MPA	Isabel	
Hon. Thomas Weape, MPA	Makira Ulawa	
Hon. Richard N Irosaea, MPA	Malaita	
Hon. Timothy Johnston, MPA	Rennell Bellona	
Hon. Johnson Levela, MPA	Temotu	
Hon. Alex Lokopio, MPA	Western	
Cr. Andrew Mua, Lord Mayor	Honiara City Council	