

THE 2009 PREMIERS CONFERENCE

THE TULAGI COMMUNIQUÉ

Preamble

Whereas:

- The Premier or Deputy Premier of each of the nine provinces of Solomon Islands and the Deputy Lord Mayor of Honiara City Council (“the Premiers”) convened in this conference at Tulagi, Central Island Province, from 28th September to 2nd October 2009
- Solomon Islands is one nation, binding together clans and tribes, indigenous and immigrant peoples to form one people under the sovereignty of Almighty God
- Reconciliation and rehabilitation remain core issues for all Governments and all people of Solomon Islands
- Government of the people of Solomon Islands is founded upon the principle of local representation and local Government
- Solomon Islands is a young Nation, proud of its heritage and committed to advancement;

the Premiers met under the theme **“Striving for a Better Future,”** mindful of the need to cultivate the Biblical Spiritual virtues and the respectable norms of all Solomon Islands societies, and to ensure that these values are upheld wherever we go and in whatever we do, at home, in the workplace, and in society.

Statement of Guiding Principles

The Premiers humbly acknowledge the Honourable Prime Minister’s statement emphasising the responsibility of government to recognise the rights of the people and to fulfil their duty to:

- ensure the provision to the people of good quality basic services in the areas of health, education, police, justice and land registration, among others

- provide a professional business environment for local and overseas investors
- reform and reconstruct the National institutions damaged by years of conflict, violence, corruption, bad leadership and bad management
- develop transportation systems and infrastructure to ensure that rural people can move their products to market;

and commit themselves, under God, to strive to work together and separately for the future of Solomon Islands, and call upon the National Government to declare a National Day of prayer and fasting to seek God's direction for Solomon Islands.

The Premiers acknowledge the partnership between provincial government and the National Government and fully endorse the Coalition for National Unity and Rural Advancement (CNURA) Government's policy that provincial governments are to be recognised as governments in their own right and not simply as agents for the National Government.

The Premiers call upon the CNURA Government to ensure the fulfilment of its policy goal that provincial governments are empowered, enabled and capacitated to carry out proper provision of government services in their provincial areas.

The Premiers affirm their commitment to work with the CNURA Government to achieve its policy goal in the context of the introduction of a Federal System of Government.

The Premiers earnestly look forward to the fulfilment of the promise of the CNURA Government to determine by 2010 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 Premiers respectfully submit that the Tegano and Lata Communiqués embody the aspirational goals of the CNURA Government. The Premiers call upon the National Government to respond to all outstanding issues raised in those Communiqués.

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 maintain the request detailed in the Lata Communiqué for the legal and formal establishment of a Premiers' Council. The Premiers' Council will facilitate the Premiers Conference and a separate National Government – Premiers Budget Meeting (which may be held at the same or similar time), and the provision of a response to the Premiers in relation to issues raised at the Premiers Conference.

The establishment of a Premiers' Council ought not to await the outcome of constitutional reform. Clause 149A of the 1st 2009 draft Federal Constitution of Solomon Islands states that a federal law will provide for the Premiers Conference. There is no reason why such a law cannot now be passed.

In the interim, before the creation of the Premiers' Council, the Premiers endorse the intention of the Honourable Minister for Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening to take this Communiqué to Cabinet with recommendations and to table it in Parliament. The Premiers call upon the Honourable Minister to also table in Parliament the National Government's response to the Communiqué. The Premiers note the establishment of a taskforce to assist the Ministry in analysis and response to this Communiqué.

2. The provinces be better informed concerning the review of Provincial Service Grants.

Fiscal decentralisation is essential to the functioning of provincial governments as governments in their own right. The Premiers acknowledge that detailed review is underway of the Provincial Service Grants and call upon the Government to involve and keep informed the provinces in the review.

3. Payment of the salaries and allowances of Members and Executives, the Speaker and the Clerk of each Provincial Assembly be paid out of the Consolidated Fund.

The resolution is directed to two issues. The first is to ensure that the National Government abide by the requirement in section 25 of the *Provincial Government Act* that the salaries and

allowances of members and executives of each provincial assembly be paid out of the Consolidated Fund. Any contrary determination by the Members of Parliament (Entitlements) Commission is outside its power and void to the extent that it requires certain payments to be made out of the Provincial Funds. All such payments should be and continue to be paid out of the Consolidated Fund until full fiscal decentralisation has occurred. For the reasons previously advanced the salaries and allowances of the Speaker and Clerk of each provincial assembly should be paid out of the Consolidated Fund.

4. The policy goals and implementation framework of the Coalition for National Unity and Rural Advancement Government in relation to provincial government are endorsed.

The Premiers endorse the provincial government policy goals and implementation framework adopted by the CNURA Government in February 2008. The Premiers call upon the National Government to review the status of implementation of each strategy and, where necessary, to renew and update strategies and timeframes so that they are realistic and achievable. The Premiers respectfully encourage the CNURA Government to remove any existing barriers to fulfilment of its provincial government policy goals for (including in particular any moratorium on hiring), and suggest that the following strategies are of particular current importance:

- review of the desk officer system to provide prompt and high level service
- reduction of vacancy rates in provincial government seconded posts, in particular in core positions such as Provincial Secretary, Treasurer and Chief Planning Officer

5. The policy goals and implementation framework of the Coalition for National Unity and Rural Advancement Government in relation to infrastructure development are endorsed.

The Premiers endorse the CNURA Government's policy goal to enhance prosperity, wellbeing and participation of the community by providing integrated, efficient, and affordable infrastructure and transport systems supported by ethical, professional, proficient and valued staff.

The Premiers note the importance given to the improvement and refurbishment of existing transport infrastructure throughout 2008 and 2009 and for the development of new infrastructure throughout the period 2008 to 2012.

The Premiers request access to and involvement in the development of an updated inventory and of a more focused infrastructure development program. Such program should be linked to each provincial government's Development Plan. The Premiers respectfully submit that each provincial government's Development Plan is central to the development of each province, and is consistent with and mandated by the CNURA Government's existing policy translation and implementation framework document. These development plans concentrate on roads, bridges, wharfs and provincial staff housing.

6. Provincial government revenue collection be enhanced.

Revenue collection is an important aspect of the administration of provincial government. The Premiers request the assistance of the Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening, acting in consultation with the Attorney General's Chambers, to improve all revenue ordinances to facilitate enforcement. This will improve the financial stability of provincial governments and enable them to better provide services to their communities. The presence of a legal officer in each province ought to be a medium term goal.

7. A Premier selected by the Premiers, and his Provincial Secretary, be included in the National Government delegations to the annual meetings of the Melanesian Spearhead Group and the Pacific Forum.

These meetings facilitate discussions, particularly trade based, between many regional countries. The provinces are at the true heart of most trade, and the Premiers have valuable insights to add to the Government's knowledge at such meetings. Presence at such meetings will facilitate the engagement of the Provinces in trade opportunities with many regional countries. The provision of a report detailing the outcome of all regional and or trade meetings should be provided to the provincial governments.

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

Agriculture is the future of Solomon Islands, and is the main focus of most provincial communities. Recognising the importance of a broad educational syllabus, the Premiers request the Ministry of Education review the teaching of agriculture so as to enhance learning in this area vital for the future of Solomon Islands. Such review should consider whether agriculture ought to be made a compulsory subject after Form 3, and in particular Form 4 and Form 5.

- 9. The National Government provide an update on action being taken in regard to the effect of climate change on Solomon Islands. A Premier selected by the Premiers, and his Provincial Secretary, be included in the multi-agency group working on climate change issues.**

The Premiers request that a Premier, and his Provincial Secretary, be included in the multi-agency group consisting of ministry representatives and donor agencies working on climate change issues. This is to ensure that provincial interests are best represented. It is imperative be regularly updated concerning the effect of climate change on Solomon Islands.

- 10. Provinces be invited to annual donor talks.**

The development of, and alleviation of need in, the provinces is a primary focus of many international donors. The Premiers are in a unique position to assist the National Government and donors to understand the needs of their province, which can assist with the planning for the future of our Solomon Islands.

- 11. The National Government facilitate the collection of basic rates from seconded Public Officers.**

Each province has in place an ordinance requiring the payment of a "basic rate" by persons employed in the province. The National Government and State-Owned Enterprises are not presently complying with their obligations under these ordinances. The Premiers request the National Government and State-Owned Enterprises establish an administrative system to ensure that basic rates are deducted from staff salaries and remitted to the provinces.

- 12. The National Government ensure that the Commission of Inquiry into Abandoned Lands on Guadalcanal is best enabled to conclude its enquiry and report as soon as practicable.**

The Premiers acknowledge the important role in the peace process being played by the Commission of Inquiry into Abandoned Lands on Guadalcanal.

The Premiers express concern that the existing Terms of Reference may not best facilitate the conduct of the enquiry and request formal review of those terms in consultation with the Premiers.

13. There be a review of the provisions of the *Provincial Government Act* relating to the formation of the provincial executive.

Stability of provincial government is an important issue for all provinces. The current system does not adequately provide mechanisms to ensure stable government. Such mechanisms include the existence of a party system, coalitions and caucus. These systems are not necessarily appropriate for provincial government.

A review of the structure of provincial executives is called for to determine whether the existing structure is appropriate. For example, an alternative system may provide that the executive should consist of a majority of the total number of members of the assembly.

14. There be a review of the provisions of the *Land and Titles Act* relating to acquisition of 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 acknowledge that much work is currently underway in relation to the systems for dealing with customary land.

In the interim the Premiers request the National Government review the acquisition process to determine if the system can be made simpler and clearly apply when provincial governments wish to assist commercial entities to acquire access to land in the provinces for development.

15. The National Government facilitate discussions 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, recognising the national significance of Guadalcanal Province and Honiara City, call upon the National Government to engage Guadalcanal Province and Honiara City in negotiations to reach agreement in relation to sharing revenue generated from Honiara City.

16. Co-ordinating Committees be valued and respected by all Members of Parliament.

A relationship of trust and honest endeavour in a common purpose is central to the good working relationship between central Government and the provincial governments. Provincial Co-ordinating Committees play an essential role in fostering such relationships. All Members of Parliament are encouraged to actively fulfil their duties and responsibilities to provincial governments by fully engaging in the work of Co-ordinating Committees.

17. National Development be decentralised.

At present national development is taking place in a few provinces only based on the grounds of economic efficiency. The Premiers request that economic growth centres be created in all provinces. National projects should be distributed to all provinces to enhance development (including the development of Provincial Centres) throughout Solomon Islands. This will increase the participation of the provinces in economic development, and minimise urban migration and ensuing social problems.

The Premiers recognise that many of these social problems are faced by Honiara City Council. They share the concern of Honiara City Council about the problems caused by uncontrolled migration of people and in particular young people into Honiara. Hoping for jobs, young people quickly become disaffected, turning to drugs, kwaso and crime. The Premiers are grateful to Honiara City Council for its tireless efforts to improve the provision of services to the residents of Honiara, many of whom have come from the provinces.

The Premiers acknowledge the strain upon education and health services caused by the influx of people to Honiara. The Premiers call upon the National Government to ensure that service delivery in the provinces is at least equal to Honiara so as to reduce the underlying rationale for urban migration.

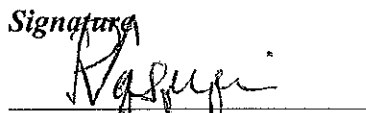
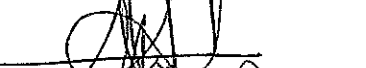
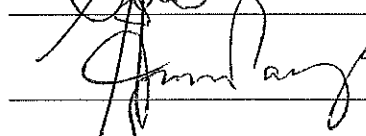



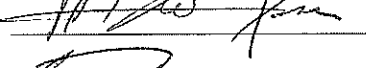
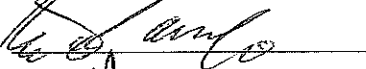

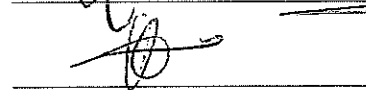
The Premiers join with Honiara City Council in its commitment to reducing criminal activity within the boundaries of Honiara City, so to make Honiara a crime free city. Decentralisation, whilst not the only solution to problems encountered by Honiara City Council, can play an important role.

18. The Premiers be consulted in relation to the agenda for the next Premiers Conference.

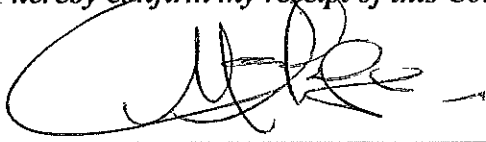
The Premiers express their gratitude to the Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening for the preparation and running of the Premiers Conference.

The Premiers, aware that priorities can change over time, desire the opportunity to provide input to the Ministry as to the form and content of the next Premiers Conference.

We signify our assent and commitment to the content of this Communiqué this 3rd day of October 2009:

<i>Premier/Deputy Premier</i>	<i>Province</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Hon. Patrick Vasuni, MPA	Central	
Hon. Jackson Kiloe, MPA	Choisuel	
Hon. Steven Panga, MPA	Guadalcanal	
Hon. Rueben Dotho, MPA	Isabel	
Hon. Thomas Weape, MPA	Makira Ulawa	
Hon. Ben Foukona, MPA	Malaita	
Hon. Timothy Johnston, MPA	Rennell Bellona	
Hon. Edward Daiwo, MPA	Temotu	
Hon. George Solingi Lilo, MPA	Western	
Cr. Alfred Maetia, Deputy Mayor	Honiara City Council	

I hereby confirm my receipt of this Communiqué this 3rd day of October 2009:



Hon. Manasseh Maelanga, Minister,
 Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening