

NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS

DAILY HANSARD

SECOND MEETING – EIGHTH SESSION

MONDAY 2nd OCTOBER 2006

The Hon Speaker, Sir Peter Kenilorea took the Chair at 10.00 am.

Prayers.

ATTENDANCE

At prayers, all were present with the exception of the Ministers for Lands & Survey, Education & Human Resources and the Members for West New Georgia/Vona Vona, West Guadalcanal, East Honiara, Ngella, Maringe/Kokota, Central Honiara, and South New Georgia/Rendova/Tetepari.

Hon Speaker: Your Excellency, the Governor General Sir Nathaniel Waena and Lady Waena, Honorable Prime Minister and Mrs Sogavare, Your lordship the Chief Justice and Lady Palmer, Conquerable Ministers of the Crown and Members of Parliament, Commissioner of the Royal Solomon Islands Police, Members of the Diplomatic Corps and RAMSI, invited guests, ladies and Gentlemen. I humbly welcome you all to this Honorable House, the National Parliament of Solomon Islands. We at Parliament are indeed privileged and honored to have you here today for the state opening of this meeting of the National Parliament. The last time a speech from the throne was delivered to Parliament was in 1998, almost eight years ago, and therefore it is a great pleasure for me to welcome you here today. It is customary for Parliaments operating under a Westminster system to have a monarch or their representative to open the session of Parliament after a general election such as was held in April this year.

In the United Kingdom Parliament the ceremony is held in the Lord Chambers rather than in the Commons due to the historical **battle?** between the Parliament and the

monarch. Of course, the case is different for a single chamber house such as Solomon Islands Parliament. With those few words of welcome I would now call upon His Excellency to deliver his speech.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

**By His Excellency Sir Nathaniel Rahumaea
Waena GCMG CSI KstJ, Governor-General
of Solomon Islands**

The Hon Speaker of the National Parliament of Solomon Islands, Your Lordship the Chief Justice, The Hon Prime Minister, Hon Cabinet Ministers, The Hon Leader of Opposition, Hon Members of Parliament, Your Excellencies Head of Missions, Reverend Church Leaders, Constitutional Post holders and Permanent Secretaries, Traditional Chiefs and Leaders, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

As the Constitutional Representative of Her Majesty The Queen, The Head of State of the Independent Democratic Sovereign State of Solomon Islands, it is my humble duty and special privilege, as the Governor General, to be able to deliver this historic ‘Traditional Speech from the Throne’.

May I humbly convey to the National Parliament, now in session, after the general elections in early 2006, very warm greetings and special well wishes, on behalf of our Head of State, Her Majesty The Queen.

May I sincerely congratulate you, the Hon Speaker of Parliament, for being accorded overwhelming parliamentary support, which you deservedly received. Your unopposed reappointment as the Speaker of this distinguished Legislature is historic. May you grace the guidance of the proceedings of Parliament with the enormity of your parliamentary leadership experience,

particularly, as the founding after of our Independent nation.

It is also most opportune for me, to sincerely congratulate the Hon Prime Minister and the government, for successfully attaining the mandate to govern the sovereign affairs of our people and nation, since taking Office, and at this point in time. Our people, throughout the nation, are eagerly contemplating enormous reform changes, by the current administration, particularly through the rural development policy initiatives, being announced by the Grand Coalition for Change Government.

To the Hon Ministers of the Crown, may I thank you for accepting responsibility to become Ministers, in order to spearhead the crucially important policy initiatives of the government. As the key players of the government administration, much would depend on your political direction and management of your departments.

By the same token, may I also convey my sincerest congratulations to the Hon Leader of Opposition and the Hon Leader of Independent Members of Parliament on your respective appointments. You have assumed the vital responsibility of providing the pivotal mechanism, which ensures checks and balances, to keep Her Majesty's Government vigilant, accountable and transparent, in their deliberations and undertakings, and to govern and lead our people and nation.

To all Members of the National Parliament, our people hold great confidence your leadership abilities and capabilities, to provide leadership vision, as the national legislators. May I respectfully draw your attention, as a reminder, to the beautiful motto of our Nation, as you begin your leadership journey of four years – "To Lead Is To Serve". May you diligently lead our people and nation forward, to the harbours of peace, tranquility and prosperity, with vision and wisdom.

The Grand Coalition for Change Government (GCCG) recognizes the importance of our human resource, who now number about half a million, in our nation, and scattered throughout the islands; from Temotu to the Shortlands, from Sikaiana and Ontong Java to Rennell and Bellona. We are one people, of one Nation, the Solomon Islands. As one people we

are graciously endowed with a wealth of diverse cultures, rich natural resources, and sound religious heritage. This enormous diversity is the basis of our national unity. We must appreciate the fundamental fact that, this country belongs to us and to our children. We have a responsibility therefore to ensure that, our nation continues to grow and prosper. The grand coalition for change government is desirous of building a strong and vibrant nation, based upon the 'pillars of democracy, unity of purpose and faith in the living God'.

The Grand Coalition for Change Administration of the Solomon Islands Government firmly believes that the most befitting theme, to direct government policies, would be: "Creating a New and Better Solomon Islands". The theme revolves around the present day aspirations, and attempts to outline the fundamental principles that embrace the policy issues and the new political directions, being undertaken the government.

The theme attempts to provide a strategic focus, on three development considerations of foundational significance, to create a peaceful, progressive and prosperous Nation, for our people, in the 21st century.

The three fundamental development considerations in focus are:

- (1) the "new political directions", necessary to take the nation forward;
- (2) the "pressing issues", facing our people and the nation; and
- (3) the "identified prospects", which would help our people and nation to achieve national prosperity.

The new political directions, call for, "a new Mission and Vision", for our country. The role and mission of the government therefore, is, to ensure that, all legislations, policies and regulatory mechanisms are duly exercised in the manner, worthy of our Sovereignty, and the mandate to govern and develop this nation. In this regard, the current coalition government believes that, sustainable and equitable development, can only be achieved through, "a bottom-up and holistic approach", that

encompasses the “empowerment of the villagers, through appropriate rural advancement strategies”.

The country had restricted itself rather unfortunately, in the past, by recognizing the players in the formal sector only and therefore under-utilised the enormous potentials that are in the rural areas. Hectares of arable opportunity agricultural land areas are still lying idle. We need to properly develop all the available Agricultural Opportunity Areas (AOA’s), for purposes of organized rural village development and income generation.

We have some of the most beautiful and environmentally sound and scenic spots and harbors, in the world, here in our nation, but Solomon Islanders are yet struggling to cope with the demands of the cash economy. No wonder why too many Solomon Islanders look for the easy way out, especially with the new mind set of the cargo-cult syndrome. The grand coalition government is therefore, determined, to stamp out that evil.

Both the Policy Framework Document launched in May 2006, and the Translation and Implementation document recently unveiled on 9th August, should set the basis, from which the government will direct and progress the country forward. Another aspect of this new political direction is, to have an acceptable vision. The vision for our nation is: “To create a God-fearing Society”, that is equitable and just; honest; trustworthy and forward looking. It is the responsibility of all Ministers of the crown; all Parliamentarians and Chief Executive Officers; together with all other persons assigned and assuming the roles of authority and responsibilities, whether it be in the public, private or civil society domains, to become consistent, and to lead and serve our people with the highest ethical standards. It is hence essential that, in order to bring about genuine economic, political and social transformation, the partnerships between stakeholders, have to be of acceptable quality and of high ethical standard.

Attention must also be given to public officers who are working within, and for, the government machinery. Public Servants must be highly disciplined and hardworking, to carry out government policies. The Public Service is the

conduit through which all government programs will be delivered. Currently, we have 9,216 working in the established sector and 409 in the non-established sector, and is steadily increasing. The government has recently addressed their salaries. This is to ensure that we not only attract the best of available talents in the country to serve the nation, but also to fairly compensate and reward performance. Public Service Reform to progressively create well trained and disciplined cadres of officers is ongoing.

Under the second theme, I wish now to highlight certain important pressing issues. Such issues include: Constitutional Reform, Ethical Leadership, Truth and Reconciliation and Nation-building. Let us not forget that nation-building is a continuing and challenging task. We as a nation have been through a lot of very trying and difficult times, within the recent past. The learning curve had been very steep and indeed quite slippery, but we have had to move on and learn important lessons, from our past mistakes. Briefly, these three important lessons are fundamental; if we are to gain anything positive from our past failures. They are:

- (i) the centralized top-heavy system, which we have adopted. It has not delivered well, as had been expected by our rural people;
- (ii) colonization and modernization, seemed to have eroded our worthy cultures and traditions. They have instead been perceived to be a threat to our rights to freedom, and to equal participation in national development; and
- (iii) the trickle-down economic development, that exploited and extracted our natural resources; and the deceitful and adverse accessing of funds, in the name of our communities, has not only deprived our people of necessary services but resultantly created serious grievances and disparities. Such improper practices also

contributed to the 'ethnic tension', which sadly brought the nation to its knees in 2000.

Fortunately, it had been our peoples' resolute resilience that we have successfully managed to come out of that devastating and nasty Civil Disturbance. Thanks to our donor friends, who have kindly come to our help, such as: the Republic of China or Taiwan; Australia; New Zealand, the United Kingdom; Japan, the United States, the EU, the UN and its various agencies, the Forum and other agencies, which have helped us in one way or otherwise. In addition, we sincerely acknowledge one entirely new and positive entity that has since continued to make its presence felt in our nation. That is RAMSI.

May I, at this juncture, sincerely express on behalf of the government and the people of Solomon Islands, our profound thanks to the RAMSI, and to the respective participating countries of the Pacific, led by Australia and New Zealand, for your continuous concern for our nation. I wish to assure you, of my government's continuing firm commitment, to work together with RAMSI, within the spirit of true partnership and cooperation, for the common good of all our people. We are harnessing a beneficial regional partnership that is purposely premised on: mutual understanding, and respect for each other's sovereignty, and the values that wet us apart as independent nations and peoples, within the Pacific Community of Nations. We agree that RAMSI still has much work to do for our people and nation. It is our ultimate responsibility thus, as a government to ensure, that, our regional partnership grows from strength to strength.

The strength of this nation lies in our own people, and how we are able to manage that important resource. We may have concentrated and spoken much about managing our land and sea resources, but have paid little attention to effectively manage our people, and to provide a governing system that best suits our diverse nation. In this context, we note, that the majority of our people now desire a Federal system of government that would fulfill their desire for decentralization and diversification. The grand coalition is therefore embarking on

finalizing the new Federal System, which hopefully would be operational by mid – 2007.

The government is also embarking on establishing three very important Commissions. They are:

- i. The Commission of Inquiry into the Honiara Riots;
- ii. The Commission of Inquiry into land dealings on Guadalcanal; and
- iii. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The Commission of Inquiry into the Honiara riots has already started its preliminary work. They should be fully operational soon and to report back to the government in due course. The other two commissions are also in the process of being established. It is hoped that during the hearing sessions and deliberations of these two important commissions, we should be able to know the truth about the root causes to the social crisis on Guadalcanal. Those three Commissions, hopefully, will all contribute to the enhancement of our national unity, as well as impacting positively on national healing.

Besides fostering national healing and consciousness, is also the fundamental and intrinsic phenomenon of promulgating our national identity, whether it be cultural or social or physical. Yes, we are one people, but the tendency to fragment this nation into regions, based on animosity or ill-feelings, is perhaps one of the potential worst blights, still hovering over our nation. This therefore calls upon each and every one of us, to be more appreciative of our inherent differences. Let us turn such weaknesses into national strengths, through fostering sound undertaking.

The final part to my address focuses on some pivotal fundamental issues, needing our attention. One such issue and inherent problem is the question of land and the land tenure system. Out of the 27,000 sq.km of land mass in our country, 85% of this is customary owned. Being mindful of this, the government has established a Land Reform Unit in the Ministry of Lands, tasked with the responsibility of determining how best we can deal with customary, alienated and crown land. Land as we all know is a very sensitive and controversial

issue. Therefore, we have to take great care when dealing with it.

Associated with land is the issue of settlement of disputes. The chiefs and our traditional leaders have an important function to fulfill in this regard. Our chiefs, rather sadly, have unfortunately, not been given due recognition. I am pleased to note, that one or two provincial assemblies have begun to involve chiefs, in their assembly meetings, as well as in training them to become effective community leaders. The national government shall be exploring ways to give more legal recognition to our chiefs and traditional leaders. This is a crucial step in the right direction.

Ladies and gentlemen, another matter which we should pay close attention to is, our natural resources, both on land and in the sea. In terms of our land resources, several commodities come to mind. Let me just refer to them briefly:

i) logging.

This concern has been a long standing one, and as we all are aware, the current logging and harvesting rate is believed to be nearly three times the sustainable level. This must be reduced, if the country is to continue benefiting from this sector. There is a need to implement a holistic management approach to the country's forests, by putting in place mechanisms to effectively monitor the activities of the logging industry. The government would be reviewing the current draft forestry bill, in order to make it mandatory, for all logging companies to process locally, 20 percent of their log harvests. In addition, the government has issued a moratorium on issuances of new licences. All current licences are to be reviewed. All logging companies are to carry out replacement reforestation, in the logged out areas. We hope that these exercises will reduce the annual harvesting quota, and would also ensure that, our forests are harvested responsibly and sustainably, with realistic returns being accorded to the resource owners and the government.

In terms of our other export potentials, we need now to look beyond our traditional crops such as copra and cocoa. Yes, these crops have kept us going for the past 100 years or so. We however, need to diversify. In this regard,

CEMA needs to be restrengthened, so that it can proactively explore areas such as in biodiesel, by developing the use of coconut oil. In this way it can help or copra producers to enjoy added value to their copra. With regards to such other crops, as bananas, honey, and cassava for export to overseas markets, we need to introduce and maintain necessary high standard. As a member of the ACP Member States, we should have easy access to the European Market. We have not, however been able to take advantage of this arrangement because we do not have the capacity, and are without an internal body to investigate and conduct research into food products, which we want to export, so that they would meet international regulations and standards. In addition, we have not as yet become a member of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC), which is responsible for the development of food standards. We are now in the process of seeking membership into that important organisation.

With regards to our sea resources, in terms of fisheries, we need to manage our fishing industry, on sustainable basis, for the benefit of all Solomon Islanders. We shall review the current tuna fishing operations in Solomon Islands, with the view to putting in place mechanisms, to oversee these commercial activities, to ensure our resources are not unnecessarily poached to depletion. It has also been confirmed recently that Solomon Islands possesses one of the richest concentrations of reef fish in the world. Bearing this in mind, we should be cautious about any activity that might deem threatening to our reefs and seabed. This would mean, working in conjunction and collaboration with the FFA, and the other regional and international surveillance agencies, to undertake vigilant surveillance and effective monitoring of our vast 200 miles Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

There is some positive development in our only local fishing and processing company, the SOLTAI. With humble beginnings in 2001, after the demise of Solomon Taiyo, SOLTAI undertook commercial tuna operations in fishing, processing and marketing. SOLTAI started off with only 150 employees in 2001, and is now employing 900 workers, with plans to expand the workforce to 1,200 employees by

December 2006. SOLTAI is one of the few companies in the world that is using pole and line fishing, and is the largest exporter of smoked fish in the world, to Soyo Sansho of Japan. To meet the required standards, in compliance to the EU List 1 status, the company is undergoing a restructuring exercise, in terms of its facilities. The company's plan to expand will require a lot of raw materials such as having adequate fish stocks. In this regard, the current government is looking at proposals which would require foreign fishing companies that are currently fishing in our exclusive economic zone, to unload 20% of their catch, to sell to our SOLTAI fishing company. We hope that after several years, we should see the company successfully reach the road to profitability.

By having only one fishing company is not enough, thus the government is soon to explore the possibility of establishing a second fishing and processing company, to be located in another part of the country. Besides these big fishing undertakings, the government also plans to actively revive the rural fishing industry, to engage our local fishermen, not only in terms of fishing, but also in prawn, seaweed and pearl farming as well.

We understand that economic development can only sustainably occur in areas where there is appropriate infrastructure in place. While it is true that agriculture, fishing, logging and mining play a substantial role in the economy, provision of reliable services associated with supplying producers and distributing their output is a major element of economic development. The high services costs and poor transport currently divert large sums of funds, from potential investment into economic activities. The government is desirous to address this important requirement by providing, developing and managing a reliable, appropriate, sustainable and affordable transport sector in the country, as encouragement to investment and economic development. There are currently ongoing projects to address this. We wish to thank the Australian and New Zealand Governments, who have provided funds for the rehabilitation of our roads and bridges on Malaita and Guadalcanal, and also elsewhere, and the EU for funding wharves development throughout the country.

Through such infrastructure developments, we believe that the necessary economic spin-offs would be realized, as our rural dwellers would open up their land and get actively involved in agricultural and commercial development, for the betterment of their lives. Such activities would include poultry, piggery and rice farming. In terms of cattle redevelopment, the RIPEL landholding property at Yandina is to be explored, for the rehabilitation of the cattle industry.

Ladies and gentlemen, at the national level, the government will still be focusing on the Aluta basin oil palm development on Malaita, and on the Vangunu Project in the Western Province. The Guadalcanal Palm Oil Ltd (GPPOL) has already started its operations and is currently processing some oil. The company expects to make its first export of 3,000 tonnes of crude oil to Europe in October and the kernel to PNG for processing. The company currently has about 2,500 employees and it would like to have all its employees living on site. The company also has plans to go into cattle raising for the domestic market only.

In relation to mineral exploration, our desire is to progressively tap and develop our other natural resources, especially in the areas of mining, energy and petroleum, which remain high priority, and very much at the forefront. In the area of mining, we are fortunate, that, the environment provided by RAMSI is now conducive, to enhance the Australia-Solomon Gold Company to recommence work on the Gold Ridge Mine in Central Guadalcanal. There have been some early positive indications that when fully operational, after several years, the God Ridge Mine will be as big as OK-Tedi in Papua New Guinea is good news for our balance of trade, but we must be ever mindful of the need to ensure fair share of benefits, for the company shareholders, the landowners, the province and of course, the national government.

In terms of energy resources, we hope to embark on alternative forms of energy, such as in hydro power and solar energy, and in the area of petroleum. The government encourages genuine investors to come in, and explore the possibilities of oil development. We can only be sure of this after oil prospecting has confirmed the status of petroleum deposits in this country.

In tourism, we have such vast potential, thus the government is encouraging, eco-tourism as well as hotel development, to cater for an increase in the number of visitors to our shores in the near future. We are hopeful on the increase in tourism numbers, but we must be able to have the capacity and professionalism to cope with this expected demand. We have never gone beyond the 30,000 visitors per annum mark, but we hope to achieve this by 2008, during which time the country is hoping to plan massive celebrations, to coincide with our nation's 30th anniversary of independence. We must now set ourselves to achieve the target of 30,000 visitors in 2008, as one of our 30th Anniversary Celebrations Special Achievements.

With reference to trade and investment, we welcome genuine investors. Under the new Foreign Investment Act, it is noted that the process in getting the papers done for investment is now faster and better. A robust financial system, with less stringent requirements, is what is now needed, to support and encourage investment. In this context, the government is planning to establish Special Economic Zones (SEZ) or Free Trade Zones in selected parts of our country, to attract sizeable investment. The Special Economic Zones will have the potential to bring about considerable benefits, in terms of revenue and income generation, employment and other indirect benefits with spin-offs, crucial for economic growth.

With regards to finance and economic recovery, our economy has been performing quite well over the recent past one or two years, and our finances have stabilised. We wish to thank RAMSI and our development partners for this positive development. However, we still have a long way to go. The government is very mindful of unnecessary spending, thus measures are in place to ensure that this does not happen. We still have to repay our debts, hence the initiative started by the last government, for continuous dialogue, with our development partners, to either cancel or reschedule some of our outstanding debts, is still a top priority.

There is a need to encourage vibrant economic growth to take place, for which we need the unfailing support of the private sector. The private sector needs to be vibrant and

enterprising. The government recognises the need to forge closer working relations with the private sector, through increased private business investment, and in facilitating rural private sector development, as a source of employment for large numbers of Solomon Islanders. The government is determined to assist in that regard.

Another important prerequisite for economic growth is political stability. The government is mindful of its responsibility to provide that stability. Certain bills are being prepared to ensure the desired political stability, as well as for essential ethnical leadership, and for dealing with corrupt leaders. To deal with corruption, we have to start with the leaders.

In the field of Law and Order, Security and Justice, we are again thankful to RAMSI for creating improvements in that sector. Our Police Force Officers have started to gain valuable experience from the PPF and RAMSI, but there are still things to be done, especially in terms of training, discipline and recovery of the national pride that our police force once had, prior to the ethnic crisis. Police and Prison Staff housing, is still an ongoing major issue of concern. The government is committed to pursuing this important requirement. The government also acknowledges the Ausaid and RAMSI's efforts in strengthening the Justice and Court Sector, to be able to deal with the many outstanding cases the ethnic tension.

In terms of communications, the government encourages open, honest and responsible media. Besides the print and radio communication, we are being ushered into the internet age, and are no longer isolated but part of the global network. Solomon Telekom plays a major and positive role in this development. However, the government feels that a review of that 15 year exclusive agreement with Telekom is necessary, so as to encourage competition. Many of our people experience the monopoly in this sector, as being very expensive. As a member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), we are obliged to eliminate monopoly, to encourage competition.

With regards to both sea and air transport, these are areas we want to see major improvements on. We are a country of islands,

and our shipping services to our remote parts still remains appallingly poor. Our domestic airline services are also below standard. The government will explore ways to bring about needed improvements on these major shortcomings.

May I now take us to the final sector, which is social services. I would like to address our Health and Education Services; Youth; Women; Sports; the civil Society; and the Churches.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is sometimes said, that, a Healthy Population, is a Wealthy Nation. Our health services throughout the country have continued to improve. However, we still need appropriate training, to cope with the many and ever increasing complex health demands that the population has on the health services. We require all Solomon Islanders to be Health conscious and to take of their own personal hygiene. Health in other words is everyone's business, and that, healthy living in other words is everyone's business, and that, healthy living begins at home.

One of the biggest health risks facing our people nowadays is the apparent threat of the HIV/Aids syndrome. The government has taken this matter as a serious priority, in terms of awareness and mass education. Although there are less than 10 known HIV cases in this country, we should not sit back and wait for the day when many of our villages will be empty of our young population, because of HIV/Aids. We certainly do not want that to happen.

While greater emphasis is being placed on the threat of HIV/Aids, the Government is also mindful as ever, of the prevalence of other sickness and disease within the Communities, such as Malaria, TB, Diabetes, and Cancerous ailments, etc, which need to be brought under control, through curative and preventative medicine.

On education, we want to provide basic education to all our children. We consider education as a right, and thus our children should go as far as to Forms 3 and 5, so that they could have adequate knowledge to face the realities of life. In this context we are determined to improve on our literacy rate, to eventually reach about 90% or even better. Those or even better. Those who cannot

continue on up the academic ladder, are being encouraged to attend vocational training centers, to learn practical skills and trades, to equip them for practical living as farmers, carpenters, fishermen, and shop owners in the villages.

The government is pursuing the need to fully resource the SICHE, so that it can become an University College. At a later stage, and in conjunction with this, the establishment of the USP's 4th Campus in Honiara, is a pressing vital priority for the present government to vigorously pursue as well, so that the two institutions can complement one another. We regard well training human resource, as an important ingredient to our nation's progressive advancement and overall development.

It is always being said that the youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow. Shall we not be bold enough to refer to them as leaders of today as well? We have a vibrant population of young people who number about 55% of the total national population. The government is putting in place appropriate policies, which would address some of the concerns raised by our young people. The government intends to establish a National Youth Commission and a National Youth Corps to provide the necessary mechanisms in dealing with youth issues, one of which is sports.

Sports is a unifying force and all forms of sports contribute to this understanding. Soccer has become our national game and pride. After the departure of Australia to join the Asian Football Federation, the Solomon Islands should see itself as the leading Soccer National in Oceania. We have just recently witnessed a breakthrough when our Beach Soccer players won the Oceania title to represent the region in the Beach World Cup finals in Brazil in November. May I on behalf of the Government congratulate our competitors for the sound achievement made so far. The government therefore encourages the Solomon Islands Football Federation to explore all opportunities, to continue to develop and maintain our Soccer standard, as the number one Soccer Nation in Oceania. The government also encourages the National Sports Council to measure up to the growing sporting needs of our country. Such national sporting events as the Solomon Games are opportunities to educate, train and unite our

young people. Internationally, we must now prepare well for the South Pacific Games being hosted in Samoa in 2007.

It is sometimes said that youths are reflections of their parents. My thoughts go out to a typical mother, who entered into an argument with her eighteen year old son. The son was blaming the mother for his predicament, but the mother lovingly turns to him and said, "Son just remember, that, when you were a baby I carried you in my arms. Now you are an angry young man, I still carry you in my heart." This would be a powerful expression of a mother's love to her son. The mothers of this nation are the backbone to our future. The government is desirous to assisting both the women's department and the National Council of Women, so that, they can become equal partners in women advocacy and development.

With regards to social welfare, the government is very mindful of the fact that there are disadvantaged groups in our society, such as the disabled, vulnerable and unwanted. The government shall explore ways of assisting such disadvantaged groups, as they too can very well take active role in our communities. Let us not make them feel that they are unwanted. Here, I am reminded by Mother Theresa, who once remarked that, "the worst type of poverty is to have the feeling of being unloved and of loneliness".

The Government is also committed to inviting the Civil Society groups, the churches and non-state actors, to be positively involved in the affairs of this nation. In this regard the government has already started holding regular discussions and consultations with those relevant important stakeholders, to see how best we can work together, to help build our nation, which we all love!

The churches have continued to play very vital and an active part in our nation's development process. The present government would want to encourage more of this worthy partnership with the churches. In this context the government, subject to the introduction of an agreed formula, is desirous to begin providing direct financial grants to churches, based on the one tent principle, on a given amount of state revenue.

We have been reminded by some of our important church dignitaries, who have visited us, such as the "President of the World – SDA Church" and the recent visit by "the Archbishop of Canterbury", that this "Nation needs Spiritual Healing". We must put our house in order. We all know that the family is the basic unit of any Society. It is often said that charity begins at home. In like manner we could also say that "poverty and most social ills" begin at home. This is a very big challenge to us parents. I like the way, His Holiness, the late Pope John Paul II, beautifully put it, when speaking to a group of families in 1992; he said that, "the future of humanity passes through the family". Might I add and say, that, "the future of Solomon Islands as a Nation, passes through the family".

Ladies and gentlemen, may I conclude by saying that, "we now have the opportunity to turn this country around". I have been highlighting some of our problems, and attempted at sharing with you some of our positive future prospects. We can indeed be able to make a difference. Here I would like to profoundly thank our donor partners, for their continuous assistance to us, and to the RAMSI, for their continued good work. To all our leaders in the villages, in our communities, churches, provinces, the government and civil society, we thank you for your unfailing continuous support.

May I now appeal to everyone of us, to continue to work together, in peace and harmony, in our collective effort to rebuild this beautiful nation, the Solomon Islands. May we be reminded that our plans and prosperity can only come about, "if we have faith in the living God". He is the same God who promised and reminded King Solomon in the Book of Proverbs, of the Old Testament, that, and I quote – "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed". We need now to submit our plans and hopes for true peace and prosperity, "to the same God, who created our beloved Nation Solomon Islands".

Thank you, and may God richly bless the Solomon Islands and our people.

Hon Sogavare: Mr Speaker, I beg leave to move that Standing Orders 13(b) be suspended

in order to allow the Prime Minister to read the Statement of Government Business.

Mr Speaker: Permission granted for Standing Orders 13(b) to be suspended.

**STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT
BUSINESS**

The House adjourned at 11.30 am