

MONDAY 14TH DECEMBER 2009

The Deputy Speaker, Hon. Kengava took the Chair at 10.56 a.m.

Prayers.

ATTENDANCE

At prayers, all were present with the exception of the Ministers for Justice & Legal Affairs; Women, Youth and Children's Affairs; Environment, Conservation & Meteorology; Communication & Civil Aviation; Agriculture & Livestock Development; Infrastructure & Development, Forestry; Home Affairs; Police, National Security & Correctional Services and the Members for Mbaegu/Asifola, Ngella, North Malaita, Temotu Pele, Central Honiara, Temotu Nende, Lau/Mbaelelea, East Makira, North Guadalcanal, West Honiara and North West Guadalcanal.

PRESENTTION OF PAPERS AND OF REPORTS

- Status of Audits of the Solomon Islands Government Entities as at 30th June 2009

STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

BILLS

Bills – First Reading

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Amendment) Bill 2009

Bills – Second Reading

The 2010 Appropriation Bill 2009'

Mr Speaker: I would like to remind Honorable Members that according to Standing Order 61(2) a maximum of four days including today is allowed for the second reading debate. However, whether we use up all allotted days depends on Members. When no further member rises to speak on the Bill. I will call on the Honorable Minister for Finance and Treasury to wind the debate up before the question is put.

The floor is now open for debate. It is a long standing Westminster Parliamentary Convention one that we also adopted in this Parliament that the Leader of the Opposition is given the first opportunity to respond to a Minister's budget speech. I will therefore, call on the Honorable Leader of Opposition to speak on the 2010 Appropriation Bill 2009.

Mr SOGAVARE: Before I do so I just want to seek your views. I understand that the budget books have yet to be distributed to all Members of Parliament and I just want to seek your views on that whether it is appropriate for Parliament to start to debate the motion on the Second Reading when Members of Parliament have yet to receive the various volumes, the number of volumes that comes with the schedule.

Mr Speaker: Thank you Leader of Opposition. I think that is a very important point raised and if the Minister of Finance can be provided to MPs by this afternoon and so I will suspend Parliament until 1.30pm.

Parliament is suspended until 1.30pm

Mr Speaker: Honorable Members, debate on the 2010 Appropriation Bill 2009 resumes following suspension. I have been advised that the documents which necessitated the suspension have been made available for Members. I trust that Members will now be in a better position to contribute to this debate. I believe I have outlined the basic rules about consideration of this bill and also the debate. I ask Members to bear my earlier comments when contributing the debate. I now call on the honorable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. SOGAVARE: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to formally place our views on the 2010, Appropriation Bill 2009.

I think at the outset, I must register our congratulation to the Minister of Finance and the Government for delivering its third consecutive budget in two years. And I thank God they last as a government.

As required of us in the debate to the second reading of the Bill, I will, as ruled by you, Mr. Speaker, confine myself to the general principles, of course, making reference to the six priority areas of the CNURA Government and comment on what our people expect from the National Budget, and I will leave the threats to the Budget towards the end of my intervention. I think by way of acknowledgement, I would like to say that special mention needs to be made of the Permanent Secretary and the officials of the Ministry of Finance and Treasury for, I guess, putting up and trying to make sense of the political thinking that went into the formulation of the Budget. I must admit it is not an easy task. Some of us have been in these shoes, and I can tell you that it is not easy. It is a life of constant battle trying to make sense of different interests and aspirations.

I must also register my thanks all the Permanent Secretaries and senior Government officials for the work they also put into the preparation of the Budget, with all genuine intentions to reflect the big political statements that were made by the Government when they took office. Very often, politicians and political governments would use the public service as scapegoat for unclear political directives, but forget to appreciate the loyalty and commitment of the public service that made it appear as if the government is really working hard to deliver. It is always not easy to carry out these responsibilities when they cannot get the level of budget they need to deliver these big promises. Frustrating still is the frequent change in the priorities of the political government as reflected in the number of supplementary appropriations that were passed by Parliament.

I think the importance of the country's annual budget cannot be overstated. It is a comprehensive summary of fiscal measures designed by the Government in a strategic manner, of course, within the perimeters of approved policies to address the socio economic needs of our people. It is one document that has the potential of making or breaking the economy, depending on how the important economic tools and strategies are designed and implemented. In this context also, whether the economy will grow, stagnate or constrict depends very much on how the important players in the economy translate and respond to the economic signals sent out by the Budget.

On this note, it is important for us to appreciate that the budget is not a standalone government owned thing that the ruling government as the custodian of it can do whatever it likes with it, without being sensitive to the parties that have direct interest in how it affects them. As a matter of fact, the important parties to every budget that came before this House during the reign of any governments and how they relate to the Budget is summarized as follows. (And I would like to do so in the contexts of the CNURA Government being in power). One, the private sector is an important party to the National Budget. This sector is also recognized as the engine of growth; it is the main financier of the Budget.

It will be interesting to note and appreciate that the ability of the private sector to sustainably support the annual budget depends, to a large extent, on the kind of business environment created by the effects of the macro and micro economic strategies that underscore the formulation and implementation of annual budgets. And the 2010 Budget is no different.

It is important to note as well that it is the private sector's unwavering commitment to see this country moving forward and taking on the challenges of bad economic policies that kept us going. Otherwise this country would have ceased to exist. I raised my hat to the private sector.

The second group is the ordinary citizens of the country. This group of people that this Parliament takes for granted as the beneficiaries and in whose names budgets after budgets were passed and implemented by successive Solomon Islands Government. Look at it also from another angle; they are innocent victims, very often innocent victims of poor budgeting and unworkable development strategies. They are also targets of reviews and analysis conducted by various interest groups to justify certain line of thinking. They are often used as the authority for action under the principles of democracy to justify recommendations and line of thinking on issues of national interest. It is their dependent on subsistent living that acts as a cushion against absolute poverty in this country to allow the government to work without having to be concerned about poverty. These people have been doing this for the last 30 years or so, and it would be simply irresponsible of us to take their perseverance for granted.

Thirdly, I would like to recognize the indigenous participants in various economic activities. This group of people is trying to fit in with the capitalist mode of economic development, but it is struggling to come to terms with the workings of the system. They simply cannot understand why their wealth and resources are not recognized, their security for financial resources, by the custodians of these factors of production. They are still waiting for the implementation of the Secured Transactions Act, the various guarantee schemes and promises of direct funding assistance from the budget for agriculture, fisheries and other funding. These people, together with the other ordinary citizens of the country are direct custodians of the country's strength in the abundant natural resources and acres of land that are simply lying idle for years, and yet we are still talking about our potentials.

The next group that I would like to recognize is the young and vulnerable sector of the country's population. This group is the future leaders of this country and it expects national leaders to be visionary and set this country on a sustainable path. They watched hopelessly as our logs and other resources are depleted with nothing to show for. Talking about time bomb, this group is just waiting to explode if nothing positive is forthcoming. Governments are taking

them for granted and have been careless about addressing their needs. The longer we continue to be careless in this matter, the more dangerous and complicated it will become for us to address.

The way the key economic strategies like education and employment system are designed are simply out of tune with the realities that is faced by a modern Solomon Islands that must move with the changing world if we are to cope with the challenges of globalization. We are sitting ducks in this respect while the world and our neighboring countries are moving ahead. As a matter of fact Solomon Islands is yet to reach a stage where we can be proud of our human resource, as a meaningful factor of production. The level and quality of human resource we produce is still below what would be required to cope with the challenges of development in the 21st century. More children are born into this country than there are schools to accommodate them and hospitals to attend to their medical needs. More and more Solomon Islanders are dropping out from the formal education system and got recruited into Master Liu organizations putting more pressures on the already overly stretched government formal service delivery capacity and meager resources. Their expectations are for the Budget to set a clearer path for sustainable economic growth and prosperity to improve the capacity of the country to build more schools and hospitals to cope with the growing demands for these services.

What we see and will continue to see instead is a budget that has been rendered ineffective in achieving these objectives because it is plagued by conflicting vested foreign and domestic interests that are only counterproductive to achieving long term sustainable growth for our developing economy. Unless governments stand up and take effective control of the way we are going, we will only drive this country down the path of absolute poverty and hopelessness. We should be thankful that we are Solomon Islanders because there are countries in the world that can no longer talk about developing their natural resources because they have nothing left. Is that the kind of Solomon Islands we want to leave for our future generations? I do not think so. I would like to believe that we are more responsible than that.

Talking about vulnerable population in the broad context of the term, our people who were direct victims of the ethnic conflict and the problems that devastated their lives are still looking for hope. Most of them were very well established business people before. Their lifetime investments were zapped out of existence in a matter of minutes. These people are yet to be properly settled. I take personal interest in this group because they have demonstrated that they are capable of participating effectively in economic development. In economic terms they are willing and capable human resource waiting to be utilized. In that regard our vulnerable population is looking for a budget that is backed by sound

economic strategies that will set the path for realistic public and private sector investment in growth to create opportunities for the growing population of this country.

I would also like to recognize as another group, the potential foreign investors. These people are looking for more than just an indication of commitment to sound economic strategies. They are looking for actual and realistic public investments in infrastructures both in terms of institutional arrangement and physical infrastructures strategically located to reduce the risks associated with accessibility to these infrastructures. What we have so far are commitments to building infrastructures and virtually nothing is seen and actually delivering on these commitments.

Our investment related laws despite undergoing reforms are still getting us nowhere in terms of attracting the right kinds and size of investments that not only show interest but actually invest in the country. Honiara remains the primary destination of investors. This is despite the fact that what is desperately needed now is decentralization of major economic developments to other parts of the country to reduce pressures on Guadalcanal. Frustrating still, is despite the fact that millions of dollars appearing in the books as assistance to Solomon Islands, we are moving nowhere in achieving the objectives of focused decentralization.

I can go and talk about other groups that have direct interest in the implementation of the National Budget but I think I have made my point. What we are talking about here is effective and focused use of budget resources both internal and external sources to address the real needs of Solomon Islands, and not what people think is good for us. If there is any government in the history of this country that enjoyed an overwhelming majority to comfortably and confidently attend to the needs of the populace without the fear of political disturbance, it has to be the present CNURA Government. They took over the government making huge promises to the people of this country. With the comfort it has, one expects the government to take radical economic decisions to make a difference to the way the country has been managed over the years marked by over reliance on unsustainable utilization of our natural resources and very little investment on growth. Unfortunately that is not the case. This is the third budget of the CNURA Government and we see very little improvement in terms of the economic decisions and directions that goes into its structure and emphasis. It is still guided by the growth neutral six pillar priorities of the Government purporting to advance rural development. It failed to appreciate where the strength of the country really lies and advanced economic measures and reasoning resembling a normal economy where the coverage and influence of the traditional key institutions and drivers of economic development in any

economy are fully functional in terms of coverage and accessibility by all capable and willing Solomon Islanders. In short, this is the third successive budget of the CNURA Government that failed to invest in growth.

I am making this comment in the setting of Solomon Islands economy as commented on earlier. The coverage and accessibility to important factors of production by Solomon Islanders is grossly frustrated due to confidence barriers, and for Solomon Islands as a country our accredit worthiness. It still does not dawn on the majority of leaders in this country that we have been heavily relying on the unsustainable development of our forestry sector to survive economically. The so called growth we pride ourselves is attributed to the unsustainable harvesting of our logs, which will now run out in three years time. We did not do any better in the fishery and marine sectors. Our investment in the agriculture sector does not fully explore the potential in the artisan sector. Under such environment, we must be strategic in our thinking. Unfortunately, we do not see it in the present CNURA Government as clearly manifested in the three budgets presented to this House since it took over the reign of power in 2007. There is very little strategic thinking. Our meager budget resources are thinly spread across many priorities, and in the end we achieve nothing after two years.

I think it is also worth mentioning that CNURA also came into power boasting that it has the confidence of all donor partners because the Prime Minister took the pain of going around the region and apologized for the sins committed by the Sogavare Government against Australia and the Region. Well, it did not show. The CNURA Government is struggling to implement the 2009 Budget due to the effects of the global financial crisis and reprioritization of the budget during the year under contingencies warrants and therefore badly needed direct budgetary assistance. We are yet to receive that, although we have promises of such assistance as the Prime Minister informed this House a number of days ago.

In the meantime, the 2009 agriculture, fisheries and forestry projects were hardly implemented. As a matter of fact, the Government only managed to deliver 48% of the 2009 Development Budget; a very poor record indeed for a government that boasts to have the world in the tip of its fingers. It is also clear judging from the level of supplementary appropriation bills, both by way of regularizing expenditures incurred under contingencies warrants and request for additional funds, the Government cannot make up its mind about its priorities.

Let us leave the argument on growth aside for a while and deal with the argument that the six pillars are important for the country, and see whether the government is really putting resources into these sectors to achieve real outcomes. It will be an interesting exercise. Interesting still is whether donor partners' input into these sectors makes any difference to the desired outcome.

On reconciliation, the green book is quite clear. Reconciliation is the number one priority of the government. We take reconciliation alone, which is a very important policy objective of the government, a total of \$44.3million is invested in that sector by the Government since it took over in 2007. Come 2010, we only invested \$44.3million in that policy objective. But it is the number one priority of the Government. You have to be a mathematician to see that. That is a lousy investment considering the coverage of the program envisaged by the government. That boils down to the point whether the government is serious about what it wants to achieve on reconciliation and whether reconciliation is still considered a number one priority. This year it is a lousy \$15.8million on the number one priority of the Government.

What is more serious is the total absence of donor contribution to this very important CNURA Government program, and that is why we cast doubt on the claim made on this floor of Parliament that donors are coming and this time they will direct budgetary assistance to help government programs. If there can be any more serious program of the Government than this one. This is number one priority of the Government, and that should automatically get the attention of donor partners by putting funds into it. If donor partners make direct budgetary assistance as intimated by the Minister in his speech, my question is, will reconciliation be considered a priority or are we floating away from that priority now and something new becomes a priority, although we continue to mention the priorities whenever we deliver the budget or we talk about big government programs.

If as suggested by the Minister and the Prime Minister on various occasions, the hands of response of our development partners in assisting the country in conducting reconciliation established the point that donors commitment to providing direct funding to the budget looks a bit doubtful. That is, donors are first and foremost committed to their home country policies, their own aid policies in utilizing their aid in any developing country including Solomon Islands. It is those policies that guided and directed the way they operate in this country, and that is why in a number of occasions I said that if we want aid donors to change their attitude, then the place to really focus is the aid policies in their own countries to get their Parliament to change their policies before we can achieve the big, big things they are telling us and we inform each other.

National security is the second priority of the Government. On national security and foreign relations, is taking a big, big portion of the budget. A total of \$4billion would have been invested in this sector during 2008/2009 and the 2010 fiscal year, putting these years together. Of this amount, the Solomon Islands Government invested \$464.3million, and the remaining balance of

\$3.5billion is RAMSI's input into the Law and Order sector. And it would be interesting to note that \$2.4billion of this amount is salary and allowance of the Visiting Contingent. Now I am of the view that this investment could be utilized to curb the rising lawlessness even with the presence of RAMSI in Solomon Islands. This is a serious matter of concern, which we would simply be irresponsible to brush aside as unimportant. The fact of the matter is that criminal elements no longer respect the presence of our friends here. Now, you do not have to be a genius to work that out. It is time now for the Royal Solomon Islands police to take full charge of law and order. The question, however, is how can we expect the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force to confidently take over that responsibility when they are still depending on RAMSI for logistics support. I was disappointed because when I look at the budget there is basically nothing in there.

I would have thought that by now, six years after the arrival of RAMSI, we should see a systematic transfer of RAMSI vehicles and other logistics to the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force and allow our Force to take the frontline fully equipped with vehicles and other logistics. Judging from a number of incidences that have happened lately, I believe that if our Police are in full control of the command of logistics and deployment of police to the areas concerned, we will see a much improved response by the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force. If this suggestion is not possible due to other complication, I simply cannot understand why the Solomon Islands Government cannot invest in additional police vehicles. There is nothing on that in the Budget. I would suggest a direct investment in 30 police hiluxes and other logistic by the Solomon Islands Government. The way we are going we maybe into a terrible shock when RAMSI assistance which includes the provision of requisite logistics is withdrawn. Our police must now get used to taking control of law and order.

Having said that, we welcome the investment in police housing and police stations by the New Zealand Government and the continual upgrading of the prison services. But our real concern on this sector is the ability of the Solomon Islands Government to take on the cost of delivering law and order in the country in the long run; something which the Minister of Police may want to enlighten this house when he makes his contribution. We would like to know where we move on from now when the Government is basically making very little investment in the requisite logistics.

On foreign relations, we insist that the Government immediately reconsiders the wisdom of engaging Iran in talks of any kind. The decision by the CNURA Government will go down as a shameful act by a government that speaks so much about protecting the image of the country in the international

arena. It is nothing short of international corruption and blatant approval of human rights violation by Solomon Islands. The Minister may want to inform Parliament where are we on this matter. In case, the Government does not know, Iran has a very bad human rights record. Persecution of the followers of the Baha'i faith is a state sponsored activity in Iran simply because the headquarters of the Baha'i faith is in Haifa, Israel. The Baha'i followers are accused of being Zionists and hundreds are being persecuted on a daily basis with the full approval of the Iranian Government. The Minister must also explain how and why is it that Solomon Islands voted in support of the Goldstone report that was basically designed to isolate Israel in a very vulnerable situation. That is not about exerting our sovereignty as the Government may want us to believe. No, it is pure international stupidity. We note that the Ministry is asking for \$1.3million for overseas travelling. The last thing we want is for this fund to be used for travels to secure deals with governments that do not share the values we uphold in this country.

Infrastructure is the third important priority in the CNURA Government, and on infrastructure development the CNURA Government with our development partners have invested \$733million by way of public investment in the sector come 2010. About \$520million of the total investment is from aid donors. About \$93.8million of this amount is technical assistance.

It is interesting to note that the CNURA Government has actually drifted away from its own policies in this area, so much so that what appears in the 2010 Budget is no longer what the CNURA has said it will deliver when it took office. Some of these projects are like this: build at least two new bridges each on Malaita and Guadalcanal main roads; build 6 new airfields in at least six provinces, three airfields every year; build at least six new wharves in six provinces; tar seal Gwaunaru'u, Seghe, Nusa Tupe, Kirakira, Fera, Lata, Tinggoa and Taro airstrips over two years; and coming up with a rural shipping policy and revisit the policy of government owned ships to serve outlying constituencies. Those projects no longer appear in the Budget, although when it came into power it outlined them in Part 2 in the policy book. The Government may want to explain the reason for the removal of these projects from its lists of priority. Are they still priorities or not?

Development of the social services sector is the fourth priority of this Government. By 2010 public investment in social services would have reached \$2.4billion for the three fiscal years commencing 2008. This is a very big investment, and if you look at it, Solomon Islands Government is making a very big contribution towards this in this Budget. Of this amount, the Solomon Islands Government contributes \$1.9billion while our aid donors contribute the balance of \$490million come 2010. This is very, very encouraging. I am saying

this because one of the challenges that the country will face in the long run is to sustain the level of service at a much improved level. Health and education are crucial to the development of the country and we have to be very strategic in our approach in addressing these two sectors.

Even with this level of public expenditure, education and health services are yet to be delivered at an acceptable level. Right now the country has only one referral hospital and this is unacceptable, especially when we have a growing population in this country. The ideal is for the country to have a number of referral hospitals in our provinces. We understand that the Ministry has plans to attend to this problem and accordingly we encourage the Ministry to take that up seriously.

On education, we still believe that the country must continue to embark on the policy for the country to have its own university. I do not believe the open campus strategy is the way to achieve this objective. If Solomon Islands is to achieve the objective of having its own university at some point in time, then the present arrangement with the University of the South Pacific and the University of Papua New Guinea must be reviewed. We would suggest that a partnership approach will be more appropriate. The plan for Solomon Islands to have its own university must be part and parcel of the partnership arrangements right from the word 'go'. Under such arrangement Solomon Islands will slowly and systematically take over the institution as the capacity of the country allows it. In this way we incorporate the policy of building our own university with the USP and the UPNG Open Campus Program, which we consider a cheaper way of achieving our objectives. It is rather unfortunate that the education budget hardly feature this important project. The Minister may need to brief Parliament on the new direction with regard to this matter.

The fifth priority area of the Government is economic and productive sector. The country's total investment in the productive sector, namely agriculture, mines and energy, fisheries, tourism, forestry, lands, commerce and industries and finance and banking will have reached \$1.5billion by 2010. As a matter of fact, the 2010 budget allocates a total of \$503million to this sector. This is quite a lot of money to allocate to one sector, and depending on how it is utilized the country should see positive outcomes. Unfortunately, we will expect nothing from this investment if we take a closer look at how it is allocated, its distribution. Removing the recurrent portion of this allocation, the sector is allocated a total of \$331.7million for projects, under the Development Budget in 2010. If we also remove aid donors' contribution to this sector of \$235 million mainly for institutional strengthening, we are left with the Solomon Islands Government contribution of \$96.7 million from the \$503 million to \$96.7 million that we can do anything with. Of this amount, only \$60.3million is invested in

agriculture, fisheries, tourism and the forestry sectors, which is totally unacceptable. We are still repeating the same mistakes of thinly spreading our resources.

We are concerned that the country is not investing in growth, as I said earlier, enough in growth related activities. With a very gloomy projection of the likely level of economic growth at 1 to 2 percent in 2010, we are expecting an aggressive investment in the areas that the country is traditionally strong. We should put more funds in there and push those areas. But we are not doing this in this budget, which is rather unfortunate and it only shows very poor economic management.

The management of this economy in terms of investment in growth suffers from the Government's inflicted disease of wanting to do everything and achieving nothing. This is not something unique to the CNURA Government. We need to make that very plain and clear. It is something that is a disease since we only had very little money to go into the development budget. It is only about 6 so years ago that we had a little bit of money to put into the development budget. In the past there is nothing, and that is why those of us who are probably in this government, last government and may be the last government that has already passed, have to really seriously think about how we have been investing money that is extra from the recurrent budget. That is what I am talking about. We cannot talk about aid donors' money because they will not put it into those areas. It is only our money that I am talking about here. So the way we have been managing this, as I have already said, suffers from the disease called wanting to do everything and achieving nothing. As is seen throughout the 2010 Development Budget, the budget resource is spread so thinly that they end up developing nothing. We need to appreciate that financial resources are scarce and therefore we must be strategic in the way we utilize them.

We believe that the government must play a significant role in developing the key productive sectors. What if these priorities are just narrowed down? Throw away the other priorities and just focus on our strengths. We either choose agriculture, fisheries, forestry or tourism, which one, and put it in front and then approach it an integrated approach. Get one as the driver and have all the others supporting that sector, in an integrated approach. This is fully justified on the reason that it will take years for the formal sector to engage meaningfully with the economic players in the rural areas. That is where our strength really lies, and that is why we are concern here. The only meaningful way of availing capital to these people is through the annual budget. No matter who talks about this thing, they argue like what, adviser says what, the only way now to direct resources to the people that have the strength of the country is

through the national budget. The need for the government's direct investment in key productive sector is a policy that we must seriously consider.

That being the case, the government has the duty to increase the portion of the national budget so that it addresses those sectors. That should involve some kind of serious reforms to reduce the portion of our resources that go into the recurrent budget, and there are ways of doing that so that funds are released to the development budget without making people who are depending on the recurrent budget suffer unnecessarily, you can actually incorporate them in the strategy.

Furthermore, the time has come, I believe, for this country to review the hands-off-leave it to the private sector policy of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. It still haunts me as a person, as an individual. The reason is that this policy is no longer working for Solomon Islands since we undertook major privatization and corporatization of important state owned enterprises. Every time I think about this I feel rather guilty about it because I was very heavily involved in privatization and corporatizing some of these important government entities by listening to the IMF and listening to World Bank. It is only years after now, after looking back at how we have been coping with what we wanted to do without these entities that it dawn on me that probably we have done the wrong thing. We now find ourselves in a position where the private sector could not pick up on the gap created. For example, the liberalization of CEMA is now causing problems for farmers located in routes that are not considered viable by private ship owners and beach traders. They are suffering now. The demise of the Development Bank of Solomon Islands is creating huge gap between the indigenous and non indigenous entrepreneurs in terms of access to finance. And I was really excited when I see this policy appear in this green book that this government is going to hold this thing by the horn and address it. Revive the Development Bank of Solomon Islands. The discontinuation of the Livestock Development Authority results in the uncoordinated approach to the development of livestock in the country. We are still waiting for cows until today but they have not arrived yet. Probably, we need some kind of organization. Maybe the Ministry is totally hopeless to do it. This is the way we have been doing in the past; it coordinates how we develop the livestock sector. Maybe this needs to be looked at because the decisions may be wrong. It is not too late to say sorry and let us revisit these and make them alive. The laws are still there, the governing laws, and so it is just a matter of the Minister using another gazette to say this law comes into force again. I believe we need to review those policies.

Civil affairs is the last priority of this Government. The government is not adequately resourcing this sector, although it is priority, and meaning of priority

is real priority; it is something that ranks above all other things. These six are the things we will be looking at, and government funds will be injected into these areas. As a matter of fact, in the two years ending 2010, the total public investment in this sector will be \$247million. Of this amount, the Solomon Islands Government contributes \$132million and the contribution by aid donors stood at \$150million for 2008, 2009 and 2010. Now the figures are a bit inflated because of the tsunami funds given to us to rehabilitate our people who suffered in the Western Province. Otherwise it would have been below \$100million. This is unacceptable, especially when we come out and say that this is priority area that we are going to address. The development of women, children and youths is a serious responsibility. The Government rightly recognizes this sector as priority, however, it failed to reflect that importance in the three budgets that have come to this House so far.

The same can be said for the functions that come under the Ministry of Home Affairs because only two ministries come under this sector, and this includes ecclesiastical affairs and the responsibility to manage an effective response to natural disasters. You see the preparedness of this country for major natural disasters is still a major concern. The people of this country are fully entitled to know the level of the country's preparedness, especially when we put this sector as priority. The last thing we would want to see and experience is for us to be caught unprepared when calamity happens.

The effects of climate change and the rate at which sea is rising is becoming a real threat to the lives of many Solomon Islanders who live on low-lying areas of the country. The Ministry of Home Affairs together with the Ministry of Environment and Conservation have to be clear about the contingency measures to address any drastic changes. I would have thought that these are the kinds of things that we should develop when we say that this sector is priority. Until today we are not clear as to how we will respond quickly when calamities happen. I believe this Parliament must be fully briefed on the outcome of the negotiations in Copenhagen where the Pacific Islands countries are taking a united stance on addressing the issue and our duty towards any global commitment in addressing the effects of climate change. I believe the Minister who is probably now in Copenhagen, when he arrives back will brief this Parliament on how we should organize ourselves and may be at the dying hour we re-prioritize the budget so that it really addresses this area as priority.

Solomon Island, in our view, does not need to wait any longer to implement appropriate measures to mitigate the effects of climate change. It is common knowledge that villages are being washed away as we are talking right now in Parliament. What we should have now is a permanent allocation in the budget every year for relocation of vulnerable villages to higher grounds. This is

not difficult. I am suggesting \$1million permanent allocation per constituency or wherever you want to put it to address this matter. It is not unreasonable to ask for that because it is a current problem we are facing. There is no need to wait for the outcome of Copenhagen talks. They are talking about funds that will come to help us. I think we need to take the first step. Tag in \$1million for every constituency or something to start addressing it, and this is addressing two birds with one stone. Change the leaf houses to iron roofs and also addressing the issue of relocation of villages to higher grounds. I think it is not unreasonable to ask for that, and for us to start, if this indeed is priority area as the government is telling us when it took over.

It would appear that the government is not taking this matter seriously and would rather wait until we face a real calamity. This is not right and is unacceptable. We do not need to wait for something to happen. Our people are already witnessing the effects of rising water level. You just go to the villages now and you will see houses that have water underneath them.

Maybe we need to look at Savo too. I remember during the colonial days when there were exercises. What is happening to Savo is that there needs to be only a certain number of population that must live in Savo. That is true because of the dormant volcano there. We relocate some of them but they can still vote in Savo, but they are relocated somewhere so that you reduce the number of population there so that if an evacuation needs to happens, it is done in the level that the preparations can accommodate.

On ecclesiastical matters, the role played by our churches in the moral development of our people must be properly recognized by the government. It is interesting to note that every Solomon Islander is a member of a Christian denomination in this country. This is one very significant point because if such is true then one would assume that we should see that reflected in the lives of our people, especially how they relate to the issue of law and order. This is a Christian country as we often say. I guess what we need to establish here is why are we struggling with law and order problem in a country that professes Christianity and whether church going and praying is part of, especially when church going and praying is part of our Christian living or way of life. This is a question that, I guess, only our churches will be in a better position to respond to. Maybe we need to organize a series of talks with them, sit down and say why is it that we say we are Christians but this country is experiencing a serious law and order problem and maybe they will help us on how we should address it. I am just speaking on issues like that because these are priority areas the Government is saying it will look at.

I will quickly address areas that I feel are threats associated with the 2010 Budget and then I will take my seat.

The implementation of the 2010 Budget will not be without major challenges, as always. As a matter of fact, the whole policy rationale and assumptions behind the formulation of the Budget will stand as a perpetual threat to the effective achievement of its intentions without inflicting hardship on the private sectors that are financing this budget. I am going to discuss about 10 of the threats. The first one is this. The economic assumptions that go behind is that the government is telling the nation that it will implement a budget that carries a level of expenditure to the tune of \$1.9 billion in 2010. This is quite a feat in an economic climate that simply does not support any likely improvement in the level of economic activities that would facilitate the collection of the level of revenue required. This one is already casting doubts on the ability of the Budget to be delivered.

What I am saying here is that the Government may not be able to collect the predicted level of revenue. This is something that we will just cross our fingers and see what will happen. The 2009 Budget suffered the same fate. In fact, the government banks on the assumption that the improvement in the global situation will quickly filter through the Solomon Islands economy and that will help us to collect the level of revenue we need to finance this budget. Now, that maybe a long shot.

Secondly, the country has virtually used up its stock of harvestable logs which are predicted to run out in three years time. This scenario presents two possible reactions. Firstly, there will be no control over the harvesting of the remaining stock of trees by the loggers. It is almost finished and so let us go for our lives and harvest everything and let us get the hell out of here. You know what will happen. There will be environmental degradation; the effect on the environment will be so great. That is the first one. And at the end of this, they will go away, I guess, just laughing their heads off for making a total fool of this country. They have successfully raped the country's forests and they leave.

Secondly, the government probably will not be able to collect the level of revenue expected from the logging industry, and that is a serious concern. Thirdly is direct payments to Members of Parliament for constituency projects will still be a potential area of concern because of the absence of proper coordination and management mechanism at the grassroots level. We understand that the Attorney General has already given his legal opinion that the RCDF and other payments made to Members to Parliament are subject to auditing. There is nothing stopping him under any law in this country to audit payments made to us.

Our concern is that in the absence of a standard rule of accountability as far as these funds are concerned, the Auditor General will have to understand 50 different accountable standards before he can undertake any auditing. In this

regard, we are concerned that the Ministry of Rural Development was going to come up with a standard system, and he often mentions it in this Parliament, but to date nothing was done about it. We are yet to see this standard accountable system. Our concern here is about the proper management of public funds and government cannot just disregard that matter. We have enough criticisms from the public and from the people who have the right to talk about us, so let us look at addressing these issues to lighten the finger pointing at us.

Fourthly, in an economic climate where growth is predicted to be minimal, the likely negative consequences for the private sector for supporting a budget of the size proposed by the Government for 2010 can be burdensome. The logical thing to do in such an economic environment, the only way to increase revenue is to tax the same tax base. That is surely going to happen when you maintain government expenditure at a fixed level and you want to reduce it, the only way to address that is to impose more taxes on the same tax base. This is quite clear in the imposition of new rates of excise duties on locally manufactured goods, especially alcohol and tobacco products. The whole fiscal rationale here does not really make sense, and we are trying to understand it. Commonsense suggests that in a situation where the economy is stagnating, the logical fiscal strategy is to reduce taxation to assist business to grow and cope with the challenges of a constricting economy. That is what you do. You do not increase tax during hard times when businesses are struggling to survive. The opposite really happens here in this Budget. The government is imposing additional taxes purely to satisfy its desire to increase government expenditure for really wrong reasons. Again, because the policy is purely to raise additional revenue, the government may be disappointed here. The negative consequence of overtaxing is quite clear and logical. Businesses, do you know what they will do? They will respond by reducing activities. This could have a detrimental effect on revenue. We may not be able to collect the kind of revenue that we expect.

Fifthly, the government again, and where is the Minister of Education, he should be in Parliament right now to hear this, again under budgeted for NPF contribution under the Ministry of Education to the tune of \$13 million. The concern here is that NPF contribution is a statutory expenditure and it takes priority over other expenditures. Even if it is not budgeted for, it has to be spent, it must be paid. This is a constitutional requirement and it must happen. This \$13million must be paid although it is not budgeted for. The effect of this on the Budget is that unless revenue performs above expectation, we will struggle to meet budgeted items in the other areas that we budgeted for.

The sixth area that I see as a threat to the Budget for 2010 is the proposed increase of the number of constituencies from 50 to 65. This is yet to be factored

into the 2010 Budget. The cost associated with these additional constituencies is phenomenal. It is not for me to stand up here and say we should not do it or we should do it. It is not for me to say that. What I am arguing here is that this Budget must accommodate for it. The following costs need to be factored: members' salaries and we are not really clear about the rates, and in my view which should not be less than \$16million, for the 15 new members; rural development fund entitlement, which should not be less than \$30million. Other entitlements like allowances, meal allowances, accommodation, micro allowance should easily account for \$5million. Now you could be easily talking about additional contingency costs of not less than \$50million.

The point here is if this parliament intends to introduce additional constituency in 2010, then the logical thing to do is to provide for it in the budget. We should not hide our political intentions, but put it in, if that is the intention. Now the scenario that is looming here is that the cost of any new constituencies probably will be introduced by way of supplementary appropriation. If the revenue position is as discussed earlier then what we are effectively saying is that the government will reprioritize the 2010 Budget. That is all the Government can do; reprioritize the 2010. This will be at the expense of approved projects and expenditures and the question is, which project is going to suffer.

The seventh threat is that the budget will also be threatened by reprioritization, as I have mentioned already. This is so in an environment where the government may not be able to collect additional revenue. Under that scenario the introduction of new expenditures will be at the expense of previously approved expenditures and projects. And that supports point number six.

The eighth is the ability of the Budget to address contingencies and emergencies maybe seriously undermined by unfunded reprioritization which will be the main feature of this Budget as is always the case.

The ninth, and it is quite serious and I am holding an envelope here which I am not going to show its content but I will just wave it, threat posed by deliberate mismanagement of the Budget. The Public Finance and Audit Act and the Financial Instructions and other instructions on how our public funds are to be managed by accounting officers is very clear in those laws and instructions. There have been cases of deliberate abuse of the system by people who are entrusted with the management of public funds.

I am particularly concerned about what is going on in the Ministry of Communication and Aviation where millions of dollars have been deliberately, according to these documents here, deliberately misused. And I will take the liberty to refer this to the right authorities to look at. Contacts of work were

granted to close friends according to this documents and cronies of people in authority without going through tender requirements. As a result, these contracts were not properly costed and granted at exorbitant prices. To repair the fence is \$1.5million. There are cases where officials of the Department arranged for different people to collect payments for the work that other people are doing. We have payment vouchers here by people who signed for those payments. This is corruption, and if the Government is serious about addressing corruption as it always prides itself to be, which you have announced saying you have established corruption units, then deal with this matter, and deal with it now. There are clear cases of disregard of professional advice on a lot of these matters. That place is a technical area. A long term contract was given to a very close friend and the cost of this contract is \$9million. This is a serious matter of concern, especially for a technical department of the government that deals with the safety of traveling passengers. There are clear cases where the Ministry entertains advice from former employees of the Department who are not qualified to render advice on technical issues because of the high standard that is required. We understand that these matters are said to be reported to the Aviation Board of Inquiry, and we hope that the Board will give it the due attention it deserves. We will insist that the Minister responsible for aviation explains to Parliament how officials in his Ministry can get away with misuse of public funds. Is the Minister still in control of his Ministry, his officials or not?

The tenth threat is that we are also concerned that a number of incidences of possible misuse of public funds that were raised in this Parliament were hardly attended to by the relevant ministries. As custodian of the Budget, the Government cannot entertain a spirit of complacency on matters of misuse of public funds. They must be dealt with swiftly and decisively, anything less than that would only suggest that we do not care. We only express big political statements that we are concern about issues of corruption and we establish institutions to address them, but we do not mean it.

Lastly, and the eleventh threat is an issue that comes to my notice and that is the desire of the advisers to look good by achieving surplus. You achieve surplus for what when this country is struggling to finance its budget, and yet people are talking about trying to come up with a surplus, to report back them that we have managed government finances and we achieve a surplus, when services suffer. I would encourage the Minister of Finance to stand behind these people. We need to kick their bottom and tell them to do it. It is not right when we are struggling to finance a budget, finance the services and yet people are trying to look good by trying to achieve a surplus. It does not make sense. The Minister said it plain and clear that they do not want to keep any money, any money comes must go for services. That is very clear in the speech that the

Minister presented, and he is right. If that indeed is what is happening in the Ministry, address it.

Finally, the issues we are raising here are serious issues the government must take note of, and not only take note but take note and do it, attend to it. This is more so for reasons that the CNURA Government says that it will seriously address these areas. Our role on this side, and may be sometimes we are busy that we say something and probably we forget them, and probably that is the reason why we are here to remind you. In saying this, we want you to address the areas we are raising here as threats to the implementation of the 2010 Budget.

Having said everything I have said, this group does not find any reason why we should oppose this Budget and accordingly we support it. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: I understand that the Prime Minister would like to move a motion to adjourn the debate.

Hon. Sikua: The Government proposes to bring on another item for this day, and so to allow time for that item I move that debate on the 2010 Appropriation Bill 2009 be now adjourned until the next sitting day.

Debate on the 2010 Appropriation Bill adjourned for the next sitting day

Mr Speaker: Honorable Members, since debate of the 2010 Appropriation Bill 2009 has been adjourned, we would normally conclude business for the day. This is because under Standing Order 61(3), if a day has been allotted to the second reading or committee of supply of an appropriation, no other bill or motion may be considered on such allotted day. However Members, we have noted that today's Order Paper included the motion of the Honourable Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. This was an oversight in that this item of business was set down for business on an allotted budget day. That motion should not have appeared on today's Order Paper and can only be brought up by special arrangement. The Government's intention, however, as I understand is to bring that particular item on today. I therefore call on the Prime Minister again to take the necessary steps.

Hon. Sikua: Mr. Speaker, I seek your permission to move a suspension to the relevant Standing Order, to bring on the motion of the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee.

Mr Speaker: Leave is granted.

Hon Sikua: I move that Standing Order 61(3) be suspended under Standing Order 81 to allow the consideration of business other than appropriation on an allotted day.

As Members are aware, last week I earmarked today for the motion on the report of the Foreign Relations Committee on its Inquiry into the Facilitation of International Assistance Notice 2003 and the RAMSI Intervention. As such, today was not originally intended to be an allotted day for consideration of the Budget. However, it now appears that we are running out of time given that next week is Christmas week. For that reason I set down debate for the 2010 Appropriation Bill 2009 for today.

Under Standing Order 61(3), this means we cannot consider any other business because today has been allotted a budget day. An alternative would be for me to set aside tomorrow for the motion of the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. That, however, would mean that tomorrow will be an ordinary government day not allotted to the Budget. This in turn would mean that tomorrow after considering the report of the Foreign Relations Committee, we would have to adjourn for the day. We cannot afford to waste the rest of tomorrow, and thus I believe that the best option is to allow both second reading of the debate of the 2010 Appropriation Bill 2009 and the motion by the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee to be considered today. Notwithstanding that today has been allotted as a budget day only. To facilitate this, the only alternative is to have Standing Order 61(3) suspended, hence this motion. For this reason, I beg to move.

Mr Speaker: It is proposed that Standing Order 61(3) be suspended for the reasons outlined by the Prime Minister. Unless any Member wishes to comment, I will put the question.

Hon. Sogavare: This side of the House does not have any problem with that. In fact, Parliament can make its own rules and vote on issues put before it.

The only comment I want to make is in regards to the timing of the consideration of the report. What really are we trying to do? I am saying this because the issues that will eventually come out from the consideration of the report will be placed before leaders of the Forum, and I assume that the Minister of Foreign Affairs, depending on what the outcome will be when the discussions are made, will take those issues and discuss with his counterparts throughout the region and prepare a paper to be laid before the Forum Leaders in their annual meetings. Now, that will not be until October or somewhere around there, so that is the kind of time we are focusing on and so we really need to work in a

hurry to finalize this, but we go along with what the government wants to do if it wants to complete the debate on the report and take a vote on it. It is the Committee of the Whole House that I was thinking we might not have the time to do that. Because as I said, you are really looking at placing the issues that will come out from what this Parliament will decide on leaders of the Forum, and that is not until somewhere around the end of next year, but in saying that I support the motion moved by the Prime Minister.

Sir Kemakeza: In view of that point, and also in view of the statement by the Prime Minister this week that this meeting will conclude on Friday, the 18th, I would like to raise just one point for the consideration of the Prime Minister and the Government. We must not rush this budget. Perhaps you should consider giving extra time because from experience, as you know, Sir, debate on the budget usually goes on for five to six days, especially in the general debate and the committee of supply. This is just a thought. I have no difficulty supporting this motion, but the Government has to consider because we only have three days ahead for this budget. I know the Minister Finance will make a good time for us to go through and check on the valves of the Budget. In fact, tomorrow I will be talking the whole morning and that means others would want to speak next week. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: I think the Prime Minister has made further statement of government business saying the house will stand sine die next week.

Sir Kemakeza: Sorry, I did not know about that

Mr. TOSIKA: Thank you for this motion. I think this report is a very important report that must be properly considered because it concerns the Facilitation Act and also the views of people in the provinces. In my view, we should not hurry its discussions, but give this report an opportunity when we come back sometimes in February/March when it should be re-noticed so that people discuss and finalize it so that we concentrate only on the 2010 Budget so that everyone of us engages on one particular thing, and not split up in two things. I think it is appropriate that we give time to this report and further defer it or push it a bit further to February/March and then we conclude this report. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: From my understanding I know that the government is along similar lines. I think the most important thing is to allow the Chairman to wind up the debate on the motion today.

The motion is passed.

Mr Speaker: The motion standing in the name of the honorable Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee may now be brought on.

Honorable Members, on Monday 7th December the Honourable Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee moved a motion that Parliament resolves itself into a committee of the House to consider National Paper No. 37 of 2009, Report of the Foreign Relations Committee on the Inquiry into the Facilitation of International Assistance Notice 2003 and RAMSI Intervention.

Last Friday the debate was adjourned to the sitting day. The Honorable Prime Minister has taken the necessary steps and has set down continuation of this debate today and as such debate on that motion continues today. As I understand if no other Member wishes to contribute to this motion, I shall call on the Chairman of the Committee to deliver his speech of reply before I put the question.

Mr Boyers: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for your indulgence. I rise to windup the debate on my motion that Parliament resolves itself into a Committee of the Whole House to consider the Report of the Foreign Relations Committee on its Inquiry into the Facilitation of International Assistance Notice 2003 and RAMSI Intervention. First of all, I would like to thank every Member who had contributed to the debate. I sincerely appreciate your comments even if we may not see eye to eye on certain issues. Such is the nature of a transparent review and indeed a sign of a robust Parliament. I note that while there are issues that appear to still be controversial despite our attempt to address these in our report, all Members who have contributed supported my motion. This indicates to me that we are all keen to put the report to scrutiny in the Committee of the Whole House and I am glad that you all feel the same way and I look forward to an open discussion later on at that stage.

Having listened to the various views raised during the debate I have identified eight broad areas that I feel I must respond to on behalf of the Foreign Relations Committee. These areas are:

1. The conduct of the Inquiry
2. The formation of RAMSI
3. The powers and privileges of RAMSI personnel
4. Sovereign concerns
5. RAMSI's financial arrangement
6. Representing the provinces
7. The root causes of the ethnic tension; and

8. The recommendations

I will confine my reply to these areas. Before I do that however, I wish to clarify that my intention today is not to defend every criticisms made about our report. Instead, I will only respond to criticisms which I believe have been raised about our Committee and our inquiry, and criticisms that have already been addressed in the report but were raised, perhaps because Members have not read the report.

The first issue I wish to clarify is the nature of our inquiry compared to previous reviews of RAMSI. As noted in the report there were other reviews of RAMSI and its operations starting with the 2004 taskforce and the most recent being the proposed GCCG review in 2007. I hope that I made my point in my opening speech but there still appears to be confusion on difference between an executive review and a parliamentary review. Without laboring on the point, I must reiterate that Parliament as the legislature can only review RAMSI in two ways. First, is through a general debate on this honorable floor and second by referring that matter to a standing or special select committee. Any other review, even if approved by Parliament, such as that in 2007 is ultimately carried out by the Executive or by the Forum or another independent body. On that basis, I must, with all due respect, correct the Leader of the Opposition and maintain that the review proposed by the GCCG Government in 2007 was an executive review and not a parliamentary review. Parliament's review of the FIA Notice was the debate of the GCCG's motion on Monday, 27th August 2007. Parliament's review ended on the same day when the motion was passed. What was to come after that was for the Executive to organize and carry out, not for a parliamentary committee or Parliament itself to lead.

The second aspect of the inquiry I wish to comment on is the terms of reference. First, I wish to discuss how this played out in the provinces. I note that some Members have argued that the report is not representative of the views of the people of Solomon Islands, particularly in the provinces. This is, of course, a matter of opinion and I do not propose to be defensive about this concern. Instead I would like to take this back to the conduct of the inquiry so that Members and the public are aware of how the inquiry developed. The decision to extend our review to the provinces was not required by our terms of reference. This only called for a review of the FIA Notice. We decided to undertake the review throughout the nation and not just Honiara. That decision was the Committee's own and was not a direction of Parliament or the Government. When we ventured out into the provinces, our inquiry took an unprecedented turn. It became quite obvious from day one that apart from RAMSI's work on restoration of law and order, people in our rural communities had very little or

no idea of the full mandate of RAMSI. Nevertheless, true to our terms of reference we ask the people about what they thought of a number of legal and technical matters that were the subject of heated debates back in Honiara. These included issues of parallel governments, sovereignty and powers and privileges of RAMSI personnel, to name a few. The responses we received varied. It became clear that on these rather abstract issues, people held perceptions that were based entirely on what they heard through the media. In fact, responses mirrored what had previously been said in this very House. Such perceptions were clearly not based on any proper analysis of the existing instruments pertaining to RAMSI but in most instances on parliamentarian's personal views aired by the media. We reacted to the situation by refocusing the inquiry to issues that actually meant something to the lives of people in the provinces. Thus, we started asking more practical questions about what people expect of RAMSI and the government. The responses from all nine provinces were genuine and quite moving. The people took that opportunity to voice their real concerns and needs and to call on whoever is listening to assist. Our inquiry from that point onwards effectively became a review of both partners, RAMSI and the Government. As such, in our provincial hearings witnesses held two sets of views. First, the loose perceptions about legal, political and technical issues which were based on debates in Honiara, and second real concerns about service delivery, infrastructure and economic development in the provinces. Consequently, in the preparation of our report we focused on their concerns and needs, and not the perceptions which are better off left to Honiara by its debates. This is why our report dedicates a whole chapter, Chapter 12 to the needs of the provinces, but by and large left out provincial perceptions on issues like sovereignty and the likes. Had we responded or reproduced the criticisms we heard from provinces on sovereignty issues, for instance, these would almost be identical of those contained in the Leader of Opposition's very detailed written submission. At this stage, I wish to commend the Leader of Opposition for his well articulated and supported submission. The fact that on technical, legal and political issues we relied on his submissions to reflect the other side of the coin was not meant to unfairly pick on him. On the contrary, his views have been well known since 2006 and he stood up to this to this day and so we were more comfortable with relying on his views than on the rural people's perceptions, which are probably based on the Leader's views in the first place.

The second point I would like to touch on is the accusation by the Member for Temotu Nende. The large part of our inquiry was outside our terms of reference. In the Committee's defense I urge Members to re-read Chapter 1 of the Report which describes how the Committee interprets its terms of reference based on legal advice given by the Attorney General on the floor of Parliament.

Reviewing the FIA Notice required us to look at the Participating Countries, the public purpose of the Intervention, the RAMSI Treaty and the FIA Act. This in turns opened up our scrutiny to scrutinize the composition of RAMSI, its mandate and legal framework, the undertakings of both RAMSI and the Government under the Treaty and the provisions of the Act. In order to make a full assessment of these aspects of RAMSI, we had to appreciate that RAMSI is not here in isolation but is a partner of the Government. As such, we have every right to consider the responsibilities of the government in order to gage what is and is not RAMSI's responsibilities. Moreover, because RAMSI operates alongside aid donors, we had to explore potential overlap and synergies between RAMSI, the government and aid donors.

Further, Members should not forget that an overarching consideration when reviewing the FIA Notice under Section 23 of the FIA Act is whether or not it is still relevant. In other words, one must look at whether the Notice should be maintained or revoked. In order to advise Parliament on this, we had to consider how relevant or appropriate RAMSI is in its current form. Clearly, this led us to consider the broader picture. I believe most contributors including the Honourable Leader of the Opposition recognize this, so in their submissions. They addressed all these areas. To suggest that we should have taken a strict and literal interpretation of the FIA Notice is to say that our review should have been really one of legal drafting. That is not the intention of Sections 23 and 3 of the FIA Act. That Act must always be read with all relevant instruments pertaining to RAMSI, hence our broad interpretation of both provisions. I, therefore, refute the argument advanced by the Member for Temotu Nende as ill advised, literalist interpretation which considers the FIA Act in a vacuum, thus ignoring the whole context in which the Act applies.

I wish to turn to the suggestion that our report is not representative enough of the views of the rural populace. I have already explained why we left certain perceptions out. That is not to say, however, that we ignored the provinces in our report. One needs only to look at Appendix 2 of our report to appreciate the wide coverage our own inquiry had. In terms of written submissions we received submissions from parliamentarians, constitutional office holders, senior RAMSI personnel, the judiciary and the local and regional academics. In our provincial tour as indicated in Appendix 2, we heard from chiefs, elders, Church leaders and women and youth representatives from every single provincial ward and every constituency in the country. As I explained earlier, while much was said in the provinces we could not reflect all views, so in Chapter 12 of our report, we attempted to consolidate the concerns and needs of the provinces in order to present these succinctly. The fact that we did not quote extensively from provincial hearings does not detract from the core concerns and

needs that were shared by all provinces. These, I believe, are well articulated in our report, together with three important recommendations. Any Member who still wishes to read the details of the provinces' needs should read transcripts that I earlier had provided to Members in a DVD form.

The final point I wish to make in respect of the conduct of our inquiry relates to views raised during this debate regarding awareness of the rural populace of RAMSI's mandate. It had been variously suggested in the debate that our inquiry was premised on a preconceived pro-RAMSI agenda as reflected in our decision to go out to the provinces who do not know much about RAMSI. I am extremely disappointed in Members who still hold this view. I hope that I had provided sufficient clarification in my opening speech but obviously some Members are blindly obsessed with the conspiracy theory, and that I am afraid says much about the state of mind.

Today, before this honorable House and the good people of Solomon Islands listening in, I categorically reject any suggestion that our Committee was influenced by the Government or any external authority. The Foreign Relations Committee is a standing Committee of Parliament and functions independently of the Government and other authorities just like the other four standing committees. It is sad to see Members who are also members of other committees, conveniently forgetting the impartiality of the respective committees and importing external and even foreign influence on our Committee and report. As Chairman of this standing committee of the Foreign Relations Committee, I would never question the impartiality of other committees. While Members are entitled to question the contents of our report, it is absolutely inappropriate for Members to question the impartiality and proceedings of the Committee of the house, your own Parliament. Clearly, these Members do not understand parliamentary procedures and practices. If they did, they would realize that since committees are extensions of Parliament, inputting foreign or executive influence on communities is essentially inputting the same on Parliament itself.

Members concerned should relook at their understanding of parliamentary democracy and parliamentary practice. Whatever politics goes on between the Government and the Opposition, our committee is a parliamentary standing committee that is bipartisan with membership, including government, opposition and independent group members. Since the review of RAMSI was referred to our Committee, we as a group took upon ourselves an approach and reached consensus on every issue despite our different political affiliations. Members cannot appreciate the genuine solidarity and collective independence that Committee Members can develop unless you embark on a similarly long and extensive tour with the Committee.

Returning to the question of why we chose to approach people who were not well informed of RAMSI and its mandate. I maintain this issue did not influence or deter our Committee. As indicated in the report, it is never a parliamentary committee's role to educate people about the subject matter of an inquiry before questioning them about that subject. I believe that expectation is fostered by the confusing over the distinction between a parliamentary review and an executive review. An executive review may be preceded by nationwide awareness of RAMSI and what it is all about. A parliamentary review, on the other hand, cannot, coach potential witnesses. A quick comparison of how the Public Accounts Committee, the Constitutional Review Committee or the Bills and Legislations Committee carry out their functions will clearly demonstrate that a parliamentary committee must not and should never put question or answers in witnesses' mouths. Thus, in our review we took witnesses from the provinces as we found them, whether well informed or not. A parliamentary committee should not be expected to conduct awareness programs on RAMSI whilst reviewing RAMSI or on other areas such as constitutional rights and freedoms. This is for the government, RAMSI and the Civil Society to undertake as they see fit. Was this done in past years? No. Let me ask that since the arrival of RAMSI in 2003 up to 2008, why did successive governments failed to carry out awareness on RAMSI amongst the provinces? If we take it a step further, in the last 30 years, did any governments since independence take the time to educate our rural people about other important issues, especially their fundamental rights? No. Why? I do not think any Member can answer me on that, and yet some are trying to hold our Committee to account for supposedly failing to be involved in awareness programs before undertaking our inquiry. In fact, our very first finding out in the provinces was that successive governments have failed miserably to educate rural people on their basic rights, and governments since 2003 as well as RAMSI itself failed to educate the provinces of the functions of RAMSI. This makes me wonder how many people in our country actually know what the Constitution entails. For instance, in South Malaita, many women requested that awareness of RAMSI be carried out for them. They also indicated that there was a very low literacy rate amongst the women and girls. Thirty years since independence and still a large amount of rural Solomon Islanders cannot read or write. Whose fault is this? Even if RAMSI and the Government decide to carry out an awareness program, how do you expect that to be successful when the recipients cannot even read or write? In terms of awareness on RAMSI during our provincial tour, the only Member who took the initiative to educate his people about RAMSI prior to our hearing is the Member Temotu Nende in relation to the Lata hearings. I commend the Member for being proactive. However, it is very obvious during that hearing that many

witnesses were talking about concepts they had just learned literally overnight. While highly commendable, even the initiative by the Member for Temotu Nende was only undertaken because of our inquiry. No Member did this prior to our inquiry during the whole six years that RAMSI has been with us.

On the basis of the many questions I have just raised, I called on Members not to confuse everyone by coming here and blaming our Committee for your own failures. That said, let me tell you what we did. Under the UNDP Parliamentary strengthening Project there is a civic education component which seeks to promote Parliament and educate people, especially youths and women about their rights under the Constitution. When the decision was made for our Committee to visit all provinces, the UNDP project jumped at this opportunity and sent its civic education officers out to the provinces. Thus, during our tour, there were two sets of officers; those who supported our committee and those who went on a civic education program. That program was not part of our inquiry but our Committee fully supported it because ultimately both our Committee and the civic education program were promoting parliament out in the provinces. In fact, as I recall, on certain occasions after we had concluded our hearing some committee members joined the program to lend it support. I hope this clears the air and any further innuendos that Members may still have about the awareness program. I am very happy that the UNDP civic education program was run alongside our inquiry. At least a handful of young officers were able to deliver basic education about Parliament and fundamental rights to all corners of the country, an achievement that I am sad to say, no government has yet even to attempt in over 30 years. Personally, I witnessed firsthand the sincere gratitude and appreciation the rural people had for our committee and its inquiry and the civic education program. We decide to feature that program in our report because the inquiry and my program went everywhere together, although funded separately. If any Member wishes to read the full report of that program, it is a separate document with the UNDP project. Inclusion of the civic education program in our report, however, should not be misunderstood as the responsibility of our Committee to educate our people about RAMSI.

A committee inquiry is one way traffic where we ask questions and witnesses answer; never the way around, and that is why we never answered any question put to us by witnesses during our hearings. At this stage I would like to comment briefly on views raised about the formation of RAMSI and how its mandate emerged. It has been suggested that an intervention could have occurred through arrangements other than the Biketawa Declaration. To me this amounts to suggesting that Australia and New Zealand could have been invited to intervene directly without regional backing. I single these two nations out because they are the only regional countries with the capacity to carry out

effective intervention to the situation we were back in, in 2003 and prior. This argument does not hold water. I say that in view of what actually happened prior to RAMSI intervention. As Members are aware, there was a request made to Australia for assistance before the Biketawa Declaration. This request was rejected outright because Australia was quite rightly concerned with interfering with the domestic affairs of a sovereign nation. This fear was only allayed when the Forum came up with the Biketawa Declaration, which would see a regional response and not an intervention by one country. I believe that Declaration was the only reason why Australia and New Zealand agreed to lead the RAMSI intervention. Had it not been for it our pleas for assistance would have continued to fall on deaf ears. As the Member for Savo/Russells and former Prime Minister quite rightly put, at that time that was the best we could come up with.

Having said that, I am cognizant of the argument that in the end the RAMSI intervention was not strictly premised on the Biketawa Declaration. By that I am referring to the Forum's undertaking in the declaration which provides in part, that in responding to a request by a member country, the Forum, and I quote "Must constructively address difficult and sensitive issues including causes of tensions and conflict, ethnic tensions, socio economic disparities, lack of good governance, land disputes and erosion of cultural values" Despite that undertaking when negotiations commenced, Australia as the nation identified to lead the intervention made a very clear offer outlining the preferred mandate, which excluded addressing difficult and sensitive issues such as causes of our conflict. This was obviously a take it or leave it offer, and in its wisdom the government at the time accepted and subsequently RAMSI's mandate was based on the original offer. I have no doubt in my mind that had our government argued for the mandate to include longer term issues such as the root causes of the conflict, Australia and New Zealand would have backed off. In the end, despite the Forum's undertaking, RAMSI's mandate as negotiated in those tough circumstances was confined to what we have today. I encourage Members to read pages 22 and 23 of the report, which outlines how RAMSI's current mandate came about. Today, looking at the achievements under the limited mandate, however, I believe we should be grateful instead of dwelling on these kinds of technicalities. Let us focus on what we actually receive at the end of the negotiations and build on that.

The next broad area I wish to comment on is the powers and privileges of RAMSI personnel. I do not propose to repeat what we have already covered in our report but only to respond to some views raised during this debate. Once such view is the challenge of our Committee's conclusion regarding the constitutionality of such powers and privileges. I note the various comments

made about the supposed limitation of the judgment in Nori's case as confirmed by Makasi's case. Our report dedicates a whole chapter, Chapter 4 on these two cases but clearly some Members read the case differently. It is true that in Nori's case the high court was asked to rule on specific set of questions that were confined to the Participating Police Force. However, in that case, his lordship the chief Justice had to consider how the PPF entered the country in the first place. In so doing, his lordship considered the legal mandate of the whole of RAMSI including the Act, the RAMSI treaty and the FIA Notice. Clearly, the Chief Justice did not find any of those instruments unconstitutional. We must appreciate that the High court does not deal with specific questions put to it in isolation from the bigger picture. Before looking at the specific questions or declaration sought, the High Court must first establish the basis. The Chief Justice did precisely that, and I am very sure that had his lordship find flaws in the overall legal framework of RAMSI, his ruling would have been very different in term of the specific question raised by Mr. Nori. I am however no lawyer although our Committee took advice from competent sources in analyzing the two cases. As such, if anyone still believes that these cases did not establish the constitutionality of RAMSI's legal framework, powers and privileges, please feel free to take this up with the High Court. As far as our Committee is concerned, from our analysis of the two judgments as well as the evidence of the Chief Justice when he appeared before our Committee in 2008, I believe any such challenge will be futile. The fact that the challenge remains, begs the question, if the legal authority of the High Court is not good enough, what is.

The report's conclusion on the consistency of RAMSI's powers and privileges with local, regional and international practice has also been questioned. The basis appears to be that we failed to table international instruments referred to in the report. I am disappointed that despite our attempt to be honest and transparent in our inquiry, there is still this kind of suggestion that our Committee maybe fabricating treaties and laws in order to support our conclusions. I assure this Honorable House that our Committee has read the following instruments: the Status of Forces Agreement between Timor Leste and Australia, New Zealand and Portugal of May 2006 and the United Nations Model of Status of Forces Agreement. These are available on the Internet if any Member wishes to obtain copies. The Committee would be very stupid to make reference to these in a report that will be read internationally without looking these up first. In our report, we also considered our local laws. After comparison of the FIA Act with diplomatic privileges and immunities granted to other donors under the relevant local legislation, we made the following finds:

- (1) Generally, if the FIA Act powers, privileges are removed and replaced with diplomatic privileges and immunities, RAMSI personnel will have complete immunity from legal proceedings, which is what staff high commissions and embassies currently hold.
- (2) If RAMSI personnel have diplomatic privileges, these would be the same as their existing privileges in relation to immigration, customs and taxation under the FIA Act.
- (3) High commissions and residences in Solomon Islands are, in fact, representing the sovereignty of their country in our country and are thus given full diplomatic immunities. This means that if you step into the Australian High Commission or the PNG High Commission or their residence for that instance, you are on Australia or PNG soil under their laws, and not Solomon Laws. RAMSI personnel have no such complete immunity and yet people try to make it appear that way.

I note that in this year's budget we have a large consideration for establishing our embassy in Australia, and we too have the immunity that all international embassies have and therefore Solomon Islands owns and controls soil in Australia under our laws. If any one wishes to check the local laws referred to in our report, these are available in the green volumes, Laws of Solomon Islands, 1996 revision and also on the internet. However, it is not a requirement for us to table any of these documents. These are public requirements that everyone is deemed to have constructive knowledge of.

A parliamentary committee is not required to table laws that it refers to in its report. Laws including treaties need not be proven because they always available for inspection if only one take the time to look these up. For our report, I must decline earlier suggestions that we will not table any such documents, but instead encourage Members to download treaties and international agreements from the internet before we consider the report in detail.

On a related matter, I note the five questions that the Leader of Opposition raised in his contribution, which he believes should guide the review of RAMSI powers and privileges. However, I need not respond to those questions. Our answers to each question are in the report so perhaps we might revisit these questions in the committee of the whole house so I can point out such answers.

Another area that came up repeatedly during the debate was Solomon Islands sovereignty and RAMSI's operation in the country. Again, this is one area we put a lot of emphasis on in our report, especially in Chapter 7. The same questions which were posed during our inquiry came up again during the debate. I belief in the Committee comment, a section of Chapter 7, our Committee has already responded to these questions. I did not hear any new

questions in the debate so perhaps Members would like to reread Chapter 7 if there is any still some uncertainty on our position on the issue of sovereignty.

I also note with alarm and also concern the allegations made by the Leader of Opposition suggesting direct interference of state secrets and local politics by a foreign power. We were certainly not given any such evidence during our inquiry, although this would have been helpful for us. Our Committee would have gladly analyzed this and commented on such in our report had we been given copies and evidence during our inquiry. Now that we have concluded our inquiry and reported back to Parliament, the only avenue to handle these allegations would be the courts for an independent arbitration. I am also very concerned because if there is indeed merit to these allegations, they need to be brought to light in the proper forum whether the courts or international courts.

At this juncture I would like to make some remarks about how some people in the provinces relate RAMSI to sovereignty. I remember one young man in the hearing at Lake Tengano in Renbel Province told us how much he suffered abuse at the hand of militants in Honiara. He told our Committee that since then he never felt like he belonged to our country. He continued that it was only when RAMSI arrived that for the first time in his life he really felt that he was part of Solomon Islands. There were many similar comments throughout other provinces. To me, these kinds of sentiment reflect the rural people's practical view of sovereignty. It is about being part of a nation and having fundamental freedoms and rights. It seems that for 30 years our own government did not give the people this kind of sovereignty. RAMSI did that almost overnight. What is wrong with us? Why are we accusing RAMSI of infringing on our sovereignty when in the eyes of our people, RAMSI is in fact restoring our lost sovereignty? I will return to the issue of sovereignty and its bearing in the bigger picture later.

One other criticism of our Committee was that we failed to secure full disclosure from RAMSI in terms of financial arrangements and assistance. In response, I wish to point out that apart from questions we posed on these matters to RAMSI senior executives in two separate hearings, one in September 2008 and the other in June 2009, we sought further information by subsequent correspondence. We received response from the Special Coordinator on 8th June 2009 and again on the 16th October 2009. We persistently went after information about RAMSI's budget and the spending and by October this year we had the basic statistics. These are all reflected in Chapter 8 of the report. In this regard, I wish to express my gratitude to the former and current Special Coordinator for their indulgence. There were certain pieces of information, which we could not

solicit as these were protected as 'sensitive' that the Coordinators did try their best to provide what they had with them.

I acknowledge as does the report that the issue of boomerang aid is quite frustrating to our Government and people. However, we must understand that we have had this issue long before RAMSI arrived. This is an ongoing issue with all donors. We made two recommendations that we hope will minimize the boomerang effect of RAMSI's budget. These are Recommendation 6 which calls for taxation of RAMSI contractors and sub contractors and Recommendation 8 which calls for RAMSI to employ more Solomon Islanders and spend more on local goods and services. These two options are the only practical and realistic steps we could come up with. Maybe to some, this is not enough, however, at least it is a start. I am sure there are other areas of RAMSI employees coming to the country getting paid three times more than their normal salary and because that would be an issue reflecting service in the Solomon Islands we could probably negotiate positions of taxation of balance of their income. But that is subject to the Government and what they want to do about it.

At this juncture, I would like to return to the issue of representing the provinces. As I explained earlier we developed a whole chapter, the longest chapter in the report to the needs of the provinces. That is why the rest of our report may appear to leave out provincial views. Personally, my take on the rural people's view was that while they were keen for our committee to take up their practical concerns and needs, the majority expected Parliament and the Government to fulfill their respective functions. For instance, in Munda I recall one witness challenging our Committee and why we even bothered to consult the grassroots people in the review of RAMSI when they were not consulted before RAMSI entered in the first place. Similarly, in Auki and Marau witnesses asked why we as parliamentarians needed their views when we were elected to carry out work on such a review of RAMSI on their behalf. Their explanation was that we will do the right thing or as I remembered it clearly, "you are our leaders and so you just do the right thing". On that note, I must express my disappointment to the Member of West Makira for the generalization that the people of Makira do not need RAMSI. While I respect the honorable Member's views, particularly in relation to the incidents he referred to, I must put on record that our Committee did hear directly from the people, especially the Member's constituents and the rest of Makira Province. And as far as I can recall their support for RAMSI was quite strong. In view of the fact that our Committee heard directly from all provincial wards and constituencies, I strongly encourage Members to be careful when purporting to talk on behalf of their people on the issue of RAMSI when they are listening and maybe disheartened by any potential misrepresentation.

Speaking of representing the provinces let me relate to you two key concerns that the rural people raised directly with our Committee. First, many people complained about crocodile attacks and indicated that although RAMSI has a taskforce which culls crocodiles, this is on a request basis only, and often they arrive too late after people have been killed. When we later asked RAMSI about this, we were informed that RAMSI had already produced a crocodile management strategy and handed it to the CNURA Government. This issue was also tied to that of rearmament and of special units with the RSIP. However, the Government has done nothing about the proposal RAMSI submitted. I have a copy of it. If anyone wants a copy I am sure it is part of the documentation; very interesting.

Every province we visited demanded that the government and RAMSI must work together and that the RSIP and the PPF work together too. This consistent call is reflected in the request of provinces for more vehicles where there are roads and more boats where there are no roads. They strongly believe that if RAMSI and the Government work together on focusing on provinces, their combined resources could achieve this. However, I am very disappointed that this is not reflected in the 2010 Budget. I have yet to ascertain RAMSI's response to this request but it seems that the Government is not responding at all.

Let me talk about the root causes. I acknowledge that most Members who have spoken discussed this subject matter at some length. It is a good sign to me because it indicates that we are all on the same page. This is perhaps the most significant area for all Solomon Islanders. In that regard, I wish to thank the people of our provinces who brought this subject in the first place. When we started our inquiry, we did not envisage looking into the root causes, but as we started to pay more attention to the concerns of the provinces, this topic stood out the most, so we explored it further.

Based on evidences our Committee gathered, and I believe that there are two categories of root causes, the first category can be described as the direct triggers of the ethnic tension and the second category included longer-term underlying causes that existed well before the ethnic tension started. I acknowledge points raised about both categories during this debate. However, while I have categorized root causes this way, the simple fact remains that throughout the country different groups hold varying views of what the real root causes are. For instance, in Malaita there was a general consensus that the ethnic tension was caused by political manipulation that predated the conflict. By contrast in Guadalcanal, the bona fide demands and the failure of successive governments featured predominantly when witnesses talked about root causes. To them if these are not addressed including establishment of federalism there can never be even reconciliation. People from the West and Choiseul were of the

view that corruption and political manipulation are the core root causes. All provinces agreed that the issue of land ownership is perhaps at the heart of the root causes. By the end of our inquiry one thing is very clear. Today, whilst we may think that identifying root causes, is a simple matter of commonsense we cannot reach consensus on what these really are without proper investigation. That, however, was never part of our terms of reference in the first place. This very investigation is the purview of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a body established by this House with the mandate not only to foster reconciliation but to investigate and compile a complete record of the root causes of the ethnic tension including those who instigated it, if any.

The complete mandate of the Commission, along these lines maybe found in Section 5 of the Truth and Reconciliation Act 2008, which we all passed in this House. That section provides in part, and I quote: “the objects and functions of the Commission shall be to promote national unity and reconciliation by, (b) examining the nature, root causes, responsibility for and the extent of the impact of human rights violations or abuses which occurred between the 1st January 1998 and the 23rd July 2003, including the destruction of property, deprivation of rights to own property and the right to settle and make a living”.

In case, some other Members might be wondering I will not table that Act either. It could not be expressed any clearer under the Act before the Commission could hope to start any reconciliation process. Its first goal is to establish the root causes of the conflict as they existed between 1998 and 2003, although this could potentially uncover root causes that pre-date 1998. This is to be done properly through an independent and empirical investigation or research throughout the country but definitely not based on commonsense of personal opinions of a handful of past and current politicians. Our Committee took legal advice early on the Commission’s mandate, so all along we were very careful not to intrude on that mandate. That is why our views in this report are conservative and couched as observations but without taking a conclusive stand. To do so would be wrongful attempt to usurp functions of the Commission and preempt its findings and recommendations as established by this Parliament. For that reason ...

Hon. Sikua: Point of order. It is now 4.30pm and so with your consent I wish to move suspension of the relevant Standing Order under Order 81 to allow the Chairman of the FRC to continue with his remarks.

Mr Speaker: Permission granted.

Hon. Sikua: I move that Standing Order 10 be suspended under Standing Order 81 to allow the Chairman of the FRC to continue and conclude his remarks and Parliament will be adjourned by the Speaker under Standing Order 10(5).

Standing Order 10(5) suspended under Standing Order 81 to permit the continuance of the business of the House after 4.30 pm

Mr Boyers: Thank you. For that reason we made no real attempt in our report to identify the root causes as such. Instead we made broad observations about how different groups define these, but left the topic at that.

In terms of the related issue of national reconciliation, we made observations about the CNURA Government's policy and work, as well as the ongoing work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and other stakeholders. However, we could not make recommendation on how to achieve meaningful reconciliation because that is for the Commission to explore and make recommendations on. Having said that I wish to also make my personal views, which is from my heart, as I mentioned in previous meetings especially on national reconciliation. Personally, I strong believe that there should be a forgiveness bill if our nation is to move forward. I understand that the government has a forgiveness bill as part of its policy, but subject to the outcome of the TRC on who should be forgiven. It would be a huge positive step if that bill is progressed. However, this is just my own view and not the report. The views in the report are the consolidated views of the whole country and are thus more conservative in order to encompass the majority's view.

Returning to the two categories I earlier identified, perhaps the only question that we set out to answer was whose responsibility is it to address the root causes. I believe that contrary to what some Members claimed in the debate, we have a very clear answer to this question. The responsibility rests squarely on the shoulders of the Government. We are talking about identifying and either forgiving or prosecuting instigators of the conflict, and delivering on the Government's duty to service and advance the whole country in terms of economic activities and infrastructure development. There was absolutely no need for us to make any recommendation in this regard because this is the default position anyway.

Some Members have raised whether RAMSI has a say in addressing the root causes. Again our Committee's answer to that question is quite loud and clear. RAMSI should not be directly involved in addressing the root causes. To us, this is because despite the broad terms of the Biketawa Declaration, RAMSI's final mandate does not extend to addressing these issues that would affectively mean developing the provinces over a few decades, and not just years. Members

will note that earlier on in our report we concluded that there was no real need to change RAMSI's current mandate. Because we hold this view before we consider the root causes we could not contradict ourselves by suggesting changes to the mandate to cover the root causes contrary to our earlier views. Of course, each member of the Committee has his or her own opinion about this issue, but at the end of the day I believe we made some tough calls that maintain consistency in our views as reflected in the report. Our views on this issue are, of course, subject to final outcome, whether failure or success of the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We would like to recommend that RAMSAI assists as many in the provinces called for. But our hands are tied because the Commission is yet to complete its work. If that is done, the Government would be in a much better position to reassess whether RAMSI should play a part, if for instance the Commission's findings reflect that our Committee heard in the provinces, our immediate recommendation would be for RAMSI to be more proactive in addressing the root causes and national reconciliation.

Having said that, I wish to join previous contributors in calling for the refocusing of efforts in the provinces. Our Committee shares this view as reflected in our report, particularly in Chapters 12 and 14. Whether the government will do this on its own or with RAMSI's assistance, depends very much on the findings and recommendations of the Commission. I hope I have provided some clarity on this issue regarding our Committee's stand.

Before I leave this topic, however, I wish to point out a major inconsistency that I could not help but notice during the debate. It appears to me that when we talk of sovereignty some Members strongly demand that RAMSI stay out of the affairs and responsibilities of the Government. Yet on the issue of addressing root causes, the same Members turn around and start demanding that RAMSI have a direct role. This is an extremely contradictory line of argument. If we want to stay out of the government turf, then let us be consistent with that in order to maintain our sovereignty. Asking RAMSI to be involved in root causes, to me, is effectively giving away the Government's core obligations to foreign countries.

I can assure this Honorable House that from the demands that the people of our provinces put to our Committee, the moment RAMSI steps in to address the root causes, we might as well say goodbye to our sovereignty. The people want roads, clinics, airports, wharves, schools, airports, hospitals, police stations, surveillance ships, projects, small business and the lists goes on. Our people have not seen much service delivery or development in their areas for over 30 years and the ethnic tension only worsen things.

Addressing the root causes for them, therefore, was boosting and maintaining both service delivery and development in rural areas. What right

thinking government in this world would give such responsibilities away to foreign countries? Should we be asking RAMSI or Australia to take over the Government's duty to develop Solomon Islands? If that is to happen, what on earth would be left of our Government to do, and what people will it serve? We had 30 years of sovereignty but that resulted in the ethnic tension. Why are we now asking RAMSI to identify and solve the root causes of our own problems in a short timeframe when we could not do the same for ourselves in the last 30 years? If RAMSI is to assist, we must nevertheless take leadership of addressing the root causes. That, I believe, is the approach taken in the partnership framework, hence our strong support for that framework.

Some have suggested the compromise whereby RAMSI should simply redirect its funds through the government to various sectors in the provinces such as agriculture. On that point, I note that in recent years we as parliamentarians have not done well in demonstrating accountability for aid money. In fact, each year our trustworthiness is being increasingly questioned because of some actions at the national level that we cannot fully justify. This thus begs the question that even if RAMSI agrees to provide this kind of funding, will they ever trust us as politicians to deliver on RAMSI's behalf.

Before I conclude, I wish to thank colleague Members who have been very positive in suggesting the way forward during the debate. It is indeed heartening to see that while we may have varying views on specific issues we all share a common goal, and that is to shake off our sad history and rebuild our nation and advance our people.

Many have suggested different routes of getting to that goal. Our report suggests one such root, and I urge Members to reread the report to see where we are coming from. For those of you who might think that that report is too thick to read, I am somewhat shocked that national leaders could possibly take such simplistic approach on a very important matter. With all due respect, I strongly question the ability of any Member to represent and lead his people if he does not have the will or cannot find the time to read our report.

In terms of recommendations of the report, I appreciate the question posed by the Member of Savo/Russell and former Prime Minister on who will implement our recommendations. In most, we identified whether it is the Government or RAMSI who should act but this is not clear. Naturally, it falls on the Government of the day. On this issue, I also note comments made by the Member for Temotu Nende to the effect that 11 of our recommendations are outside our terms of reference. Earlier I explained why we interpreted our terms of reference broadly. Since that, in turn led to the review of both RAMSI and Government, I believe all our recommendations are well within our terms of reference.

In conclusion I wish to once again thank everyone who took the time to study our report and contribute to this debate. While I stand here to facilitate the consideration of the report, the ball is really now in the Government's court, so I certainly hope the Honorable Prime Minister has been taking note of all the suggestions raised on this floor. As this will be my last public speech on the inquiry of the Foreign Relations Committee into the RAMSI Intervention, I wish to thank and again thank my fellow committee members and our secretariat for our combined efforts during the inquiry. I extend my gratitude to all those who assisted our Committee in terms of logistics during our provincial tours. To the Government, thank you so much for your financial support. I wish to thank all stakeholders who participated in our Honiara hearings, especially the Honorable Prime Minister, Ministries, RAMSI executives, donors, constitutional post office holders, public officers, academics and the civil society. I also thank Members of this house for your support throughout the inquiry.

Lastly, but certainly not the least, I wish one last time to express our sincere gratitude to the good people of the nine provinces who appeared before our Committee. I hope that we have done justice to your concerns in our report and in my speeches in this House. As the former chairman and myself always stress in our opening statements, this is where our Committee mandates ends and we hope we have provided reasonable recommendations on your behalf, but beyond that it is up to the Government and RAMSI to respond positively to our recommendations. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The motion is passed

Mr Speaker: The motion is passed and Parliament will resolve itself into a committee of the whole house to consider the report of the Foreign Relation Committee specified in the motion. Normally we would go straight into the committee of the whole house, however, this is not automatic but depends on government business. I understand due to time constraints and the importance of the report concerned, the government proposes to bring on consideration of the report by the committee of the whole house on another sitting day to be determined by the Hon. Prime Minister pursuant to Standing Order 15. As such, the resolution we have just made will take effect on a date so nominated.

Honorable Members, that concludes our business for today.

The House adjourned at 4.37 pm