



# OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL COORDINATOR

## REGIONAL ASSISTANCE MISSION TO SOLOMON ISLANDS

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**Friday 6 February 2009**

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### **NEW ZEALAND COMMITTED TO RAMSI AND A BRIGHTER SOLOMON ISLANDS**

Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands Special Coordinator, Graeme Wilson, today congratulated New Zealand on their National Day, acknowledging the strong leadership role and contribution that New Zealand provides to the mission.

Mr Wilson said he was delighted to have personally thanked the New Zealand Prime Minister during his visit to RAMSI headquarters last week for the commitment of the many New Zealand soldiers, as well as police and civilian advisers who are currently serving with the mission.

“On the occasion of Waitangi Day, New Zealanders can be proud of their efforts in supporting Solomon Islands to become a safe, well-governed and prosperous nation,” Mr Wilson said.

New Zealand makes a significant contribution to RAMSI in both personnel and funding, including senior leadership roles across the police and military areas and the position of Deputy Special Coordinator. There are almost 100 New Zealanders currently working with RAMSI in law and order and capacity building roles.

Andrew Minto, from New Zealand Inland Revenue, is currently serving with RAMSI as Acting Commissioner of Inland Revenue Solomon Islands.

He says the rewards are as big as the challenges.

“What we are focusing on at Inland Revenue is building the capacity of the agency by improving systems and process, and building the capacity of people by developing the skills and confidence of over 90 staff,” Mr Minto said.

“We’re looking to build pride in the public sector; by getting staff to work together and by going out to the business community and talking through any issues they might have. It’s also important to explain to people why paying tax is essential for government services and rural development activities.”

Last year the revenue collected by the division increased by 40 per cent as a result of a growing economy and registration of more businesses paying tax.

Mr Minto’s Solomon Islands counterpart, Acting Deputy Commissioner George Tapo, says community perception of Inland Revenue has changed with the support of RAMSI advisers.

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“Before, we were seen as a threat to businesses. Now, people are engaging with the tax system because they have confidence in our improved systems and see the benefits for the development of Solomon Islands,” Mr Tapo said.

Major Joe Dowick, who heads New Zealand’s military contribution to RAMSI, said Waitangi Day this year would be quieter than usual.

“We are currently on stand-by, waiting to provide assistance in response to the flooding on Guadalcanal which has devastated communities and infrastructure.”

An experienced officer of many overseas peace missions, Major Dowick said the benefit of RAMSI was its integrated approach to peace and development, with police, military and civilians from across the Pacific working together in a combined effort.

Acting Contingent Commander of RAMSI’s Participating Police Force, Trevor Pullen, works with senior management in the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, assisting them with strategic planning and policy development.

“Working in Solomon Islands is very worthwhile. It is challenging and takes you outside of your comfort zone, but in a healthy way. You have a sense of pride and personal satisfaction when you are doing something to help another country. It’s what you make it.”

Deputy Special Coordinator, Jonathan Austin, said last week’s visit of five Prime Ministers to meet RAMSI personnel was testimony to the regional nature of the mission.

“RAMSI has a good story to tell and is something all contributing countries and Solomon Islands can be proud of,” Dr Austin said.

“While the situation in Solomon Islands remains challenging and there is much work still to be done, New Zealand is committed to RAMSI and working with Solomon Islanders to ensure a brighter future for all.”

15 countries contribute to RAMSI: Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

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