



Published on Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (<http://www.ramsi.org>)

RAMSI Experience Invaluable for PNG Defence Force

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Created 29/06/2009 - 11:19am

Monday 26, June 2009

Papua New Guinea soldiers had benefited greatly from the experience of serving in RAMSI according to a senior Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) commander visiting RAMSI this week.

The Commander of PNGDF's First Battalion, Pacific Islands Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Siale Diro, said that Papua New Guinea greatly valued the experience that RAMSI as a regional mission gave to its soldiers as well as the opportunity to help its close neighbour, Solomon Islands.

Speaking during his four day visit to RAMSI headquarters at GBR, Lt. Col. Diro said he noticed a vast difference in the country since he first visited at the time of RAMSI's deployment in 2003 and again in 2007.

"You can really see and sense the difference. The place, the people are very different from when we first deployed; the fear is gone."

Lt. Col. Diro said that it meant a lot to Papua New Guinea to be part of a regional effort to assist such a close Melanesian friend and neighbour.

"For us to have this chance to help Solomon Islands get back on its feet is very meaningful."

The practical impact of RAMSI on the PNGDF has also been invaluable he said.

"I can always tell if one of my men has served in RAMSI, the skills transfer, the experience of working with our fellow soldiers from Australia, New Zealand, Tonga and previously Fiji, have greatly benefited those PNGDF troops who have served with RAMSI," Lt. Col. Diro said.

"Having the chance to work beyond our own force and outside our country transforms them; they come back more worldly, more experienced soldiers," he said.

Currently RAMSI is Papua New Guinea's only international troop commitment.

RAMSI Military Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Neil Grimes, who is hosting Lt. Col. Diro's visit, said that RAMSI was very happy that PNGDF was willing to provide a platoon of soldiers

to RAMSI's military contingent or Combined Taskforce as it is formally known.

“We are very pleased to have the PNGDF as part of the team, the men perform to a very high standard and greatly contribute to the skills and experience upon which the contingent can draw on.”

Having Solomon Islanders' fellow Melanesians as part of RAMSI's military contingent was a huge benefit he said.

“In terms of language, of culture, and in having a natural instinct for the best way to approach matters here, the Papua New Guineans greatly enhance our capacity,” Lt. Col. Grimes said.

Papua New Guinea has contributed troops, police officers and civilians to the mission since its inception in July 2003.

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