



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

## **‘The Solomon Islands Government - RAMSI Partnership Framework : Towards a secure and sustainable Solomon Islands’**

By Jeremy Miller

Created 21/01/2010 - 11:24am

*RAMSI Special Coordinator, Graeme Wilson's address to State Society and Governance in Melanesia Program (17 December 2009)*

Thank you for the invitation to address the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program. It is good to see a number of familiar faces here from the Australian National University and from government, including some old and not so old RAMSI hands. I would like to congratulate the SSGM Program for its excellent work in stimulating debate and producing quality reports on a range of issues affecting the fabric and future of Melanesia. It is a pleasure for me to speak to you today about the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), an organisation which I feel privileged to be leading as Special Coordinator.

I would like to focus on events over the past year as there have been a number of significant developments – including the finalisation of a Partnership Framework between the Solomon Islands Government and RAMSI – and as it offers me the advantage of speaking from first-hand experience given that I took up the position of RAMSI Special Coordinator in January 2009. I would also like to talk about some of the challenges ahead and to give you the opportunity to make comments or ask questions. In order to provide context to my remarks, I will start by saying a few words about the origins of RAMSI and its mandate, and about the evolution of the Mission.

In 2003, the Solomon Islands Government and the 15 other member countries of the Pacific Islands Forum agreed to form RAMSI in response to the civil unrest, lawlessness, economic decline and dramatic drop in service delivery burdening Solomon Islands. The concept of RAMSI was born following a request by then Prime Minister, Sir Allan Kemakeza, to Prime Minister Howard for an intervention. The subsequent passing of the RAMSI Treaty by Pacific Island Forum states and enabling domestic legislation, the Facilitation of International Assistance Act, by the Solomon Islands Parliament, paved the way for RAMSI's deployment.

On 24 July 2003, RAMSI arrived in Solomon Islands with a mandate to:

- restore civil order in Honiara and throughout the country – by strengthening the rule of law;
- stabilise government finances;

- promote longer-term economic recovery and revive business confidence – this was to be done mainly by strengthening economic governance and creating the conditions for broad-based economic growth;
- rebuild the machinery of government - including by promoting transparent and accountable governance and by supporting efforts to reduce corruption.

In other words, from the start, RAMSI was intended to have both a short-term and longer-term focus. Upon deployment, RAMSI's immediate focus was on restoring law and order and stabilising government finances. That was done surprisingly quickly and effectively. Some 3,600 guns were removed, there were numerous high-level arrests, the police force was reconstituted, finances were brought under control and national budgets balanced.

RAMSI has been in the longer-term phase of its mission for a number of years now and it is difficult, incremental work. That work is carried forward under a 3-pillar system, those pillars being Law and Justice, Economic Governance and Growth, and Machinery of Government (which includes programs such as the strengthening of national accountability institutions, Public Service improvement, parliamentary strengthening, electoral strengthening, provincial government strengthening and Women in Government). The election of the Sikua Government at the end of 2007 marked a new chapter in relations with RAMSI characterised by more open dialogue and close cooperation.

### **The Partnership Framework**

Without doubt, the most important development this year has been the finalisation of a Partnership Framework between the Solomon Islands Government and RAMSI. What is this document and why is it so important? The Partnership Framework, which was approved by Solomon Islands Cabinet in May 2009, endorsed by Pacific Island Leaders at the Forum in August and tabled in the Solomon Islands Parliament in November, is like a strategic work plan to guide RAMSI's assistance to Solomon Islands into the foreseeable future.

The introduction to the document notes the principles on which the partnership is based, including mutual trust and respect, accountability, transparency and shared responsibility for results. The introduction also notes that the Framework will aim to build on achievements such as the restoration of law and order, the progressive rebuilding of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) and the justice system, the development of balanced national budgets, the significant average annual increase in government revenue, the better management of government debt, the promotion of economic reform, the strengthening of formal accountability institutions such as the Auditor General's Office and improved planning and strengthened management systems within the Public Service.

The Framework sets out mutually agreed objectives for RAMSI's work and milestones or targets for achieving these. In addition to providing a detailed list of targets under each of RAMSI's three pillars, the Partnership Framework also has three cross-cutting themes that are a focus of all RAMSI's programs. The three themes are capacity development – the need to build self-reliant government institutions; anti-corruption – the establishment of an effective and cohesive approach to address corruption in Solomon Islands; and gender equality – the need to advance opportunities for women across government. These three areas were identified as being central to any effort to deliver sustainable results.

The Partnership Framework also provides a means of assessing and measuring these results by setting out suggested timeframes and targets. These timeframes and targets are only indicative

and, if necessary, can be altered by agreement between the Solomon Islands Government, RAMSI and the Pacific Islands Forum. The Partnership Framework was intended to be flexible as some targets will invariably be reached ahead of schedule and others will require extension.

And just as the Framework was jointly developed, progress towards meeting the Framework's targets will be jointly assessed.

An Annual Performance Report will be agreed by a Solomon Islands Government – RAMSI Joint Performance Oversight Group. The Group, which has already held its first meeting, is co-chaired by the Prime Minister and the Special Coordinator and contains representatives from the Government and RAMSI and the Forum's representative to Solomon Islands. It will be assisted in its work by an Independent Experts Team (with experience in program monitoring and evaluation) and a Secretariat. The Annual Performance Report will be submitted for endorsement to the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders meeting through the Forum Ministerial Standing Committee on RAMSI (which comprises the Foreign Ministers of Solomon Islands, Australia and PNG as Permanent Members and the previous, current and future chairs of the Pacific Islands Forum). The Annual Performance Reports will enable judgements to be made about progress by RAMSI and the Solomon Islands Government in meeting their shared objectives under the Partnership Framework.

It is important to note that the Partnership Framework does not go beyond or alter the mandate given to the Mission back in 2003, as expressed in Article 2 of the RAMSI Treaty and agreed by the Pacific Islands Forum and Solomon Islands Government.

Claims that RAMSI is expanding its mandate are simply incorrect. The Partnership Framework facilitates RAMSI transitioning out of particular areas as sufficient local capacity is built. This is with a view to RAMSI's eventual departure from Solomon Islands. We have deliberately avoided setting an artificial 'exit date', but rather, as explained above, have developed targets and indicative timeframes to work towards.

At the same time, those calling for a RAMSI withdrawal are sometimes the same people demanding that RAMSI invest more into provincial infrastructure projects and expand into the health and education sector, for example. As part of RAMSI's community outreach program, we have made a concerted effort to inform Solomon Islanders about what is and what is not RAMSI's role and responsibility. RAMSI does not have the capacity, nor is it deemed appropriate, to expand into areas that are traditionally supported by bilateral and multilateral donors. As part of our outreach program, we also stress that RAMSI is in Solomon Islands to provide advice and to build capacity, not to make decisions. That is the domain of the Solomon Islands Government.

As the Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum, Neroni Slade, has stated, the importance of the Partnership Framework cannot be underestimated. It provides a clear, structured way forward by defining the areas where RAMSI will work, consistent with its original mandate. It thereby helps to manage expectations and to avoid "mandate creep". It provides a sense of joint ownership as it was negotiated jointly and progress under it will be assessed jointly. It bolsters the standing of the Forum as the Framework implements a key recommendation of the Forum Task Force that reviewed RAMSI in 2007. It serves as a flexible "exit strategy" for RAMSI by providing a mechanism for assessing when conditions have been met to enable a phase down of RAMSI's involvement in particular areas and eventually to enable RAMSI's departure. Finally, it is a living document which means that, within RAMSI's mandate, it can be modified over time to take account of changes in circumstances or government priorities. Any changes to RAMSI's mandate itself would need to be agreed by Forum Leaders.

The Partnership Framework has not been the only important development this year. RAMSI Principals (ie. the RAMSI Executive) also now provide regular, quarterly oral briefings to Cabinet. These briefings, which were another recommendation of the 2007 Forum Task Force, allow RAMSI to update Cabinet on developments affecting the Mission and Ministers to raise any areas of concern.

RAMSI received strong regional endorsement at this year's Pacific Islands Forum in Cairns. The Forum highlighted member countries' collective sense of ownership of RAMSI as a regional initiative that had made a real difference. That sense of pride in the Mission has also come through in the many high-level visits to RAMSI headquarters this year by regional leaders including the Prime Ministers of New Zealand, Samoa, Cook Islands and Papua New Guinea, the Premier of Niue, a range of Foreign and Defence Ministers, and the Forum Secretary General.

RAMSI is, and always has been, a partnership between the Government of Solomon Islands and the fifteen contributing countries of the Pacific Islands Forum. The Mission derives huge benefits from the diverse cultures and experience of the 15 contributing members. Over the past six years, thousands of police, military and civilian personnel from across the region have served with RAMSI and worked side by side with Solomon Islanders. RAMSI is truly a regional response to a regional challenge.

Another important development in 2009 was the finalisation and tabling of the Solomon Islands Foreign Relations Committee's report of its review of RAMSI. The report was extremely positive and constructive. It described the Mission as an 'unprecedented regional response' that has been a great success to date. Of particular note, the FRC, a parliamentary committee with members from all sides of politics, determined that the powers and privileges (or 'immunities' as they are more commonly known) afforded to RAMSI personnel were consistent with international practice and arguably less generous than other comparable missions. It also found RAMSI's mandate remained appropriate and endorsed RAMSI's 'exit strategy' outlined in the Partnership Framework.

RAMSI enjoyed good relations with leaders across the political spectrum in 2009. Dr Sikua has stated publicly that relations between the Solomon Islands Government and RAMSI have never been better. Opposition Leader Sogavare visited RAMSI headquarters for the first time in October 2009. The visit, together with previous meetings, has enabled a number of issues of concern for Mr Sogavare to be openly discussed.

An important element of RAMSI's engagement this year has been the focus on creating stronger partnerships at all levels of government and across the country through provincial visits and community involvement, including sporting activities and other voluntary work in support of particular projects or causes. This was the theme of RAMSI's sixth anniversary in July 2009. It highlighted that RAMSI's contribution can go beyond the restoration of law and order, assistance with economic reform and growth, and the rebuilding of national institutions to playing a supportive role in community strengthening and nation-building.

The work of RAMSI's three pillars – Law and Justice, Economic Governance and Growth, and the Machinery of Government - was commended in the Foreign Relations Committee's Review. In 2009, one major highlight was RAMSI's assistance, through the Economic Governance and Growth pillar, with telecommunications reform. The Mission funded technical assistance to help the Government conduct its negotiations with Our Telekom on ending its telecommunications monopoly, and supplied a legal expert to draft the Act that has provided the legal framework for a competitive telecommunications market. It is expected that the new

competitor, bemobile, will enter the market in April 2010. The cost of telecommunications has already dropped significantly since the sector was opened to competition in June 2009.

Other highlights included support for the Government's anti-corruption initiatives, further strengthening of the national accountability institutions, building momentum in the Public Sector Improvement Program (including through strong support for the recently launched Public Service Code of Conduct), the piloting of a community policing model, the opening of a correctional centre on Malaita, further reductions in average remand times and the construction of cost-effective accommodation for government agencies in the justice sector. RAMSI advisers also continued to provide advice to the Solomon Islands Government on the impact of the global economic crisis and financial management issues. A fully funded 2009 Budget was produced with no new borrowing. All external and domestic debt arrears have now been cleared and all debt repayment obligations are now being met, whereas none were met pre-RAMSI.

The process of transition of responsibility has already begun in many fields with RAMSI increasingly stepping back into a supporting role. Within the Law and Justice pillar, Solomon Islanders now head the majority of the nation's law and justice posts. The country's Chief Justice, Attorney-General, Director of Public Prosecutions, Public Solicitor and Commissioner for Correctional Services are all Solomon Islanders.

The security situation remains stable, although there is an underlying fragility to it. The RSIPF continues to improve its capacity to respond to, and contain, security incidents when they occur. While RAMSI plays a key role in maintaining stability, through the work of the Participating Police Force (PPF) and the military contingent (CTF), the PPF is also focusing on capacity development and on building a well-trained, professional and ethical RSIPF.

Despite significant progress, there is still a long way to go. Public confidence in the police force has not yet increased to the level where the rearming of certain units is feasible. In addition, the force is considerably under-resourced, making service delivery, particularly in the provinces, a challenge. Nonetheless, the focus has increasingly shifted to a reduced security emphasis with an increased focus on supporting the RSIPF to take the lead.

The military contingent is much less visible than the PPF, but provides an important deterrent to destabilising elements and support to the PPF and RSIPF as required. The military contingent, consisting of soldiers from Australia, New Zealand, PNG and Tonga, also carries out an extensive Civil and Military Liaison Program, visiting communities throughout Honiara and the provinces to listen to their stories and learn of their concerns. Both RAMSI police and military receive cultural awareness training and pidgin lessons to assist with communication in rural areas.

RAMSI advisers have also been able to take a step back within the Machinery of Government pillar, which sees RAMSI advisers work with Solomon Islands public servants across twelve different government bodies. For example, since 2008, all audits carried out by the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) have been led by Solomon Islanders. By September 2008, the OAG had managed to remove the massive backlog of national and provincial government accounts that had existed only two years before.

Under the Economic Governance and Growth pillar, the increased capacity of staff within the Ministry of Finance and Treasury has seen the timely production of monthly expenditure reports and annual financial reports, along with strengthened ministry systems, including upgrades to payroll, financing and budget systems. Mid-level management within the Ministry is also taking on greater responsibility for work planning and prioritisation, as well as providing

strategic advice to the Ministry Executive and the Minister.

## **Risks and Challenges**

RAMSI and the Solomon Islands Government will undoubtedly face many challenges as they work towards implementing the Partnership Framework. Solomon Islands faces serious economic and fiscal challenges that have been magnified by the global economic crisis and the rapid depletion of forestry resources. The country is currently in a very difficult fiscal situation. Strong Solomon Islands Government leadership will be needed to restrain spending, especially in an election year.

National elections are to be held in mid-2010 and there will be challenges with electoral preparations, including voter registration. Security around the elections will obviously be an important issue, given the events of 2006. The elections are, of course, also of great importance for the future stability of Solomon Islands and for the way the country is viewed internationally. RAMSI will need to build a productive working relationship with whichever government emerges from the elections.

The longer-term challenges facing Solomon Islands are significant. The FRC noted in its report that the root causes of the ethnic tension period from 1998-2003 – including land ownership and tenure, the clash between traditional and non-traditional authority systems, inadequate government services, lack of economic opportunity (leading to urban drift) and issues with the delivery of law and justice – had largely not been addressed. Other long-term challenges include reconciliation, sustainability (which is closely linked to RAMSI's focus on capacity development), population growth outstripping economic growth, governance and leadership opportunities for women.

While there are processes in place to address reconciliation (through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and other existing mechanisms) and aspects of land reform, these processes will take time and will raise many sensitive issues. Rapid population growth is contributing to urban drift and could eventually feed social unrest if not addressed. Continued ethnic divisions, especially between Malaita and Guadalcanal, also complicate peace-building efforts.

The FRC report noted that Solomon Islands had 'always struggled to build a strong sense of national consciousness and unity' and that 'this is a challenge that the Solomon Islands must confront'. The Foreign Relations Committee also indicated, correctly in my view, that the Solomon Islands Government should take the lead in addressing the root causes of the tensions and in promoting reconciliation.

RAMSI, which has created a stable environment that enables Solomon Islanders to now address these issues, can also play a supportive role within the limits of its mandate, for example in providing limited logistical support with the reconciliation process, particularly when it is taking place in remote communities. However, RAMSI must continue to focus its attention on building capacity, both at the level of individuals and systems. While we are confident that progress towards developing sustainable public institutions will strengthen, all parties will need to be patient and committed. The maintenance of a close and cooperative working relationship with Government, and strong regional and Forum support, will help to ensure that the Solomon Islands – RAMSI partnership continues to go from strength to strength.

While I have covered a range of issues in this presentation, I would like to leave you with a few key messages:

- that the journey RAMSI has shared with the Solomon Islands people and government over the past six and a half years has been a remarkable one – and not without its ups and downs; but much has been achieved, we are getting to know each other better and confidence is building;
- that RAMSI's regional nature is its underlying strength;
- that 2009 has been an excellent year for SIG-RAMSI relations, with the highlight being the conclusion of a Partnership Framework to guide RAMSI's work for the foreseeable future – the Framework has provided a clear way forward and progress in implementing the Framework will be jointly assessed by the Solomon Islands Government and RAMSI;
- that many short and longer-term challenges remain that will require strong Solomon Islands Government leadership;
- that RAMSI will support the Government where it can within the limits of its mandate - RAMSI's main focus will be on capacity development and helping to build a secure and sustainable future for the Solomon Islands.

---

**Source URL:**

<http://www.ramsi.org/node/388>