

**SENATE FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE
REFERENCES COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO PAPUA NEW GUINEA AND THE
ISLAND STATES OF THE SOUTH-WEST PACIFIC**

SUBMISSION

Submission No: 73

Submittor: Solomon Islands Labour Party

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**SOLOMON ISLANDS
NATIONAL PARLIAMENT**



HON. JOSES T. TUHANUKU

Member of Parliament
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Mr Saxton Patience,
The Secretary,
Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee
Inquiry into Australia's relationship with Papua New Guinea and the island states of the
South-west Pacific.

28 May 2003

Dear Sir,

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AUSTRALIA AND SOLOMON ISLANDS

I would be grateful if you would accept the Solomon Islands Labour Party's brief submission to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee Inquiry into Australia's relationship with Papua New Guinea and the island states of the South-west Pacific.

It is with regret that we tender such a brief document but due to the short notice of your visit we were not able to provide you with a more comprehensive submission as we would have wished given the extreme importance we attach to this issue.

We wish you well in the remainder of your endeavours.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Tuhanuku', written over a horizontal line.

Hon. Joses T. Tuhanuku,
Parliamentary Leader
Solomon Islands Labour Party
NATIONAL PARLIAMENT, SOLOMON ISLANDS.
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SOLOMON ISLANDS LABOUR PARTY

SUBMISISON

to

Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee
Inquiry into Australia's relationship with Papua New Guinea and the island
states of the South-west Pacific



RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AUSTRALIA AND SOLOMON ISLANDS

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLE

Maintaining good diplomatic and bilateral relations between any two sovereign states, is about reconciling the respective interests of the two nations concerned in order to accommodate each other's interests.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The diplomatic relationship between Australia and Solomon Islands only began after the latter attained its political independent status from its colonial master, Great Britain, on the 7 July 1978. By comparison to other diplomatic relationships that the new sovereign state of Solomon Islands had entered into immediately after achieving political independence, the one with Australia was considered a very special one.

Australia was seen by Solomon islanders – perhaps less so by Canberra - as taking over the role of Great Britain, the responsibility which that state had incurred to Solomon Islands during the colonial period. But by contrast Australia was not to be a colonial master but more of an 'elder brother' who would guide and mentor the newly independent and fragile state of Solomon Islands. This is only natural as Australia is the only nation with the political, economic and military standing in the South Pacific Region to play this role especially as the island states of the South Pacific are all by comparison new and small states which only attained their political independence in the last thirty years.

It is also Australia that has the greatest strategic interest in the region and the most to lose from economic and political instability in these young states

2.0 THE SECURITY AND ECONOMIC INTERESTS OF SOLOMON ISLANDS

Since the ethnic crisis which erupted at the end of 1998 and the coup that overtook Solomon Islands in June 2000, Solomon Islands has lost its ability to effectively maintain law and order in the country, especially in the seat of the National Government, Honiara. It is not so much that statistically crimes have

risen to a level that is beyond the ability and capacity of the Royal Solomon Islands Police (RSIP) to handle, on the contrary most Solomon Islanders remain law abiding. The Solomon Islands Police Force has just become so corrupt and compromised, and has basically collapsed as the agency to maintain law and order in Solomon Islands.

The law and order situation in Honiara is such that residents of the city just cannot move freely on with their social and economic lives anymore. The situation is not conducive to progress at all. The companies that the Solomon Islands was so dependant on for its revenue and foreign reserves which were forced to close during the ethnic crisis and the coup of 2000 remained closed and there does not seem to be any prospect of any major credible new investments.

For as long as there is no effective policing and therefore no improvement in the law and order situation there can not be any real chance of economic recovery as security is rightly considered by investors to be the pre-requisite for investing and operating in Solomon Islands.

3.0 WHAT SHOULD BE AUSTRALIA'S ROLE IN ASSISTING SOLOMON ISLANDS TO OVERCOME ITS POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC MISERIES?

Australia should give priority to getting law and order in Honiara back on track. There is a project by AUSAid, known as Institutional and Capacity Strengthening project which has been going on for some years now. In this project, advisers are provided to the Royal Solomon Islands Police. However this has been proved not to be capable or an effective means of assisting the Solomon Islands Police Force to return to normalcy.

This is not surprising as most of the high ranking Police officers whom the Australian advisers have been assigned to advise are heavily implicated in the events of the ethnic crisis and the coup of 2000. Also the relationship between these high ranking Police officers and the so called former militants who are basically responsible for organising criminal activities in Honiara and indeed, throughout the country, is basically intact. The Police officers almost have to get the green light from these gangsters to make any arrests or take any drastic action, relating to law and order issues. Thus, some of the hard core criminals are well protected and regularly have access to the police armoury.

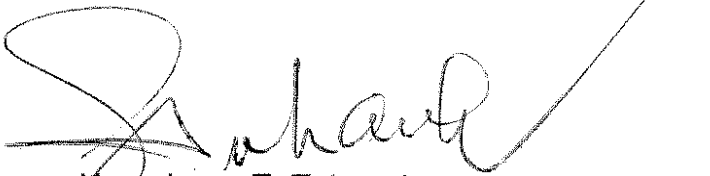
Unfortunately this relationship extends to many of our national political leaders, further undermining any prospect for good governance in Solomon Islands and rendering virtually hopeless the aspirations of normal Solomon Islanders for a return to the rule of law.

It is the view of the Solomon Islands Labour Party that the only way to break this nexus between the law breakers, law makers and law enforcers is for a neutral force to be dispatched to Solomon Islands to support the efforts of the majority in the country who want to clean up this mess.

Surely the last three years stand as enough proof of the need for such a neutral force, as the efforts by all those citizens and leaders in the peace process have proved no match for the political rule of the gun, enforced and if we are not careful, soon to be entrenched as the way of doing 'business' including government business in our beloved islands.

We understand Australia's reluctance to interfere in the sovereignty of another nation but we believe that in the current crisis Australia's support for a multi-lateral neutral force would be a move to protect the long term sovereignty of our nation. We believe it is time for Australia to assume its true role as the most established and strongest strategic power in the region and move to protect all Solomon Islanders from a sorry and uncertain future.

We strongly urge the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee Inquiry into Australia's relationship with Papua New Guinea and the island states of the South-west Pacific to consider this as a key recommendation of their findings. It is a proposal long talked about by ordinary Solomon Islanders and would receive their full support.



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