

National Peace Conference Communiqué

Preamble

The National Peace Conference was held from the 25th –27th August 2000 on board the New Zealand frigate HMNZS Te Kaha. It was attended by some 150 representatives of Civil Society from throughout Solomon Islands. These included representatives of Churches, Women's groups, Community Leaders and Chiefs, Non-Government Organisations, Business, Youth and Provincial Government leaders.

Objectives

The objectives were to bring Civil Society together to propose:

1. A framework for the Peace Process that will arrive at a peace that is constructive and sustainable.
2. A Process that is broad-based and inclusive.
3. A Process designed to initiate, facilitate and achieve constructive healing throughout the country.
4. A Process that achieves peace and promotes justice.

Resolutions

THE PEACE PROCESS

1. The National Peace Conference recognizes the need for all stakeholders including the militant groups in the peace process to establish common principles at the outset. These principles will help all parties to critically evaluate their own positions during the peace process. Such principles could include commitment to:
 - the restoration of peace and normalcy in Solomon Islands
 - the unity of Solomon Islands as one nation,
 - the national constitution and its processes,
 - upholding our democratic system of government,
 - our constitutional judicial system,
 - justice, moral standards and equity & fairness,
 - fundamental human rights
 - the restoration of law and order by a neutral body
 - the principle of equal treatment by/of both sides of the conflict
 - the principle of reciprocity
 - a process and fair procedures for the resolution of conflicting interests
 - the spirit rather than the letter of the process.
2. Civil society comprises the vast majority of the population of Solomon Islands and is an important party to the peace process.. It is acknowledged that civil society has been neglected in the peace process to date. Civil society and all provincial governments must be active parties to all peace talks and must not be made passive spectators to the process.
3. It is essential to the sustainability of the peace process to have a neutral and effective government.

4. The ethnic tension is no longer a question for Guadalcanal and Malaita alone, but has become a national issue. A peace agreement between the MEF and IFM for the permanent cessation of hostilities is very important but is only one element of a sustainable peace process. The peace process must, therefore, as of necessity include and involve all sectors and Provinces of the entire country.
5. All major stakeholders must be involved in the peace process. The peace process must recognize and reflect the significance of stakeholders.
6. The peace process should aim to culminate in a National Peace Treaty between all the Provinces that would include a significant input from all stakeholders. Such a treaty would include a permanent peace agreement between the IFM and MEF and also set the context, basis and the parameters of the relationships between different Provinces and between the Provinces and the Central Government. The provisions covering the relationship between provinces and between provinces and central government would also cover matters regarding the share and distribution of resources.
7. It is critical to the success and sustainability of the peace process that law and order is re-established and responsibility for it returned to a revived, strengthened, impartial and ethnically balanced Royal Solomon Islands Police Force.
8. Further, it is fundamental to the re-establishment of law and order that all militant groups and individuals surrender their arms and ammunition to a competent neutral agent.
9. It is recognized that an international force is needed to monitor the Cease-fire agreement, and to assist in the restoration of law and order in Solomon Islands, and administer the surrender of weapons and equipment of war from individual militants and groups. This recognition is based on the fact that no organization exists in Solomon Islands that is competent and that has the capacity to monitor the cease-fire agreement, be responsible for law and order and administer the surrender of weapons.
10. It is important that the peace process is geared to ensuring healing of and between aggrieved persons and peoples. For proper healing to take place, forgiveness must be sincerely sought and deliberately granted. The perpetrators of injustices must be given the opportunity to truthfully confess their crimes, show remorse and sincerely seek the forgiveness of the offended parties. The process must not facilitate 'cheap forgiveness'.
11. The objectives of amnesty are to promote the healing process and justice. The qualification for amnesty must be within a framework that links disarmament, truth and reconciliation processes. Amnesty must not be granted indiscriminately.
12. The need for counselling of militants and aggrieved persons and victims is recognized as urgent and must involve parents of militants taking up the responsibility and include traditional, community, women and church leaders.
13. Communities, women, Non-Government Organisations and churches are and must continue to be proactive participants in peace activities.

LAW AND ORDER

14. Restoring the rule of law is an immediate priority in the peace process. Law and order has broken down during the current conflict. The rule of law has been replaced by the rule of the gun. We live in fear of our personal security and that of our property. Victims of violence or theft no longer have recourse to the institutions of the law. Businesses have been looted or closed, from small enterprises to major earning businesses. Foreign investment has ceased. Our

economic activities as individuals and as a nation depend on peace and good order.

15. An impartial and professional police force is a cornerstone of all democratic systems of government. The police exist to uphold the law. Their purpose is to serve all members of the nation without fear or favour. As such, they should be an integral part of nation-building. Instead, the police have become an instrument of one group in society and are contributing to the destruction of our nation.
16. The Royal Solomon Islands Police must be restored and strengthened as a matter of immediate priority. In the immediate short-term an international police presence is required. Restructuring the RSIP will be a medium to long-term task and will require international assistance. The direction of this restructure must reflect fair representation of all provinces and be determined by the particular needs of our communities and the post-conflict healing process.
17. Emphasis must be placed on developing community policing.
18. Police and Prison officers and special constables who have joined any militant groups must not be re-engaged in the new restructured RSIP.

DISARMAMENT

19. All weapons and ammunition within Solomon Islands, licensed or unlicensed, must be surrendered to a neutral body in a regulated process of disarmament. This process should commence as soon as possible and should occur within a strict time frame.
20. Every person, group and organization committed to achieving peace has an important role to play. Firearms are a source of widespread fear and insecurity. Fear of guns has kept families apart and businesses closed. Families, churches, traditional leaders, women and youth groups should all be involved in persuading combatants to give up their weapons and choose the path of peace.
21. This process can only occur under international supervision.
22. Disarmament is an integral part of the peace process. It is related to the rebuilding of trust and confidence. It is related to reconciliation. Relationships that have been scarred by months of suspicion and hatred have to be rebuilt. Steps have to be taken to redress the grievances that have contributed to the tensions and conflict. In addition, combatants have to be convinced that there are alternative means for resolving conflict and disputes other than the use of weapons.
23. Disarmament must be linked to amnesty.
24. Counselling, training and other forms of rehabilitation should be given to those who surrender their arms.

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

25. There are at least two sides to every conflict. Our own conflict is no exception. Just as there are genuine grievances on all sides, so too there have been appalling acts on all sides. In order to achieve the reconciliation that will allow us to live together in harmony once more, the truth of what has taken place between us must be exposed. There can be no justice without truth. Truth and reconciliation processes have become important steps in peace making in many other parts of the world. The work of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu is the best-known international example.
26. A Truth & Reconciliation Commission must be established as an integral part of the Peace Process. The granting of amnesty must be conditional on satisfactory testimony before the truth and reconciliation Commission. Special legislation

should be prepared for this purpose and introduced in the next sitting of parliament.

AMNESTY

27. Subject to fulfilling the disarmament and Truth & Reconciliation requirements it is recommended that amnesty be considered for all those involved directly in militant activities during the ethnic tensions. This includes militants of both the IFM, MEF and other groups involved in the conflict in all parts of the Solomon Islands. It is suggested that special legislation be prepared for this purpose and introduced during the next sitting of Parliament. Such legislation must specify those offences covered by the amnesty. This amnesty relates only to acts of lawlessness that have occurred during the current conflict and will not apply to acts and crimes committed prior to the conflict or that are committed after peace has been formally established. The exact dates covered by the amnesty should be acceptable to stakeholders.
28. Amnesty would be conditional upon fulfilment of the requirement of disarmament and the truth & reconciliation within a reasonable time frame having regard to the provision of evidence. Those wishing to be considered for amnesty must apply individually to the Amnesty, Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
29. There is the need to establish an Amnesty, Truth & Reconciliation Commission.

COMPENSATION

30. The principles of compensation in kastom are to uphold justice and punish wrongdoing. The manner of the government's involvement in compensation payments has been inconsistent with these principles.
31. Concern is expressed that the kastom of compensation has been commercialised. Rather it must be reflective of traditional practises. Where the government is called upon to make compensation payments on behalf of warring parties, their respective provinces should share some of the responsibility and financial burden.
32. Provinces that are not a party to the conflict should be compensated in some form for the difficulties experienced by them. The government must ensure that services to all provinces are not neglected.
33. We recognise the demise of law and order and looting of property within Honiara and its vicinity. The Joint Operation publicly guaranteed law and order in Honiara and therefore are responsible for properties lost and damaged since 5th June 2000. The Joint Operation must compensate such losses.

REHABILITATION

34. All stakeholders - particularly churches, NGOs, Women and Youth groups and traditional leaders - need to play a role in the continuous process of the rehabilitation of individuals, groups, communities traumatised by conflict.
35. The governments and aid donors are urged to facilitate the work of stakeholders in undertaking rehabilitation covering trauma and other relevant counselling training, consultation and advice.
36. That there be special development projects for persons being rehabilitated from the militants, displaced people and all those affected in response to their identified needs.

SYSTEMS OF GOVERNANCE AND GOVERNMENT

37. Once law & order is restored, and not before, the national government with the widest possible consultation needs to immediately consider systems of government so that the following concerns are addressed:
- a. The present systems of government and governance does not bring about equitable benefit sharing between different Provinces, between Central and Provincial government, between resource owners, investors and government, between some parts of Provinces and between rural and urban areas.
 - b. The Westminster adversarial system in which government and opposition are locked in constant competition is inappropriate for dealing with wider social conflicts.
 - c. Traditional forms of governance should be recognised by law.
 - d. Resource owners should be assisted to use resources in a sustainable way rather than selling them to others. In addition, resource owners must be empowered to negotiate with investors and overseas aid sources.
 - e. Decentralisation must involve giving financial responsibility to Provinces.
 - f. Communities and churches need to ensure that the local governance structures at the village level are respected, operative and effective.

LAND

38. Land has become a major source of conflict because of many factors including land sales, people squatting on others land and development pressures.
39. Ownership of land is vested in the tribe and should not be sold.
40. We need to reactivate and strengthen our customary laws to settle disputes and revive the native courts.
41. SIG to seriously consider accommodating the ownership of customary land laws with the existing land legislation.
42. Land-owning tribes of Guadalcanal should repurchase land vacated by displaced people.
43. Perpetual title to alienated land to return to rightful original land owners.

MIGRATION

44. It is noted that migration is caused by many factors and happens for a number of reasons. It is essential that we decentralise services and economic development to encourage employment within the provinces. Provinces must be given more autonomy for the affairs of the province.
45. Serious attention and education must be given to population growth issues and improving family planning and marriage life.
46. Employment and economic opportunities in the Provinces have to be developed to reduce migration pressures.
47. Legislation must provide for the rights of migrants with regards to their host communities.

EDUCATION

48. That our schooling system incorporates a component that strengthens national unity and identity that is based upon recognising our diversity. In addition educators and communities must search for ways to make our educational curriculum more appropriate and relevant including the importance of vocational subjects.

49. All Provinces and ethnic groups must have equal access to educational opportunities.
50. Teacher training and school curriculum must emphasise moral welfare, religious values and personal discipline.
51. Teacher training and school curriculum must also emphasise self-reliance, practical and traditional skills
52. Community High Schools need to be more like rural training centres.