

Current issues of politics and development in Solomon Islands

Honorable Bartholomew Ulufa'alu MP

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Introduction: David Hegarty

This morning it is my great pleasure to introduce to you our guest speaker, the Honorable Bart Ulufa'alu, Member of Parliament for the Solomon Islands National Parliament and a former Prime Minister of his country. Bart has kindly agreed to spend some time with us this morning to discuss some of the contemporary issues in Solomon Islands and he is only too happy not only to talk to us but to field some questions at the end of his presentation.

Bart graduated from the University of Papua New Guinea in 1974 with a degree in Economics, and his time there was notable for two reasons – not only was he a brilliant student of Economics but he led the first student strikes at the University campus, much to the chagrin of those of us who were teaching there at the time. He went home to Solomon Islands and stood for Parliament in 1976, and was elected; but before that he had founded the country's first trade union movement. He spent most of the time since then as a Member of Parliament, but has been occasionally out of Parliament as well, during which time he assisted the development of not only trade unions but Solomon Islanders in business, and I think started a Small Business Association for Solomon Islanders. He was the Minister for Finance in the 1980s, and skipping from there to 1997 he was elected again to Parliament and elected Prime Minister, heading an Alliance for Change, a reformist government that was making considerable headway in turning Solomon Islands economic recovery and development around. He unfortunately was forced from office in the year 2000, soon after the coup of June that year, and although still a member of parliament was out of power, out of power at the barrel of a gun. He was then re-elected in the elections at the end of 2001 with a thumping majority, in fact the largest majority of any member of Parliament at that election. Since then he has been in Opposition, but has recently been appointed by the Solomons Government to head the Parliamentary Tripartite Taskforce to implement an economic recovery strategy. So a man of tremendous experience, and we are grateful to have you with us this morning, Bart, and to hear what you have to say about current issues.

Presentation: Hon. Bart Ulufa'alu

Thank you David, and thank you friends, *wantoks*, distinguished guests, members of academia and ladies and gentlemen. I am honoured this morning to be here and to have such a gathering before me to listen to what I will have to say. I hope I will not repeat what other people have said on the issue of politics in Solomon Islands in recent years.

I would like to start off by saying that this is the third talk that I will be giving in Canberra. The first one of course was the small one with UPNG friends who were my mentors and lecturers and tutors and professors. The second one was at the 26th anniversary of Independence for Solomon Islands for Solomon Islanders in Canberra. These two talks are somewhat related to what I am

going to say today. In the first talk I was trying to analyse the long outstanding issues that have been called the 'root causes' of what happened in recent years, and what I was saying at the 26th anniversary was about the issue of Independence. Independence is inalienable, it is something about the freedom of people and it is something that you cannot give or take away. It is always with people because it is that very essential freedom, but a freedom that has to be exercised within the context of collectiveness in order that the harmonious and peaceful co-existence of members of a society can be enhanced.

Origins of the 'ethnic tension'

Many people in recent years have referred to what happened in Solomon Islands as 'ethnic tension', because from 1999 the hostility was mainly between people of the islands of Guadalcanal and of Malaita. The media probably was responsible for labeling what happened in Solomon Islands in these years as an ethnic tension, but in fact it was not an ethnic tension. Ethnic tension is something that happens between two races or three or four or something of that nature, whereas this occurred between people of the same racial origins. In Solomon Islands it was really a social unrest, expressed more in the context of politics – it was a political rebellion against change, really, and its origins were back in the late 1980s and 1990s. My Government when we came into power in 1997 pledged ourselves to be a government for change. And it was the attitudes of those who supported the previous *status quo* that we targeted to be changed.

As you would know the development process since the declaration of a Protectorate in Solomon Islands in 1893 was basically development through the process of alienation, alienation from what Solomon Islanders knew, and owned, and believed in. It was never part of the Solomon Islands culture, and therefore it cannot be regarded as a legitimate form of development for the people of the country. The various actions taken since the declaration of the Protectorate in the name of development, up to now, have always involved a process of alienation. This lack of ownership led to various actions by Solomon Islanders themselves. Ownership throughout this period was in the hands of external forces, so that economic development and the economic system were predominantly owned and controlled by foreigners. And whoever controlled and owned the economic system also owned and controlled the political system and the administrative system.

This was the basis on which political independence was given, so-called Independence was given, but the real ownership was still that of foreigners. The lack of ownership, which provides legitimacy, is what really discouraged Solomon Islanders from feeling responsible for maintaining and sustaining that independence. And hence the foreign domination continued in Solomon Islands, and because of the absence of Solomon Islander ownership problems brewed in the structures of political independence of Solomon Islands from an early stage. The issues that arose through the so-called tensions were actually issues that appeared as early as 1978, and were based on outstanding issues that were not resolved during the Independence negotiations between the UK and the colonial authorities and the Solomon Islands people.

Those issues have been outstanding since that time. They were issues related to actions resulting from the process of alienation. These issues emerged again in 1988, again as expressed in demands of the Guadalcanal people, and re-emerged again in 1998, so every decade the same issues reappeared again. Those of you who have read about the *bona fide* demands of the indigenous people of Guadalcanal, through Tarcissius Tara's writings, you are probably aware of these issues. These are also the issues that were taken up in 1978 by the Western Province. So they are not new issues. But they are issues that are legitimate in themselves, because they were a result of the process of alienation that had happened in our history since the declaration of a

Protectorate, and they were issues that had to be addressed. Unfortunately they have never been addressed. And hence they were issues that were easily used by politicians or people that want to maintain power in the society or in the country, and such people would capitalize on these issues. But these issues were not the causes of the so-called tension. They provided a tool that was used for political purposes.

So what actually happened in Solomon Islands from 1997 on was political rebellion against reform, and my government was responsible for bringing about that reform.

While reform has been talked about in the past, and continues to be talked about today, much of that talk basically has been lip-service. The people are not actually doing anything about it. Then for the first time in 1997 when SIAC came into office we didn't only think about reform, we didn't only talk about reform, we also did it. Our reform policy, called the Policy and Structural Reform Program, was a home-grown one. It was nothing close to IMF or World Bank model because we knew that the IMF and World Bank models were short-lived models and then they were likely to leave you back in a worse situation than ever before. So this was a home-grown structure. The over-riding objective was to right the wrong of the past.

Now this is very easy to say, to right the wrong of the past, but it is a very difficult thing to do, because there are a lot of people and institutions who have accumulated a lot of wealth by doing the wrong thing. If you are trying to right that wrong you are likely to have the situation backfire in your face. The people, the supporters of the previous *status quo*, who have benefited from the wrong, will resist the change. And they will manipulate the situation in order to bring about stagnation for the new government or to bring about a change of government. And this is what actually happened in Solomon Islands in the early days of the so-called 'ethnic tension'. The problem was essentially political. It was not 'tension'.

Preparation for armed intervention

For years before the 1997 election, the people in power in Solomon Islands had been preparing for a situation where they might need to defend themselves against a challenge. These preparations had reached the stage where even as early as the campaign for the 1997 general election in the Aoke-LangaLanga constituency, which I represent in Parliament, one of the politicians who was also a candidate at that particular election said while campaigning that if I win the election – and this was in August in 1997 – there will be war coming to Solomon Islands. As early as 1997, in August.

As you know during that period, certainly after 1989, the Bougainville crisis was going on. A Solomon Islands 'underworld' was involved in such things as arms smuggling, drug trafficking, and money laundering during that time, from mid 1980s to the mid 1990s, with Bougainville. A lot of the arms that finally found themselves in Bougainville came through Solomon Islands. In fact it was a lucrative trade that was going on, between Solomon Islands business houses and politicians, and the underground world, between Solomon Islands and Bougainville.

One of the containers with arms landed in Honiara in 1996. It was supposed to be for the Solomon Islands Field Force that had been set up to patrol the border of Solomons and Papua New Guinea. Instead of being delivered at Rove the container full of arms and ammunition was delivered to Henderson Field. I personally went to look for that container towards the end of 1997, and found it at Henderson in a US expatriate's business premises. The container had been shipped from Brisbane. And all the arms it contained, they all were sealed up in canvas because that is how the arms and the ammunition were delivered.

So by 1993 an option had been developed which could be used by those in power to maintain themselves in office. The militant option was already in place, as early as 1993. If the people in power needed it, for example if the democratic process of vote-of-no-confidence were not successful in maintaining them in power, the militant option could have been taken up. And even then it could have been based on the *bona fide* demands of the people as expressed by the people of Guadalcanal, which had appeared two times already, in 1978 and 1988. In those years the so-called ethnic tension was not considered important, but the militant option was in place. Clearly during those years it was not an 'ethnic tension' - it was a political weapon, and this situation continued through the 1990s.

Those are some of the things which helped to create the situation, and the spin-over from Bougainville also taught us in Solomon Islands about militancy. The Solomons Government created a political force originally for the purpose of defence, and they were paying those who were engaged on the border a very lucrative allowance – they called it danger allowance - of \$100 a day, in addition to the normal pay. That was a lot of money for people who had no other employment.

So later, when settlement of the Bougainville border was progressing spearheaded by myself with the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, a lot of Field Force officers were threatened that their lucrative allowance would no longer be available. You can see in this some of the grounds for why people go to war. Some people become international mercenaries because they receive a lot of money during the war, and they do not like to end that kind of life. So you have a little bit of that also happening in Solomon Islands, with the Field Force. And there were a lot of Malaitans, as well as people from other provinces, who were involved in the Field Force.

It is also important to remember that there was talk about making armies for Solomon Islands years ago, by those who wanted to maintain power, and they looked seriously at the power structures of Malaysia and Singapore, where the military, the police, the business sector and the politicians are one integral group. So that model was looked at by those in Solomon Islands who wanted to maintain power all the time and that is how they thought to raise a private army in Solomon Islands. The same thing occurred in Papua New Guinea under another Prime Minister in the early 1990s, after the 1989 collapse of Bougainville. So this was a phenomenon that had been coming for some time, and it was all about maintaining the *status quo* that was put in place at the time of Independence. That *status quo* was also very important for those in the private sector, who gave a lot of support to those in power. Some members of the private sector were helping to finance the militias to protect their own interests.

The money was an important factor. In Solomon Islands as early as 1998 the people who were doing the training for the political rebellion were paid \$600 a week. There was about \$600 that was paid, and they also had access to vehicles, they had access to food, fuel, housing, outboard motors, canoes, they had access to all of these things. Now that can't be the result of 'ethnic tension' when the people who were involved come from all over Solomons and when somebody is paying those in the training to become a militia.

The more recent militant training occurred in 1998, January 1998, in the very early days of my Government. That militant training took place at 6 different sites around Guadalcanal. At first the militants or the people were looking for all the arms from the Second World War, dumped weapons and digging them up. So quite a lot of the arms, guns, used in the early activities were those of the Second World War, like .303s, they were commonly used guns during the Second World War that people dug up.

Another sign that there was a power structure that was behind what was happening, and that it was not 'ethnic tension', was that the people that trained in these 6 camps were not from Guadalcanal only. Quite a lot of them were from Malaita, Rennell-Bellona, Western Province, Makira, Temotu, Central Islands, Isabel, there were a lot of them from these places who were members of the militias.

So you can't say it started as 'ethnic tension'. You can't say that. But they used the issues that people had complained about to work on people's emotions. They focused people's thoughts on these issues by saying, for example, 'remember the 25 people who were killed by Malaitans'. So people's emotions built up.

And the leaders used as a deceptive strategy the outstanding issues since the Independence to mobilise grass-roots support, and they took advantage of the huge unemployed - people between the age of 10 to 30. You will not be surprised to learn that about 90 per cent of the militia was between the age of 10 and 30. And when you look at our education policy 'Education for what?' that is about the age grouping that came under that education policy, which was introduced in 1972. So our education system itself contributed towards creating this pool of village misfits and urban vagabonds, and that is where the criminality aspect came in.

The designers and the architects of the ethnic tension did not expect the criminality. They had given strict instructions that their people, their villagers, should not burn people's property or kill anyone. But unfortunately many of the villagers involved were very young people, and often intoxicated with marijuana and home-grown alcohol (we call it kwaso), and other drugs. They finally did not conform to the instructions of the designers and the architects of the tension, hence burning of properties and killing of people started. And that was the beginning of a swing around for what was politically motivated to become 'ethnic tension' - actually tensions between islands - because large properties were destroyed and human lives sacrificed. And that was about the time that the media blew the situation up as if it was an ethnic tension, because the fighting and the killings and destruction focused attention on the disagreements between the Guadalcanal and the Malaita people.

So it is really not surprising that if the people want to change, as they did in 1997, and if the change undermines the interests of the *status quo*, you will have those with power within the *status quo* rebelling against the government of the day. And that is what actually happened in Solomon Islands.

But the most important point to bear in mind is that because the police force of the country was the first one to go, and had become corrupt before my Government came to power, that is why this problem emerged and was not controlled. It was because the police force was the first one to go, while the second was the judiciary, the third was the public service, and then the medical profession, and then the teachers. That's the order in which the penetration and the destruction of the Solomon Islands public sector and its institutions took place. It was the police that went down first.

RAMSI and ownership

Here we are looking at the regional intervention into Solomon Islands, and hoping that the restoration of law and order will succeed. Whilst we welcome the regional assistance mission to Solomon Islands we are also concerned that unless the process of restoration, and the maintenance of law and order, is owned by the people and their institutions, sustainability of it

will be a big problem. And this is where we've got to look at the objectives of the mission. RAMSI must address the real issues, the root causes, rather than symptoms. Academics and other observers sometimes confuse symptoms with the root causes, and sometimes conclude that the problem was due to the symptoms where in fact it was due to the root causes.

In Solomon Islands the root cause is that we never really owned the governance of the country. We never really owned it. It was never ours and it will never be unless we start to devise ways to improve ownership. The way to go about the ownership is that it must be based on our cultural diversity. Our cultural diversity is the basis of the legitimacy we have in Solomon Islands, and the cultural diversity gives rise to different endowments that people have. And our culture should be the one that our ownership should be based on. The process of legalising our legitimacy is a simple issue. We have confused legalising of things with the process of alienation; whereas legitimacy, which is what is already in the country, the land tenure of the country, the inheritance system of the country, everything that people do as a country, that's what should be legalised. It is only a legalisation process, not alienation. These are two different things. What we have been having since the declaration of the Protectorate is the process of alienation. Now what we are calling for is that what we are - is what we were and we are and we will be - is what we should legalise. The legalisation process means reading it from that level of multiple cultures to a culture, and that 's what the law, the common law, is all about – a legalising process.

So unless this restoration of law, and the maintenance of law and order, the process is owned by Solomon Islanders and their institutions, we can say to RAMSI you can stay there in Solomon Islands for ever. And what is being said so far is that RAMSI is beginning to be isolated, because it is not mobilising the people. Everybody welcomed RAMSI, right from the beginning, 100 per cent. But as RAMSI goes along in implementing their objectives, which is restoration of law and order, and trying to recover the economy of the country, Solomon Islanders are not being made to be part of it. One important factor that seems to be missing between Canberra, as the leading government in the intervention, and Solomon Islands is the principle of consultation. Here when I say consultation I mean that because Solomon Islands invited the regional intervention, the Solomons supreme body, the Parliament, invited it, the basis of cooperation should be the principle of consultation. Any initiative that Canberra or the regional body wishes to take to address a particular objective of the mission, it should consult Honiara. And vice versa: if Honiara wants to do something that may upset the objective of the mission, of what we all agreed to do, it must consult Canberra. Lack of consultation will cause a rift, so it will be worth doing some of that. Consultation is actually seeing that among people we agree. We agree that we will work together. And to enhance that cooperative spirit and unity, consultation is the word. And dialogue. And those things must happen before action is started.

Mobilising the people

In Solomon Islands there is also need to mobilise the people's structures. When I say this there are structures already in existence in Solomon Islands, which look after the different purposes of living in Solomon Islands. Like on the Christian side, you have Solomon Islands Christian Association, an umbrella body there which has all the church structures within it. On the NGOs side, you have a structure there called Development Exchange Services. For the unions you have a structure there which is SIGTU. For women and women's groups you have a structure there which is the umbrella body for the women; and for youth the same. All these bodies, the umbrella bodies, which would serve different functions in the structures of the society, must be mobilised towards one common objective and that is the restoration and maintenance of law and order. This is essential because restoration and maintenance of law and order is a prerequisite to any development. If there is no law and order, you can forget about development. You can

forget about Solomon Islands, because we are going to knock ourselves out. So it is important that these umbrella bodies are brought in to form a Commission, to form a Commission for the purpose of defending and protecting law and order; and for exposure, so that the enemies of the majority – in other words those who want to enrich themselves by maintaining and continuing to do the wrong things - will be exposed. Exposure is the friend of truth and righteousness, while evil and wrong hide in secrecy and confidentiality.

So it is necessary to mobilise the people and their institutions, so that the people themselves are the police force. Then if somebody is doing something wrong, they can be easily exposed. And I think that is where transparency, accountability and being responsible people will spring from. So it is of paramount importance that a project be drawn to master that, to create a venue for awareness, to create a venue for mobilising people, instead of RAMSI's special coordinator defending RAMSI all the time – because once you defend yourself all the time people will start to say 'well what is it that you are defending all the time? There must be something wrong'. It should be other institutions and other people who appreciate, who agree and work towards the common objective which RAMSI is spearheading, that should be doing the defending. It should be. It is not for RAMSI to keep defending themselves, because soon people will say 'well there must be something wrong, that is why you keep defending yourself'. So it is important to mobilise the people. The people in Solomon Islands are desirous of what RAMSI is doing but are not organised in such a way to come up and say what they want to say. They are all waiting for somebody to do that.

Dependency and development

But that's what Solomon Islands is because that is how the aid mentality was developed in Solomon Islands. There is always somebody to do it for you. So we have got to do something, and try to mobilise these umbrella body structures of the society for their own functions, but also for the common purpose which is the restoration and maintenance of law. Because the churches need that, the women's groups need that, the trade unions need that, everybody needs law and order because without it we are finished. So that is the focus that we should be addressing and you as academics and those who are closer to the Australian government authorities should be looking seriously at this and must be also aware that unless we address the problem of development in Solomon Islands beside law and order – once we have law and order we can then address development.

And development in Solomon Islands should be addressed from the basis of that legitimacy, based on what people have, and not on what we think people should have. It is what people have, that is what we should base our development on. What system? If the land tenure has been operating surely since immemorial time, that is what we should have, and we should embark on the legalisation process early, and not the process of alienation. If the culture is matrilineal, that is what it should be. If another group is patrilineal, that is what it should be. We should not try to impose something, because the absence of ownership will be the problem. Otherwise we will be in a situation where Solomon Islands is going from a state of, increasingly, a state of dependency. Aid money has been growing in Solomon Islands ever since it was declared a Protectorate. Every year aid is growing. But it is growing different. The mentality of Solomon Islanders now in terms of development is becoming more and more one of subservience. And that's the danger. There is always somebody to do it for you, there is always somebody ready to help you. And that is certainly not going to get Solomon Islands anywhere.

Solomon Islands is in a worse situation, relatively, than our friends in Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu, because we were neglected for many years after Independence. Papua New Guinea has

had the presence of Australia there as a neighbour after Independence, so that's why they are little bit more fortunate than us. Vanuatu is the same, with the presence of the French there still. Solomon Islands was under the United Kingdom, which did not stay close to us. Eventually the UK passed us over to the European Union, but EU assistance is based on conditionality and is a very complex system. You hear about millions of dollars being available but you can never really get to use it because the system is too complex. Similarly, Australia says 'Oh you can export your goods to Australia' but the quarantine restrictions makes that almost impossible too. The situation that we are in, we are the way we went because we have been neglected by everyone including our former motherland UK, which passed us to the European Union. Even Australia, years ago when UK wanted Australia to take us they said they had enough in their hand with Papua New Guinea. So now Australia is back in Solomons, and technically we can say that Solomons has been annexed by the Forum.

I have so much to talk about but I would rather answer questions, or you will be tired of me talking to you. I am not here to cry over what happened. I am here to try to find what we can be together, and what we can do together to move forward, and not to cry over spilt milk.

David Hegarty: well thank you very much, Bart, for a very frank and illuminating presentation for us. I open it now for comments and questions.

Questions and comments

[**Note:** Due to the scatter of questions around the seminar table, some of the questions were not clearly recorded. The record below gives as much as could be determined from the recording.]

Q1. You mentioned the underworld. The members of this group who had an interest in maintaining power, those were political and structural. I would like you to talk a bit more about those groups. What sort of people did they consist of? What is the history of the Solomon Islands underworld?

A1. Well, I think the writing was on the wall about that. For nearly 20 years one particular group has been monopolizing the power structure of Solomon Islands - not consistently, but on the basis of undermining governments that come in after general elections. Then that government would be thrown out, and the same group would come back. And so it went every four years. So you have in Solomon Islands a history of one government coming after the election, lasting one and a half years, then the one that had been ousted comes back. And because of the fluidity in political affiliations in terms of groupings, this can easily happen. So personality of leadership becomes an important factor.

I don't need to point fingers, those who are acquainted with Solomon Islands will already know what group it is. This particular group has been in office for some 20 years, off and on, and the aid community did not take a liking to them. And because of that, this group was isolated and therefore they moved more towards the business houses and the private sector for support. And hence they allowed the private sector, in terms of foreign investment, to come into the resource sectors of the economy, mining, forestry and fishing. So you find that the involvement of the private sector in forestry and fishing intensified, outside of the normal practice under the colonial government and even immediately after Independence. In the 1980s the forestry sector was opened up and the fisheries sector was opened up to the private sector. And this moulded that relationship. There have been a number of books written on this issue. That relationship placed the resources under threat of being exhausted, and the sustainability of the government became a bigger problem. I think this is the group that actually was working both in the political arena and the private sector arena as well as the underworld. And when the war broke out, as we call it civil

war in Bougainville with Papua New Guinea, these same groupings took advantage of that, and they made a lot of money out of it, in terms of arms smuggling, drugs and money laundering.

Q2. I am interested in the solution you propose of legalising the more general structures of ownership. How would you go about doing it, and yes, it sounds like an ideal solution, but an extremely difficult one. It hasn't easily been carried out in any other country. How do you propose starting it?

A2. Well just to give you an example of what some of us are doing under this process of legalisation rather than alienation: In my constituency we are legalising our customary land tenure, as it is, and that means the custom in land tenure is already registered by our custom. Hence ownership is already identified by our custom, so what you do is you just mark the boundaries of where that ownership is, by our custom, and then register the freehold title under the name of the tribe or the tribes. Then that becomes a perpetual estate. The perpetual estate holders then lease it to the development entities, in this case the development entity is the people's company by virtue of shares, so the members of the tribe who own the bit of title can be shareholders if they so wish. So the development entity has the lease and that becomes a legal entity of its own, just like the freehold title is a legal entity of its own through trustees representing the tribe. Then because the development entity may not necessarily have the skill and expertise, the development entity through its board can contract the management of the company or the development project – marketing, management, technology, all that can be contracted to them as legal entities. So that you have 3 separate legal entities, their functions are quite separated and therefore are done in a transparent way, and can be accountable, and responsible. Now that is on the process of legalisation. It is not difficult. Ownership is still there, according to custom.

Q2a That is at constituency level. Does it affect national level?

It can be done nationally; but it is better to do it where the ownership is. Because when you talk of customary tenure you say that the tribe owns the land. That is the tribe as a collective entity. But really in the end, the people who really own the land, is really the family, the individual family, because they use it, and whatever is there is theirs. So it is really talking about the family household as the most important unit, and it is a unit from which all other subsequent units come, and derive their authority from. So if we destroy the family unit, the family household, all other units really have no legitimate basis. They may be legal, but the legitimacy is absent.

Q3. On this issue of ownership and legitimacy, and particularly any relationship to ...(tape not clear)

A3 Well, it would be very naïve of us to expect what I am saying to come from RAMSI. RAMSI was called a regional assistance. I think we must look at that word 'assistance', because from our side people are not looking at the word 'assistance'. They think that RAMSI will do everything. No. RAMSI is there to assist, and not to substitute. I think that the word makes complications right from the beginning. And 'assist' implies that we are talking, continually in dialogue, talking, so that we can identify areas where you can assist us. And before we identify those areas, we Solomon Islanders must be in a position to say 'well what really do we want?' It is a question of what do we want. What kind of society do we want? That question is very important.

And there are five questions that normally we would handle – Solomon Islanders and regional bodies or bilateral donors. Multilateral donors fit in somehow. The first question is what? What

do we want? The second question is: having known what you want, how would you get it? How? - the question of How. The third question is Where and When? The fourth question is For whom? And the fifth question is Why? Now these are the questions we Solomon Islanders should be able to determine, because the assistance then can be contextualised into those questions. If we can't handle these questions, then what you think is an assistance in fact is a substitute. And then you, the recipient, will sit there complaining all your life. And you will treat the guy who assists you as if he is your father, who brought you into this world. And then you can argue 'look father, I didn't ask you to come into this world. It is you and mother who say you love each other so much that is why you two brought me into this world, out of that love.' So there is a need for Solomon Islanders to be involved, but the difficulty we have at this point in time is that a lot of those that are coming up don't see these macro questions. They see themselves and their small enclaves and they think that themselves and their small enclaves is what the national interest is.

So what you have in Solomon Islands has been institutions that reflect the individuals that make up those institutions. So the individual interest becomes the institutional interest. And the institutional interest becomes nothing. Because there are different interests, there is no national interest. So that's the problem that we have. We need to be re-oriented. In fact the best Parliament so far was the Parliament in 1976 to 1980, this is before Independence. We had leaders who thought nationally. But since then, while the education of leaders is improving, the national consciousness of national issues has been going down. And that's what has been happening in Solomon Islands, and I guess it was also happening in Papua New Guinea, and Vanuatu. Now that is because of lack of ownership, so people want to take as much out of the system, which was never theirs, as much as possible. But if you own it you do not do that. And that is where corruption comes in, that's where extortion comes in, because you did not own it so you steal it. But if you own it, how can you steal it?

Q4. I was particularly interested in your emphasis about the importance of mobilising umbrella groups. I represent the Australian Council for International Development which is the Australian NGO umbrella...so my question really... you mentioned the forming of a commission and I was just wondering: are there moves to do that in Solomons or is it just a thought today?

A4 Well it is a thought that just came into my mind after I was involved in a number of activities since RAMSI came in, especially with this economic Parliamentary Tripartite Taskforce on Economic Recovery, Reform and Development. It would be good to have a Commission replacing the national Council – the National Peace Council – because the National Peace Council looks like it is becoming a haven for ex-politicians both at national and provincial and Honiara City level and all that, where they seem to sustain their livelihood from it, and it is not making an impact. If we replace it with something of this nature, it could be pro-active instead of reactionary. It is important to have a body of this nature and its objective is there, very clear, and that is the maintenance of law and order among the people. The police are there to enforce things, but somebody must be responsible not only to try to protect and defend the most important things that make society functional, in harmony and co-existence, peacefully, but to let people move forward. And the people do it. I mean in our traditional society law is really from the police, but the entire community is the police. And when they said 'Oh you did this', people would willingly come and tell their side of the story. If you said 'OK I'm guilty, sorry about that', then they would say 'That's OK, you must pay this'. So if the society itself should be mobilized, and become vocal, it would help to resolve law and order problems.

And not only that: such a body could handle simple things about complaining. A lot of members of our society don't know where they should go to with a complaint, so a body of this nature

would be closer to them in their respective places. So that's where we should go, and it is important, because unless these different parts of the society are brought together, in their structures, to realise the common interest, which is the common goal of a nation, we will all be developing a fragmented world, highly specialised, highly independent of one another, and they will treat their territories as if, you know, no pass, it is a holy land, don't come in. Whereas in fact really it is us together. So we should act together.

Q5. I was struck by what you said, when you talked about consultation and dialogue and the future. You really put a lot of hope on the existing organisations that you are seeing as representative. Is it your people's opinion in Solomon Islands that the Parliament is absent from your discussion as the people's representative, as the place where this might reside? I am just wondering what this means then for your conception of what future political system you would recommend for Solomon Islands given that the Westminster model of the elected parliamentary approach seems to be not really representing Solomons, the national view as you see it, the people's view. Is there a way you can associate the past with re-thinking about introducing some of that civil society element into the Parliament itself, as a way of a new reform in the political system. I was wondering whether you had any views on that?

A5 Well there is nothing wrong with our political system at the moment, there is nothing wrong. In fact, there is a tendency for people to over-prioritise political development. But really at the heart of the people and close to the survival of the people, what people are talking about is economic development, economic autonomy. That is what we are talking about. They are not talking about state government or some breakaway, no no. All those things are symptoms of the real problem. The real cause is that this guy could not do things to sustain his own life. Or he wants to do it, but the system in place prevents him doing those things.

In Solomon Islands if you look at the response to the maximum rule, UK thought that maybe we should get the people involved in their local affairs. So the local council was created, and after the local council we had provincial government. Now we are talking about state government. With each of the steps the problem gets worse. Under local government there were big problems. Then under provincial government there was a bigger problem than local government. And now if it would be a state, it could be even worse than provincial government. Because the main problem is not politics. Politics is a second ranking system. The first system is survival. And what is survival – economics. That's the first system. If you can eat your own food, do your own thing without much of these other things, that's economics. And with economics is what? Ownership. And ownership according to what? According to your endowment, your diversity. And that diversity should be the base of the unity, because it is our differences that are the source of strength and unity. If we are all one kind, sem sem as we call it in Pidgin, then that is uniformity, then there is no need for unity. We are all uniform, one kind. So that is where that diversity of culture is very important.

And that diversity we want to bring it into a new culture, that is the legalisation process, because you know one thing is missing that never existed before. So that's a new culture, the legalisation process. Then because it is registered and legal, it is sustainable. And that legitimacy is based on what? It is based on diversity. And what we see is a state of inter-dependency. I depend on you, you depend on me. And if we both depend on each other, why should we declare wars on each other? Isn't that the basis of the principle of love? So these are the things, we are over-playing politics.

The reality is survival, whether some people call it economic or whatever they call it, development. But to a simple person at heart, it is survival – that I, as a father, I am able to bring

up my family at this level, my children should do better than me, so that their way of life is even better than me. And so forth. But unfortunately Solomon Islands – I don't know about Australia – in the Solomon Islands context in most families the father is better than the children. So what do you expect the families are doing? They are going backwards. If our successive generations are not better than us, then mankind is going backward. So this is where I think we place too much on politics, especially in Solomon Islands. Some people call it 'over-politicised', or 'over-governed'. But we haven't looked at the most important thing which is survival, which is economics. It is economic autonomy that people in those island states and maybe other developing countries are talking about, not politics.

Q6. I want to go back to something you raised earlier on, the sequence of the breakdown of the state structures of Solomon Islands. You mentioned that police was affected first, then the judiciary, and then down to the public service. And now I think as Sinclair Dinnen mentioned the RAMSI regional assistance mission is moving into its second phase, so there's been a measure of stabilization in terms of law and order and a measure of budget processes being stabilised as well. I was wondering how you see the sequencing of state repair.

A6 Well what we are all doing at the moment is correct. The question we are not sure of and we are asking ourselves, is what we are doing at the moment, RAMSI and the Solomon Islands Government, is it sustainable? That is the question, a question of sustainability. Or is it only because RAMSI is there, that we are doing it? What happens when RAMSI is gone? And that is the most important question. Because I don't think Australia will be there forever and members of the Forum will be there forever. So the question of sustainability is important. Some of us are in fact suggesting that in the economic base, and the roadmap, which we have come so far with, we have hit a brick wall. So that means there is no point in us going back to the old base and the old roadmap, because we will hit a worse situation. So let's go and create a new base. The new base we are talking about is based on our cultural diversity, and legalising that so that it becomes a new type of culture. It could be a multi-cultural country such as you have in Australia, but under a new kind of working and register, the law, legalisation where everybody agrees that this is what we will live under. It enhances your diversity. It does not replace your diversity. It enhances it. And that is where sustainability will come, and ownership.

So that is the new base, and to do that you have got to empower the people economically to do their own thing. I mean why should you take their lives away from them and give them to somebody else. Why? Why can't you just empower him to do his own thing? That is the kind of thing. Because the other way, you take it away from him and give it to somebody else, that is alienation. He feels empty, feeling - you know – why is that? He may have liked it in the beginning, because you gave him a lump sum of money. But because he was never used to handling lump sums of money in one go, he went to the casino, he went to the bar, and he went to the nightclubs and all that, and it was gone. And that is the danger of giving big money to people who don't know how to handle money. I am saying this from experience. Most of the developing countries' people don't know how to handle huge amounts of money landed on their shoulder, on their lap, overnight. So the whole question of empowering the people to do their own thing is the most important factor. And that is how they built safely from immemorial time. That's how our fathers did it – and it is not only Solomons, this is a universal thing, and I think the most important thing; and I still come back to the family as the base of authority. The family is the authority. All other authorities derive their legitimacy from the family. And I think this is a universal principle. I don't think it belongs to Solomon Islands only, it belongs to everybody. If there is no family, that is the end of mankind.

Q7. I was interested in some of your views on attempts to integrate culture with modern institutions. I think we have a long way to go on that one. My comment on that one is ...what we have inherited, we have been trying to correct that...On the other hand we have not tried – I am talking about Bougainville now, I assume it is the same in Solomons – we have not put attempts into trying to understand our cultural systems. In that I am talking about a number of things here. We have the majority of kids who leave school and go back to their villages and do not really understand a lot of these cultural systems. And while we talk about integrating cultural systems we really are lacking understanding or studying, researching. I think it is time that we do that, because the majority do not understand the systems. They may have some idea but there are a whole lot of things that are not well understood by youth today. So I think we need to put our mouth or our money into studying our own systems as the Western people do. They do research on their own systems, and I think we need to add emphasis on research in areas of studying our own cultural systems, in order to understand where we can fit the systems together. That's one point. I mean you talked about land, but I believe there is more to it.

Secondly, I am quite fascinated by your idea of forming a Commission. I wonder though if you could propose the same kind of similar structure for politicians. In the Solomons Government, in Papua New Guinea and in Vanuatu, I wonder if the top people could form the same or a similar structure, to look at their own corruption and weed out the corruption. I want to put this on you if you can suggest this to these countries because I think the major problem is with these leaders. It is the leadership. No-one is touching the corruption at that level. I think it is time that people like you ought to. That has to be addressed, that has to be touched. And I'll put it again to you, if you could propose this to your counterparts at that level. Have a Commission of your own and deal with it. I think if the problems are dealt with at that level the outcome of that will flow into the community.

A7 About the politicians and leaders there is already sufficient commissions there. However those commissions are not exercised. That's the problem. The problem of Solomon Islands and I guess Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu and others likewise is not a question of the adequacy of the provisions of the Constitution or the organic laws. It is really a question of compliance. The laws are there. But we are not complying with them. And as a result of that we have thought that those laws need to be repealed. So you keep changing the laws year after year, year after year, whereas the critical problem is compliance. And we are wasting time, wasting money, wasting manpower, all that, on changing the laws, where in fact the problem is because you don't comply with them.

Now, compliance. Part of this Commission that I am talking about is actually to make the leaders, that you are referring to, comply. [Q: But how do you bring the leaders in?] No no, they must not come in that group. They must not come in that group. This is the people's commission, the people's structure. And it is their institutions, not the leaders. You have got to have checks and balances somewhere, to point the fingers because of the non-compliance by the leaders to those laws already in existence, which is simply because they put their own people there. Like the Leadership Commission, I might put my guy there. I might be a corrupt guy, but that guy knows that I put him there, so he won't do anything. I might break the law, but he won't comply with his legislation because he owes his job to me. So you need this kind of body, it's called a populace body, by the people and their structures, to make sure it exposes the work of these other leaders and bodies.

For democracy to operate, a system of checks and balances is what is always required. You cannot have a one-sided system, or the private sector bribes the guys in the government, the government makes sure that you don't prosecute that fellow investor, that's how networking

operates in government structures. There is nobody to stop it. Everybody is scared. I will give you a classical example: When the coup took place in Solomon Islands, I looked for the people's institutions. I looked for where SICA was, I looked for where the trade unions were, I looked for all of these. They all had disappeared! There was no-one to support what we were doing, and to save the situation from further problems I just had to step down. But if the people's institutions and their structures had been firm and strong, I wouldn't have resigned. They were weak because there was nobody that coordinated the activities of the people and their structures, to mobilise them towards the common objective, its maintenance and sustainability. There was nothing. So this is where this idea of a Commission of this nature came from, to have something which can mobilise people and move people towards the common objective, which is what all of us want, especially law and order, peace, reconciliation, and you can name all of them. Those are the most important things, which is our common purpose. But I mean as we go along, if we feel or should we see having another body for such leadership become important, that is something we can look at. But it is too early at this stage to be trying to do that. Do one thing at a time, and when you see it is necessary you can then go further forward.