

SPEECH BY HE VICTOR NGELE ON THE OCCASION OF THE CLOSING OF THE ASIA PACIFIC WEEK AT THE ANU, CANBERRA, 30TH JANUARY 2007

Organizers of the Asia/Pacific week
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is with great pleasure that I have been invited this evening to the closing of the Asia/Pacific week. I am also honoured to listen and learn from the different researches and findings from the participants, who have done an extensive work on important issues pertaining to the Pacific Region. At this juncture, I must congratulate you all for your hard work and efforts.

As we all know, our Asia/Pacific are regions characterized by diversity – their geography, cultures, land size, economy, political administration and so forth. In the Pacific we have the three regional groupings – the Melanesians, Polynesians and Micronesians. The diversity of our regions makes us unique. We also have a history of colonialism and our struggle for independence, we also have our gifted opportunities for development and challenges that confront us.

The legacy of colonial systems imposed upon us means that our region is also diverse in our political administration. We have different perceptions to issues that face our individual countries, cultural sensitivities and governance that dictate our decisions. Despite all these, our regions remain bonded by our friendly relations.

Today the political and economic challenges that dominated the region differ from one country to another. In the Solomons the recent ethnic tension has created a lot of problems for us. We have economic problems, political instability, institutional breakdown and law and order problem. But thanks to the Intervention of RAMSI in 2003, which provided another opportunity for our country to realize our own potentials again. We know that RAMSI intervened to restore law and order and assist our government to strengthen our institutions, reconciliation between warring parties, economic recovery and also nation rebuilding. Although the perception of the work of RAMSI may differ, its work has been very successful so far and the people of Solomon Islands are very grateful for the opportunity to live a peaceful life again.

Ladies and gentlemen, the intervention of RAMSI, to me, is a classic example of a successful regional initiative by our leaders as embedded in the Biketewa Declaration. It is a mechanism that stands ready to assist any member who is in crises. And I am proud to say that although the process is far from over, RAMSI is one of the success stories of regionalism in the world today.

The voices of women become important in the regions today. The establishment of Women Councils/Groups has encouraged women to actively participate in the affairs of the society as well. In the Solomon Islands, this is something we rarely find in our society but the establishment of our National Council of Women has taken us one step further to involve women in our decision making. During the crisis period in the Solomon's, they have been actively involved in trying to bring about peace. Today, they continue to be an important group in the peace process in Solomon Islands.

The issue of sovereignty and nation-state building are vitally important as well. I must also say that I have learnt a lot by listening to the findings by the participants especially with the nation-state building in the Asia/Pacific. Although we in the Asia/Pacific are one, we have diverse cultures as well, so it makes it more difficult for us to define ourselves.

Good Governance and democracy are vital components of our society and it is very encouraging that the participants have done great work in this area as well and I must say they are the cornerstones for development of our countries.

Ladies and gentlemen, at this juncture, let us not forget to acknowledge the role of our bigger neighbours, Australia and New Zealand and other countries in Asia region that have continuously assisted us in our development and rebuilding process. These two neighbours, along with other donors, have played significant roles to the development of our region and we must appreciate their continuous commitment.

Finally, may I take this opportunity again to congratulate the participants of this Asia/Pacific week – for your hard work in preparing these papers and also the information you have provided for us in the region. I certainly believe that you have provided a wealth of information to our leaders and peoples to utilize. We all know that the “Pacific Plan” which our leaders have agreed on recently, is an Organic Plan and such ideas or information you have gathered will be useful for our leaders to utilize. Your work will be important to the region as it addresses the complex

issues that hinder our development efforts and also perhaps identify the approaches for us to undertake to reshape our Asia/Pacific regions.

To the organizers and moderators of this Pacific Week, I sincerely thank you for inviting me and I hope you continue to organize such events in future. Let us all continue the good work we have done and may I wish you all success in your future engagements/work. Finally ladies and gentlemen, this Asia/Pacific Region is our place and let us build on our uniqueness, with our leaders and peoples to achieve a prosperous place for our future generation.

Thank you.