



**16TH MELANESIAN SPEARHEAD GROUP SUMMIT
GOROKA, EASTERN HIGHLANDS PROVINCE,
PAPUA NEW GUINEA,
19 – 20 AUGUST 2005**

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ

The 16th Summit of the Leaders of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) was held in Goroka, Eastern Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea from 19th – 20th August 2005.

The Official Opening of the Meeting was held at the University of Goroka Auditorium on 19th August 2005. The opening ceremony involved the handing over of the Chairmanship from Solomon Islands to Papua New Guinea and the presentation of gifts by the host Leader, Sir Michael Somare to his visiting colleagues. The Meeting then proceeded to the Pacific Gardens Hotel, where the Leaders' Retreat was held. The plenary was held at the Bird of Paradise Hotel on 20th August 2005.

The Summit was chaired by the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, the Right Honorable, Sir Michael Somare. MSG Leaders included the Prime Minister of Solomon Islands, Sir Allan Kemakeza; the Prime Minister of Vanuatu, Honorable Ham Lini Vanuaroro; the representative of Fiji's Prime Minister the Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade, the Honorable Kaliopate Tavola; and Honorable Victor Tutugoro, spokesperson of the Front de Libération Nationale Kanak Socialiste (FLNKS) and Vice President of the Northern Province of New Caledonia.

Apologies were received from the Prime Minister of Fiji, Hon. Laisenia Qarase.

Also attending were the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Vanuatu, Hon. Sato Kilman; the Foreign Affairs Minister of Solomon Islands, Hon. Laurie Chan; Ministers from Papua New Guinea; Rt. Hon. Sir Rabbie Namaliu - Foreign Affairs and Immigration; Hon. Paul Tiensten - Trade and Industry; Hon. Bire Kimisopa, Minister for Internal Security of PNG and Hon. Malcolm Smith, Governor of Eastern Highlands Province.

Political and Security Issues

Bougainville

The Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea briefed the meeting on current developments and progress of the peace process on Bougainville, particularly the successful conclusion of the recent elections for an Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) and the formal establishment of the ABG administration in June 2005.

Leaders were further informed that Bougainville is an autonomous region and remains an integral part of Papua New Guinea. The PNG Government was satisfied with these positive developments, recognizing that much work remains to be done in addressing administrative, political and financial challenges.

Leaders accepted the briefing and congratulated the Papua New Guinea Government on the developments on Bougainville.

The Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea also thanked the MSG Governments, Pacific Islands Forum member countries, other development partners, regional and international organizations, including the Forum Secretariat and the Commonwealth through the observer mission on Bougainville elections and the United Nations, for their cooperation, participation and assistance towards achieving a peaceful and amicable resolution to the Bougainville issue.

Solomon Islands (RAMSI)

The Solomon Islands Prime Minister briefed the Leaders on the progress of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI). Solomon Islands acknowledged with appreciation the support of the MSG and PIF member countries.

Leaders reaffirmed MSG support and commitment to RAMSI and to the Solomon Islands for as long as it takes to reestablish peace and stability.

The Leaders noted and also endorsed the Report of the recent Eminent Persons Group (EPG) mission to Solomon Islands which was adopted by the Solomon Islands Parliament.

Leaders also commended the set of recommendations emanating from that mission, including the proposal to set up a fund to facilitate Pacific Islands technical assistance through the recruitment of professional civilians from within the Pacific to help the country's support services in various disciplines, in a move aimed at enabling an increased regionalization of some aspects of RAMSI operations.

Update on the Situation in New Caledonia

The FLNKS representative updated the meeting on current political, economic and social developments relating to the implementation of the Noumea Accord, especially where it relates to the Kanaks.

Leaders also agreed to render support to New Caledonia in hosting a seminar on Decolonization in 2006, to be conducted under the auspices of the United Nations Committee of 24 (C24) on Decolonization.

The need for bilingual (English and French) officers in the MSG Secretariat was recognised to facilitate a smooth and full participation by New Caledonia in the work program and activities of the MSG.

Leaders also agreed to support the set of recommendations contained in the report of the recent assessment mission to New Caledonia by the Forum Ministerial Committee on New Caledonia, and to present a common position at the upcoming Pacific Islands Forum in October 2005 in Port Moresby.

Nauru

Leaders noted the progress of the various programs provided to Nauru through the Pacific Regional Assistance to Nauru (PRAN) initiated by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. Leaders called for concerted efforts from MSG countries to identify areas of possible assistance, either individually or collectively, based on the matrix on areas of needs prepared by the Forum Secretariat.

Leaders agreed to consult with their national governments and revert in the margins of the Forum Officials Committee meeting in early October 2005 in Suva on the areas each MSG country would be able to assist within the framework of the Biketawa Declaration.

Regional Security Force

At the 15th MSG Summit in the Solomon Islands in 2003, Leaders fully endorsed the establishment of a Regional Rapid Response Security Force, for potential security threats and natural disasters in the region, and agreed to explore the concept in detail at future meetings. Leaders agreed that Papua New Guinea would provide a concept paper for progressing this issue further.

Trade and Economic Issues

Biscuit and Kava Ban

The Vanuatu Prime Minister briefed the meeting on the background to Vanuatu's import ban on Fiji's FMF biscuits, and made the undertaking that steps will now be taken to lift all restrictions upon his return to Vanuatu.

In response, Fiji's Foreign Minister informed the meeting that it will seek Cabinet approval to rescind the Kava Ban that the Cabinet had just imposed.

Leaders welcomed these positive outcomes and congratulated both parties for reaching an amicable solution.

Revised MSG Trade Agreement

Leaders noted that Fiji and Papua New Guinea have obtained the necessary domestic endorsements to implement the revised Trade Agreement, whilst Vanuatu and Solomon Islands have yet to do so.

Leaders also noted the agreement reached by SOM that members should complete all requirements by the end of September 2005 for the signing to take place in the margins of PIF in Port Moresby in October 2005.

Harmonization of Airport Protocols for MSG Leaders

Leaders noted the concerns expressed by PNG in relation to the harmonization of protocol arrangements accorded to regional leaders when traveling within the member countries of the Pacific Islands Forum. It was agreed that the MSG Leaders should be accorded proper protocol treatment in accordance with international practice. The meeting agreed that it be discussed at the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' meeting.

Harmonization of Labour and Immigration Laws for Spouses from MSG Countries

Leaders were briefed on the outcomes of Foreign Ministers' Meeting and endorsed the proposal for PNG to provide a paper on legal migration; including movement of professionals and superannuation benefits for consideration at the 15th MSG SOM in 2006.

On the issue of facilitation of movement of semi-skilled workers within the region, Leaders noted Fiji's experience in this area and agreed to the proposal for the MSG to act as a lobby group within the region, apart from keeping ahead of related developments on the subject being coordinated through the Pacific Plan.

Pacific Plan

Leaders reaffirmed the importance of the Pacific Plan, and the need for national ownership in the development of national priorities and in agreeing on national and regional strategies in the four pillars of the Plan – Economic Growth, Sustainable Development, Good Governance and Security.

It was also agreed that the MSG sub-region consider coordinating their positions on their priorities prior to the 2005 Pacific Islands Forum in Papua New Guinea.

Leaders noted New Caledonia's desire to fully participate and be integrated in the Pacific Plan. Leaders also took note of the concern by their MSG Ministers on the slow progress of the Pacific Plan.

Carbon Trading

Leaders were briefed on the possibility of MSG members' engagement in Carbon Trading. It further endorsed the recommendations by the Foreign Ministers for PNG to develop a concept paper for discussion by the Working Group on Services at the next TEOM in the Solomon Islands in 2006.

MSG Secretariat

The Leaders noted the updates by the MSG Secretariat and acknowledged the support of Vanuatu Government thus far in accommodating the Interim Secretariat. The Solomon Islands reported on their contribution of \$250,000 being remitted to the MSG Secretariat account. PNG also informed the meeting of its contribution of \$AUD 54,000 being remitted to the MSG Secretariat account. It was also noted that officials would further consider the recommendations on the establishment of the Secretariat and take appropriate steps accordingly.

Reviving the Spirit and Solidarity of MSG Countries

Change of Name

The Solomon Islands elaborated on the proposal to change the name of the MSG to reflect the evolving nature and objectives of the group. Whilst appreciating the vision, The Leaders agreed to re-visit the matter at a later date and tasked Solomon Islands to prepare a concept paper for discussion.

Observers to MSG

In the absence of any proper procedure for granting of the "Observer" status to those that request it, the Leaders agreed that Solomon Islands will draw up a concept paper and circulate it to member countries for consideration.

Melanesian Arts Festival (MAF)

Fiji's agreement to host the MAF in 2006 was noted. It was agreed that members will await Fiji to revert to them on the details that will facilitate their preparations.

Air Services Agreement

Leaders discussed and endorsed the Foreign Ministers' proposal for a multilateral Air Services Agreement between MSG countries. It was agreed that PNG will provide a paper for referral to relevant national authorities, including their national airlines, for their consideration and report to the next SOM in 2006.

Additional Items: Shipping Services and FFA Assistance

Leaders expressed their concern with the services currently being provided by the Pacific Forum Line, as opposed to the originally declared objectives of that shipping service. The Leaders also noted the importance of investment in the shipping sector, and agreed that a feasibility study be coordinated to further progress the matter.

Leaders discussed and noted that financial resources were available from the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), particularly the Pacific Development Fund (PDF), and suggested that it could be better utilized in the development of small island states' fishing industry and shipping services. It further tasked Fiji to develop a concept paper on it for consideration at the next SOM in the Solomon Islands in 2006.

Other Matters

Regional Posts (SPREP, FFA)

Leaders noted the discussion by SOM for Vanuatu to formulate a paper to be presented at the 15th SOM in 2006. The Ministers agreed that concern be expressed through the Forum Leaders' retreat in October on the need to maintain a Pacific balance on recruitment to strategic positions in regional institutions.

Future MSG Meeting Arrangements

Leaders agreed to include country statements in future Summits and also approved for sufficient time for the preparations of outcome documents, briefings and related preparations between the SOM and the Leaders' meetings.

Leaders agreed for officials to work on the design of a MSG logo, flag and composition of a song to be considered at future Summits.

Date and Venue of next MSG Leaders' Summit Meeting

Leaders endorsed Vanuatu's offer to host the next MSG Leaders' Summit in 2007, to coincide with the planned opening of the new MSG Permanent Secretariat building.

Signed at the Bird of Paradise Hotel, Goroka, Eastern Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea
on 20th August 2005.

Rt. Hon. Sir Michael T. Somare, GCMG, CH, KStJ, MP.

Chairman of 16th MSG
Prime Minister
Papua New Guinea

Hon. Sir Allan Kemakeza, Kt., MP.

Prime Minister
Solomon Islands

Hon. Vanuaroro Ham Lini, MP.

Prime Minister
Republic of Vanuatu

Hon. Kaliopate Tavola, MP.

Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade
Republic of the Fiji Islands

Hon. Victor Tutugoro

Spokesperson of Front de Libération Nationale Kanak Socialiste (FLNKS)
and Vice President of the Northern Province of New Caledonia