

Forum Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting

30 June 2003, Sydney, Australia

Outcome Statement

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Pacific Islands Forum met in Sydney, Australia on 30 June 2003 to discuss a regional response to assist Solomon Islands according to the principles set out in the Biketawa Declaration. The meeting was chaired by the Hon Kaliopate Tavola, Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade of Fiji and was attended by the President of Nauru, the Prime Ministers of Cook Islands, Samoa, Tonga, the Premier of Niue and Ministers from

Australia, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Fiji was represented by its Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, and Republic of the Marshall Islands by its Ambassador to Fiji.

2. Ministers noted the earlier consideration by the Forum of the challenges facing Solomon Islands, particularly the work of the 2002 Forum Eminent Persons. Group and the close personal involvement by the Secretary-General in Secretariat programs to assist Solomon Islands.

3. Ministers received a formal presentation from the Hon Laurie Chan, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Solomon Islands, on the current situation in Solomon Islands and the need for external assistance to address law and order problems in Solomon Islands. The meeting also received a report from the Australian and New Zealand Foreign Ministers on the findings of the scoping mission undertaken by officials from both countries to Solomon Islands in June 2003, and on the assistance both countries were seeking to provide at the request of Solomon Islands.

4. Ministers agreed that the problems facing Solomon Islands were very serious. The deterioration of law and order had undermined the stability of the country. It had contributed significantly to the economic decline of Solomon Islands in recent years and had greatly weakened many of the country's important institutions.

5. Ministers agreed that the extent of the problems facing Solomon Islands now called for a concerted regional response, as envisaged in the Biketawa Declaration. In this respect, Ministers noted that the Solomon Islands Prime Minister, Sir Allan Kemakeza, had formally approached Australia in April 2003 outlining the challenges facing his country and seeking urgent assistance, and that he had discussed these issues with the Australian Prime Minister.

6. Ministers indicated overwhelming support for the provision of assistance to Solomon Islands and noted that the majority of Forum members had indicated a willingness to assist the Solomon Islands Government. In particular, they noted that Australia had indicated that if formally requested by Solomon Islands it would be disposed to respond positively to such a request in concert with New Zealand and other Forum members.

7. Ministers welcomed the assistance package proposed by Australia. In particular, they noted its comprehensive nature, encompassing law and order, the justice and prison systems, rebuilding Solomon Islands institutions and establishing conditions under which Solomon Islands can achieve social and economic recovery. Ministers agreed that Forum members willing to contribute to such a package would coordinate their assistance through a taskforce.

8. Ministers agreed that the envisaged restoration of law and order in Solomon Islands would be essentially a policing operation, and that police from Forum members would provide the capabilities needed by the Solomon Islands Government to implement Solomon Islands laws according to the Solomon Islands Constitution. Police would be supported, as required, by armed peace-keepers.

9. Ministers agreed that an essential condition for the provision of a program of strengthened assistance by Forum members would be a clear, formal request from the Solomon Islands Government, and the passage of legislation through the Solomon Islands Parliament allowing police and, as necessary, armed peace-keepers from Forum members to support the Royal Solomon Islands Police in the performance of its duties.

10. Ministers endorsed the provision of a package of strengthened assistance to Solomon Islands, including a policing operation to restore law and order, supported, as required, by armed peace-keepers, and a program of assistance to strengthen the justice system and restore the economy and basic services. They agreed also to recommend that Forum Leaders endorse the package.

Forum Secretariat, Sydney

30 June 2003