

## Solomon Islands

The year 2005 saw a return to stability in the Solomon Islands, attributable largely to the presence and efforts of the regional assistance mission RAMSI. While rebuilding the chief institutions of governance will take some time, as will economic recovery, law and order have been restored and the country is clearly on the rebound.

In 1998, an outbreak of intercommunal violence on the main island of Guadalcanal displaced nearly 20,000 Malaitians. An Australian-brokered peace agreement in October 2000 led to elections in late 2001, but a general climate of instability and insecurity prevailed. The next two years witnessed sharp economic decline, high unemployment, and a lack of basic services for the majority of the population. Conflict fueled by a variety of factors led to new violence in the summer of 2003. A campaign of intimidation began, led by militants under the banner of the Guadalcanal Liberation Front (GLF) and the command of Harold Keke, a Guadalcanalese rebel who had refused to sign the Townsville Peace Agreement in 2000. In Honiara, the capital, the government and citizenry were threatened by former militants who had been part of the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF), the Malaitan opposition to the GLF. Further weakening the government, many of these militiamen had been integrated into the special constables unit and were committing crimes in uniform. Faced with these difficulties, Prime Minister Sir Alan Kemakeza requested support from Australia. The governments of the Solomon Islands, Australia, and New Zealand then took the matter to the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). The PIF notified

### Regional Assistance Mission in the Solomon Islands (RAMSI)

• Authorization date	23–30 October 2000 (Pacific Islands Forum Communiqué 2000)
• Start date	July 2003
• Head of mission	James Batley (Australia)
• Budget as of 30 September 2005	\$171.3 million (2005)
• Strength as of 30 September 2005	Troops: 80 Civilian police: 300 Civilian staff: 120

the UN Security Council on 22 July 2003 and RAMSI was deployed on 24 July of that year.

The initial 2,000-strong contingent, led by Australia, with contributions from Fiji, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and Tonga, was granted a mandate by the Solomon Islands' parliament "to reinforce and uphold the legitimate institutions and authorities in Solomon Islands, and ensure respect for the Constitution and implementation of the laws." RAMSI's deployment produced immediate results in terms of security. Harold Keke surrendered on 13 August 2003, and forty of his GLF fighters laid down their weapons. Senior MEF commanders, including Jimmy "Rasta" Lusibaea, surrendered their guns and ammunition to RAMSI shortly thereafter. Almost all internally displaced persons had returned by the middle of August 2003, and by the end of that year, almost 4,000 firearms had been collected and destroyed, nearly 3,000 arrests had been made, and 15 police posts had been established throughout the country. Over 400

police officers (about one-third of the active police service) were dismissed, stood down, or retired. Many more were arrested and put on trial.

In 2003, RAMSI reduced its troop presence and began to focus on economic reform, the machinery of government, accountability, and law and justice (with support from the UN, donors, and international financial institutions). By 2005, in addition to Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and Tonga, four other Pacific Island countries, (Cook Islands, Kiribati, Samoa, and Vanuatu), each contributed a handful of police personnel to RAMSI. Australia continues to play a dominant role, providing the majority of the Participating Police Force (PPF) and non-police staff. RAMSI has a presence in every province through the PPF, which has seventeen police posts outside of Honiara. Approximately a hundred civilian advisers, seconded to various ministries, as well as a continued presence of one hundred soldiers supporting and protecting the civilian and police mission components, complement the PPF presence.

Over the past twelve months, the Solomon Islands have remained mostly peaceful. On 22 December 2004, however, an Australian Federal Police Protective Service officer serving with RAMSI was shot and killed. This led to the immediate redeployment of an Australian infantry company, to perform rapid response capability out of Townsville. The conviction of Harold Keke on 18 March 2005 passed without incident.

In 2004 the Solomon Islands saw an economic growth rate of 5.5 percent—the highest

among any PIF nation, though low for post-conflict countries on the rebound. An increase in fiscal revenue of over 40 percent has also helped restore budgetary stability. Perhaps more importantly, foreign investment has begun to return; a palm-oil plantation has recently reopened in the Guadalcanal plains, and there is discussion about reopening the Gold Ridge Mine.

The challenges facing RAMSI in 2006 are the challenges facing Solomon Islanders. Law and order have been successfully restored, and signs of economic growth are encouraging; there is a continued risk, however, of austerity measures and aid-conditioned restructuring alienating the population. Also of concern is the dual structure of the police, with a real risk of the PPF undermining the Royal Solomon Islands Police. The May 2005 PIF “Eminent Persons Group Report” on RAMSI identified additional key challenges facing the country: battling corruption, improving the working culture in the public service, creating a business-friendly environment, giving opportunities to the majority of the population living in the villages, encouraging development in all parts of the country, and supporting infrastructure development.

For RAMSI, this means helping to manage the transition from an emergency situation to transitional recovery and long-term development. The accomplishments to date suggest that there is cause for hope. However, in order to ensure that the gains made thus far outlast RAMSI, it is essential for the mission to continue to build local capacity.

#### Box 4.7.1 Enhanced Cooperation Programme: Australian Police in Papua New Guinea

A Papua New Guinea (PNG) Supreme Court ruling derailed Australia's first post-RAMSI attempt at further intervention in the Pacific region, six months after Australian federal police began patrolling their former colony.

Signed in June 2004, Australia's five-year, nearly AUD\$1 billion (US\$744 million) enhanced cooperation program (ECP) stipulated the deployment—which commenced in December—of 210 Australian police officers and 64 public servants to bolster the PNG state against service delivery breakdowns, a growing law and order crisis, and endemic corruption in politics, business, and the public service. In May 2005 the PNG Supreme Court declared unconstitutional a treaty clause granting Australian officers

immunity from prosecution. The police were then promptly withdrawn.

Like RAMSI, the ECP established in response to Canberra's concern over 'failed states' in the Pacific—which are potential threats to Australia's security. The program also reflects new thinking around enhancing the effectiveness of aid to PNG and suggests post-RAMSI confidence in the positive potential of intervention in the region. Its aim is to transfer skills to local counterparts by (1) empowering Australian police to exercise the functions of the Royal PNG Constabulary, including the power of arrest; (2) giving Australian officials positions in police headquarters, criminal investigations, prosecutions, and other areas; (3) placing Australian public servants in mentoring and supervisory roles in strategic,

in-line PNG government positions; and (4) integrating Australian judges and legal officials into the judicial system.

At the time of writing, the principal challenge facing the ECP is how to redepoly the police. A compromise arrangement may accomplish this, but in vastly reduced numbers and not on the front line of law enforcement activities—with perhaps forty Australian officers in resource-rich provinces to build capacity among provincial police and station commanders. If approved, the ECP still faces important questions about sovereignty and accountability, given that the degree of direct control envisioned for the Australians is a significant departure from the traditional role of consultants and contractors.