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Solomon Islands

The Solomon Islands continued in 2009 to pull away from its conflict-ridden past and build efficient and legitimate state structures, largely on account of continued cooperation with the Regional Assistance Mission in the Solomon Islands (RAMSI). The Solomon Islands government undertook a greater responsibility in administering the country in 2009, but support from RAMSI was recognized as remaining crucial.

RAMSI was established in 2003 under the auspices of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) at the request of then–Solomon Islands prime minister Sir Alan Kemakeza acting with the approval of his parliament. The request was made in response to a five-year conflict between the Malatian and Guale ethnic groups. RAMSI deployed on 24 July 2003 and successfully secured the surrender of both parties and worked toward further demobilization and disarmament.

Beyond establishing a secure environment, RAMSI’s mandate focuses its assistance activities into three pillars: law and justice, economic governance, and machinery of government. Accordingly, RAMSI is organized into

three branches under the direction of a special coordinator: a military branch, the Combined Task Force; a civilian police branch, the Participating Police Force; and an additional branch consisting of civilian advisers for governance, economic, and justice issues. After achieving stabilization in 2003, the civilian police branch set out to train the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, while the civilian branch worked closely with the Solomon Islands government to improve capacity building.

During the first years of the mission, cooperation between RAMSI and the Solomon Islands government was often strained, with government leadership questioning the motives and influence of the heavily Australian-staffed RAMSI. These tensions reached a highpoint in 2006 during the anti-RAMSI administration of then–prime minister Mannasseh Sogavare. However, relations improved significantly and have remained positive since Sogavare was voted out of office and replaced by Prime Minister Derek Sikua in December 2007.

During 2009, Graeme Wilson was appointed special coordinator for RAMSI. Upon taking up his position, Wilson stressed the importance of moving beyond working in Honiara with the national government, to coordinating with the provincial governments. In early 2009, Wilson and his staff met with leaders from Malaita, Guadalcanal, and other islands. At its annual meeting, the PIF Regional Security Committee expressed its approval with the ongoing cooperation between RAMSI and the Solomon Islands governments. RAMSI’s assistance to the Solomon Islands government over the course of the past six years has yielded a 30 percent growth in government revenue and a 28 percent drop in government debt. Similarly, RAMSI’s

Regional Assistance Mission in the Solomon Islands (RAMSI)

• Authorization Date	23 October 2000 (Pacific Islands Forum Communiqué)
• Start Date	24 July 2003
• Head of Mission	Graeme Wilson (Australia)
• Budget	\$26.1 million (1 July 2008–30 June 2009)
• Strength as of 30 September 2009	Troops: 160 Civilian Police: 268 Civilian Staff: 106

technical and infrastructure assistance to the justice sector allowed for the adjudication of crimes perpetrated during the 1998–2003 conflict and the establishment of a judiciary and corrections system capable of processing and imprisoning criminals arrested by the Royal Police Force (RSIPF).

Despite significant development in capacity and professionalism of the RSIPF, the institution still suffers from a deficit of trust from the civilian population. In December 2008, villagers attacked a group of police comprising both RSIPF officers and members of the Participating Police Force. Two RSIPF and five Participating officers were injured. Then–police chief Denis McDermott urged Solomon Islands residents to view police officers as legitimate agents of the state rather than as potential threats. The legitimacy of both police forces was also damaged by the publishing of a report concerned with the riots that hit Honiara during 2006. The report blamed confusion between the respective roles of the two police forces as central to the

failure to stop the escalation of hostilities. Participating Police Force representatives maintain that these issues have since been addressed and no longer present an operational challenge.

Despite negative perceptions, the Participating Police Force continued to effectively interface with RSIPF officers, with the latter taking on more patrols and community policing activities and with the former acting in an advisory role. Nevertheless, RAMSI’s advisory role for the RSIPF remains a crucial element to ensuring that the Solomon Islands remains stable and secure.

In the second half of 2009, the Solomon Islands government and RAMSI agreed to a jointly developed partnership framework that outlines their future goals. The document identifies the achievements made through the government-RAMSI partnership over the course of the past six years, but also recognizes that significant work remains before the Solomon Islands can stand on its own.