



**SOLOMON ISLANDS**  
**TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION**

*Confronting the Truth for a better Solomon Islands*

**FINAL REPORT**

**FEBRUARY 2012**

**Honiara, Solomon Islands**



## TRUTH & RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

Hon Gordon Darcy Lilo  
Prime Minister  
Honiara

Honourable Prime Minister:


We, the members of the Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission, have the honour to present our final report and recommendations in accordance with Section 16 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act 2008 and have subscribed our names below this 15 th day of January, 2012.

In doing so, we also acknowledge respectfully the contributions of the late George Kejoa who began this task with us, but tragically died midway before its completion. This work also bears George Kejoa's imprint.

  
Sam Ata  
Chairman

  
Sofia Macher  
Deputy Chair

  
Joni Madraiwiwi  
Commissioner

  
Caroline Laore  
Commissioner

  
Kamilo Teke  
Commissioner

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document is the Final Report of the Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), mandated by an Act of the Solomon Islands Parliament in 2008. The Commission of five members worked from 2009 through 2011 to discover the causes, details and effects of the country's "ethnic tension" crisis of 1998-2003, which nearly destroyed the country, killed at least 200 persons, and adversely affected many thousands more. The TRC did its work through conducting public and closed hearings; collecting statements from victims, perpetrators, and other involved parties; facilitating focus group interviews with all sectors involved in the conflict; and organizing research on issues related to the conflict.

The first volume contains chapters discussing the mandate of the TRC, the historical background of the Solomon Islands conflict, the timeline and details of the conflict, the various militant groups (especially, the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army/Isatabu Freedom Movement, the Malaita Eagle Force, the Black Sharks, and the Guadalcanal Liberation Front), and the response of the Solomon Islands Government.

The second volume discusses human rights violations committed by all parties during the conflict, including the state, non-state militant groups and state-authorized Special Operations conducted by police and former militants. After an initial chapter discussing the domestic and international legal framework for the TRC's human rights work, there are separate chapters on the six human rights violations identified by the TRC as most prevalent during the conflict: killings, abductions/illegal detentions, torture/ill-treatment, sexual violence, property violations and forced displacements.

The third volume begins with two chapters discussing the situation of the two most vulnerable groups in the conflict, women and children. It then discusses the economic and social costs of the conflict and the TRC's exhumation program. In light of all that has been previously presented, a chapter follows on reconciliation in the Solomon Islands context, discussing how the country might move forward with justice, peace, and reconciliation. The chapter concludes with

an overall a summary of conclusions from the TRC's work and recommendations to Government, civil society and overseas aid donors for future peace and reconciliation work. The latter chapter also includes a discussion of the appointment of a Commission by the Prime Minister, as required by the TRC Act, to oversee the implementation of the TRC's recommendations.

The fourth volume contains transcripts of the 11 public TRC hearings held around the country in 2010-2011. The fifth volume is an annex which includes an institutional history of the TRC, a profile of the Commissioners, the texts of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act and Townsville and Marau Peace Agreements and lists of compensation claims (many false and illegal) to the Solomon Islands Government following the Townsville Peace Agreement and the Joint Operation to the Weather Coast, whose payment contributed to the further economic collapse of the country.

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**SOLOMON ISLANDS**  
**TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION**

*Confronting the Truth for a better Solomon Islands*

**VOLUME I**

**FEBRUARY 2012**



# 1.

## MANDATE OF THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

*Remembering is not easy, but forgetting may be impossible.*<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Introduction

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (“TRC”) was established under the Truth and Reconciliation Act (the “Act”) passed by Parliament in September, 2008.<sup>2</sup> It was an initiative of the Solomon Island Christian Association (SICA) which first advocated the concept shortly after the arrival of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), and took several years to come to fruition. The TRC mandate<sup>3</sup> related to the tensions which engulfed Solomon Islands, though mainly confined to Guadalcanal and Malaita between 1998 and 23 July, 2003, when RAMSI intervened to restore law and order at the request of Solomon Islands Government.

The general objective of the TRC was to promote national unity and reconciliation by engaging all stakeholders in the reconciliation process, by discovering and helping to understand what happened in the tensions and why.<sup>4</sup> It was to examine the patterns of human rights abuses and intervene in synergy and co-operation with other initiatives and strategies being implemented in the process of reconciliation and peace-building in the country.<sup>5</sup>

More specifically, the TRC was to investigate and fully report on the root causes of the tensions, the human rights and international humanitarian law violations and abuses which occurred and those responsible for them, whether governments, groups or individuals, as well as the role of

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<sup>1</sup> Priscilla B. Hayner: *Unspeakable Truths. Confronting State Terror and Atrocity*; New York and London: Routledge, 2001, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> For the text of the Act, see volume 5, annex 3.

<sup>3</sup> A mandate is a conferral of authority to carry out or perform certain functions or tasks.

<sup>4</sup> TRC Act, section 5(b)

<sup>5</sup> TRC Act, section 5(c)

internal and external factors in the conflict.<sup>6</sup> It was also to report on the raid on police armouries and the destruction or damage done to public property.<sup>7</sup> The TRC was also to work to restore the human dignity of victims and promote reconciliation by allowing victims to tell their stories about the violations and abuses suffered and providing for perpetrators to relate their experiences, creating a climate fostering constructive exchange between victim and perpetrator.<sup>8</sup> Special attention was to be given to the subject of sexual abuses and children's experiences within the armed conflict.<sup>9</sup>

The TRC recognized the inability of the institutions of the State to afford its citizens the protection of their fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed by the 1978 Constitution of Solomon Islands. People were killed, tortured, abused, ill treated, displaced, and lost property; women were raped and sexually abused children deprived of education, forced actively to support one or other of the protagonists during the tensions. There was widespread suffering because law and order collapsed and those with guns held sway for a time. The TRC process was intended to create space for victims and former combatants to engage constructively with each other and with Solomon Islands society for reconciliation to be inclusive and complete. But these are matters of intense emotion, raw feelings and personal choice that cannot be rushed or imposed. There has to be mutual readiness and acceptance by the parties for reconciliation to occur.

## **2. Composition**

The Commissioners of the TRC were appointed by a National Selection Committee (NSC) chaired by the Chief Justice.<sup>10</sup> Members of the NSC were drawn from the Government, the Official Opposition, the Churches, Ministry of Provincial Government, Solomon Islands Christian Association Federation of Women and traditional leaders.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> TRC Act, section 5(2)(a)

<sup>7</sup> TRC Act, section 5 (2)(b)

<sup>8</sup> TRC Act, section 5 (2)(c)

<sup>9</sup> TRC Act, section 5 (2) (c)

<sup>10</sup> TRC Act Schedule 2, paragraph 2(1)

<sup>11</sup> TRC Act, *ibid.*

The TRC was comprised of five Commissioners, three of whom were required to be Solomon Islands nationals, and two, non-nationals.<sup>12</sup> The Commissioners were required to have integrity, credibility and be impartial in the performance of their functions under the Act and enjoy the confidence of the people of Solomon Islands.<sup>13</sup> They were also required to have high standing or competence in professions such as law, medicine, church ministry, social sciences or others relevant to the function of the TRC.<sup>14</sup>

Decisions of the TRC were taken by consensus but could be voted on where consensus was not possible.<sup>15</sup> In the event of a tie, the Chairman had a casting vote; a quorum consisted of three members, one of whom must be a non-national member.<sup>16</sup>

### **3. Term of the TRC mandate**

Under section 4 (1) of the Act, the term of the TRC mandate was one year, which could be extended for up to another year by the Prime Minister.

### **4. TRC Code of Ethics**

The following principles applied:<sup>17</sup>

- i. Participation by each member of the TRC was personal and based on his/her personal qualities. Therefore, their actions, votes and reviews were governed exclusively by the dictates of their conscience, regardless of any other institutional relationship or political inclination, and for the sake of achieving the objectives contained in the mandate, particularly for truth, justice and reconciliation amongst Solomon Islanders.
- ii. Each Commissioner was committed to putting every effort and use of his/her time and skills to the success of the TRC in fulfilling its mandate.

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<sup>12</sup> TRC Act, section 3(3)

<sup>13</sup> TRC Act, section 3(3) (a)

<sup>14</sup> TRC Act, section 3(3)(b)

<sup>15</sup> TRC Act, section 6(5)

<sup>16</sup> TRC Act, schedule 2

<sup>17</sup> Adopted by TRC, 2009.

- iii. Relations between the members of the TRC were based on mutual trust and respect and regard for each other's dignity, actions and opinions.
- iv. The TRC, taking into account the sensitive nature of the mandate, were to ensure that its public and private acts were carried out with due regard that any misconduct would compromise the legitimacy and integrity of the TRC.
- v. The TRC was to ensure that its members' personal opinions were withheld to ensure its unity in the public arena. The TRC members recognized the Chairman as the authorised spokesperson to speak and issue statements about matters concerning the mandate of the TRC; and the Executive Secretariat concerning its administrative operations.
- vi. The Commissioners were required, while in office, to maintain strict confidentiality regarding information that was part of the research, programs and administration of the TRC. They also undertook not to use information from the TRC for personal use or other than as agreed, without prior written permission of the Chairman.
- vii. The intellectual property of any material written or systematised by the TRC or a member or officer of the TRC in the fulfilment of its responsibilities, belonged to the TRC, as did papers and reports prepared at the request of TRC for the fulfilment of its mandate. Therefore, the Commissioners could not reproduce these materials in whole or in part, without the prior written permission of the Chairman.
- viii. The Commissioners agreed to abide by established procedures regarding travel and travel allowances in the use of TRC resources as well as their rational and prudent use.
- ix. The Commissioners undertook to inform the Chairman of the TRC of any change in his/her personal situation, employment or other considerations that might result in a conflict of interest with his /her status as a Commissioner.
- x. The Commissioners accepted and endorsed TRC decisions, whether taken by consensus or a majority. In the event of differences, these could be formally recorded but not disclosed publicly.
- xi. Each Commissioner accepted the moral authority of the TRC to impose sanctions and agreed to abide by those decisions and not take them to a third party for resolution.

## **5. Powers of the TRC**

The powers of the TRC related to the implementation of its mandate concerning the promotion of national unity and reconciliation through the process of truth seeking.<sup>18</sup> It could gather information it considered relevant by appropriate means from any source, and compel production if necessary.<sup>19</sup> The TRC could also visit any place considered necessary, after prior notice, for any reason relevant to its mandate, including obtaining information or inspecting any property or copies of documents.<sup>20</sup> It could also interview any individual, group or organization at its discretion or in private.<sup>21</sup> Provided witnesses' personal expenses were met, the TRC could require any person to meet it or its staff and compel their attendance if necessary.<sup>22</sup> It could also require statements to be given under oath or affirmation and issue summons or subpoenas in fulfilment of its mandate.<sup>23</sup> Finally, it could receive police assistance to enforce its powers.<sup>24</sup>

As a matter of policy, the TRC preferred not to use the power to subpoena witnesses as it believed people would be more cooperative if they were persuaded rather than coerced into providing relevant information.

It was an offence to wilfully obstruct or otherwise interfere with or fail to comply with any direction of the TRC or any of its members or officers in the execution of its functions under the Act, punishable on conviction to a fine not exceeding one thousand dollars or to a term of imprisonment not exceeding one year or to both fine and imprisonment.

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<sup>18</sup> TRC Act, section 8 (1) (a)

<sup>19</sup> TRC Act, section 8 (1) (b)

<sup>20</sup> TRC Act, section 8 (1) (b)

<sup>21</sup> TRC Act, section 8 (1) (c)

<sup>22</sup> TRC Act, section 8 (1) (d)

<sup>23</sup> TRC Act, section 8 (1) (e) & (f)

<sup>24</sup> TRC Act, section 8 (1) g

## 6. Mode of operation

TRC determined its own operating procedures and mode of work in relation to its mandate.<sup>25</sup>

The procedures included:

- (a) undertaking research into key events, causes, patterns of abuse or violations and the parties responsible;
- (b) holding public hearings to hear victims and perpetrators and others about violations or abuses or closed hearings in special circumstances;
- (c) taking individual statements and gathering additional information about matters in (a);
- (d) in agreement with the Director for Public Prosecutions and other relevant authorities, exhume the bodies of missing persons.

In performing these responsibilities, the Commissioners had weekly meetings. The TRC had discretion to permit anyone to disclose information to it on a confidential basis and it could not be compelled to disclose any information given to it in confidence.<sup>26</sup>

### *Witnesses' rights*

- i. The TRC was obliged to take into account the interests of victims and witnesses when inviting them to give statements, including security and other concerns of those who do not wish to appear in public. It could also invoke special procedures to address particular needs of particular victims such as children and/or those who have suffered sexual abuse, as well as child perpetrators of abuses or violations.<sup>27</sup>
- ii. No statement, written or oral, made by any person before the TRC could be admissible against him/her in any legal action.<sup>28</sup>
- iii. No witness could be compelled to incriminate himself/herself.<sup>29</sup>
- iv. Every person appearing before the TRC was informed of this right, and if it appeared that a question asked was likely to elicit a response that might incriminate the witness, the TRC was to re-advise the witness of his right not to answer the question.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> TRC Act, section 6 (1) (a)-(d)

<sup>26</sup> TRC Act, section 6 (3)

<sup>27</sup> TRC Act, section 6 (4)

<sup>28</sup> TRC Act, section 7 (1)

<sup>29</sup> TRC Act, section 7 (2)

- v. No witness was compelled to incriminate his spouse, parents or children.<sup>31</sup>

## **7. Confidentiality policy of the TRC<sup>32</sup>**

Section 6 (3) of the Act states: “At the discretion of the Commission, any person shall be permitted to provide information to the Commission on a confidential basis and the Commission shall not be compelled to disclose any information given to it in confidence.”

### **7.1 Interpretation of Section 6 (3) of the Act**

The TRC had discretion to permit people to provide information on a confidential basis. As such, everyone providing a statement on a confidential basis signed a consent form prior to providing such information. The procedures for confidentiality are set out above.

Participants who provided information to the TRC were entitled to have the information they provided treated confidentially by all members of the TRC and TRC staff, where the statement was provided confidentially or where it was clear to the TRC that it should be considered confidential. The information participants provided was only accessible to TRC employees who required the information to perform their tasks.

### **7.2 Personal information**

Personal information belongs to the individual and may include home phone numbers, home addresses, cell phone numbers, etc. No Commissioner or staff member of the TRC was allowed disclose, directly or indirectly, personal information about any person for whom the TRC possessed such information. This information included, but was not limited to, personal information held by TRC employees, TRC advisers or any member of the public who shared information with the TRC.

Access to personal records by employees whose job descriptions did not authorise such access was given on the basis of necessity and only with the consent of a supervisor entitled to such access.

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<sup>30</sup> TRC Act, section 7 (3)

<sup>31</sup> TRC Act, section 7 (4)

<sup>32</sup> Adopted by the TRC.

### **7.3 Personal information held by the TRC**

No Commissioner or staff member of the TRC was permitted to disclose any information contained in either TRC records or any information that came to his or her knowledge in the exercise, performance or carrying out of his/her powers, functions or duties. This information included, but was not limited to, information about any events described or personal details about those who provided it. It also included any information acquired while attending any meeting of the TRC. Information, including that obtained during investigations, could only be released by Commissioners or designated staff and, if relevant, in accordance with the consent of the information provider.

No Commissioner or member of the TRC staff was allowed make private use of or profit from any confidential information gained as a result of his/her membership of or employment with the TRC.

### **7.4 Breaches of confidentiality**

Any breach of confidentiality would result in the following:

- i. A warning from the person's supervisor.
- ii. Dismissal for any further breaches, agreed to by the direct supervisor and their supervisor; in the event that the latter was the Commissioners, such a decision required the agreement of two Commissioners; in the event that person was a Commissioner, the decision would be made by a quorum as set out in the Act.
- iii. A serious breach of confidentiality resulted in immediate dismissal without warning. A serious breach was one that was deliberate. This determination would be made by the person's supervisors (or two Commissioners or a quorum as above).

### **7.5 Purpose of section 6 (3) of the Act**

The purpose of this policy was to:

- i. Ensure that the confidentiality of personal information was protected and not violated.
- ii. Ensure that information collected by the TRC was assessed only by those who needed it in order to fulfil the requirements of their position.
- iii. Determine how to interpret section 6 (3) of the Act.



## **8. Research**

The TRC was mandated to investigate the antecedents and root causes of the tensions, focusing on violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, the destruction of property and deprivation of rights to own property, and which individuals, groups or governments may have been involved. This mandate included research into particular events that occurred during the tensions that might be windows to a better understanding and appreciation of reasons for the tensions and how repetition might be avoided. Public hearings and statement-taking contributed significantly to this process, as well as highlighting the incidence of human rights violations and abuse, and enabling patterns and structures of these violations to be drawn and victim profiles established. The former combatants were also given an opportunity to participate in public hearings as a means of providing some balance and to allow the public to hear what the alleged perpetrators had to say. Statement taking enabled victims to tell their stories in a safe environment and ensured that their voices and perspectives would be heard and incorporated in the final report.

## **9. Public hearings**

Public hearings provided opportunities for victims, perpetrators and other actors to share their experiences with the people of Solomon Islands. For victims particularly, it was a significant way of allowing them to recover some of their human dignity by sharing their stories of violation and suffering. It enabled the country to hear about individual cases and put a human face to the tragedy suffered by thousands of their fellow citizens. For perpetrators it was a way of explaining their actions and, perhaps, make amends for the harm done. Public hearings contributed to reconciliation by encouraging victim and perpetrator to engage constructively with each other and wider Solomon Islands society.

### **9.1 Role of public hearings**

Public hearings were solemn events in which the Commissioners received, before the public, the statements of victims, experts, leaders and former combatants about the violations covered by the TRC mandate, the circumstances which led to the tensions and how to avoid their repetition, with the goal of facilitating national reconciliation.

The objectives of these public hearings were to promote social healing and the rehabilitation of victims through public recognition of their suffering, to educate the public on human rights, particularly the human cost of human rights violations, to clarify human rights violations of the past, including their causes and patterns, and to promote reconciliation through truth-telling.

The public hearings affirmed fundamental principles of the TRC in transparency, the primacy of the victim and his/her statement and the healing qualities of the truth.

The public hearings were part of a general focus that valued the process of uncovering truth, as much as the goal of producing an official final report.

The public hearings were not mechanisms for personal reconciliation between victims, victimizers and bystanders. Only a long-term process can result in the free decision of people involved in establishing ties of confidence and solidarity amongst themselves. Undoubtedly, however, the public hearings initiated and facilitated this process.

Public hearings were open to the media to enable these objectives to be met across the country.

## **9.2 Basic principles**

The basic principles of the victims' public hearings were to respect and honour victims and to provide a safe space for victims to tell their stories. The basic principles of the other actors' public hearings were also to respect and honour victims; but these hearings had the added focus of truth-seeking and investigation and the principles reflected this.

### *i. Informed consent*

The participation of victims and witnesses was based on informed consent. This included their right to receive adequate information about the objectives of public hearings as well as the emotional and personal risks involved. All victims/witnesses who spoke at a public hearing were required to sign a consent form beforehand.

In the case of presumed perpetrators, if the Commissioners considered it important to hear from them, they were first required to appear on a voluntary basis. If they declined, and where their public statement was considered highly relevant and necessary, the Commissioners could subpoena the person pursuant to section 8(1)(f) of the Act. For the public statement to be

necessary, the TRC had to be satisfied that a private statement would not serve the public interest.

*ii. Respect for diversity*

Everyone was respected in his/her right to recount events in an environment that was respectful of their identity; in particular, they were not the object of discrimination based on their race, sex, origin, religion, political opinion or cultural identity.

It was important to represent adequately what women experienced, as often women's accounts are focused on their family members rather than on themselves.

*iii. Non-hierarchical order*

The cases and themes selected were examples of crimes that were committed and violations that occurred. The cases and themes selected were not considered more important than other cases and themes that were left to be privately investigated.

*iv. Emotional and social support*

Victims and witnesses had the right to be accompanied by their family and support groups, as well as the right to all forms of protection from harassment and lack of respect that would increase the emotional cost of giving a statement in public. In the same manner, the public hearings sought to present cases of victims who the TRC expected could rely on the solidarity of their family and community throughout and following the giving of their statement.

*v. Trauma counselling*

Trauma counselling was provided to all witnesses appearing before a public hearing, both before and after, as most were still traumatised by their experiences during the tensions. This process enabled witnesses to deal with the emotional and psychological pain and stress they had been carrying with them since the tensions.

*vi. Children*

According to section 5(2)(c) of the Act, the TRC was to give special attention to the experiences of children within the armed conflict. As such, people who were children at the time of the

conflict were permitted to speak at public hearings. The victim support unit ensured appropriate precautions were taken to protect and support these people.

The victim support unit consulted with children and their families beforehand. If approval was obtained, the children were prepared for a hearing by the victim support unit. A social worker was always be present at a hearing in which children participated, sitting next to the child and offering any emotional or other support required. After the hearing, the social worker was required to conduct further visits to the child, to ensure no adverse consequences from his/her participation.

Hearings for children were always closed hearings; that is, closed to the public with only Commissioners and TRC staff present.

#### *vii. Transparency*

As much as possible, information was made available to the public. This information included publicising the criteria that the TRC used to select those who were to speak at a public hearing.

#### *viii. Language*

Victims and other actors were able to make statements in the language of their choice, with translators translating their statements.

#### *ix. Procedural fairness*

Hearings were not judicial proceedings, so the TRC did not attempt to determine the definitive truth from the public hearing process. Nevertheless, basic principles of procedural fairness were followed, especially for former combatants. People who spoke before a public hearing were not prohibited from naming their perpetrators. However, they were warned about the legal and security implications of doing so and given opportunities to provide their names to the TRC in private. As a result, as far as practically possible, anyone accused or implicated in an offence during a public hearing had the opportunity to make representation to the TRC via a letter of clarification, to be published in the TRC's Final Report.

### **9.3 Closed Hearings**

The TRC had the power to decide if information was so sensitive that it required a closed hearing, in which only Commissioners and essential TRC staff were present.

## **10. Statement taking<sup>33</sup>**

### **10.1. Role of statement taking**

The overall objective of the TRC was to promote national unity and reconciliation. As such, the TRC in section 5 of the Act was mandated to engage all stakeholders in the reconciliation process; examine, investigate and report on the nature, antecedents, root causes, accountability and responsibility for and the extent of the impact on human rights violations and abuses; consider the sectoral impact; restore the dignity of victims giving special attention to those who have been sexually abused and to the experiences of children; and to provide recommendations for the future.

Section 6 of the Act states that in order to fulfil its functions, the TRC shall be able to take individual statements. The statement taking will be conducted in a way that enables the TRC to reach out to all parts of Solomon Islands society and capture the experiences of the population including specific groups such as women and children. Statement taking was, therefore, considered to be one of the core activities of the TRC. This data model answered the questions: who did what to whom? It had the ability to identify and make a systemic record of violent acts: type of act, victim, perpetrators, places and dates.

Statement taking served multiple purposes. It provided methodologically sound data for the TRC's final report; it honoured the individual's experience; and it promoted healing and reconciliation. The process of statement taking, in addition to documenting the period of history of Solomon Islands that is laid out in the Act and providing a basis for analysis, also gave a voice to individual experience in a way that restores human dignity.

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<sup>33</sup> Adopted by the TRC.

## **10.2. Objectives**

Objectives of statement taking were as follows:

- A. Estimate the magnitude of the conflict number of victims.
- B. Assess the responsibility of the armed actors in the conflict.
- C. Reconstruct patterns and structures of human rights violations.
- D. Identify the victims' profiles.
- E. Identify individual victims and specific events of violence.

## **10.3. Basic principles**

Statement taking was an important part of building the truth of the nation. Statement taking also gave victims the opportunity to speak and be heard. Every person had the right to make a statement to the TRC about issues relating to its mandate. The TRC endeavored to hear from all those people who wish to provide statements. However, due to limited resource and time constraints, this was not always possible. Every effort was made to ensure the TRC received statements from as many people as possible.

### *a. Accuracy and Standardization*

The information collected was required to be comparable, standardized and representative of what people told the TRC.

The statement takers never argued about facts or other details with the statement givers. The job of the statement taker was to record what was said, not analyse the accuracy of the information given. The statement takers were aware that standardised data collection procedure and processes were necessary if information is to be collated and compared. Statement takers were required to follow procedures outlined for statement taking.

### *b. Confidentiality*

The statement takers required to respect the confidentiality of information provided by statement givers. This meant that no TRC employee was permitted to disclose any information contained in TRC records. This included information about any events described in those records or personal details about those who provided it. Information could only be released by

Commissioners or designated staff; and access to TRC records by employees whose job descriptions did not authorise such access was only with the consent of the Commissioners.

According to section 6 (3) of the Act, the TRC had discretion to permit people to provide information on a confidential basis. Confidentiality was the prerogative of the TRC and it extended this protection to all who require it. As such everyone providing a statement signed a consent form prior to providing any information. By signing a consent form, the statement giver agreed that the TRC could use the information in any way as long as it was consistent with the TRC mandate and the principles of confidentiality.

Statement takers were aware of the TRC's Confidentiality Policy and were required at all times to act in accordance with it. The sanctions set out therein were applied to anyone who did not respect the confidentiality request by the participant.

#### *c. Impartiality and Objectivity*

The statement takers were required to keep in mind that the TRC was an independent and impartial body and did not favour any party or institution. Violations and/or abuses by all parties were addressed and investigated with equal thoroughness. Each interview was approached with an attitude of impartiality. Statement takers' affiliations were not allowed to interfere with that process. Under no circumstances, was a former combatant allowed to be a statement taker.

#### *d. Sensitivity and Integrity*

When interviewing, the statement takers were required to be sensitive to the suffering which an individual may have experienced, and to the need to give to the statement giver enough time to tell his/her story. Statement takers required to be empathetic and particularly sensitive to problems of re-traumatisation.

#### *e. Gender balance*

Women were enabled to give statements to women statement takers to encourage them to converse more freely. The onus was on the TRC staff to attempt to provide gender balance to facilitate this outcome. Women, like all statement givers, were reminded they were permitted to bring a support person with them to be present during the interview if they wish. As with all

statement givers, women were encouraged to tell their own story as well as stories about husbands, children and other close family and friends.

*f. Language*

As Solomon Islands is a country made up of about seventy languages, wherever possible people were enabled to provide statements in their local language. However, the TRC concedes that this was not always possible. Thus, use was made of interpreters as required.

*g. Professionalism*

Statement takers were required approach each task in a professional manner, by being diligent and competent. Training was provided by TRC in areas such as the mandate of TRC, objectives of statement taking, understanding the statement taking form and counselling.

*h. Anonymity*

A person could give information to the TRC anonymously. If a person decided to come forward to give information to the TRC, personal details had to be provided. The information was kept confidentially within the TRC as per the consent form and TRC Confidentiality Policy.

*i. Misleading Information*

It was an offence to provide false or misleading information to the TRC or to wilfully obstruct or otherwise interfere with a direction of the TRC in the discharge of its functions; and a person is liable on conviction for this offence to a fine not exceeding a thousand dollars or a term of imprisonment not exceeding a year, or to both fine and imprisonment.

## **11. Exhumations**

Objectives of the TRC Exhumations program were as follows:

### **11.1 Objectives**

- A. Legal: identification and cause of death and evidence.
- B. Humanitarian: return the body to the family.
- C. Promote respect for and compliance with the legal process.



- D. Develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the TRC, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), and the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) to work effectively together to define a framework to undertake exhumations which can be set out in a formal protocol adapted from precedents in other jurisdictions.
- E. Training: develop local capacity by bringing in foreign experts to train local people, focusing on mapping and ante-mortem data collection.
- F. Establish a database to record all information.
- G. Co-ordinate co-operation between and among all stakeholders (i.e., TRC, DPP, RSIPF, SI Red Cross (and ICRC), MNURP, Ministry of Health, Public Solicitor's Office, technical experts and regional representatives (Guadalcanal).

## **11.2 “Principles for the Development of Exhumations and Related Investigations, applicable throughout the process”<sup>34</sup>**

In carrying out exhumation and throughout the process, all the professionals, institutions and organizations involved were to be guided by the following principles:

### *a. Dignity*

Dignified handling of the remains helps significantly in the reconciliation process. Undignified handling of remains may reopen emotional wounds and further traumatise them.

### *b. Ethical, Religious and Cultural Sensitivities*

The ethical management of the remains, including removal, should be ensured, as well as respect for religious and cultural protocols practiced by Solomon Islanders.

### *c. Close Consultation*

Due to the sensitivity of the operations, and the real possibility of a live crime scene, success is dependent on close consultation between all stakeholders.

### *d. Proper Identification*

The remains must be properly and positively identified before they are handed over to the relatives for final interment.

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<sup>34</sup> Adopted by the TRC, 2009.

*e. Expertise*

The whole process of exhumation must be carried out with the highest level of expertise, sensitivity and respect.

**12. Reports and recommendations**

The TRC was required to submit a report of its work at the end of its operations to the Prime Minister, which states its findings and recommendations needed to achieve its objectives, providing an impartial historical record of the tensions, preventing the repetition of the violations or abuses suffered, addressing impunity and responding to the needs of victims and promoting healing and reconciliation.<sup>35</sup>

The Prime Minister shall table the report in Parliament, make it available to the public and the Government “shall as far as practicable” implement the recommendations of the report.<sup>36</sup>

A person or body shall be appointed by the Government to monitor the implementation of the recommendations and given necessary resources to facilitate implementation.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> TRC Act, section 16 (2)

<sup>36</sup> TRC Act, section 17 (1) & (2)

<sup>37</sup> TRC Act, section 17 (3)

## 2.

### “A NATION CONCEIVED BUT NEVER BORN”: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO SOLOMON ISLANDS

*Those who cannot remember the past  
are condemned to repeat it.*<sup>38</sup>

#### 1. Introduction

Internal conflicts are often a culmination of actions precipitated by a social environment structured in the past. With this in mind, this introductory chapter attempts to identify historical events and circumstances surrounding the recent “ethnic tension” in Solomon Islands.<sup>39</sup> Given the limitations in time and resources of any Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it is based entirely on published work.

Solomon Islanders have recorded much of their history – a term which refers both to the events of the past and to ways of viewing those events – in a rich oral tradition, and in a variety of art forms. But hitherto few of them have written about it. Most of the writing about the Solomon Islands has been done by foreigners, *araikwao*.

Not much has changed since the above was published in 1989.<sup>40</sup> *Ples blong iumi*, an interdisciplinary volume written by Solomon Islanders, is still the exception. And although we now have access to a growing academic production from national social scientists such as David Welchman Gegeo, Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka, Alice Aruhe’eta Pollard, Ruth Maetala and Transform Aqorau, the most published research documenting social conditions of the country is still produced by foreigners.

This final report of the TRC, which examines a sinister though fundamental chapter of the country’s recent history, is a modest endeavour to break with this practice. For the most part, the report was produced by young Solomon Islanders and the Commission dearly hopes that this will

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<sup>38</sup> George Santayana: *The Life of Reason: or, the Phases of Human Progress*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons; London: Constable and Co. Ltd., 1905, p. 284.

<sup>39</sup> If it was and to what extent it was actually an *ethnic* conflict will be discussed in chapter 3.

<sup>40</sup> Hugh Laracy (ed.): *Ples blong iumi. Solomon Islands: the first four thousand years*. Suva and Honiara: USP, Solomon Islands Extension Centre, SICHE and Solomon Islands Ministry of Education, 1989.

become the standard in the not too far future. The Commissioners are convinced that a critical reflection on the historical evolution of the country and the creation of a *national memory* by Solomon Islanders who have more than a mere academic interest in the topic is a crucial step in the process of building a unified and peaceful Solomon Islands.

## **2. Explorers, whalers, traders and missionaries**

On 19 November 1567 a fleet of around 170-180 men in two ships, the *Capitana* and the *Almiranta*, departed from the port of Callao in Peru with the mission to find *Terra Australis Incognita* (the “Southern Continent”) and the biblical King Solomon's mines of Ophir. The governor (*adelantado*) of the fleet was Alvaro de Mendaña de Neira, a nephew of Mr Lope García de Castro, the President of the High Court (*audiencia*) in Lima. At the age of only 25 Mendaña was entrusted with a mission for which there were very high expectations.<sup>41</sup>

On 9 February 1568, after 80 days at sea, Mendaña's expedition came upon a large island they named Santa Ysabel. Soon they found other large islands where they spent six unrewarding months searching for gold before they headed back to Callao where they arrived on 11 September 1569. Mendaña found no Southern Continent, but he discovered and named Santa Ysabel, San Cristobal and Guadalcanal. Upon his return to Peru cartographers optimistically named the archipelago the Solomon Islands.

The accounts of Mendaña's expedition – “so accurate and detailed that it is possible, 333 years afterwards, to identify every harbour and islet and creek by which they passed”<sup>42</sup> – are the first written testimonies about the Solomon Islands, and for a long time remained the only ones. After Mendaña's departure<sup>43</sup> the Solomons eluded foreign sailors for two hundred years and were rediscovered only in 1767 when English explorer Philip Carteret landed on Santa Cruz.

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<sup>41</sup> See Colin Jack-Hinton: *The Search for the Islands of Solomon 1567-1838*; London, Clarendon Press, 1969, for an account of the European obsession with the Islands of Solomon during that time.

<sup>42</sup> Lord Amherst of Hackney and Basil Thomson: *The Discovery of the Solomon Islands by Álvaro de Mendaña in 1568. Translated from the Original Spanish Manuscript*; London: The Hakluyt Society, 1901, p. i.

<sup>43</sup> Mendaña returned to the South Pacific in 1595. Reaching the Solomon Islands again, he landed on an island which he named Santa Cruz where he died soon afterwards; according to some sources he was killed by indigenous, others assert that he died of malaria. For more detail on Mendaña and the discovery of the Solomon Islands see Mercedes Maroto Camino: *Producing the Pacific. Maps and Narratives of Spanish Exploration (1567-1606)*; Amsterdam, New York: Editions Rodopi, 2005. Miriam Estensen: *Terra Australis incognita: the Spanish quest for the mysterious great southern land*; Crows Nest NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2006.

Little wonder then that in *The Discovery of the Solomon Islands* Lord Amherst and Basil Thomson observed that “there is surely nothing in the history of maritime discovery so strange as the story of how the Isles of Solomon were discovered, lost, and found again”.<sup>44</sup>

The South Pacific was the last region of the world to be “discovered” by European explorers. The voyages of James Cook and Jean-François-Marie de Surville in 1769–79 brought to an end the search for *Terra Australis Incognita* in favour of the acquisition of new colonies, minerals, spices, and trade. At the same time, geographical and scientific knowledge became an important motivation for the expeditions. Cook’s ship *Endeavour* was a floating laboratory equipped to store and process all sorts of biological specimens. Its crew included astronomers, artists, and biologists, who recorded in great detail each new natural phenomenon encountered during the voyage. French explorer Jules Sébastien-César Dumont d’Urville (1790-1842) was another sailor-converted-scientist who undertook several voyages to the Pacific, one of which brought him to the Solomon Islands. It was d’Urville who popularized the division of the Pacific into Micronesia, Polynesia, and Melanesia by publishing an article in the *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie* in 1831. “Melanesia” – the “Black Islands” (from Greek “melos” [black] and “nesos” [island]) – was the name given to the group of islands comprising New Guinea, the Solomons, New Caledonia, New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) and parts of Fiji, distinguishing them from Polynesia (“many islands”) and Micronesia (“small islands”) in geographic, cultural and, last but not least, ethnic-racial terms because “dark islands” refers to the skin color of its indigenous population (see Map 1 at the end of this chapter).

The 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries saw the arrival of whalers and “pioneers of global capitalism”<sup>45</sup> in search of sandalwood, tortoiseshell and copra. The whalers’ contact with the indigenous people of the Solomons was short-lived and was confined to trade of manufactured goods from Europe for food, manpower – and women.<sup>46</sup> The exchange had a huge impact on the life of the natives who for the first time became acquainted with the benefits of iron tools. “Iron” says Judith Bennett, “in the form of hoop iron, axes, tomahawks, plane blades, fish-hooks, and nails, was, in

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<sup>44</sup> Lord Amherst of Hackney and Basil Thomson: *The Discovery of the Solomon Islands, op. cit.* p. i.

<sup>45</sup> Edvard Hviding: “Contested rainforests, NGOs, and projects of desire in Solomon Islands”, *International Social Science Journal* N° 178, 2003, p. 541.

<sup>46</sup> Judith A. Bennett: *Wealth of the Solomons. A history of a Pacific archipelago, 1800-1978*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987, chapter 2.

a stone-age society, almost magical.”<sup>47</sup> Bennett notes that the trading transformed substantial elements of the traditional economy, and ultimately the political and social organization. Barter was done with coastal communities so it was mainly the “saltwater people” that benefited from the trading and became generally better-off than the “bush” communities.

The gap in levels of affluence between groups within the Solomon was widening. By mid-century large numbers, if not the majority of the population, lived in the bush on the big islands. These people looked with helpless and envious eyes at the largesse visited upon some of the saltwater people who, as ever, exploited their geographical advantage to the full.<sup>48</sup>

Traders began to settle in the Solomons in 1870 and were few in numbers: in 1870 there were about seven, in 1875 perhaps four, in 1880 six, 1890 fourteen.<sup>49</sup> They were attracted by high prices for copra and a steady demand for other Solomon products in European and Asian markets.<sup>50</sup> Together with temporary traders they introduced thousands of Solomon Islanders to many of the products of Western technology.

Another point of contact with the outside world was “blackbirding”: the indentured recruitment of manpower for the plantations in Queensland, Fiji and New Caledonia.

In the aftermath of the abolition of slavery, these laborers provided the essential cost-neutral, coercible, and colored labor that was deemed essential to the economic viability of white settlement in the tropical belt of Britain’s Australian colonies.<sup>51</sup>

Between the 1870s and the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some 30,000 Solomon Islanders labored for bonded periods of at least three years in the burgeoning sugar industry of the British colonies. The overwhelming majority were Malaitans from the inland districts, who joined the Pacific labor trade primarily because there was no other way to obtain the trade goods that were beginning to circulate.<sup>52</sup> Malaita was bypassed by the whaling industry and had no important sources of bêche-de-mer, pearls or tortoiseshell; in short, “they had nothing to interest whalers

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, p. 23.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, p. 43.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, p. 59, Annex 5.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, p. 47.

<sup>51</sup> Tracey Banivanua-Mar: *Violence and Colonial Dialogue. The Australian-Pacific Indentured Labor Trade*. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2007, p. 1. See also Dorothy Shineberg: *The People Trade. Pacific Island Laborers and New Caledonia, 1865-1930*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999.

<sup>52</sup> Clive Moore: “The Misappropriation of Malaitan Labour. Historical Origins of the Recent Solomon Island Crisis”, in *The Journal of Pacific History* Vol. 42, N° 2, 2010, p. 215.

and traders”.<sup>53</sup> Malaita’s dilemma for the first time revealed itself: the island with the highest population, its harsh topography and poor soil presenting insurmountable drawbacks for participating in the development of the market economy, leaving out-migration as the only suitable solution:

From the 1870s, Malaitans became the major source of labour in the Solomon Islands. During the next 70 years, in excess of 51,000 indenture contracts were entered into by labourers from Malaita Province, more than the number of people living there at any time. Many served two and three terms, often in different colonies, or on different plantations in the Solomon Islands. It is impossible accurately to estimate the total number, although an educated guess would suggest 35,000 to 40,000, since perhaps one-quarter participated in the labour trade more than once.<sup>54</sup>

Economic benefits of labor migration did not go far, however, because recruits used most of their earnings to buy goods which they distributed among relatives, or to pay tax.<sup>55</sup> Their earnings were very small compared to the income of producers from the coastal regions. Bennett shows that laborers had to work three to six times harder than their producer neighbours for trade goods.<sup>56</sup> Even though Western goods were now accessible to all, the gap between the “wealthy” and “needy” was widened: “capitalism was creating rich and poor Solomon Islanders.”<sup>57</sup>

Chronologically and by no means insignificant, the last pre-colonial foundation of integration into the global society was Christianity. The first missionaries, a group of French Roman Catholic Marists, arrived in the Solomons in 1846 and left soon afterwards when their bishop was killed by a native with an axe he was given as a gift. They did not return until the 1890s. Anglican presence began in the 1850s but was limited to sporadic visits until the late nineteenth century. The Methodists arrived in 1902 and evangelized New Georgia, Choiseul and surrounding islands. The Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) church arrived in 1914. The presence of the South Seas Evangelical Church (SSEC) in Solomon Islands had its origins among indentured laborers in Queensland and became particularly strong in Malaita.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, p. 216.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, p. 219.

<sup>56</sup> Bennett, *The Wealth of the Solomons, op. cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, p. 102.

<sup>58</sup> About the history of evangelization in the Solomons, see: David Hilliard: “Colonialism and Christianity: The Melanesian Mission in the Solomon Islands”, in *The Journal of Pacific History*, Vol. 9, 1974, pp. 93-116. David Hilliard: “The South Sea Evangelical Mission in the Solomon Islands: The Foundation Years”, in *The*

In a twofold sense, churches are key actors in the Solomons today: first, Christianity offers spiritual guidance for more than 90 percent of Solomon Islanders, usually in an indigenized form as noted by anthropologist Geoffrey White in Santa Isabel:

Rather than destroy or desecrate shrines, the indigenous specialists attempted to transform them ritually with Christian practice. Acts of “blessing,” “anointing” and “baptizing” were (and still are) the weapons in the spiritual arsenal of indigenous Christians. Local catechists and priests were sympathetic to the substantial continuities of the past in the present, of the old in the new. Their model of transformation was not one of rupture but of reformulation.<sup>59</sup>

But churches are also of overwhelming *social* and *political* importance. They provide social services like education, health or disaster relief programmes.<sup>60</sup> Church leaders are extremely important in local governance formations and it is not unusual for ordained ministers to be directly involved in politics. As Keith Joseph and Brown Beu rightly observe, “the Western separation of religion and daily life, and subsequently the separation of Church and State, are not features of Melanesian culture.”<sup>61</sup> In some instances churches have given rise to independent churches such as the Christian Fellowship Church or political movements such as the “Western Breakaway Movement” at the dawn of independence (see chapter 3.2.5). The Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA) was formed in 1967 and comprises the five largest denominations in Solomon Islands and is, without doubt, the main actor in the very fragile “civil society”. As anthropologist Geoffrey White writes: “Historically, involvement in Christian churches has provided an important avenue for developing leadership status that combines practical, spiritual, and moral qualities – desirable combination in light of indigenous models of leadership that did not separate religious and political authority.”<sup>62</sup>

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*Journal of Pacific History*, Vol. 4, 1969, pp. 41-64. David V. Vunagi: *Liturgical spirituality under the Southern Cross. A study of the impact of the Anglo-Catholic tradition on the Anglican Church in Melanesia*. Thesis submitted to the Graduate Studies Committee of the Vancouver School of Theology, 1998. Tony Swain and Garry Trompf: *The Religions of Oceania*. London and New York: Blackwell Publishers, 2005. G.W. Trompf: *Melanesian Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

<sup>59</sup> Geoffrey M. White: *Identity through history. Living stories in a Solomon Islands Society*; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 108.

<sup>60</sup> Cliff Bird: *Blowing the Conch Shell: A Baseline Survey of Churches Engagement in Service Provision and Governance in the Solomon Islands*. Honiara, 2007; available at: [http://www.ausaid.gov.au/publications/pdf/solomons\\_church\\_survey.pdf](http://www.ausaid.gov.au/publications/pdf/solomons_church_survey.pdf); date of access 15/10/2011.

<sup>61</sup> Keith Joseph and Charles Browne Beu: *Church and State in Solomon Islands*; Canberra: The Australian National University. State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Discussion Paper 2008/11, 2008, p. 1. [http://rspas.anu.edu.au/papers/melanesia/discussion\\_papers/08\\_11\\_joseph.pdf](http://rspas.anu.edu.au/papers/melanesia/discussion_papers/08_11_joseph.pdf); date of access 17/09/2011.

<sup>62</sup> Geoffrey White: *Indigenous Governance in Melanesia*. Canberra: The Australian National University. State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Discussion Paper 2007/05, 2007, p. 10. Available at



### 3. Archaeologists, historians and anthropologists

Notwithstanding a hundred years or so of increasing contact, little was known about the *people* of Solomon Islands well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When W.H.R. Rivers, Melanesia's first ethnographer, came to the Solomons in 1907, he still found a sort of cognizant desert:

There are several distinct cultural regions in these islands, with great differences in the mode of social organization and in the way of counting relationship. In the larger islands of the Solomons there are two distinct populations, the people inhabiting the coast and those of the interior, who may be spoken of as the coast and bush people respectively. These people are hostile to one another and at the present time we know absolutely nothing of the social organization of the bush people.<sup>63</sup>

Since then archaeological,<sup>64</sup> linguistic<sup>65</sup> and genetic<sup>66</sup> research have improved immensely our knowledge of Melanesians and given us a fair idea about the first occupation of the Solomons some 40,000 years ago. A second colonization occurred around 3500 BC with the arrival of Austronesian settlers from South-east Asia, which led to the development of the Lapita cultural complex whose geographical distribution originated in the Bismarck Archipelago in the west and spread through to the Solomons, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, Fiji and onto the Polynesian islands of Tonga and Samoa.<sup>67</sup>

Unfortunately little is known about the period between Lapita and the arrival of the first explorers. The period between 1800 and independence in 1978 is well documented in Judith A. Bennett's *Wealth of the Solomons*, our main reference for Solomon Islands' economic history,

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[http://rspas.anu.edu.au/papers/melanesia/discussion\\_papers/07\\_05\\_dp\\_white.pdf](http://rspas.anu.edu.au/papers/melanesia/discussion_papers/07_05_dp_white.pdf); date of access 15/07/2011

<sup>63</sup> W.H.R. Rivers: *The History of Melanesian Society*, Vol. I; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914, p. 232.

<sup>64</sup> Ian Lilley (ed.): *Archaeology of Oceania: Australia and the Pacific Islands*; Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2006. Peter J. Sheppard and Richard Walter: "A revised model of Solomon Islands culture history", in *Journal of the Polynesian Society* Vol. 115, N° 1, 2006, pp. 47-76.

<sup>65</sup> Tom Dutton: "Language Contact and Change in Melanesia", in Peter Bellwood, James J. Fox and Darrell Tryon (eds.): *The Austronesians. Historical and Comparative Perspectives*; Canberra, ANU, 2006 (first edition 1995). Malcolm Ross: *Proto Oceanic and the Austronesian Languages of Western Melanesia*; Canberra: Australian National University, 1988.

<sup>66</sup> Jonathan S. Friedlaender (ed.): *Genes, Language, and Culture History in the Southwest Pacific*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. François-Xavier Ricaut, Timothy Thomas, Maru Mormina, Murray P. Cox, Maggie Bellatti, Robert A. Foley and Marta Mirazon-Lahr: "Ancient Solomon Islands mtDNA: assessing Holocene settlement and the impact of European contact", in *Journal of Archaeological Science* Vol. 37, 2010, pp. 1161–1170.

<sup>67</sup> Matthew Spriggs: *The Island Melanesians*; Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997. Patrick V. Kirch: "Lapita and its Aftermath. The Austronesian Settlement of Oceania", in Ward H. Goodenough (ed.): *Prehistoric Settlement of the Pacific*; Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1998.

quoted throughout the second and third chapters of this report. In a review of Bennett's book, Lamont Lindstrom gently censured its colonial focus and limitation to "a chronology of alien actors and external forces and events."<sup>68</sup> This should not be a problem, however, since the presentation of indigenous actors, forces and events has been taken on by generations of anthropologists who felt attracted by Melanesia's extraordinary cultural diversity, a characteristics by which it is often identified.<sup>69</sup> Studies which have long since achieved the status of ethnographic classics on oral traditions, kinship regulations, cargo cults or *kastom* as a counter-hegemonic ideology have given insight into an enormously complex epistemological and social environment, often in sharp contradiction to the simplicity of physical life.

Ethnographic work shows that political groupings in Melanesia were generally small-scale and fairly equal. Traditional societies consisted of autonomous clan-based communities usually headed by a male leader who gained individual status by the personal acquisition and application of private wealth. The prototype of Melanesian politics is the "bigman", a particularly influential member of a community who assumed leadership through ceremonial exchange and feast-giving. His position is not hereditary; he held no title and usually lacked any conspicuous display of social distinction, although everyone in the community was fundamentally aware of the importance of this "invisible chieftaincy".<sup>70</sup> Anthropologist Marshall Sahlins summarized the characteristics of the Melanesian bigman in his influential essay *Poor man, rich man, big man, chief: Political types in Melanesia and Polynesia*:

In the several Melanesian tribes in which big-men have come under anthropological scrutiny, local differences modify the expression of their personal powers. But the indicative quality of big-man authority is everywhere the same: it is *personal* power. Big-men do not come to office; they do not succeed to, nor are they installed in, existing positions of leadership over political groups. The attainment of big-man status is rather the outcome of a series of acts which elevate a person above the common herd and attract about him a coterie of loyal, lesser men. It is not accurate to speak of "big-man" as a political title, for it is but an acknowledged standing in interpersonal relations – a "prince among men" so to speak as opposed to "The Prince of Danes".

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<sup>68</sup> *Pacific Studies*, Vol. 11, N° 2, 1988, pp. 135-136.

<sup>69</sup> Eight million Melanesians speak some 1,200 different languages, which is almost a fourth of all the languages spoken in the world. Information about languages in Solomon Island is somewhat confusing and numbers range between 70 and 120 (the highest number is mentioned in the CIA Factbook). The project "Ethnologue", probably the most serious academic linguistic endeavour that claims to register all the 6,909 languages spoken in the world, enumerates 68 living and 3 extinct vernacular languages for the Solomon Islands (including Kiribati, but not Pidgin). See Paul M. Lewi: *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 16<sup>th</sup> edition; Dallas: SIL International, 2009. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com/>.

<sup>70</sup> Steven Roger Fischer: *A History of the Pacific Islands*. Houndmills: Palgrave, 2002, p. 57.

In particular Melanesian tribes the phrase might be “man of importance” or “man of renown”, “generous rich-man”, or “center-man”, as well as “big-man”.<sup>71</sup>

Sahlins found that big-man societies were less stable than chiefdoms because chiefs possessed power over well-established hierarchically organized political units, whereas bigmen had to rely upon the erratic support of followers belonging to small segmentary groups. It is in the bigman system that we can find the historical roots for the indigenization of modern political institutions in contemporary Solomon Islands. Geoffrey White comments:

With a few notable exceptions, Melanesian societies do not exhibit marked forms of hierarchy in ranking, inherited titles, chiefly etiquette, and so forth. Although the diversity of the region makes generalization impossible, an important feature of most indigenous communities is adherence to egalitarian values that see power dependent on networks of exchange and personal reputation built up over time. This aspect of social organization is associated with consensus-style decision-making rather than reliance on positions or authority or elite status. These features are summed up in concept of Melanesian “bigman” as a kind of leader who operates in a personal, competitive environment and must continually demonstrate his success in public activities.<sup>72</sup>

In contemporary Solomon Islands, political leaders and public officers are still renowned for employing big-man policies, particularly the dispersing of wealth to kinfolks and immediate supporters. At the same time, the voting public perpetuates the system by supporting those candidates who promise immediate material returns.<sup>73</sup>

Melanesian national politics works through a modern version of the classic bigman syndrome. Leaders are almost always male and no matter that many are tertiary educated, they exhibit behaviour patterns that often would not be out of place in village settings.<sup>74</sup>

Related, but not restricted to big-man dealings, is the *wantok* system. *Wantokism* may be loosely defined as the set of obligations between people related to each other by a common language (“one talk”), ethnicity, and/or district or provincial boundaries. It is the most important feature of Melanesian society, though in contrast to the bigman system which is “a modern rather than

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<sup>71</sup> Marshall D. Sahlins: “Poor Man, Rich Man, Big-Man, Chief: Political Types in Melanesia and Polynesia”. In *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 5, N° 3, 1963, pp. 285-303.

<sup>72</sup> Geoffrey White: *Indigenous Governance in Melanesia*, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>73</sup> Abby McLeod: *Leadership Models in the Pacific*; Canberra: The Australian National University. State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Discussion Paper 2008/06, 2008, p. 8. Available at [http://rspas.anu.edu.au/papers/melanesia/discussion\\_papers/08\\_06.pdf](http://rspas.anu.edu.au/papers/melanesia/discussion_papers/08_06.pdf); date of access 09/10/2011.

<sup>74</sup> Clive Moore: “Pacific view: the meaning of governance and politics in the Solomon Islands”, in *Australian Journal of International Affairs* Vol. 62, N° 3, p. 395.

tribal or traditional institution.”<sup>75</sup> To external observers, the *wantok* system is usually perceived as nepotism that endorses corruption and undermines political stability.<sup>76</sup> A more sympathetic look would, however, reveal that the *wantok* system plays an important social support function in the absence of functioning state welfare systems.<sup>77</sup> When thousands of immigrant settlers were evicted from the island of Guadalcanal during the “ethnic tension”, the *wantok* system alleviated much of the hardships for the displaced families (see chapter 3.2.3).

#### **4. Colonialism**

In Melanesia, Western colonization did not really begin until the nineteenth century, and even then it was limited by tropical diseases and the resistance of the indigenous population. Missionaries started arriving around 1839, and by the 1850s the Dutch, British, French, and Germans began claiming parts of the Melanesian islands.

The Solomon Islands were declared a British Protectorate in 1893, primarily to appease fears in Australia and New Zealand that they would be colonized by France or Germany, and thus threaten Australasian security.<sup>78</sup> Tulagi, in the Central Province, was established as headquarters and a resident commissioner formally posted there in 1896. The British protectorate at that time covered only Guadalcanal, Malaita, San Cristobal (now Makira) and the New Georgia group. The remainder of the Solomons had fallen under German dominion; some of these islands, including Choiseul and Santa Isabel, were transferred by treaty to the British in 1900.

The British ruled Solomon Islands until 1978. Throughout this time, they maintained as minimal an administration as could be found in the British Empire. A quarter century after colonialism began, for example, the entire administration consisted of ten colonial officials and 100

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<sup>75</sup> Morgan Brigg: “Wantokism and state building in Solomon Islands. A response to Fukuyama”, in *Pacific Economic Bulletin*, Vol. 24, N° 3, 2009, p. 149.

<sup>76</sup> Francis Fukuyama: “State building in Solomon Islands”, in *Pacific Economic Bulletin*, Vol. 23, N° 3, 2008, pp.1–17.

<sup>77</sup> Abby McLeod: *Leadership Models in the Pacific*, *op. cit.*, p. 8. Australian anthropologist Morgan Brigg sees even an “innovative possibility” in *wantokism* as a culturally recognised and valuable resource that could be mobilised to facilitate emergent national identity and nation building (Brigg: *Wantokism and state building*, *op. cit.*, p. 148). See also Clive Moore: “Pacific view”, *op. cit.*

<sup>78</sup> Michael Havinden and David Meredith: *Colonialism and Development. Britain and its Tropical Colonies, 1850–1960*; London and New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 84.

indigenous police officers.<sup>79</sup> With such a small staff to control their subjects, the British depended on missionaries to convince converts to accept British domination and to even provide basic services to much of the population.<sup>80</sup>

British strategies of colonial domination were almost always based on some form of indirect rule, and Solomon Islands provide one example. Because of the absence of powerful pre-colonial chiefs, the British ruled through government-appointed headmen and native councils. The positions of the councillors, however, were not hereditary and the traditional authorities in colonial Solomon Islands were considerably weaker and less autocratic than chiefs in other British colonies. Traditional powers were not formalized and headmen and native councils were under the direct authority of the District Officers.<sup>81</sup> Indigenous political participation thus remained very weak throughout the colony:

Nothing has been done to enable our people to participate in the exercise of political power. Their opinions were not sought; their wishes were ignored, they were subject to a government that was not responsible to them.<sup>82</sup>

The declaration of Solomon Islands as a British Protectorate marked the beginning of large-scale land alienation for commercial plantations through King's or Queen's Regulations. The first regulation (Regulation N° 4, 1896) alienated large tracts of land to the Pacific Island Company Ltd, which were later sold to Lever's Pacific Plantation Ltd, a branch of Levers Brothers, Britain's largest purchaser of copra, which would quickly become the main plantation company in the Protectorate. By 1906 Lever's Pacific Plantation Ltd. was in control of 200,000 acres,<sup>83</sup> and by 1914, 291,510 acres<sup>84</sup> of fertile land throughout the country. Fifty years later Levers had

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<sup>79</sup> Bennett: *Wealth of the Solomons*, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

<sup>80</sup> Matthew Lange: *Lineages of Despotism and Development. British Colonialism and State Power*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009, p. 175.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Sam Alasia: "Politics", in Hugh Laracy (ed.): *Ples blong iumi. Solomon Islands: the first four thousand years*. Suva and Honiara: USP, Solomon Islands Extension Centre, SICHE and Solomon Islands Ministry of Education, 1989, pp. 140-141.

<sup>83</sup> Colin H. Allan: *Customary Land Tenure in the British Solomon Islands Protectorate*; Honiara: Western Pacific High Commission, 1957, p. 33; quoted in Naitoro: *Solomon Islands conflict*, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>84</sup> Moore, "The Misappropriation of Malaitan Labour", *op. cit.*, p. 221.

appropriated about six percent of the total land in the country, which meant that 90 percent of the coastal fertile land was under foreign control.<sup>85</sup>

Similar regulations known today as “Waste Land Regulations” were enacted in 1900, 1901 and 1904 and further alienated land from the natives. By 1913 indigenous Solomon Islanders had lost 163,000 hectares of land to foreigners, calculated as 4.5 percent of the total land.<sup>86</sup> By 1920 colonial government and traders possessed 22,720 acres of land on the plains of Guadalcanal alone.<sup>87</sup> Land that was not alienated remained in the hands of the indigenous people as customary land. Colonial administration did little to address the occasional outbreak of violent protests by the indigenous population. Increasing complaints eventually prompted the colonial administration to set up the Phillips Commission, which between 1919 and 1925 returned some planted and all unplanted lands to the indigenous owners.<sup>88</sup> During the 1930s and 1940s little land was alienated and new planting was kept to a minimum due to the global economic crisis.

Plantations in Solomon Islands were fewer and smaller than in Fiji, and there was no need to import laborers.<sup>89</sup> Labor was obtained through indenture contracts with the native population, mainly from Malaita. To coerce them to work in the plantations, in 1921 a head tax on all healthy adult males was introduced to “show Solomon Islanders that they had to support the colonial state, and to ensure the men had to work to pay the tax.”<sup>90</sup> In 1927, a group of Kwaio men led by Basiana killed a government party led by District Officer William Bell because of resentment over harsh enforcement by the tax collectors. Two weeks later a government force consisting of 50 Australian soldiers, 28 white civilians, and some 50 Malaitan police officers and volunteers, primarily from the north, arrived in Kwaio aboard HMAS *Adelaide*. Despite meeting

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, p. 60.

<sup>86</sup> John Ipo: “Land and Economy”, in Hugh Laracy (ed.): *Ples blong iumi. Solomon Islands: the first four thousand years*. Suva and Honiara: USP, Solomon Islands Extension Centre, SICHE and Solomon Islands Ministry of Education, 1989, p 127.

<sup>87</sup> I. Q. Lasaqa: *Melanesians’ Choice: Tadimboko Participation in the Solomon Islands Cash Economy*; Canberra: Australian National University, 1972, p. 29; quoted in Naitoro; *Solomon Islands conflict, op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>88</sup> Philip Tagini: “The Effect of Land policy on Foreign Direct Investments in the Solomon Islands”, in *Journal of South Pacific Law*, Vol. 5, 2001. Online version available at <http://www.paclii.org/journals/fJSPL/vol05/5.html>, date of access 14/09/2011.

<sup>89</sup> Matthew Lange: *Lineages of Despotism and Development. British Colonialism and State Power*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009.

<sup>90</sup> Moore, “Misappropriation of Malaitan Labour”, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

no resistance, they killed about 60 people and committed a series of atrocities for which the Kwaio people are still demanding compensation until today:

Women and girls were gang-raped and many were shot, children were murdered, and prisoners were routinely executed and their bodies mutilated. Most of the victims had played no part in the attack on Bell's party. . . . The soldiers systematically desecrated ancestral shrines and sacred men's houses, and Kwaio believe this provoked angry spirits to kill more descendants later through illness and mishap. About two hundred men, most of them innocent of any crime, were jailed in Tulagi, where thirty-one soon died in a prison dysentery epidemic. Six were hanged and seventeen sentenced to lengthy prison terms.<sup>91</sup>

Because of their weak integration into the trade system, Malaitans had no options but to participate in the coercive labor system until World War II when plantations were closed down. Again, out-migration was the only suitable solution, though this time not abroad but to plantations on other islands of the Solomons, mainly Guadalcanal and the Western Province.

The Solomon Islands became one of the countries in the region for some of the most brutal battles between American and Japanese troops after the Japanese occupied Guadalcanal in 1942, to the great surprise of most Solomon Islanders who knew little about the outside world prior to the war.<sup>92</sup> Half a century later, militants from Guadalcanal would dig for World War II shells and use them in their campaigns against Malaitan settlers. But for Solomon Islanders, the World War II was, above all, an “eye-opening experience”.<sup>93</sup>

David Welchman Gegeo describes how the war shattered old beliefs about cosmology:

“that is, how the world works. The outside world – previously far away and little known – suddenly was seen to be connected to them in a drastic way”.<sup>94</sup> One of the primary social and political outcomes of the World War II in the Solomons was the rise of *Maasina Ruru* (or *Marching Rule*), a movement to restructure traditional society and gain independence from the

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<sup>91</sup> Davin Akin: “Compensation and the Melanesian State: Why the Kwaio Keep Claiming”, in *The Contemporary Pacific*, Vol. 11, N° 1, 1999, pp. 39-40. See also Roger M. Keesing and Peter Corris: *Lightning Meets the West Wind. The Kwaio Massacre*; Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1980.

<sup>92</sup> The battle of Guadalcanal is portrayed in the movie *The Thin Red Line* (1998), directed by Terence Mallick. In 2010, HBO produced the TV miniseries *The Pacific*. There are also a huge number of books about World War II in the South Pacific.

<sup>93</sup> Spriggs, *The Island Melanesians*, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

<sup>94</sup> David Welchman Gegeo: “World War II in the Solomons: the impact on society, politics and worldview”, in Geoffrey White (ed.): *Remembering the Pacific War*; Honolulu: Center of Pacific Studies, University of Hawaii, Occasional Papers Series N° 36, 1991, p. 31; online version available at <http://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/bitstream/handle/10125/15551/OP36-27-35.pdf?sequence=1>; date of access 24/11/2011.

British Empire that had its origin in Malaita.<sup>95</sup> Sometimes erroneously labelled a “cargo cult”, *Maasina Ruru* was “both a revitalization movement and an independence movement”<sup>96</sup> that focussed on indigenous self-help, improving living standards and elevating “custom” as a guiding principle for a new social order.<sup>97</sup> The movement spread quickly over Malaita, where *Maasina Ruru* meetings were attended by thousands of people, and reached neighbouring islands, including Guadalcanal, Gela and Isabel. Across Malaita’s nine districts, chiefs were appointed in defiance of the colonial administration. New coastal villages were built and Malaitans were forbidden from enlisting as plantation laborers. In 1947, the British government arrested the leaders of the movement and the chiefs and charged them under the Sedition Act for organizing secret meetings.

By the 1950’s the government had regained control over *Maasina Ruru*, but could not avoid the emergence of similar, though smaller, movements in the less developed areas of the eastern Solomons and in the Ndi-Nggai region of Guadalcanal where Matthew Belamatanga in 1947 formed the Society for the Development of Native Races.<sup>98</sup> The western Solomons produced their own kind of movement against their strongest perceived political power, the Methodist Mission. The leader of the movement, Silas Eto, broke away from the Methodists and established the Christian Fellowship Church, which later would become one of the promoters of the Western Breakaway Movement (see chapter 3.2.5). In the mid-fifties, a “back to custom” movement, Moro Movement, was gaining strength on the Weather Coast and adjacent regions of Guadalcanal (see chapter 3.2.2).

World War II had given birth to the dream of independence from colonial rulers who would never again be treated with pre-war deference.<sup>99</sup> However, contrary to many other British colonies, the emergence of a nation-wide anti-colonial movement was obstructed by geographical distance, socio-cultural diversity, historical resentment between “districts”<sup>100</sup> and

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<sup>95</sup> Hugh Laracy: *Pacific Protest: The Maasina Rule Movement, Solomon islands, 1944-1952*; Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1983.

<sup>96</sup> Gegeo, “World War II in the Solomons”, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>97</sup> Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom, op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>98</sup> Bennett, *The Wealth of the Solomons*, p. 299.

<sup>99</sup> Spriggs, *The Island Melanesians, op. cit.*, p. 273-274.

<sup>100</sup> See for example chapter 3.2.5 for the historically rooted aversion between the Solomons’ West and Malaita.



political fragmentation which still characterizes the country's political culture today. Commenting on the tenth anniversary of independence, Richard Feinberg notes that "in contrast with the usual euphoria of people on the verge of independence, many Solomon Islanders faced the prospect of being on their own with trepidation".<sup>101</sup> Independence was achieved in 1978 more as a result of Britain's desire to rid itself of a loss than of local drive for sovereignty:

Without any general clamor for independence in the Solomons and with the near exhaustion of the worldwide anticolonial movement of the postwar decades, Britain was very much the instigator of independence for the Solomons. The British saw the process as one of their gaining independence from the Pacific rather than of territories like the Solomons winning independence from them. The Solomons, a bare decade before considered only a possible candidate for eventual self-government, were now to be prepared for independence as quickly as the appropriate legal and constitutional niceties would allow.<sup>102</sup>

## 5. Post-colonial Solomon Islands: Westminster in the Pacific

Independence faced Solomon Islands with a twofold interwoven challenge: building a functional state *and* building a nation. In Europe, the consolidation of the nation-state required several hundred years of political architecture and came to its termination only in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries;<sup>103</sup> in the Pacific, states were established abruptly over a plethora of semi-autonomous groups with no sense of shared identity.<sup>104</sup>

There was little sense of shared political community in Solomon Islands . . . capable of uniting the peoples of the newly independent state. Living predominantly in rural communities, bonds of kinship, shared (local) language and ties to ancestral land, along with Christianity, provided the basis for individual identities and allegiance, rather than abstract notions of "citizenship" or membership of the modern state. Localism prevailed over nationalism in virtually every sphere of social, political and economic activity. In the absence of sizeable anti-colonial movements in their fragmented territories, the result of formal independence was the creation of what were, in effect, states without nations.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Richard Feinberg: "The Solomon Islands' tenth anniversary of independence: problems of national symbolism and national integration", in *Pacific Studies*, Vol. 13, N<sup>o</sup>. 2, 1990, p. 23.

<sup>102</sup> Bennett, *The Wealth of the Solomons*, *op. cit.*, p. 321.

<sup>103</sup> For the case of England, see for example Krishan Kumar: *The Making of English National Identity*; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Colin Kidd: *British Identities before Nationalism. Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600–1800*; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

<sup>104</sup> M. Anne Brown: "Custom and Identity: Reflections on and Representations of Violence in Melanesia", in Nikki Slocum-Bradley (ed.): *Promoting Conflict or Peace through Identity*; Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008.

<sup>105</sup> Sinclair Dinnen: "A Comment on State-building in Solomon Islands", in *The Journal of Pacific History* Vol. 42, N<sup>o</sup> 2, 2007, pp. 259.

The political system of Solomon Islands is an adaptation of the British Westminster model. The head of the state is the Queen of England, there is a unicameral National Parliament of 50 members (increased in 1994 from the original 38), and the Prime Minister is elected by secret ballot and chooses the other members of the Cabinet. The Speaker is designated by open vote by the Members of Parliament, but is not a Member of Parliament himself, and the Attorney General is a public servant who sits in and can speak in the House when requested, but has no vote. The Governor General is also elected by the National Parliament by open vote.<sup>106</sup>

The decision to adopt the Westminster system was made despite the fact that there was widespread demand for alternative forms of governance.<sup>107</sup> The Constitution of 1978 was the product of extensive local consultation over what model to adopt in a country like Solomon Islands where there is a tremendous cultural and linguistic diversity and geographical dispersion. In 1977 the *Special Committee on the Provincial Government*, more commonly known as the Kausimae Review Committee, had toured the country convening village meetings to elicit views on decentralization<sup>108</sup> In these meetings local leaders, most emphatically from Guadalcanal and the Western District, expressed the demand for a federal system, or what was locally known as “state government”. Central to the demand was the expectation that districts and communities would retain control over the development of their natural resources. However, with little or no resistance from local political leaders who negotiated Solomon Islands’ move to independence, Britain discarded federalism in favour of a provincial system that concentrates most of the political and economic decision-making in the central government. “Having no alternative and little imagination,” says Judith Bennett, the British imposed a political system that had taken themselves several hundred years to evolve.<sup>109</sup> Professor Yash Gai, reflecting on the process of constitution-making in Solomon Islands in which he had played an active part as a constitutional

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<sup>106</sup> Clive Moore: *Decolonising the Solomon Islands: British theory and Melanesian practice*. Geelong: Deakin University, Alfred Deakin Research Institute Working Paper 08, 2010, p. 6.

<sup>107</sup> Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka: “Westminster meets Solomons in the Honiara riots”, in Sinclair Dinnen and Stewart Firth (eds.): *Politics and State Building in Solomon Islands*; Canberra: The Australian National University, 2008, p. 100.

<sup>108</sup> Ralph R. Premdas and Jeffrey S. Steeves: *The Solomon Islands: An Experiment in Decentralization*; Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1985.

<sup>109</sup> Judith Bennett: *Roots of Conflict in Solomon Islands. Though much is taken, much abides: Legacies of Tradition and Colonialism*; Canberra: The Australian University Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies; State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Discussion Paper 2002/5, 2002, pp. 7-8.

advisor, concluded, “Despite consultation with the people and active involvement of their leaders, the constitution cannot be said to be rooted in indigenous concepts of power, authority and decision-making.”<sup>110</sup>

As elsewhere in the Pacific, the Westminster system thus became a negative symbol of an introduced system of government.<sup>111</sup> Its inadequacy is reflected in the low prestige of public institutions and a political heritage that gave little chance for the development of a sense of shared community:

These modern states emerged very recently out of rickety colonial regimes which lacked indigenous precedents or *raison d’être*. The arbitrary borders, dubious local legitimacy and general internal invisibility of the colonial states bestowed an unfortunate legacy on their independent post-colonial successors, which are further burdened by global capitalist encompassment that ensures ongoing economic dependence on external aid and transnational resource extraction.<sup>112</sup>

A sense of shared political community is a critical foundation for rendering states accountable to their citizens.<sup>113</sup> In Solomon Islands, the government of the independent state was swamped with accusations of corruption from its very beginning, and there can be little doubt that it was present. Judith Bennett shows how corruption in the logging sector went awry during the 1980s and 1990s:

Asia-based logging companies poured into the Solomon Islands because logging was restricted by controls in South East Asia. . . . Rights to whole forests, including former government plantations, have been sold with little return to the public purse, but ample reward to a few individuals who facilitated the loggers. At the village level, the big man or the local spokesman able to read and design papers conjured for their families and clans' dreams of the roads, schools, clinics, and employment that were supposed to come with logging; at the regional level, the chiefly educated son saw his prestige expanding as he collected director's fees to head a local paper company that was a front of a giant Malaysian company; at the provincial level, the premier had a house built by the loggers or a new truck and a wharf for the province; at the national level, the politicians received thousands of dollars in “gifts” and trips to Asia while they suborned public servants to sign licenses for unsustainable logging. Often these public servants were harassed by rural relatives to expedite a license for loggers on their island. . . .

By the late 1990 . . . the standards of political morality were falling and corruption and self-

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<sup>110</sup> Quoted in Peter Larmour: “Westminster in the Pacific Islands”, in Haig Patapan, John Wanna and Patrick Weller (eds.): *Westminster Legacies. Democracy and Responsible Government in Asia and the Pacific*; Sydney: UNSW Press, 2005, p. 232.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Bronwen Douglas: “Conflict, gender, peacemaking, and alternative nationalisms in the Western Pacific”, in *Development Bulletin* N° 53, 2000, p. 11.

<sup>113</sup> Dinnen, “A Comment on State Building in Solomon Islands”, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

serving among the so-called elite so obvious that none could miss it. The governments of Solomon Mamaloni encouraged this behaviour, undermined the timber control units of the Forestry Division, and allowed the issue of licenses to overseas loggers with local partnerships to obtain massive tax and duty exemptions and remissions, calculated in 1995 alone to have been worth \$24 million.<sup>114</sup>

But even this apparently unambiguous case shows how complex a phenomenon corruption is in contexts which maintain much of its pre-modern traits of involving both State *and* society on all levels: with local chiefs on the lower end and the Prime Minister on the top. When political elites remain enmeshed within local networks of patronage, reciprocity and obligations<sup>115</sup> – or, in Matthew Allen’s words, when the state “remains firmly embedded in society”<sup>116</sup> – then the World Bank-endorsed definition of corruption as “abuse of a public office for private benefit”,<sup>117</sup> which assumes a neat separation between both spheres, does not make much sense. Simple institutional and normative reforms will not be sufficient to create a state that serves all its citizens without making any distinctions. As Dinnen states, “the dysfunctionality of the Solomon Islands state is not simply the result of a lack of institutional capacity to be remedied by carefully targeted technical assistance”.<sup>118</sup>

More than 30 years after independence, the debate about which system of government is suitable for Solomon Islands is still alive. Since 2000 the country has engaged in the process of constitutional reform, resulting in the release of the first draft of a new constitution in 2004, taken back to the people for further consultation. As a result of these consultations and deliberations by a constitutional congress, a second draft was released in August 2009. The

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<sup>114</sup> Bennett, *Roots of Conflict in Solomon Islands, op. cit.*, p. 9. Attempts to investigate the misuse of state funds by Mamaloni’s government came to an abrupt end in November 1997 when the building which housed both the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Development Planning was burnt down to ashes, destroying all the official records. The fire was set deliberately by arsonists. Despite an intensive investigation, including a forensic investigation by a specialist from Australia, no person was charged.

<sup>115</sup> Michael Morgan: *Cultures of Dominance: Institutional and Cultural Influences on Parliamentary Politics in Melanesia*. Canberra: The Australian National University. State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Discussion Paper 2005/02, 2005.

<sup>116</sup> Matthew Grant Allen: *Greed and grievance in the conflict in Solomon Islands, 1998-2003*. Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Australian National University, August 2007, p. 11.

<sup>117</sup> Definition sanctioned by the World Bank in its *World Development Report 1997* and adopted by Transparency International (TI), the world’s leading private organization dedicated to fight corruption; TI has small but a quite vigorous chapter in the Solomons.

<sup>118</sup> Sinclair Dinnen: “Dilemmas of intervention and the building of state and nation”. In Sinclair Dinnen and Stewart Firth (eds.): *Politics and State Building in Solomon Island*. Canberra: Asia Pacific Press, ANU, 2008, p. 28.

Constitutional Review Commission agreed on a final draft in November 2011 that will soon be released for discussion. It is hoped that the people will continue to participate in this process and help steer the country forward.<sup>119</sup>

So much for state-building as an uncompleted task; nation-building is probably even more complicated. Historian Benedict Anderson famously defined a nation as an “imagined community”: “It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”<sup>120</sup>

Nations, like states, have to be made; they do not exist naturally.<sup>121</sup> Post-colonial societies often face the challenge that nationhood has to be created out of statehood, rather than the other way round; a challenge which in Solomon Islands is complicated by the cultural, historical and linguistic diversity which undermines efforts to construct an imaginary community of common national interests and values. Creating an “imagined community” in the Solomons, with no shared common language other than Pijin, no unifying ideology and no countrywide leadership, is not an easy task. Three times Prime Minister Solomon Mamaloni’s famous portrayal of the Solomons as a “nation conceived but never born” gives evidence of this difficulty.<sup>122</sup> Up to now, in Kabutaulaka’s words, “national consciousness is often only skin deep: peel it off and you find a person with allegiances to a particular wantok or ethnic group; most people carry competing identities between their island and their country.”<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Paul Mae: “Constitutional Reforms in Solomon Islands: An analysis of public participation in the reform process”; The University of the West Indies, Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies, March 24 – 26, 2010, p. 2. Available at <http://sta.uwi.edu/conferences/09/salises/documents/P%20Mae.pdf>; date of access 24/09/2011.

<sup>120</sup> Benedict Anderson: *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*; London and New York: Verso, 1983. p. 6.

<sup>121</sup> Dinnen, “A Comment on State-building in Solomon Islands”, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

<sup>122</sup> Solomon Mamaloni: “The Road to Independence”, in Ron Crocombe and Esau Tuza (eds.): *The First Ten Years of Solomon Islands Independence*; Honiara: Government Printing Press, 1992, p. 14.

<sup>123</sup> Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka: *A Weak State and the Solomon Islands Peace Process*, University of Hawaii at Manoa, East-West Centre Working Papers N° 14, 2002., p. 5.

## 5.2 Migration and land acquisitions on Guadalcanal

The uneven distribution of important resources motivated population movement between islands well before the colonial era, and just as often this movement has provoked resistance. While in pre-colonial times the intrusion of foreigners might have led to tribal warfare, the colonial administration tried to limit migration by decree. Between 1933 and 1937 the Native Passes Regulation (King's Regulation N° 4) restricted long-term absence from the village and allowed only government servants, indentured laborers, and seamen to travel from one district to another without first obtaining a pass.<sup>124</sup> World War II attracted many Malaitans to move to Guadalcanal to work for the US military, as scouts and porters and sometimes even fighting, and many of them stayed for good. After the war, the Native Administration ordinance once more prohibited, until 1964, a person to leave a subdistrict for more than seven days without the headman's permission.<sup>125</sup>

In practice, however, colonial policy increased incentives for migration by concentrating infrastructure investment to the islands where the export investment opportunities were: mainly Guadalcanal, and to a much lesser degree, Western Province.<sup>126</sup> In 1971, the Solomon Islands Plantations Ltd. (SIPL) established large oil palm plantations at Ngalimbiu and Tetera on the northern Guadalcanal plains. Sixty-eight percent of the company was held by the Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC), 30 percent by the national government, and only two percent by indigenous landowners.

The demand for a work force on the plantations attracted many people from other islands. In the 1970s Malaitans made up 30 percent of the national population but found scarce employment opportunities on their home island due to lack of private and public investment. On Guadalcanal they were often seen as disrespectful guests. As early as February 1954 the Special Lands Commissioner in northeast Guadalcanal, Colin Allan, noted in his diary that “the worst fear the

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<sup>124</sup> Murray Chapman: “Population Movement: Free or Constrained?”, in Ron Crocombe and Esau Tuza (eds.): *The First Ten Years of Solomon Islands Independence*; Honiara: Government Printing Press, 1992, p. 88.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> John Braithwaite, Sinclair Dinnen, Matthew Allen, Valerie Braithwaite and Hilary Charlesworth: *Pillars and Shadows: Statebuilding as Peacebuilding in Solomon Islands*; Canberra: Australian National University, 2010, p. 77.

Tasiboko people have is in regard to the immigration of Malaita people.”<sup>127</sup> Inversely, Malaitans claim that having developed the Guadalcanal plains with hard labor gives them the right to receive a share of the wealth they helped to generate:

With Lever’s Pacific Plantations, it was Malaitans who were recruited to clear the forest, without modern tools, for plantations around Guadalcanal, at Rere, Tangarere, Ruafatu where the first ancestors were buried, Lavuro, Tasifa’arongo, Ruaniu, Doma; any plantation you can name was cleared and planted by Malaitans. That is the justifiable reason why Malaitans settled in Guadalcanal, because while working as copra cutters they sought permission from the rightful landholders to live and garden in Guadalcanal and purchased land to live by businesses such as cattle, piggeries and market gardens. This made the Malaitans prosperous and they even built and upgraded large buildings in parts of Guadalcanal.<sup>128</sup>

In 1953, the colonial administration decided to move the capital from Tulagi to Honiara, taking advantage of the infrastructure left behind by the US Army. Town boundaries were surveyed and the land formally alienated. As the colonial administration increased in size, Honiara became the central “pull” factor for other islanders; once more, most of them were from Malaita.<sup>129</sup>

Independence gave a further push to immigration. Section 14 of the 1978 Constitution guarantees the “right to move freely throughout Solomon Islands, [and] . . . reside in any part”. As a direct result of this new constitutional right, movement of people to provincial centers, and foremost to the capital, Honiara, increased dramatically.<sup>130</sup> Between 1970 and 1999, when the tension began to reach its peak, the official population of the capital quadrupled (see Figure 2.1). Furthermore, there were an estimated 8,000 additional Malaitan squatters particularly around “Fishing Village” at Ranadi on the eastern outskirts and in villages in the foothills of Mount

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<sup>127</sup> Colin H. Allan: “Customary Land Tenure in the British Solomon Islands protectorate. Report of the Special Lands Commission”, 1957; quoted in Chapman, “Population Movement”, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

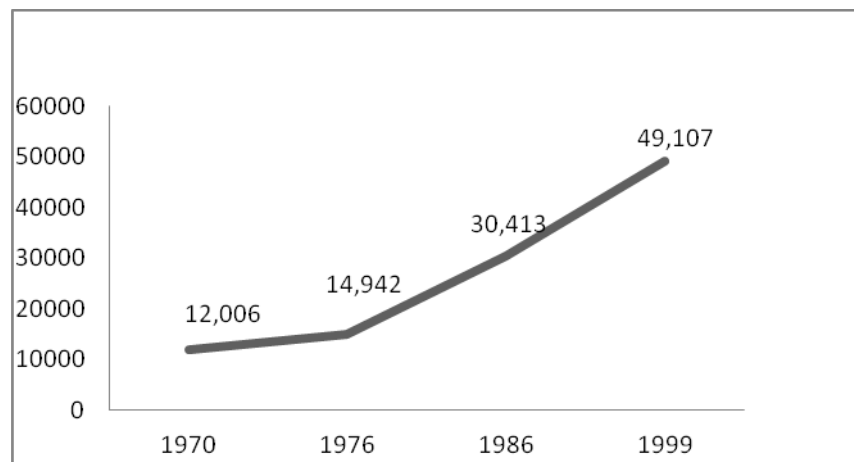
<sup>128</sup> Michael Kwa’ioloa and Ben Burt: “‘The Chiefs’ Country’: a Malaitan View of the Conflict in Solomon Islands”, in *Oceania* N° 77, 2007, p. 114.

<sup>129</sup> Trevor H. B. Sofield: “Solomon Islands: Unity in Diversity – The End of a Dream?”, in Dennis Rumley, Vivian Louis Forbes and Christopher Griffin (eds.): *Australia’s Arc of Instability. The Political and Cultural Dynamics of Regional Security*; Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2006, p. 183.

<sup>130</sup> The Mamaloni-led Constitutional Review Committee set up in February 1987 to reconsider the 1978 Constitution identified uncontrolled migration as one of the main concerns among the population. In its final recommendation, the Committee set down two constitutional possibilities to confront the problem: a federal system of government (“state government”) which maintains the constitutional guarantees to move freely, or a unitary republic where parliament might wish to restrict free movement *a.* to prevent urban migration; *b.* to prevent persons loitering in other places which are subject to the control of other authorities; *c.* to minimise problems associated with unemployment; and *d.* to protect cultures and traditional norms of people. (Constitutional Review Committee Report, Vol. 3, p. 129; quoted in Chapman, “Population Movement”, *op. cit.*, p. 79). None of the alternatives was applied by the government.

Austen.<sup>131</sup> When the tension started, more than half of Honiara's population were Malaitans, many of whom were born on Guadalcanal and lacked strong roots to their home island of Malaita.

**Figure 2.1**  
**Population development in Honiara**



**Source: National Census 1999, Table B1.01**

But Malaitan immigration to Guadalcanal was by no means limited to Honiara. Many migrants purchased land in the rural areas through either customary procedures or legal means, often with the ascendancy of male members of the landholding community, even though land tenure on Guadalcanal is transmitted through matrilineality. In some cases land acquisitions were made through the Lands Department which issued Temporary Occupation Licenses (TOL) without consulting the landholders. By 1998 Malaitans constituted almost 25 percent of the population of Guadalcanal and some 60 percent of the population of Honiara;<sup>132</sup> how the immigrants multiplied is described by Judith Bennett:

Like migrants everywhere, when a man had found a job in Honiara, made a garden and, with a few relations, built himself a house he would send for his wife and children, then a brother might come and eventually a parent and cousins. As the links became a chain, numbers often grew beyond the agreement between the first settler and his vendor or landlord.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>132</sup> Sofield: "Solomon Islands: Unity in Diversity", *op. cit.*, p. 181.

<sup>133</sup> Bennett, *Roots of Conflict in Solomon Islands*, *op. cit.*, p. 8.



When population pressure on resources obliged young members of the communities to look for new garden land, “they often found their land pockmarked by Malaitan settlements”.<sup>134</sup> Conflict announced itself.

## **6. Conclusions: Solomon Islands at the wake of the tension**

By the end of the 1990s, Solomon Islands was still a patchwork of local identities with little progress in nation-building. Nation-building was and continues to be too huge a task for a state whose constitution, which allows free movement of citizens within its borders, is in collision with the country’s immense ethno-linguistic and cultural diversity, while at the same time struggling with unequal distribution of development investments and the massive immigration to Guadalcanal as a result of concentration of public services in Honiara. It was also during those years that corruption, fraud and large-scale mismanagement began to surface. Incorporating the Asian financial crisis of 1997 and the decline of prices for local products on the world market (see chapter 6.1), little imagination is needed to perceive a situation where, in Judith Bennett’s words, “All that was needed was a cause or, more correctly, an excuse to focus on a target near at hand that personified all that seemed to have gone awry in their world and to validate their social worth.”<sup>135</sup>

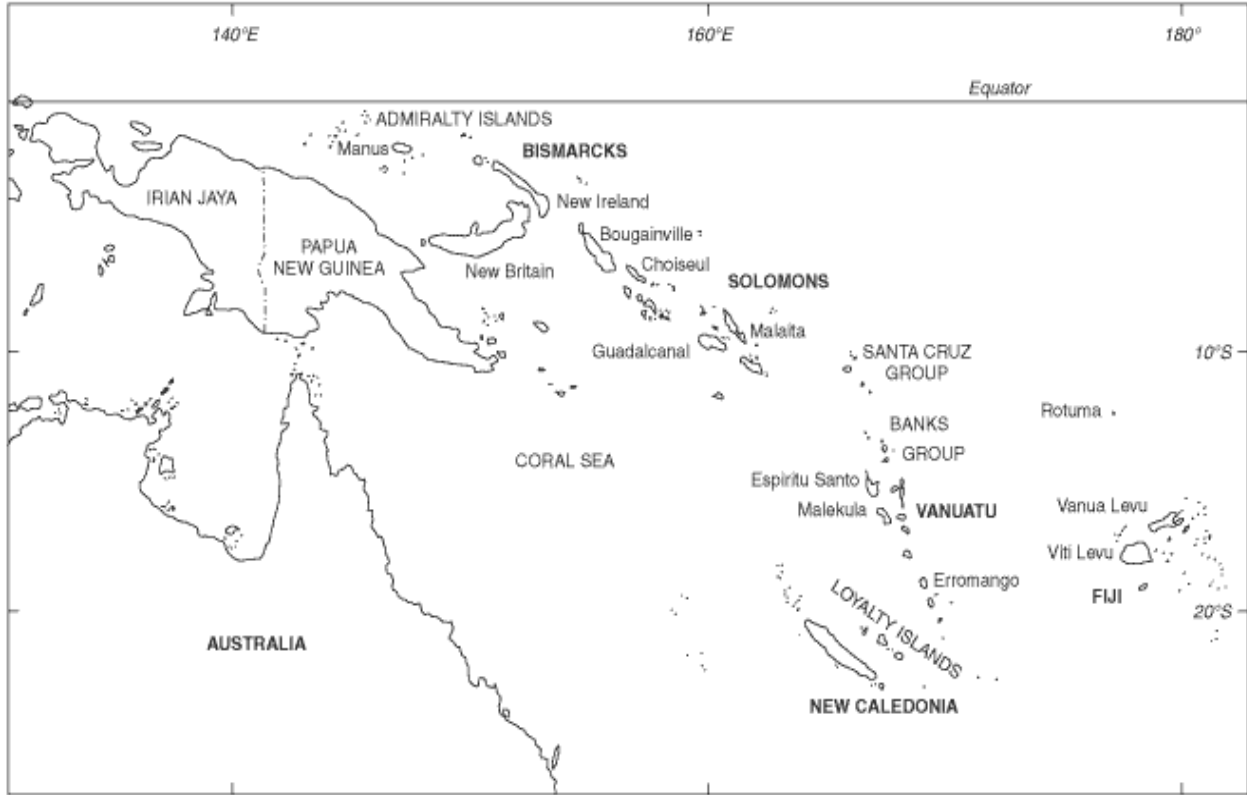
Structural features alone, however, *never* make things happen. It is certainly true that a single spark can start a prairie fire, as Chinese revolutionary leader Mao Zedong famously stated; but someone has to strike the match. In the following chapters, we will try to show the spark that lit the tensions of the Solomon Islands.

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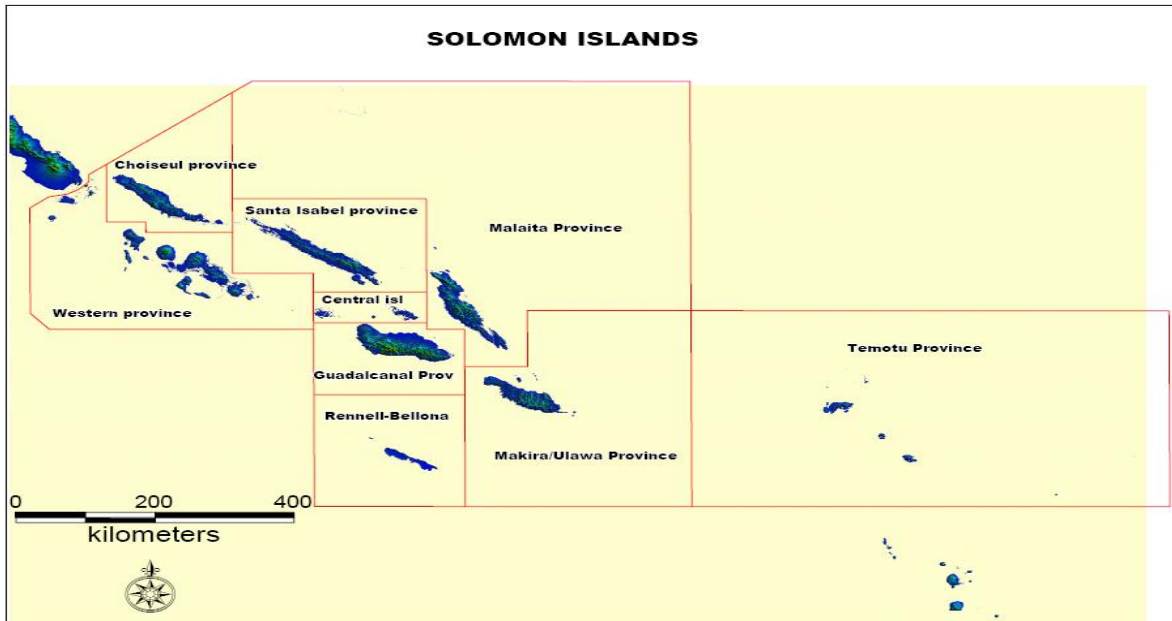
<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Judith Bennett: *Roots of Conflict in Solomon Islands, op. cit.*, p. 14.

**Map 1 - Melanesia**



**Map 2 – Solomon Islands**



## 3.1

### UNHAPPY ISLES: THE CONFLICT IN SOLOMON ISLANDS BETWEEN 1998 AND 2003

The following chapters tell the story of the conflict in Solomon Islands from the victims' perspective. The aim is to give voice to those who have been ill-treated and humiliated, who lost their loved ones and their properties. For this reason their testimony will often be quoted at length.

The chapters are based on case studies conducted by the TRC Research Unit; more than 2,300 statements collected by TRC's statement takers; closed and public hearings with women, young people, ex-militants, politicians and national leaders; and about 200 interviews with key actors and witnesses, including some focus group discussions and the examination of unpublished and published documents.

#### 3.1 TIMELINE

Year(s)	Date	
1567-1568		Mendaña explores Solomon Islands.
mid 1800s		Arrival of Christian missionaries.
1860's-1910		"Blackbirding"
1893		Solomon Islands declared British Protectorate.
1896		Resident Commissioner Charles Woodford arrives.
1899		Germany cedes the northern Solomon Islands to the United Kingdom.
1942		World War II: heavy fighting between American and Japanese troops, especially on Guadalcanal.
1946		Maasina Ruru Movement in Malaita.
1960		Executive Council created as the Protectorate's policymaking body.
1974		A new constitution adopted, establishing a parliamentary democracy and ministerial system of government.
1975		The name Solomon Islands officially replaced that of British Solomon Islands Protectorate.
1976	January 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Solomon Islands attains self-governance.
1978	July 7 <sup>th</sup>	Solomon Islands achieves independence within the British Commonwealth.

1978	September 27 <sup>th</sup>	Guadalcanal leaders raise demands for state government.
1988	March	Demonstration of Guadalcanal people at Government House as a follow up to their submission ten years previously.
1998	March - September	Rumours of formation of a militant group on Guadalcanal.
	October	Violence begins on Guadalcanal – eviction of Malaitan settlers.
	December 10 <sup>th</sup>	Harold Keke raids police armory at Yandina.
	December 30 <sup>th</sup>	Bungana shoot-out; Harold Keke and Joseph Sangu arrested
1999	March	Keke and Sangu released on bail.
	May 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Reconciliation “Kastom Feast” in Honiara, boycotted by militant groups
	May 26 <sup>th</sup>	IFM raid Malaitan settlements in Kakabona, Aruligo, Tenaru and Foxwood.
	June 12 <sup>th</sup>	IFM raids CDC, east Guadalcanal.
	June 13 <sup>th</sup>	MOU signed between Guadalcanal Provincial Government and Solomon Island Government for negotiations to begin with rural Guadalcanal people and Government on the Bona Fide Demands.
	June 15 <sup>th</sup>	Government declares State of Emergency.
	June 20 <sup>th</sup>	Commonwealth Special Envoy Sitiveni Rabuka arrives in Honiara.
	June 28 <sup>th</sup>	Honiara Peace Agreement
	July	Solomon Islands Plantations Ltd. closed down.
	August 12 <sup>th</sup>	Panatina Peace Accord
	October 15 <sup>th</sup>	State of Emergency lifted.
2000	January 17 <sup>th</sup>	Auki Police armory raided; public appearance of Malaita Eagle Force (MEF).
		Andrew Nori declares himself spokesperson of MEF.
	February	Governor General declares IFM and MEF “unlawful societies”.
	May 5 <sup>th</sup>	Buala Peace Communiqué
	May 12 <sup>th</sup>	Auki Peace Communiqué
	June 5 <sup>th</sup>	Rove Armory raid by MEF and PFF officers.
	June 6 <sup>th</sup>	MEF places Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa’alu under house arrest, demands his resignation and declares “all-out war” on IFM.
	June 7 <sup>th</sup>	MEF uses patrol boat to shell the IFM at Alligator Creek.
	June 10 <sup>th</sup>	Raid of police armory on Taro (Choiseul) by William Amalo and a group of South Bougainvilleans and local “Black Sharks”.
	June 11 <sup>th</sup>	Militants from Bougainville arrive in Gizo.

	June 12 <sup>th</sup>	Bobby Nare Sae shot and killed by Bougainville group and Black Sharks
	June 30 <sup>th</sup>	Manasseh Sogavare is elected new prime minister.
	July 10 <sup>th</sup>	MEF kills two IFM militants in National Referral Hospital.
	July 13 <sup>th</sup>	MEF raids clinic in Visale and kills two men; it then burns villages in west Guadalcanal.
	July 18 <sup>th</sup>	Guadalcanal Provincial Government and IFM propose ceasefire.
	August 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Ceasefire Agreement
	September	SIG pays Malaita Provincial Government SBD\$6.8 million compensation but most of money taken by armed MEF members.
	October 15 <sup>th</sup>	Townsville Peace Agreement – Harold Keke refuses to attend and forms Guadalcanal Liberation Front (GLF).
		MEF and IFM dissolved, guns surrendered.
	November	International Peace Monitoring Group arrives in Solomons.
	November 12 <sup>th</sup>	Ian Chapangi (GRA), Brianly Java (Black Sharks), Ivan Reve and Barry Ofuana (Bougainvilleans) shot and killed by Bougainvilleans led by Gregory Luavex at Room D, Gizo Hotel.
2001	February 7 <sup>th</sup>	Marau Peace Agreement
	March	First Joint Operation on the Weather Coast.
	September 22 <sup>nd</sup>	IFM leader Selwyn Saki murdered.
	December 5 <sup>th</sup>	National General Election held and is described as fair and free by international observers.
2002	February	Melanesian Brother Nathaniel Sado killed by the GLF
	February 22 <sup>nd</sup>	Fred Fawcett-Kay and Rex Dahlia special constables shot and killed by Bougainvilleans and Solomon Islanders (locals from Western Province)
	March	International Peace Monitors withdraw from their posts amidst growing lawlessness.
	April	Six Melanesian Brothers murdered by GLF (date of incident was not known until months later).
	June 8 <sup>th</sup>	Ten Kwaio men murdered by GLF.
	August	Group of SI women hold a meeting and make recommendations taken up to the National Peace Conference in August 2000.
2003	February 10 <sup>th</sup>	Sir Frederick Soaki, a member of National Peace Council and former Police Commissioner, murdered in Auki.
	June 15 <sup>th</sup> -16 <sup>th</sup>	Marasa incident; GLF kills Adrian Bilo and John Lovana.
	June 5 <sup>th</sup>	Prime Minister Kemakeza asks for military assistance and regional countries agree to send in troops to restore law and order.
	July 11 <sup>th</sup>	The National Parliament approves peacekeeping plans.
	July 24 <sup>th</sup>	RAMSI arrives in Solomon Islands.

## 3.2

### THE CONFLICT

#### 3.2.1 THE “ETHNIC TENSION”: AN OVERVIEW

##### 1. The Bona Fide demands of Guadalcanal as a precursor of the crisis

In October 1978, only three months after Solomon Island obtained its independence from the British Empire, a group calling themselves the “Guadalcanal Provincial Assembly” sent a letter to Prime Minister Kenilorea and other public authorities. The letter lamented the negative impact of mass migration into Guadalcanal and presented nine demands to the government, one of which was a SBD\$4 million compensation demand for an offensive article in the local newspaper *Solomon Toktok*, dated 27 September 1978. Several demands related to land. One was for the immediate removal of squatters from both all customary and alienated lands on Guadalcanal.

In its “Demand No. 4”, the Guadalcanal leaders presented for the first time the demand for a “state government”:

We now demand the right to form a complete state form of government to be granted to us. This is the wish of our people and you must give it to us. A state form of government is our wish and the wishes of a majority of people from other islands and island groups. May we take this opportunity to make it clear to you, that there is very little you can do to deter us (Solomon Islands) from achieving our aim, which is to have a state form of government.

By stating that “there is very little you can do to deter us”, the demand was presented in an intimidating tone.

In 1988 another petition commonly referred to as the *Bona Fide demands of the indigenous people of Guadalcanal* was submitted by a group of Guadalcanal politicians and public officers to the Solomon Island Government headed by Prime Minister Ezekiel Alebua, a Guadalcanal native. The demands included actions regarding the killing of 15 indigenous people allegedly murdered by migrants from other provinces, mostly Malaitans. The first step should be the

repatriation of all illegal settlers and the adoption of a “state government” as had been recommended by the Constitution Review Committee in 1987.<sup>136</sup>

Other demands included the shift of major development projects away from Guadalcanal; the return of alienated land to the Guadalcanal Provincial Government; the relocation of prisons from Guadalcanal; the reduction of internal migration and the pressures caused by it; the registration of customary land by tribes/clans to avoid unscrupulous individuals selling the land without tribal consent; legislation to give every province exclusive authority over its 12-mile marine zone; and the re-introduction of capital punishment to deter murders being committed on Guadalcanal. Again, in paragraphs 20, 33 and 36, the demand was presented in an intimidating tone:

20. . . referring to Fiji: The mixing of two diverse types of people, whose colour of skin were almost identical, was a time bomb. Solomon Islands is no exception. Now is the time to prevent the Solomon Islands going astray, by giving us a federal state form of Government. . . . Any moves by the government to side track recommendation No. 1 of the report must be prepared to answer for any social upheaval that could or would follow.

33. Sir, who amongst you, will not retaliate or respond in like manner if your integrity is threatened or have your worldly possessions removed from under your very noses?

36. DEMANDS:

(1) Sirs, if our demands are not satisfactorily dealt with immediately, we must inform you, that, other alternative ways and means will be sought and employed. However, we hope that we will not have to resort to those rather disruptive alternatives. The first of these is the boycotting of the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations. Others will follow.

Finally, when Malaitan settlers were being evicted from Guadalcanal in February 1999, the Bona Fide Demands were re-submitted to the SIAC Government of Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa’alu. The demands remained basically unchanged, though adapted to the situation of the moment: state government; review of the Constitution (on the issue of freedoms, rights and protections); land reviews; Solomon Islands Plantation Limited (SIPL) shares and 50 percent resources sharing grant on revenues generated in Guadalcanal; relocation of the national capital; control and management of internal migration; amendment to the electoral act; SBD\$2.5 million compensation for 25 Guadalcanal people allegedly murdered by non-indigenous perpetrators; an independent investigation into the police; \$100,000 compensation for the death of Ishmael Panda

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<sup>136</sup> The Constitutional Review Committee had been established by the government to re-examine constitutional arrangements regarding the provinces and was headed by former Prime Minister Solomon Mamaloni. In its report, the Committee recommended that Solomon Islands adopt federalism to grant greater autonomy and independence to the provinces (Recommendation No. 1).

during the Bungana incident in 1998 (see below); and the appropriate acquisition of coastal reefs in front of Honiara.

The Bona Fide Demands in 1999 were presented by Alebua, now Premier of Guadalcanal Province, who had refused to act on the demands ten years earlier when he was Prime Minister. In a closed hearing before the TRC, he explained why he did not act on the demands before:

The first Bona Fide demands were presented to me as Prime Minister in 1988. I received them in front of the High Court and told them that I would get the Government to address this. I am not a Prime Minister for Guadalcanal; I am a Prime Minister of Solomon Islands. I am not to give you any answers right here, right now. I left that to the Cabinet. That was the initial Bona Fide demand. I became the Premier and I made changes that suit the eye, then I submitted to Government. I did not get back my diary from the Police because all this was recorded and they got the dates.

*Who prepared the first version of the Bona Fide demands?*

I am not too sure but it must have been the late Gordon Billy Gatu. It was read and presented to us, to the Prime Minister and Parliament by Cornelius Voniseu. That was the original Bona Fide demands.

*After that you modified them?*

Yes, I modified them after that.

*When you were Prime Minister and they presented the Bona Fide Demands to you, you told them that you were not the Prime Minister of Guadalcanal but of Solomon Islands. Then in 1998 you presented the Bona Fide Demands to Prime Minister Ulufa'alu. Why would there be any different situation?*

OK, you try to understand the situation in Solomon Islands. We are a nation of different ethnic backgrounds, our cultures and customs are still one, but our attitudes are different. If I addressed the issue when I was Prime Minister, certain sectors would say that I favour [Guadalcanal]; late Ulufa'alu was from Malaita, he would be in a better position to address the issue. That would make a difference, being a Malaita man addressing the problem. That's the politics of Solomon Islands.

#### **Ezekiel Alebua, Closed Hearing before the TRC, 13/01/2011**

In its response to the 1999 Bona Fide Demands, the Government initially promised to consider the claim for state government and to hand over some of the government-owned SIPL shares and a portion of locally-generated government revenue to the Guadalcanal Provincial Council, but kept none of those promises. In recompense, the Ulufa'alu administration handed over \$500,000 as a "goodwill gesture" to the Guadalcanal Provincial Council in mid-May 1999. The Solomon Islands Government also paid SBD\$2.5 million to the Guadalcanal Provincial Government in compensation for the 25 indigenous Guadalcanal supposedly murdered by migrants.



The central demand of Guadalcanal leaders has always been the formation of a “state government”. Generally, the term refers to a federal system that gives more decision-making power to sub-national governments, but there was never presented a clear-cut proposition of *how* it should work in practice and the demand always remained on a general level.<sup>137</sup>

Before the tension, previous governments had tried to take up the demands of Guadalcanal (and other provinces, above all Western) for a federal system. Commissions were formed and presented their reports building upon the 1979 Kausimae Report that stated that sometime after independence decentralization of power would be necessary for national unity. In 1987 the Constitutional Review Committee presented a report of three volumes that recommended a federal system of government for Solomon Islands (the “Mamaloni Report”); in the same year the report of the Provincial Government Review Committee (the “Lulei Report”) was released. Next was the report of the Provincial Government Review Committee on Provincial Government in Solomon Islands (the “Tozaka Report”) in 1999. In 2001, the Sogavare government appointed a six-man State Government Task Force.

None of these reports has made their way to a political agenda that would satisfy the demands of the Guadalcanal leaders for state government; this is the case until now. The incapacity to find a solution for the Bona Fide Demands is at the bottom of the conflict, commonly referred to as the “ethnic tension” that erupted in Guadalcanal in 1998, and still bears potential for further conflict. This potential for future conflict was highlighted time and again by the Guadalcanal ex-combatants during the public hearing on 11 and 12 May 2011.

Former Guadalcanal militants also claimed that they were forced to resort to violence because petitions and peaceful manifestations did not lead to any result. However, the wording of some parts of the Bona Fide Demands indicates that from the very beginnings at least some leaders considered violence as an option.

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<sup>137</sup> In February 2003 Sethuel Kelly wrote a report for the Solomon Island Government “to address the Guadalcanal Indigenous People original petition, and the additional Bona Fide Demand.” In this report, which “is confidential and is the property of the Government of the Solomon Islands”, Kelly states:

... the Guadalcanal people in having a form of State Government they will have their own criminal procedure code, penal code legislating against squatters and stop free movement of criminals to Guadalcanal to kill the people which the government failed to address.

## 2. The Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army and the beginnings of the tension

Violence started towards the end 1998 with the eviction of settlers from Western Guadalcanal. Since then, a number of studies have identified a set of underlying “root causes” such as the colonial heritage, lack of national unity, disagreement over land issues, uneven development, mismanagement of successive governments, economic crisis, and/or the weakening of traditional authority structures and law enforcement mechanisms,<sup>138</sup> which finally culminated in an “ethnic discontent”<sup>139</sup> among many Guadalcanal people.

Before the outbreak of violence, village meetings were held all over Guadalcanal where the eviction of settlers was openly discussed. Rumors that something “big” would happen spread around the island long before the first immigrants were forced to leave. The conflict in Solomon Islands was not an abrupt, unforeseeable outburst of violence but the culmination of a process of careful preparation. Proper police intelligence and adequate political precautions could have prevented much of it.

The first fatal victim of the emerging conflict was a security guard at the Tambea Beach Resort, who was murdered allegedly because he had given information to the police about GRA militants. The very first person killed by Guadalcanal militants was a fellow Guadalcanal person.

On 10 December 1998, a group of militants led by Harold Keke raided the police armory in Yandina on the Russell Islands and took rifles and ammunition.<sup>140</sup> On 30 December, a mission to raid the armory of the police station in Tulagi in Central Province was frustrated by the police on Bungana Island. During the shoot-out with police officers, Keke was wounded and another

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<sup>138</sup> See for example Ruth Liloqula and Alice Aruhe’eta Pollard: *Understanding Conflict in Solomon Islands: A Practical Means to Peacemaking* Canberra: The Australian National University. State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Working Paper 00/7, 2000. Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka: *Beyond Ethnicity: The Political Economy of the Guadalcanal Crisis in Solomon Islands*. Canberra: The Australian National University. State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Working Paper 01/1, 2001. Judith A. Bennett: *Roots of Conflict in Solomon Islands. Though much is taken, much abides: Legacies of Tradition and Colonialism*. The Australian University Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies. State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Discussion Paper 2002/5. 2002.UNDP: *Peace and Conflict Development Analysis. Emerging Priorities in Preventing Future Violent Conflict*. Honiara, 2004.

<sup>139</sup> Clive Moore: *Happy Isles in Crisis. The historical causes for a failing state in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*. Canberra: Asia Pacific Press, 2004, chapter 4.

<sup>140</sup> See the testimony of Peter Maru during the Public Hearing in Makira for a detailed account of the Yandina armory raid (Annex1).

militant, Ishmael Panda, was killed by a police officer, becoming the IFM's "first martyr".<sup>141</sup> Keke, his brother Joseph Sangu, Henry Rokomane and Victor Tadakusu were arrested. Dickson Maeni, the police constable who shot Ishmael Panda, who had been suspended from duty some weeks earlier for misconduct, was sentenced to one year in prison for manslaughter.<sup>142</sup>

In March 1999 Keke and Sangu were released on bail paid by Ezekiel Alebua and Catholic priest Fr. Norman Arkwright.

*Did you pay for Harold's bail after he was arrested for the Yandina armory raid?*

I paid for his bail.

*Why did you pay for his bail?*

We paid for this because it was a process of law. He is my nephew, distant nephew, because they requested, we paid for it.

#### **Ezekiel Alebua, Closed Hearing**

Among the four IFM militants apprehended during the Bungana incident, only Victor Tadakusu was re-arrested and convicted for possession of firearms and ammunition.<sup>143</sup> Keke and Sangu, rather than showing up for trial, resumed their militant actions straight away and intensified the harassment of Malaitan settlers.

The release on bail of Keke and Sangu led immediately to a strong increase of IFM activity. "Malaitan" was extended to include "half" and "quarter" Malaitans. The following transcriptions of interviews made by a TRC researcher in Langa Langa, Malaita, provide a vivid testimony, not only of the militant actions itself, but also of the *process* that finally culminated in the eviction of Malaitan settlers from Western Guadalcanal.

Before we were chased out, they observed us for three months. They were watching us and trying to find out if we possess any guns, dynamites or bullets. As time passed on, some new stories were released. They said, a very big ship will come to collect all the Malaitans; Alex Bartlett and Dausabea will send this big ship to collect all the Malaitans. These stories had been around for a long time.

During those times we started to witness the males wearing *kabilato* and the females wearing grass-skirts. The GRAs came to us and demanded that we wear the same clothes as everybody else, because if we don't they would term us as spears. We remained where we were and how we have been, but their big bosses, Joe Sangu and Harold Keke, were there. Sometimes they would come at night and we would not even know they were there. In the morning we would wake up

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<sup>141</sup> ISATABU TAVULI. *The Isatabu Freedom Movement Newsletter*, Vol. 1, N°2, 18 February 2000.

<sup>142</sup> Regina v. Maeni [1999] SBHC 115; HC-CRC 117 of 1999 (2 December 1999).

<sup>143</sup> Regina v. Tadakusu [1999] SBHC 108; HC-CRC 239 of 1999 (8 November 1999).

to realize that Sangu and Keke had come last night and had gone back in the morning. They had been coming to monitor their program.

Other stories circulated about the youth's military trainings. The GRAs said that the young people are being trained as militants and also as traditional believers, in how to use the magic called *vele*. They did their training in the hills of Lambi. One group would be at the training ground and another group would be at home. The trainings included how to use the power of *vele* when a war broke out. While all of this was happening we remained at Tangarare. Some of our women were trying to persuade us to leave because of fear that if a war breaks out we would be the ones who would die first.

At the same time, the GRAs had been having meeting at Kolianibo, where the school was. It was at these meetings that Harold Keke with his militants who instigated this ethnic tension discussed important issues. In the beginning our chief had been attending those meetings, but when it came to discuss the actual implementation of the plans they asked him not to bother and attend no more meetings. By then, youths and even some mature men and women were already patrolling the villages and were already wearing their custom dress.

#### **Extract from interview with Mr. Samane**

Because of the tension we were forced out of Guadalcanal. We went to settle there because my husband's grandmother was an original landowner from Tangarare, and because we had performed the necessary requirements to satisfy the Guadalcanal custom and tradition. For one to return to Guadalcanal and share the land-rights through their tribal system, custom ceremonies and custom rituals must be performed so that you are recognized and to have equal right as those who live there. My husband's grandmother was married to man from Langa Langa that was why we were living in Langa Langa during the early days.

Before the ethnic tension, our kids were in school. Sometimes when they were in school some of their class-mates from Guadalcanal would tell them that something big is bound to happen. These kids said that the people of Guadalcanal are planning to fight you and chase you away from here, whether you are from Langa Langa, half Langa Langa, or quarter Langa Langa, they will chase all the people from Malaita away from here. Talks of chasing us away were becoming clear. My husband was a member of the Tangarare Area Council, and during those times he was invited to two high level discussions conducted by the chiefs, provincial delegates, elders. The discussions focused mainly on chasing people from Malaita who have no legal right to settle on Guadalcanal.

The chiefs told my husband: You and your family should not be worried because you are truly one of us. You are a true blood relative, your return to us is very clear and no one should deny this, because you have satisfied all the necessary requirements according to the customs and culture of land. People knew this. You did not come back like a person coming to purchase land or a person roaming around to find a place to settle, but you came back to your real place of origin and that you have satisfied all the rituals and the proven yourself that you are truly one of us. So, have no fear, stay with us.

During our stay by mid-1998 and towards 1999, we started to observe people wearing custom dress walking in the village. They decided to call a meeting for everyone. In this meeting it was announced that everyone must make their own custom dress and contribute shell money plus 20 cents each to the people of Moro because they are the ones who will look after us all and they are the ones leading this war. Anyone who disobeys this command will not remain here but be moved from our land. If you disobey you will be met by all the dangerous animals in the bush. We will make them come alive and they will bite you. So everyone must abide with this order. This was the message translated to us.

We remained in Tangarare until Harold Keke was put in custody after the Bungana incident and was later bailed out. The chiefs, elders, village organizers and those who were with Harold at Bungana returned home and organized a final meeting which they did not invite my husband to attend. This was where we were cut off from the communication. We did not know what they discussed and what their intention was. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of March 1999, it was Easter, between eight and nine; they came and raided our home. This raid was a no mercy type. Anything in the way was either crashed to pieces or stolen. We escaped into the bush and hid. No one could stand against those who were armed. They became so barbaric that talking sense into them was like throwing shit into their mouth.

They came and gun-pointed us in the house and stole all the beer that we had license to sell and all the cash taking for that Easter Weekend. They opened fire in our house and smashed everything, then moved on to our next door neighbours and did the same. All my children jumped out of the windows and ran into the bush. As it was getting dark, we did not know where our children were. We did not have time to look for them. We just prayed that by day break we would be able to know where our children are. It was between nine and ten in the evening and it was raining. It was dark, wet, and cold. There were no covers or even a piece of *lava lava* to use as a cover. And they kept shouting: we do not want any Malaitan here, whether you are half, quarter or full Malaita. Everyone must fuck-off from here.

They were not members of our community. The two boys who came in to attack us in the early part of the evening were boys from Tangarare who lived four kilometers away from where we live. We recognized them because they used to come and buy beer from us. These boys came with a group of boys who stood at a distance and waited, but we recognized these two boys. They were brothers. Before the ethnic tension, we had a land dispute with the family of those two boys, and the case is still pending.

When they went away with what they wanted I went to look for my children. At about four in the morning I managed to find them with an old man who is my uncle. We stayed there until morning. The old man was on guard the whole night.

When the GRAs came to raid our house, a miracle happened to us, they did not find our two-way radio. When they were gone I took the radio and contacted my brother at Ruaniu to contact Honiara for the patrol boat to come and collect us. That was the only blessing we had. We could have been dead if the patrol boat did not come. At that time the GRA boats were patrolling our passage, making things even harder for us to escape. The bush was hilly and the sea was guarded by outboard motors. Even if you came as far as Lambi you could travel by road because the roads too were blocked.

Monday morning we got back to our house and started moving our belongings to the beach. We left them there for rain and sun. The tide was high but we did not care. We were only praying for a rescue. We were able to get some of our clothes, but not all. It was Tuesday morning that the patrol boat came. When we were rushing to the boat, we were surprised to see students appearing from different parts of the bush and running to the patrol boat. Some of them were literally covered with blood, while others sustained injuries to their faces, legs and bodies. Some of the students had their faces smashed. The GRAs did inhumane things against these students. They hit them with the butts of the guns. The students hid the whole night in a river called Kosisi until the next day. One of the students was able to recognize one of his wantoks among those from Guadalcanal and even called him by name. So, in Tangarare, the GRAs are mixed with some Malaitans and some Renbels.

What triggered the fight was what happened at Bungana. If Harold would have died it could have been solved. Things would not have got out of hand.

**Extract of interview with Mr. Donato and his wife Mina**

Many statements collected by the TRC indicate a good *personal* relationship between Guadalcanal people and Malaitan settlers on the village level. Many Malaitans were warned by friends from Guadalcanal or even the landowners they had bought the land from; they informed them about the imminent uprising and advised them to leave and evade, if not the displacement, at least the physical ill-treatment or even death.

In 1998 the landowner whom we bought the land from warned that we had to move out because there was going to be an ethnic crisis and the boys from the Weather Coast would come and they would chase us out.

**Statement N° 0440**

In 1998 I was employed with an electrical contractor known as the Kindly Electrics; we did a lot of electrical contracts around Honiara town. For three months I lived at Mbarana; the reason for going up to Mbarana was to mill timber to build my house there. The people there gave a piece of land to my mother-in-law, so we decided to build a house there and the people gave us trees to mill timber. Towards the end of October going towards November, our friends at Mbarana came and warned us that something big will happen since the Guadalcanal people are planning to chase Malaitans who lived on the outskirts of Honiara.

**Statement N° 5226**

Before the tension we lived at the Kakabona area. I bought the land we settled on from the Guale land owners Simone Mavi and Damaso Roko at the price of \$12,000. At that time I had a very good friend from the Lambi area, his name was John. He came and informed us of the planned upheaval plotted by the Guadalcanal people. He told us to pack our things in preparation to leave since all the rumors we had been hearing about the Guale militants were true. When he first came he told me that it was the Weather Coast people who are taking up the leading role in the uprising. A few weeks later my friend came to our house one night towards midnight and warned us to leave since the GRA militants are now closing in on Lambi. He warned us to leave for our own safety. I called my wife in Malaita and she came on the following day, we quickly packed all our belongings and we fled over to our village of Malaita called Gwaidalo.

**Statement N° 2725**

Statements of this kind are quite numerous. They reveal the emotional pressure that the conflict had generated in many people from Guadalcanal who, in principle, agreed with the objectives of the militants but at the same time maintained good personal relationships with some of the Malaitans. The problem of coming to terms with the contradiction between the Malaitan as the down-to-earth individual who lived next door, and the Malaitan as an aggressive and land-

grabbing *stereotype* was perceivable in quite a number of testimonies given by Guadalcanal witnesses to the TRC. In ethnic conflicts, it is always the stereotype that finally succeeds; but never entirely.

The Guadalcanal militants were aware of this situation. Mistrust of their own people and accusing them of being “spears” that protect or even support Malaitans was a common issue during the whole tension and generated many intra-ethnic human rights violations. As we shall see, this problem got worse when the Malaitans retaliated and formed the Malaita Eagle Force; but Guadalcanal people had already become victims of the GRA already during these first months of the conflict.

[The GRA] alleged that my father was leaking out information to the Malaitans when going over to Honiara, since he has a lot of Malaitan friends. One day in 1999, it was going towards late evening, my father had already closed the main door to our house and some of the family members had already retired to bed, all of a sudden the militants arrived and shouted out for my father in an angry manner. My father was the chief in our community and people respected him very well. When he was ordered to come out he felt insulted, but he humbled himself and he came out to see who was calling for him. As he came out of the house he saw armed men standing outside. They started accusing him of going to town and informing the Malaitans of their plans here on the Weather Coast. My father was shocked and did not know what to do; it took him a few minutes before he responded to them. He denied all the allegations leveled against him, but the militants insisted and claimed he was lying and they accused him of having many Malaitan friends. They then pointed their guns right to his head, the weapon was a pistol; the militants were standing right in front of him and pointed it right to his head. Then he lifted the pistol in the air and fired one shot in front of our house, my father was left in an awkward position because of fear and he was not given time to explain himself about the allegations. The militants behaved in an uncompromising manner and demanded that he must give them compensation. My father later returned back into the house and called for all family members to come and he talked to us. He explained the situation and he denied having anything to do with MEF or hiding Malaitan friends. He was so worried and he asked us how these unfounded claims came about. Eventually the trauma affected him resulted in a permanent disability, up until now he is mentally unstable.

**Statement No 0161**

On the other side, Malaitans could save themselves from displacement by joining the GRA, which a few of them did, or by paying compensation. This opportunity was given primarily, but not exclusively, to Malaitans who were married to a Guadalcanal spouse.

My family and I bought a piece of land from the Guadalcanal landowners; we acquired the land through their custom. I named my eldest son after the landowner; he was also the head chief in that area. We settled there for more than seven years before fighting broke out and we were forced out from Guadalcanal. We were left with not much option but to leave because of fear and for our own safety. The chief did not want us to leave because of our cordial relationship, he insisted that we remain and join in with the GRA militants. He explained that we only had to pay the GRA militants compensation for our heads and remain as Guadalcanal people; the amount for

us to pay and remain back on Guadalcanal was \$400 plus one shell money. However, we declined since we started to see Malaitans fleeing over to Honiara in truckloads.

**Statement N° 1512**

The militants stopped my husband at the check point. In the morning they sent us the news and my brother and I went and picked him up and we came back. One night the Guadalcanal militants came and they asked him for compensation and he gave them red money, a pig and money. My father was the one who gave them the money.

*What year did this happen?*

It happened in year 1999.

*Why did they do that to your husband?*

They said he was a man from Malaita and he had to pay for his head and my father was the one who paid for my husband's head.

**Statement N° 0491**

I saw these people from Malaita evacuating their houses and it frightened me because these were my people from the same province and I wondered if I should go as well or not. My family stayed back when a message was sent around saying that Guadalcanal men who were married to Malaitans must pay for their wives' heads; if not they must leave immediately with their family. I was so worried then because we had not much money and my husband is a disabled man and we did not know where to get the money from to give when the militants came around. I suggested to my husband that he had to let me go back to Malaita because we had no money; because I was pregnant. I would go and give birth in Malaita and our older child would stay back with him in Guadalcanal. He did not allow that, he told me to stay with him and that I would give birth there. If anything was to happen it was to happen to all of us as a family.

We stayed back and every day I wondered when the militants would come and demand the compensation for my head because I was from Malaita.

**Statement N° 1408**

By mid-1999, after Keke was bailed out from prison, things got worse and hostilities against Malaitans, which until then had focussed almost exclusively on settlers, with claims for *land* being an important trigger, were extended to plantation workers in the northeast plains of Guadalcanal. The large Solomon Islands Plantations Limited (SIPL), a palm oil plantation and processing operation, employed almost 1,800 people, most of them from the province of Malaita.<sup>144</sup> On 12 June 1999 the plantation was raided by the GRA/IFM militants and two persons were killed, one of them in front of his children. Most of the infrastructure and the oil mill itself were destroyed during and after the raid. The company transported its workers to

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<sup>144</sup> Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade: *Solomon Islands: Rebuilding an Island Economy*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2004, p. 111.



Honiara, and in July the “second largest export income for SI before the tension”<sup>145</sup> had to finish its operations.

I was residing in the CDC 5 area near Mberande. The GRA attacked and raided our area one Saturday evening. We were sitting in our houses since it was raining, actually only showery, when a motor cycle arrived and we could see the GRA militants coming behind. It happened all of a sudden, it was unpredictable and they arrived unnoticed. They attacked our settlement. I could see families struggling to get their children and a few belongings. I was a single person at that time; I grabbed some of my belongings and escaped. We fled our settlement and the militants ransacked it, damaged and looted all our properties. We fled down to Mbalasuna and told the other people there what had happened. Some of us returned back to our settlement, we stood at a distance and watched as they continued to damage our properties and remove all the goods from the society store.

The people from Mbalasuna tried to contact the PFF but did not succeed; they were attending another shooting incident at Kakabona. Later the PFF unit arrived and the GRA militants fled into the bush. We came back to our settlement and saw a lot of people fleeing the area, some were severely injured; some sustained injuries on the head, and others had knife wounds on their backs. They warned us not to go back to where we settled since there were so many of them. We followed the PFF officers, and collected some of our belongings. There I saw a man from Baegu who was shot and had a knife stab wound on his body. I helped carry his body to a helicopter but unfortunately he died at the spot. Another man was lying down in the flower hedges; the militants had removed the skin of his face. His two children were given a piece of biscuit each and stood over their father’s body. He was rushed to the hospital but unfortunately he died later. Two men died during the attack, one in his settlement, the other after arriving at the hospital.

That same night SIPL Company provided transport to get everyone down to safety. When we were transported over to town as we came past an area called Binu. The militants shot one of the passengers while the truck was travelling towards town. He did not actually realize it until later he felt blood coming out. We rushed him to the Central Hospital but he died three days later.

We were accommodated at SICHE Panatina Pavilion. We spent about three to four months there. Our company helped to provide food for us, and later they gave us our redundancy package and we returned back to Malaita.

#### **Statement No 2204**

It was at around five in the afternoon when the GRA militants attacked us. I thought it was just our boys from the neighbourhood shouting and making loud noises; however I was shocked when a bullet came through my window and out on the other side of my house. A Guale militant had taken a shot at me, luckily the bullet missed me by an inch; if not I would have been dead already. We ran away between the oil palms until we reached CDC 4, where we met up with the Police Field Force that was on their way to Mberande. We followed them to Mberande and saw the bodies of dead Malaitans who were shot by the Guadalcanal militants. The deceased person’s name was Alebaru; another boy from east Kwaio was also shot at the Binu Bridge while travelling in a truck, luckily he survived until we reached the hospital, only Alebaru was killed.

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<sup>145</sup> *Solomon Islands Smallholder Agriculture Study*, Volume 4, 2004, p. 42.

Another man from Baegu was hacked with machetes with the skin on his forehead removed and was then shot, his two children standing around him. We came down to Tenaru School and my father came and picked us up there brought us to town. Three days later Red Cross arranged the MV *Ramos 3* to transport us over to Auki.

**Statement N° 2205**

By then, the conflict had already achieved its own unprecedented course and victims were no longer only from Malaita. Settlers and plantation workers from other provinces faced similar problems and decided to leave Guadalcanal; the following statement was given by a man from Choiseul who had lived in Tandai ward for many years:

I am actually from Choiseul and got married to a Guale woman from the Lelei area. One morning the Isatabu Freedom Fighters told us to move out from the area. We took heed of the warning since we anticipated that the fighting would escalate into a worse stage. I took my family and we went over to my home on Choiseul. We lost everything we left behind, our house, chicken, pigs and most of our valuable assets. We stayed in Choiseul until my wife told me to return and check our properties; to my dismay I discovered that all the things we left behind had been looted and ransacked. We stayed at our house and one day a group of armed men came and threatened us with guns, I then took my sons and came over to Honiara wharf and boarded a ship and fled back to Choiseul. After peace was signed we returned, but we found it very difficult to earn money. We lost all our valuable properties during the tension.

**Statement N° 1566**

The next statement shows how a man from Temotu and his Guadalcanal wife were first harassed by GRA militants and later forced to leave Guadalcanal after the attack on SIPL:

My family and I settled on Guadalcanal, in fact I was married to a Guadalcanal woman from Tau village on the northeast side in the Tasimboko area. At that time my wife and I had four children; we had a house there and I was employed in Honiara. At first we heard rumors that there will be an ethnic unrest and that several Guadalcanal people had formed a group in the villages around. First we took barely notice and did not expect anything to happen. Later, towards the year of 1999, the activities started. The groups, especially youths, started to behave unusually and many villages around were alarmed and advised everyone to remain vigilant since we did not know what will happen next.

Then I had a problem with some people in our area. In one particular incident they came and threatened my family and me since we had a small store and those men normally came and demanded goods from our shop without paying for them; if we failed to give them whatever they wanted they would threaten us. It happened frequently and we were unable to stand up against them; one of my shopkeepers was threatened with a gun just in front of our shop. In the end we decided to close our shop. That is one of the incidents; I cannot remember the date but I think it was towards the end of 1999.

This incident occurred prior the GRA raid on the SIPL area. Later the situation got worse and we were unable to move around freely. We had about one hectare of cocoa which we had planted ourselves; it had started to bear fruit during that time but we were unable to maintain our

plantation because the situation was very tense at that time. When the GRA attacked the CDC 3 area, we fled into the bush and stayed there for almost two weeks; most of our properties remained back in our house. I lost most of my working tools and a chainsaw including my milling frame. It was after this occurrence that my wife and I decided to leave and we came over to my home in Temotu.

Arriving in Temotu we had to start all over again since we did not have a house here and had to find shelter from relatives. It took us several months to start ourselves up, we did not have any food garden or and money since I had lost my job on Guadalcanal.

### **Statement N° 5011**

Both statements quoted above include women from Guadalcanal and explain in part why a relatively high percentage of persons who were affected by the harassments of the GRA during this first stage of the conflict were Guadalcanal people themselves (see chapter 4.2 for more detail).

1999 was the year with the highest number of human rights violations reported to the TRC. Most of them were cases of forced displacement related to property violation, often also of ill-treatment and sexual violence, and sometimes even to death. The overwhelming majority of human rights violations in 1998 and 1999 were committed by militants from Guadalcanal (for more details, see chapter 4.2).

### **3. Retaliation: The appearance of the Malaita Eagle Force**

By the end of 1999, Malaitans in Honiara had organized vigilante groups to avoid Guadalcanal militants' taking over the capital. They received support from business houses, including members of the Chinese community and Malaitan merchants at the Central Market. Non-Malaitans whose families had been harassed by the GRA joined the vigilantes as well.

There were some isolated acts of revenge outside Honiara but organized retaliation depended on access to weapons. This is why on 17 January 2000 a group of Malaitans, with the support of sympathetic police officers, raided the armory at the police station in Auki.

A few days after the break-in, the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF) was launched and later joined by hundreds of Malaitans who had been victims of the GRA. Andrew Nori, one of Solomon Islands' most outstanding lawyers, presented himself to the public as spokesman and legal advisor of the MEF, whose main objective was to counteract harassments of Malaitans by

Guadalcanal militants; and to pressure the government to pay compensation demands for lost properties and lives, as well as for profanities against Malaitans by GRA leaders.

The MEF organized various camps just outside the city boundaries of Honiara. The camps were organized according to the different language groups of Malaita and set up in town districts where the majority of their language group lived. Each camp received weapons from the Auki break-in to protect Honiara from a takeover by the IFM who had now reached the outskirts of the capital. The Malaita Eagle Force is presented with more detail in Chapter 3.3.2.

#### **4. The response of the state**

It soon became obvious that the state was unable to handle the situation and has since been labelled as weak – even a failure. Without entering into a discussion about the usefulness of certain concepts,<sup>146</sup> the tension surfaced these weaknesses harshly.

To begin with, Parliament was deeply divided in a fierce battle over state power: one side led by Prime Minister Ulufa'alu, the other by his predecessor, Solomon Mamaloni. In November 1997, April 1998 and September 1998 the Opposition presented three motions of no confidence against the Prime Minister and motivated backbenchers to engage in the usual “grasshopping”, creating a risky stalemate. After the dismissal of Manasseh Sogavare as Finance Minister in July 1998, the Ulufa'alu-led government saw the defection of six of its members to the Opposition. The vote for the last motion of no confidence on 18 September 1998 resulted in a tie, which, under parliamentary standing orders, meant that the motion was defeated.

Ulufa'alu and his followers were convinced that the conflict on Guadalcanal was masterminded by forces in Parliament who, having lost their motion, were left with no legal grounds to oust him from power. In February 2000, after the Malaita Eagle Force appeared on the scene and questioned his government, he wrote: “. . . with the failure of the democratic processes to

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<sup>146</sup> On misleading and sometime counterproductive images of Pacific island states in the Western world, see M. Anne Brown: “Custom and Identity: Reflections on and Representations of Violence in Melanesia”, in Nikki Slocum-Bradley (ed.): *Promoting Conflict or Peace through Identity*; Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008. Clive Moore: “Pacific view: the meaning of governance and politics in the Solomon Islands”, in *Australian Journal of International Affairs* Vol. 62, N° 3. Sinclair Dinnen: “Dilemmas of intervention and the building of state and nation”, in Sinclair Dinnen and Stewart Firth (eds.): *Politics and State Building in Solomon Island*. Canberra: Asia Pacific Press, ANU, 2008.

overthrow the government [referring to the motions of no confidence], the platform was now being braced for the extraordinary events of Guadalcanal.”<sup>147</sup>

The Government tried several options to bring violence to a halt, none of which was successful. A meeting with about 50 traditional leaders from Guadalcanal was held in April 1999 at the Rove Police Club with the intention to use the chiefs to stop the conflict. At the time of the meeting it was reported that militant activities had been halted which raised some optimism. Soon afterwards, however, on 13 May 1999, the IFM launched an attack on east Guadalcanal forcing Ruavatu Secondary School to suspend classes and burning houses belonging to Malaitan families at Tasimboko to ashes.

Underestimation of the issues underlying the crisis resulted in the Government approaching conflict resolution through traditional practices.<sup>148</sup> On 23 May 1999, it sponsored a reconciliation ceremony in Honiara. The “kastom feast” attracted more than one thousand people, but none of the militant groups attended. Just a few hours after the ceremony IFM militants launched another attack at Tasimboko area and burned sixteen houses that had already been abandoned by their owners.

On 10 June the Solomon Islands Government signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Guadalcanal Province. Three days later it paid SBD\$2.5 million to the Provincial Government for the 25 murders charge that was part of the 1999 Bona Fide Demands (see chapter 3.2.1 for more detail). Ezekiel Alebua received the funds when he was Premier and was supposed to distribute it to the families of the victims. There are still outstanding claims of persons who allege to be dependents of the 25 murdered Guadalcanal persons.<sup>149</sup> On 4 July 2007

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<sup>147</sup> *Beneath Guadalcanal: The Underlying Causes of the Ethnic Tension*, Serialized by the Office of the Prime Minister, SIAC Government (1997-2000), p. 5; published as “Beneath Guadalcanal – Inside SIAC” in *Solomon Star* 23/02/2000.

<sup>148</sup> Matthew Wale: “The Solomon Islands Peace Process – Made in Townsville, made for unsustainability”; Paper presented at the *Solomon Islands Workshop: Building Peace and Stability*, 24-26 October 2000, Australian National University, Canberra.

<sup>149</sup> The following is an excerpt of a letter to the Advisor/Secretary of the Constitutional Law Reform, with the date of 8<sup>th</sup> August 2011:

... the fact of the matter is that the entire \$2.5 million had totally used up [sic] for other purposes by the Guadalcanal Province when Mr. Ezekiel Alebua was then the Premier.

Since June 1999, we as legal dependents of the 25 murdered persons had been trying in vain to have the remaining balance of the outstanding claims paid to us by the Guadalcanal Province and SIG but without success.

Ezekiel Alebua was convicted and sentenced to 18 months imprisonment for embezzlement of the death compensation money, and another 24 months for misusing funds of the Guadalcanal Province. The sentence stated that: “The accused’s high position in society meant that he was to be held to a high standard of behaviour, and made the breach of the trust placed in him all the more grave”. In a closed hearing before the TRC, Alebua explained the use of the compensation money as follows:

In the Bona Fide Demands, I decided out of the blue for \$100,000 per head. I personally decided on that for the 25 dead people that it came to \$2.5 million. The agreement that we signed with the Government was not solely for payment of compensation but for reconciliation. We paid all the families \$50,000 each. Remember the payment is not solely for \$100,000 per head, but also the cost to reconcile with the people from Malaita who were involved in the murder of those people.

*Do you have any documents relating to these compensation claims?*

Yes, all the documents were transferred to the Premier who took over from me. We have records of them, \$50,000. The problem is that the families of the dead people kept on coming back because they wanted the other \$50,000. This reconciliation was meant for the families of the dead people and the families of the offenders, the money was meant for administration.

#### **Ezekiel Alebua, Closed Hearing**

Whatever might have been the final destiny of the \$2.5 million, the government of Prime Minister Ulufa’alu had soon to acknowledge that the payment did not decrease militant activities. Beginning with 15 June 1999, it declared a four-month State of Emergency on the island of Guadalcanal. In addition, the SIG requested the Commonwealth for assistance. In June 1999 Special Envoy Major-General Sitiveni Rabuka, who had been the leader of the 1987 Fijian coup, arrived in Honiara with the assignment to broker peace. He was joined by Ade Adefuye, a former High Commissioner to London for Nigeria. Though his arrival was not welcomed by all, Rabuka managed to negotiate the Honiara Peace Accord which was signed on 28 June 1999.

In clause 6 (1), the Honiara Peace Accord declared that the militant groups of Guadalcanal should be dissolved, and in clause 7 it established that the Government should pay compensation to the displaced families:

(6) Following the acceptance for the need for all sides to compromise and sacrifice in the search for peace in the country, it is hereby resolved that:

(i) All organizations formed for the purpose of pushing the demands of the people of Guadalcanal through the use of force be dissolved with immediate effect. All members of the group should return home and surrender their weapons at agreed points established by the peace envoy. In the

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The letter is signed by the claimants Sipriano Wiri, Kasiano Veomate and Selestino Kuji.

case of those who have committed particular offences, the process of law will be allowed to take its course as there is no constitutional provision for an amnesty.

(ii) Victims of the unrest of the recent past who have been forced to relocate in their province should be encouraged and assisted by Government. A mechanism should be established to pay adequate compensation to those who had suffered loss of properties.

However, only one week after it was signed, the local newspaper *Solomon Star* announced the failure of the peace accord;

*Militant activities continue*

There has been no stoppage of militant activities in both the eastern and western part of Guadalcanal since the reported acceptance of the peace accord by the militant leaders.

On Thursday last week, three linesmen working for Telekom were held at gun point near where they had gone to work on a telephone line. Police said that their vehicle was initially taken from them but later was returned. The three were told to leave the area and before they left, the militants grabbed their mobile phones.

Also on Friday morning at Mbalasuna Bridge, a party of SIPL workers were held up at gun point by armed men and their SIPL vehicle stolen from them. The militants told the workers to leave the area since they did not agree with the peace accord as their demands have not been met.

***Solomon Star* N° 1399, 05/07/1999**

On 31 July 1999 police officers killed four IFM militants at Mount Austin. Following the Mount Austin incident, on 12 August 1999, a new peace agreement was signed at Panatina. The main objective of the Panatina Agreement was to scale down the police interventions, shifting back to community policing, and to induce IFM militants to lay down their arms. As with the Honiara Peace Accord, it had no effect on militant activities.

The Ulufa'alu government asked Australia for police to fill line positions and later, when violence got out of hand, for military intervention. Both requests were declined. Instead, Australia agreed to give financial support for the first international monitoring group, the Multinational Police Peace Monitoring Group (MPPMG) which in January 2000 was re-named Multinational Police Assistance Group (MPAG).<sup>150</sup> The MPPMG was made up of 25 unarmed police officers from Fiji and Vanuatu and its main role was one of weapons collection in coordination with the RSIPF. In a manoeuvre called "Operation Crossroads" they managed to collect a number of homemade guns, but militant activities of the IFM and, since January 2000,

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<sup>150</sup> Martin Sharp: "Australian Policy on the 'Ethnic Tension' in Solomon Islands 1999-2001"; background paper for the *Solomon Islands Workshop: Building Peace and Stability*, 24-26 October 2001, Australian National University, Canberra.

of the MEF, continued. Meanwhile, thousands of displaced families poured into Honiara and pressured the Government for help. The Displaced Malaitans Committee demanded Solomon Island Government pay \$1,000 per head as a repatriation grant. Even though the Government agreed to this petition, repatriation funds were exhausted. As early as July 1999, a spokesman for the repatriation committee told the *Solomon Star*: “We have about 18,000 displaced people on our record but with the funds made available by the government, we can only be able to make payouts to around 2,500 people”.<sup>151</sup> Allegations of corruption and misuse of funds spread and gave rise to Malaitans’ “becoming frustrated” with the Ulufa’alu Government. MEF spokesman Andrew Nori would later explain:

In mid-November 1999 many of the displaced Malaitans were becoming frustrated. GRA/IFM were dishonouring all the peace agreements and the government appeared to be treating property claims with a no-care attitude. The displaced Malaitans, therefore, organized a march to Parliament House to present a petition to Ulufa’alu, demanding that their claims for compensation be addressed urgently (even if not payable immediately). Ulufa’alu’s reply was the most insensitive, stupid and arrogant statement a leader could have ever made in the circumstance. He told the marchers something to the effect that “the SIG was not responsible for the damages caused and should not pay compensation”. . . . A day later talkative and speech-hungry Alfred Sasako, Ulufa’alu’s minister of state, repeated the same statement over national radio. Soon after Paterson [*sic*] Oti, Foreign Affairs Minister, confirmed the same position, also over national radio. These men added insult to injury. These immature leaders literally struck the match that caused the fire that burned the nation to near ashes up to October 2000.

**Andrew Nori: 5<sup>th</sup> June 2000 in Perspective**<sup>152</sup>

Caught between increasing militant actions from both sides and helping thousands of displaced families, the Government fostered further peace talks. On 5 May 2000, General Rabuka was back in the Solomons and mediated a peace meeting of 100 delegates in Buala, Isabel Province. Both the MEF and the IFM boycotted the meeting on grounds of having been declared “unlawful

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<sup>151</sup> *Solomon Star* N° 1410, 21/07/1999, p. 11.

<sup>152</sup> Without mentioning names, in February 2000 Prime Minister Ulufa’alu accused Nori and politicians of the Opposition of manipulating the compensation demands for their own benefit:

The compensation demands for the Malaitans that had been considered in principle earlier were again put to the Government by some leaders of Malaita in late December 1999, the same time the Malaita Eagle Force was being assembled. In the absence of comprehensive assessments of the properties that were the subject of the demands, the Government was provided with the details that specifically asked for a compensation package of \$70.0m. . . .

The relevant question in as far as the \$70.0m is concerned has been over the basis of this figure. To perhaps help unravel the puzzle, that figure was founded and put across by a number of individuals that included prominent lawyers and former beneficiaries of the cronies-era that have been directly affected by the Government’s new fiscal policies. “Beneath Guadalcanal, A consistent account of the ethnic tension and the reform, the implications and the prospects”, *Solomon Star* N° 1558, 23/02/2000.



societies” by the Government and the Government’s refusal to grant amnesty. Another peace summit was held in Auki on 12 May 2000 with the objective of bringing the two provinces in conflict together, and to ensure that militants laid down their arms. The Auki summit led to the revocation of the order that outlawed the two militant groups, but did not create any headway.

## **5. The Royal Solomon Island Police Force (RSIPF)**

In 1999, when the tension approached its peak, the RSIPF was made up of 897 officers, well below the authorized establishment of 1000 personnel of all ranks.<sup>153</sup> General duties police officers were responsible for dealing with common law-and-order problems and were not armed. Assisting them were special constables who were called upon for assistance in urgent situations.

The Police Field Force (PFF) was the only unit that carried weapons. Initially the PFF was trained as a Riot Dispersal Unit and underwent special instructions for handling situations of civil disturbances. Until the mid-nineties, there was no training in handling lethal weapons.

This was to change during the Bougainville Crisis. Solomon Islands does not have a standing army, so in 1994 the Government of Solomon Mamaloni decided to establish the National Reconnaissance Surveillance Force (NRSF) for the protection of the border with Papua New Guinea. At the same time, the supply of high-powered weapons increased rapidly:

When I became the Minister of Finance in 1993, I received an invoice from Singapore, from the Company that supplied weapons. So I said who ordered this, Mamaloni did. This involved a lot of money; I think it was US\$2 million or something, it could be more. It was one of a series of invoices, so I said where are the weapons. They are in the armory; some are in the border areas, Bougainville, Shortlands and Choiseul. So I instead get to Rove Amory in about 1993 towards the end to verify the stock with the invoice. I travelled to Choiseul and Shortlands. Now the volume of arms I saw was frightening, it was enough to fight the PNG Defence Force for over six months or one year. When the Bougainville crisis ended the weapons were still remaining in here, and I was fearful because if those weapons fell in the hands of any two militant groups, they could be very dangerous.

**Andrew Nori, Closed Hearing before the TRC, 15/11/2011**

The NRSF was a result of the amalgamation of the PFF and the Maritime Unit. The Australian government provided the training and support, including the maintenance of the RSIPF's three patrol boats. The NRSF's main base was also funded by the Australian government. The Commander of the NRSF, Michael Wheatley, a Solomon Islander by birth, had served as a major

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<sup>153</sup> *Solomon Islands Strategic Review 1999. In Partnership with the People*, p. 9.

in the Australian Defence Force. Some members of the PFF were sent to military academies overseas to undergo military courses such as weapons training, special force training, section commanding, company commanding, Explosives Ordinance Dispersal (EDO), paramedics training, first aid, as well as courses on human rights and humanitarian laws. From 1995 onwards, about 200 military-trained PFF officers were deployed in three-month shifts to the border where they were involved in occasional clashes with the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) and the Papua New Guinea Defence Force. While at the border, they received a \$60 per day danger allowance:

During those times there were a lot of shootouts between the Papua New Guinea Defence Force and Bougainville Revolutionary Army and sometimes with us. In 1996 was the worst year, we came across shootouts between the BRA and PNGDF and also with the SBIA, the defect group of militia from Bougainville.

**Officer of the PFF**

Towards the end of 1998, all but a dozen PFF officers were recalled to Guadalcanal to take care of the emerging internal conflict, serving in increasingly war-like conditions outside of the scope of proper police work. The PFF was thus caught unprepared and forced into a paramilitary role by leaders in the RSIPF and the Government.

In July 1997, Frank Short, a British born Australian citizen, arrived in Honiara to take up the post of Police Commissioner. Short was chosen over other applicants because of the broad experience he had gained in previous assignments in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), Swaziland, Hong Kong, Vanuatu, and St. Helena. Before taking up the post as Police Commissioner in Solomon Islands, he had worked as a Senior Legal Administrative Officer for the post-apartheid government in South Africa.

In a closed session with the TRC, Short described the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force he found at his arrival as morally bankrupt and devoid of the most basic equipment: transport, communications and supplies. In addition, the members of the Police Force were often unpaid and badly accommodated. To improve the situation, Short introduced a number of reforms. Constables were recruited and trained to assist the general duties police officers, especially in community policing. The idea of community policing fosters the collaboration of general duties police officers with communities to curb criminal activities on the rise in Honiara and in the

provinces. A Complaints Against Police Office (CAPO) was established, and foreign experts were brought in to help reform the CID department and to train local officers.

Formed in the British tradition of “policing by consent”, Short was uncomfortable with the paramilitary arm of the RSIPF right from the start. In his view, the PFF consisted of *soldiers* who had never received training in basic police duties, and as such were not the right personnel to be involved in what he interpreted as “civil disturbances”. Instead, a Rapid Response Unit (RRU) was established under the initial command of a British weapons specialist, Charles Hosking, intended to respond to violent incidents with proper police work and not military tactics” “

At a time when the Commonwealth Envoy was attempting to broker a peace settlement and the government had offered to make a SBD\$ 2.5 million payment to the self-styled GRA in return to end the conflict and was awaiting the Guadalcanal provinces next move, it seemed expedient to me not to provoke the situation by ordering all out police assaults on the road blocks, but to try and await a peaceful outcome.

**Frank Short, Closed Hearing before the TRC, 01/10/2011**

Underestimating the underlying issues of the unrest in rural Guadalcanal impeded a vigorous reaction of the police to resolve ethnic disputes and confront the rise in militant activity from the outset. Asked by the TRC for an evaluation of the RSIPF leadership’s position in hindsight, Short answered with a letter to the chairman:

Father Sam Ata  
Chairman, Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Dear Father Ata,

One of your Commissioners put the question to me today at our meeting that I should have used the armed NRSF to put down the militancy.

The question was fair and needed to be raised, but I would like to, once again, say why it was not a realistic or feasible option.

1. The police were used to respond to militant attacks and given arms for self protection but it became highly risky and dangerous since their vehicles often came under fire from a "faceless enemy" concealed in the thick bush alongside the roads in the higher terrain.
2. Policemen deployed on missions had no protective clothing and their vehicles were also open and limited to carrying just a handful of personnel. Logistically the RSIPF was devoid of sufficient and adequate transport, as well as personnel.
3. The three sea-going maritime craft supplied and maintained by the Australians could not be used for operational duties demanded by the nature and scope of the militancy.
4. The Government realized, albeit too late, the need for a political solution to the unfolding crisis and had sought the intervention of the Commonwealth.

5. The Australians, despite their non-intervention, had judged correctly that the RSIPF was not equipped, logistically, numerically and provisioned to take on the faceless militants who were capable of hit and run tactics avoiding the police easily.

6. There was substantial evidence that the core militants were being manipulated and encouraged by power hungry politicians and by their fellow travellers amongst the ranks of the failed politicians. The reasoning was that to have used the NRSF the chances were that one element of their ranks would have turned on the other and this could have provoked an all out civil war.

7. There was highly reliable intelligence given to all “our” close development partners well in advance of the scale of militancy that it became and they failed to help or render practical aid.

8. In the absence of external aid the RSIPF was not able, for the reasons I have explained at length, to take on the militants without incurring great loss of life, including police, provoking a civil war and forever destroying the possibility of future co-existence between the population groups.

9. External intervention when it came relatively quickly put down the insurgency but one had to witness the arrival of huge quantities of logistical supplies, boats, vehicles, aircraft, soldiers, communication etc., to understand what the RSIPF lacked to even risk using the NRSF.

I hope that I have made the position clear by highlighting these points and I stand by my decision not to have deployed the NRSF.

Yours sincerely

Frank Short

2/10/2010

Honiara

Short’s appreciation of the situation, however, is not shared unanimously by all executives of the RSIPF. A high ranking officer interviewed by the TRC is still convinced that Guadalcanal militants could have been militarily defeated at an early stage of the tension with a more aggressive attitude.

My officers were very capable officers. They were well trained by Australia, New Zealand and the US Military. If they were properly utilized at that time the situation would already have been contained at an early stage.

#### **Police executive**

After the Bungana incident, Short was severely criticized in the media by some politicians from Guadalcanal, mainly Ezekiel Alebua and Sethuel Kelly. Attacks increased during the following months and at the end of his first two years term as Police Commissioner, in July 1999, Short decided not to renew his contract and left the RSIPF under the acting Police Commissioner Morton Siriheti until the arrival of the new Commissioner, Rerangi Rangihiki from New Zealand.

The statement of former police officer Alick Saeni during the Public Hearing in Buma in May 2011 revealed misjudgments of the situation continuing under the new leadership, with fatal consequences.

There were a few Malaitan police officers being posted at Foxwood at that time. There were other police officers posted at Alligator Creek and they were armed. Those of us who were posted at Foxwood were unarmed. Five Malaitan officers without arms went beyond the road block to do community policing in the height of the tension. Is that right, chairman? When I came to think about that it did not make any sense to me. What inspired me to go out that time was because I thought of my oath that I had taken. I kept to my oath that was why I went beyond the road block and worked at the height of the tension to do community policing. This was in December 1999.

What type of community policing would I carry out with the Guadalcanal people when they already chased out the Malaitans from Gold Ridge? The Malaitans at SIPL were already evacuated and only five police officers from Malaita to do community policing with the Guadalcanal people? It's unbelievable.

During the night the militants from Guadalcanal Plains came and raided the police station. They took over the police post and took away two of our officers; I was lucky enough and escaped. They took two of our officers and one of them was killed and the other officer escaped, but he was mentally affected because of what happened that night. The other officer was stabbed and left on the roadside.

That happened in the year 1999 and in 2000 I was mentally changed, I did not have trust in the Government anymore. Why was there no mixture of police officers from other provinces to share shift that night? Instead there were five officers from Malaita to do community policing at the height of the tension!

Then came the year 2000, then 2001 and I continued my work as a police officer. As I said in the Force there were divisions, things were not right. The Police Commissioner had left and gone. I believe the high ranking officers at that time had their own stories. They knew what was going on. We were victims of their decisions.

**Extract of the testimony of Mr. Alick Saeni, Public Hearing, Buma 03/05/2011**

Once the RSIPF began aggressive actions, they often overreacted and used heavy-handed tactics that inflamed the situation and reinforced community concerns that officers were biased and ineffective. The police deployed its RRU to selected positions in north and northeast Guadalcanal in search of militant strongholds and to protect economic key areas like the Gold Ridge Mine, where the TRC received statements denouncing abusive behaviour of police officers against workers of the company and villagers from surrounding communities:

During the tension I was employed at the Gold Ridge mine, I worked as a barman in the company's pub. Not long after the militant activities started the Police Field Force officers were deployed to provide security for the company, they had sent over about seventy plus officers and they were all armed. The Police officers treated us badly. They accused us of being members of the GRA. I told them that we are not members of GRA; we are employed here and have no part in the militant activities. One of the officers from Tikopia responded angrily by taking his gun

and fired his it into the sky; it was a very terrifying moment since it was my first time ever to hear the sound of an automatic rifle. I fell to the ground and trembled. I asked him what I have done wrong, he told me to shut up or he will put a bullet in my mouth.

**Statement N° 0633**

I am going to give you an account of what the RRU did to me before the escalation of the tension. This happened to me when I worked as a security personnel with the Ross Mining Ltd and I was attached to Boom Gate I. Each time they drove past they would use insulting words to us. They told us that if anything happened, the first people to receive their bullets were security officers. They would spray them within a minute. These insulting words brought down my morale and I did not work as I should.

Sometimes they also swore at us, and they kept telling us that they would shoot us within a minute. Sometimes the security personnel did not open the gate quickly and they would swear at us. We would tell them that we have the right over the gate. Those RRU officers did not respect our rights. According to the company's procedures we were to take details of the trucks and their loading capacity.

One day they came and attacked the whole Obo Obo village and everyone had to run away in the bush. The village was just like a battlefield at that time. The way the officers used the guns was too much and this made us of all run away to the bush. Everyone was affected and frightened and had to take cover by lying on to the ground. The bullets were landing on the roof tops and also shots were fired to tree tops.

**Statement No. 0194**

The TRC also received information about unlawful killings committed by police officers in the early stage of the conflict. John Meneanea, a 21-year-old youth from Guadalcanal was killed on 19 June 1999 by the RRU when he accompanied people from his village in Suaghi to witness a ceremony at the log point, off Tetero oil palm mill. The police had been hiding in the bush and when the Suaghi people arrived at Tetero log pond they were fired upon. John was immediately killed. Likewise, Robert Roso (Junior), a 27 year old from Guadalcanal was shot and killed by officers from the RRU while fishing off Talaura Point, northeast Guadalcanal in the morning of 9 October 1999. The RRU team were returning by boat from Marau when they shot at Roso and the others who were net-fishing for merely suspecting they were IFM militants (see chapter 4.2.1).

Such incidents impressed upon many young Guadalcanal men that the police were definitely an opposing force, not there to protect but commandeered under heavy Malaitan influence. This situation motivated young men to join the IFM:

The Company made arrangements for RRU to come and take care of its properties. The GRA had not been active but the RRU officers were already carrying out shootings up and down the road and even at Obo Obo and surrounding villages. I was working with the Ross Mining and when I saw what the Field Force officers did and other boys joined the GRA, I was interested and

I joined, too. Not long after I had joined the GRA I was shot on the hand and stomach. I was just about to die but I was rushed to the clinic and got treated.

The reason why the militants retaliated was because the RRU Officers carried out shootings almost every day causing the villagers to run away into the bush.

**Extract from Statement N° 0549**

By this time, the conflict had begun to corrupt the police force. Suspicions that high ranking police officers from Guadalcanal had taken sides with the militants arose as early as December 1998 when Harold Keke raided the police station at Yandina and, according to officers interviewed by TRC, the intervention of the police was arbitrarily delayed by high ranking Guadalcanal officers to avoid the capture of the militants. At the same time, some Guadalcanal officers began to return from patrols without their weapons, claiming they had been lost or stolen; others took leave and resumed their duties only several months later. Operations failed because militants had been warned through leakages from inside the police force. There were also suspicions that police officers were training militants in the use of weapons:

In 1999 it was becoming obvious that Guadalcanal and Malaitan officers were not cooperating with each other. Some of the police officers from Guadalcanal went to their villages for a couple of months before returning to resume duties. There were incidents whereby some of the weapons were gone missing. We started not trusting them; we had an assumption that they were arming their *wantoks* for something.

**Police officer from Malaita**

As will be developed in Chapter 3.3.1, allegations of support of Guadalcanal police officers for the GRA were confirmed to the TRC by former militants; some of the officers are still in service.

On the other hand, Malaitan officers saw their families and *wantoks* affected by the increasing activities of the militants. Mistrust between Malaitans and Guadalcanal officers began to erode the institution:

On the first day of my leave there was a difference, my senior supervisor was a Malaitan who had trained me and we worked very closely and good together. But because of the burning down of houses and because of my leave my colleague did not want to talk with me as we used to, there were feelings of suspicion between Guale and Malaitan officers.

**Police officer from Guadalcanal**

When the MEF was formed and decided to retaliate, many Malaitan officers were only too willing to support the new militant group. Some of them, when they were off-duty, gave their guns and ammunitions to their relatives who were organizing groups to retaliate. The armory raid at the police station of Auki in January 2000 could not have been carried out without

logistical support from inside the Police Force. The TRC interviewed officers who confessed they participated in the planning of the break-in (see chapter 3.1.2).

Between 1998 and 2000 the RSIPF disintegrated. Ethnic allegiances ruined the professional codes and the loyalty the police officers towards the Force. Discipline and respect for rank faded away as executives were unable or unwilling to hold the institution together:

During that time I got poor feedback from my superior bosses whenever I asked for assistance, since most of the bosses stayed at home and did not attend work during those times. It was very difficult to be in charge of the station when there are no proper directives and assistance from the bosses.

**Police officer**

## **6. 5 June 2000: Rove armory raid and “coup”**

In the early hours of 5 June 2000, MEF militants and Malaitan members of the PFF raided the police and prison armouries at Rove in Honiara. That same day they put Prime Minister Ulufa’alu under house arrest and gave him a 48-hour ultimatum to resign.

The night before, a meeting was held at a restaurant in the Placemaker’s Building, opposite the Honiara main market. Those in attendance were Field Force Officers from Malaita, headed by Manasseh Maelanga. He instructed the policemen to “brush aside the high ranking officers” and take full control of the armory and the Government. At around two o’clock in the morning, dozens of officers and MEF militants gathered at the former Shorncliffe base at Ranadi. They were divided into groups by their leaders and assigned specific tasks: some were given detailed instructions on the raid of the main armouries at Rove, others for the armouries at the Central Police Station, Naha Police station, Kukum Traffic Station, and the Patrol Naval Base.<sup>154</sup> Precautions had been taken to break off telecommunication to the provinces and overseas. Both domestic and international air services were also halted.

Officers who knew of the forthcoming armory raid and were on duty at the Headquarter on the night of 4-5 June remained at Rove after the end of their shift. Sometime before daybreak, between four and five o’clock in the morning, the paramilitary police forces and the MEF militants that had gathered at Ranadi arrived in several vehicles. They wore masks and

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<sup>154</sup> Information provided to the TRC by officers who attended the meeting and participated in the armory raid.



camouflaged uniforms. There was no resistance; the officers in charge were forced to hand over the keys. One witness said “people just walked in and got what they were looking for.”

Among the police officers that were present that morning at the Rove Headquarters were Manasseh Maelanga, James Kili, Leslie Ofu, Robert Madeo and Patteson Saeni. As regards the MEF, witnesses mentioned leaders like Leslie Kwaiga, Jimmy Lusibaea, Jeremy Rua, Andrew Fioga and spokesman Andrew Nori. Nori himself gave the following statement to the TRC:

Now it was then that the victims of the Guadalcanal uprising started planning to carry out their attacks. They were talking about raiding the Rove armory, by that time they already raided the Auki armory quite successfully. In fact the first person to inform me about the Auki armory, he rang me on 17<sup>th</sup> January; he said, did you hear the Auki armory was raided last night? I said no, I did not hear that. So they were planning to raid the Honiara armory, but they were quite sceptical about it because of the seriousness of the operation which required a lot of preparation.

Then on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2000, I was in church, that’s when they planned the raid. They rang me on 4<sup>th</sup> June, in the morning at about 9:00 a.m., to hold a meeting with them and I never knew about the plan. I said no, I cannot be free until 3:00 p.m. in the afternoon. At 3:00 p.m. on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> I went to see them; that was in Leslie Kwaiga’s office. I saw police officers there, five members of the Malaita Eagle Force; that was when they told me they had already approved a plan and they had set up logistics to raid the armory at 4:00 a.m. that night. That was how the operation took place; we had deployed manpower, Police Commanders and about eighty members of the Malaita Eagle Force in logistic places and the issue is beyond cancellation. That’s how I learned about the operation.

**Andrew Nori, Closed Hearing before the TRC, 15/11/2010**

After listening to many witnesses, including police officers who were directly involved, TRC has come to the conclusion that contrary to widespread rumors, Opposition leader at that time, Manasseh Sogavare, was not involved in the armory raid.

Shortly after the raid at Rove, MEF and PFF officers proceeded to take control of weapons from the patrol boats anchored at Point Cruz. The group also removed arms and ammunition stored at the Central Police Station and other police stations in Honiara.

There is no way of knowing the exact number of weapons taken from the armouries. One high-ranking police officer interviewed by the TRC estimated that about 1,000 would be a realistic number. The Small Arms Survey 2006 estimates a similar quantity.<sup>155</sup> One year after the raid, David Hegarty, who had been leader of the International Peace Monitoring Team after the Townsville Peace Agreement, estimated that “over 500 modern weapons remain unaccounted for

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<sup>155</sup> “Over 1,000 high-powered weapons were looted from police armouries”. Carol Nelson: *BCPR Strategic Review Solomon Islands*, 2006, p. 4.

– some being held illegally by the police, some still in the hands of the militants and their core followers, some in the hands of key political players, and others with criminal elements.”<sup>156</sup> Several hundreds of those weapons are still unaccounted for.

Many of the weapons taken from the police and prison armouries went straight into the hands of MEF militants, that is, untrained civilians who later would use them to harass people and commit heinous crimes; some even ended up in the hands of ex-prisoners who were liberated during the operation. One high ranking police officer who was not involved in the raid told the TRC how he saw high-powered weapons in the hands of prisoners:

As I came past the bridge I saw one prisoner holding a gun. I started to panic because all prisoners go to prison because of us police officers. Luckily he did not say anything to me so I managed to pass him. As I came towards the Honiara Town Council I saw another one standing there also with an arm. I gathered my courage and pushed myself to go further down to the Rove Headquarters. Somehow I reached the gate but was not permitted entry. [One of the officers] saw me and he told the Joint Operation members who were manning the gate to allow me in. I was trying to get to my office, and then I saw another convicted prisoner holding a gun. I was alarmed and decided to go to the Head Office. As I entered the Head Office I saw Andrew Nori and Leslie Kwaiga. They said nothing when they saw me. . . . At that time I began to understand that things were not looking good.

The following statement was given by a Guadalcanal inmate who served a sentence in Rove for being a member of the IFM (which he denies). He describes how Malaitan prisoners were set free while Guadalcanal prisoners were threatened by militants and prison officers. He said the MEF had taken *de facto* control over the prison. This inmate managed to escape two weeks later together with other IFM prisoners, thanks to the help of a prison officer who was not sympathetic with the MEF<sup>157</sup>

Most of the prison officers and other RSIPF officers came and released Malaitan men who were also held in custody. They threatened to kill us and we were labelled as pigs, kept in fences and slaughtered any time they wish. Only one particular officer treated us very well and with respect.

While there, it came on the news that Red Cross wanted to release us on cash bail, but the MEF group disallowed us from being released on cash bail by withholding the keys from the prison officers. However, we managed to escape with the help of another officer. News reached us that on a Sunday on June at 8 a.m., they will come and execute all of the 28 inmates from Guadalcanal

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<sup>156</sup> David Hegarty: *Monitoring Peace in Solomon Islands*. Canberra: The Australian National University. State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Working Paper 01/4, 2001.

<sup>157</sup> “An arranged escape of 20 IFM inmates happened at Rove on the 19<sup>th</sup> June 2000 night. When MEF heard of that, they came and ordered all the prisoners to be set free. The total 98 prisoners of Rove Prison escaped or were set free.”

***Solomon Star* 20 June 2000.**

who were in prison at that time. That particular evening the officer came and released us, it was about 6:30 p.m. We managed to escape when the MEF members who were manning the gate went out to have their dinner. Within a short period we managed to escape.

*During that time who was responsible in manning the prison gate?*

The MEF was manning the prison gate. When we were released we followed the Botanical Garden road towards the water pump area, then up towards Titinge village, and then we went over to Valeato and then into the thick bush towards a place called Tamuni. There most of the people from Titinge and Valeato had taken refuge from the fighting and were hiding there. We arrived there around 11 p.m. towards midnight, from there we could still hear gunshots fired by the MEF when they came and discovered that we had escaped.

Shortly after that, the MEF went in and released all the lifetime prisoners from Malaita. We were lucky to be alive because of the help and assistance from that particular prison officer, since they had planned to kill all us on the following Sunday.

#### **Statement N° 0921**

After the armory raid the crowd made their way up to Prime Minister's Bartholomew Ulufa'alu's house, put him under house arrest and directed him to step down within 48 hours. Later the ultimatum was extended in a meeting between the SIAC Caucus and a Joint Operation group led by lawyer Andrew Nori, and Ulufa'alu finally resigned on 14 June 2000. Before he resigned, he asked Australia once more to send troops to help restore law and order; the request was declined.<sup>158</sup>

Two weeks later, on 30 June, Manasseh Sogavare was elected Prime Minister under irregular conditions because several supporters of the rival candidate, Rev. Leslie Boseto, were prevented under threats by the MEF to participate in the elections. At that time, Sogavare was aware that his election was manipulated:

*Were you aware that militants prevented some MPs from coming to Parliament, and how actually was your relationship with the MEF?*

I was made aware that some elements of the MEF and the Joint Operation had stopped people from coming, so I was aware. But there was nothing I could do about it. Relationship with the MEF, well I think it was good in fact to know some of them, especially the spokesman of MEF, Andrew Nori. He went to the same church as I.

#### **Manasseh Sogavare, Closed Hearing, 18/03/2011**

The IFM refused to recognize Sogavare's election, while the governments of Australia and New Zealand granted it immediate recognition. The *de facto* government during this time, however,

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<sup>158</sup> "Foreign Minister Patteson Oti stated that they had been asking Australia to send troops to help restore law and order in Solomon Islands but is continually rejected".

***Solomon Star, 14 June 2000***

was the Supreme Council formed by MEF leaders and PFF officers. Thus the “coup” produced what Braithwaite and his collaborators called a “shadow state”; it paved the way to unbridled compensation demands, most of which Sogavare’s Government attended to, resorting to a loan from the Taiwanese Exim Bank (see chapter 3.1.4.2).

There were many ways in which the events of June 2000 were not a conventional coup. One was that we can conceive the agenda of the MEF leadership less as running the state and more as using a temporary monopoly of force to demand financial compensation from the state for the loss of Malaitan lives and property. Security for Malaitans and positioning of men such as Andrew Nori, Alex Bartlett and Jimmy Rasta as kingmakers within a shadow state of sorts were also part of the agenda. A paramount reason for the fall of the Ulufa’alu government was the Prime Minister’s refusal to agree to the compensation payments demanded by evicted Malaitans. Hence, the Sogavare government of 2000–01 implemented a “justice before peace” philosophy that it defended in terms of Melanesian *kastom*, in which justice meant financial compensation for both sides. This resonated with Guadalcanal Premier Alebua’s earlier (1999) philosophy/demand of “compensation before reconciliation”. In the event, the militia leaders of both sides were allowed to capture the compensation payments, with most ordinary victims missing out.<sup>159</sup>

The incidents of 5 June 2000 initiated a new stage of the conflict, as MEF militants, now in possession of hundreds of high-powered weapons, could no longer be controlled, even by sympathetic PFF officers.

The RSIPF was left in a position that they could not control the situation since the MEF men joined in with the paramilitary force. It was difficult to control the MEF men. We tried to disarm them on several attempts but they often reacted in a manner that could lead to a blood bath. So we just followed the system set up after the coup.

“During this period we were pretending to be brave at work, but as a matter of fact we were scared of ourselves”, said another officer, “most of the time I preferred to get drunk before going to work to control my fear because of the situation.”

#### **Police officer**

The MEF, whose influence increased dramatically after the armory raid, declared an “all-out war” on the IFM and attacked their bunker at Alligator Creek from the sea with a vessel and from inland with a bulldozer mounted with a 50 calibre machine gun which killed six IFM militants. Operation “Eagle Storm” launched an attack on the IFM strongholds at Tenaru area on 7 July 2000. One week later the MEF landed in Visale destroying the clinic and killing two men,

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<sup>159</sup> John Braithwaite, Sinclair Dinnen, Matthew Allen, Valerie Braithwaite and Hilary Charlesworth: *Pillars and Shadows: Statebuilding as Peacebuilding in Solomon Islands*; Canberra: Australian National University, 2010, p. 46.

only to return to burn the houses of the village. In Marau, Joint Operation forces liberated 115 people taken hostage by the IFM. On 15 July Operation “Hat Soa”<sup>160</sup> was launched to attack IFM strongholds at Kakabona. Further west Aruligo was attacked with LC *Muva* (see chapter 3.3.2 for more detail).

MEF retaliation initiated a new phase of forced displacement; this time, the victims were villagers from Guadalcanal who had to leave their homes and find shelter in the bush, often for several months:

There was news over the radio that the *Daula* was going to come back. By then the boys were alert. By morning they could hear the ship’s engine and they could see the MV *Daula* approaching Visale Bay. Some of the children went to check their fishing nets because they left them overnight in the sea. The children saw the ship and the MEF militants took an OBM engine and came ashore. It was still early in the morning and I was still sleeping, so my brother woke me up and told me that I should take the children and start running away. I called my husband and he came back and we took our children and ran away. When we got to the bottom of that tree over there then the MEF started shooting. When we got to the bottom of the hill where our water source was, two of the nuns were there, too, so we all ran away up the hill to where we camped. I said to my husband, “Let’s climb up further.” When we got to the top we looked down and our house was on fire. After the burning we managed to collect whatever was left and carry them to a water source to put up a temporary house. We had a big garden of cassava and this lasted us for a long time, up to the time peace was achieved.

*How long did you stay in the bush before coming back to the village?*

We stayed in the bush for a long time.

*What year did you come back?*

It was when peace was declared in the country.

#### **Summary of Statement N° 0663**

I am a chief of this village and it was on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 2000, it was early morning and I witnessed when the Eagle Force landed at the Visale Mission Station. They then started to burn our houses and they harassed our people in our community here, and we fled our village and stayed in the bush.

#### **Extract from Statement N° 0176**

More and more civilians who had tried to remain neutral were pressured from both warring sides, as shown in the following statements from Marau Sound:

Early one morning we heard the patrol boat started firing to the shore. When we heard this we woke up and started to run away without any belongings. After the shooting, we came back to the house and collected a few things and then we back to the bush. One group of militants from the Weather Coast came and took our boys and held them hostage.

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<sup>160</sup> The word *hat sore* is a pijin term meaning “broken hearted”.

After a few days one of our elders in the village died due to illness. During the funeral of this old man Harold Keke's group arrived by boat. They came and occupied the village. By then everyone had to run away in the bush again and the fighting had gotten worse. We built small houses for shelter in the bush, but not good enough to keep the rain off.

I was on my way to gather some belongings from my house but when I got there I could feel that something was around, I could see some of the Marau Eagle Force were in the house. I started to run away and they shot at me, but I just kept on running. In my mind I only pray to God for his protection. It was a big group, I could see some of them going into my house and taking my properties out. Then when my house was burned down at Onetete and we moved to another village, Ponetasi. We then decided that we should move to Oa village. We stayed at Oa but still in the bush. When we stayed at Oa we felt that we were safe. We returned to our respective villages after the Marau Peace Agreement was signed.

**Statement No. 0923**

Around 6 o'clock one morning we heard gunshots around our village. We were shocked with fear since it was our first time to hear sounds from a high-powered weapon and we did not expect something like that would happen in our area. The GRA militants entered our village, pointing the guns on everyone and harassing people, and demanded money from me. I gave them one shell money and \$100. At that time there was nothing much I could do since I was afraid of the guns they pointed at my neck. We remained there and the Marau Eagle Force came and burned all our houses down.

**Statement N° 0909**

Weapons also dominated the public scene in Honiara, causing intimidation and fear. The Supreme Council tried to control the situation by announcing that they “will deal severely with those who tend to loot shops and private properties during the ethnic tension.”<sup>161</sup> The Joint Operation established posts in and around Honiara: 100 men were selected to form the military police and they worked with regular police to control crime. Unfortunately, most of the efforts were in vain.

Criminal activities is very easy that time as whoever can wear green uniforms can claim to be MEF just to loot or steal.

***Solomon Star, 20 July 2000***

There were renowned criminals who used the MEF as a façade to commit felonies, and there were “common citizens” who took advantage of a situation that had gone out of control. Their target was not IFM militants but local businessmen and even neighbors—it did not matter where you came from. Malaitans were forced to leave their homes by militants who claimed to defend their cause:

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<sup>161</sup> *Solomon Star*, 13 June 2000.

The militants came and assaulted one of my cousin brothers at one of the lock up shops along the Kukum area. The next morning around 6 a.m. the same group of men came and demanded \$2000 from us and we were to give the amount before 6 p.m. in the evening. They returned later and took the money. We were scared after the incident since James was stabbed with a knife. We decided to close the shop and return to our house after giving compensation. They returned towards midnight and broke into our shop and removed all the goods inside. We were helpless since there was no law and order at that time. My family and I had been relying on the shop to meet our basic needs including our children's school fees. We were so scared of being continuously intimidated so we left Honiara and fled back to our home village on Small Malaita. Back home we found life very difficult; we could not pay our children's school fees. You could see a lot of people moving around with guns, knives and other weapons.

*Which militant group was responsible for the demand?*

They claimed to be members of the MEF but we believe they were criminal elements hiding under the name of MEF.

**Statement N° 1515**

I was married to a Guale woman. In fact, we were afraid of the two groups, the MEF and the GRA. In the end we decided to leave. We approached the church priest to help arrange ways for us to go to our province. He arranged the Red Cross to meet our sea fare expenses and I took my family and we went over to Malaita. We arrived on Malaita and a few weeks later news reached us that the MEF had burned down my house. They looted everything before burning it to the ground. At that time the militants went around looting and stealing the properties left behind by people fleeing from the fight; they took the items and they sold them for money.

**Summary of Statement N° 1569**

In the weeks after the Rove armory raid, people of other provinces, including Guadalcanal people who still remained in Honiara, were evacuated in huge numbers to their respective provinces. The governments of Western and Makira Provinces called on its people to return home. Foreign nationals were evacuated with an airplane of the New Zealand Army, New Zealand HMNZS *Te Mana* and Australian HMS *Tobruk*. Malaita Eagles not only increased the power of militant operations against the IFM, but also put pressure on the Government. A few days after the armory raid, the *Solomon Star* published a report from an Australian photo-journalist:

The [MEF] Eagles have effectively taken control of the capital. Commander Joshua stated “we are just here to protect our homes and our families from the Guadalcanal militants. We bought this land in good faith and unless the government compensates us, we will stay here and defend it. If compensation is paid, then we will happily go back to Malaita”. But the government is unable to pay for the SBD\$150 million demanded by MEF.

**Ben Bohane, in *Solomon Star* N° 1631, 9 June 2000**

In the Western Province, the armory raid re-surfaced long-held antagonism between Westerners and Malaitans. On 11 June 2000, a platoon of South Bougainvilleans, militants of the

Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) arrived in Gizo, supposedly invited to protect the Province from any incursion of the MEF (see chapter 3.2.5).

The IFM, depending on a limited number of high-powered weapons obtained from the Yandina and Gold Ridge raids, at first tried to fight back. In the end, however, they had to give in to the superiority of the MEF firepower and agree to negotiate:

When we heard about this raid we knew there were thousands and thousands of bullets and arms of the Government in the hands of the paramilitary and Eagle Force. But despite that we knew that we stood on our right and believed we fought our rights; and even if we went through hard times and people would die, we hoped to achieve the end results. We heard the sounds of bullets but we were brave enough to stand, but we had to make sure we don't lose our lives. We continued to fight and the Joint Operation and MEF found hard times because we started to place explosives at the Kogulae water source and we had trucks and carried out lots of fighting. By then we started to talk and MEF and Joint Operation would like us to talk about peace so we came to a round table discussion.

**Charles Vangere, Closed Hearing before the TRC, 17/11/2010**

## **8. Towards the Townsville Peace Agreement**

Almost immediately after the armory raid, a series of meetings began between delegations of Guadalcanal and Malaita provinces, Australian diplomats, Solomon Islands Government officials and church leaders, to encourage militant groups towards peace negotiations. The Government created the Ministry of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace (MNURP) to facilitate a crosscutting peace-building approach.<sup>162</sup> The Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA) established a peace office in Honiara to co-ordinate civil society efforts at peace. The Women for Peace Movement was formed and visited MEF checkpoints, trying to talk militants into peace negotiations (see chapter 5.1).

To a considerable degree due to these external pressures, representatives of the MEF and IFM met on the Australian Navy's HMS *Tobruk* on 21 July 2000 to begin a series of ceasefire talks. Also present were church leaders, NGOs, women's organizations, the Chamber of Commerce, and representatives of the Chinese and Gilbertese communities.

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<sup>162</sup> For an evaluation of the MNURPJ, see Jack Maebuta and Rebecca Spence (with Iris Wielders and Micheal O'Loughlin): *Attempts at Building Peace in the Solomon Islands: Disconnected Layers*, Collaborative Learning Projects, 2009.  
Available at:  
[http://www.cdainc.com/cdawww/pdf/casestudy/rpp\\_cumulative\\_case\\_solomon\\_islands\\_final\\_Pdf.pdf](http://www.cdainc.com/cdawww/pdf/casestudy/rpp_cumulative_case_solomon_islands_final_Pdf.pdf); date of access 15/04/2011.



The Ceasefire Agreement was signed on 2 August 2000 between MEF, IFM<sup>163</sup> and the Solomon Islands Government. IFM's supreme leader Harold Keke, who had not attended the peace negotiations, later signed from his camp in western Guadalcanal.<sup>164</sup> The Ceasefire Agreement established that all MEF and IFM soldiers would lay down their arms and all offensive weapons of war, and that they would refrain from:

- (a) entering, carrying and discharging firearms and from making any armed incursions into the Restricted Zones as described in clause 4 herein;
- (b) conducting themselves in any hostile, offensive, insulting or provocative behavior which run counter to the terms and spirit of this agreement, and
- (c) acquiring or making any weapons or equipment of war (Clause 2[1]).

MEF and IFM were assigned "Areas of Influence": for the Malaita Eagle Force the area starting at the Bonege River west of Honiara to the Ngalibiu River in the east, including Honiara City; and for the Isatabu Freedom Movement, the rest of Guadalcanal Island, excluding the Marau area. Responsibility for the maintenance of law and order would be returned to the RSIPF. The Agreement's duration was 90 days, during which negotiations for an enduring peace should be accomplished. A Ceasefire Monitoring Council under the leadership of Sir Peter Kenilorea was set up to monitor the Agreement.

Even though there were sporadic gun battles, in general the ceasefire held. Throughout August and September the parties to the conflict continued to meet under the chairmanship of Peter Kenilorea aboard Australian and New Zealand naval vessels stationed off Honiara. These discussions led the parties to accept an invitation by the Australian government and travel to Townsville in northern Queensland, Australia, for a peace conference. There, the delegates worked from 9 to 15 October 2000 to broker the Townsville Peace Agreement (TPA). Harold Keke was the only important militant leader who refused to participate in the conference and to sign the agreement.

The TPA established that weapons had to be surrendered and stolen property returned within 30 days. In return, amnesty would be granted to the militants. MEF and IFM "soldiers" would be

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<sup>163</sup> A slip in the editing of the Cease-Fire Agreement describes the IFM as "the military arm of the Provincial Government", while the MEF is presented as "the military arm of the people of Malaita Province".

<sup>164</sup> Andrew Nori alleged that Minister for National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace, Allan Kemakeza, paid Keke and other IFM leaders large sums of money to buy their signatures (John Braithwaite et al., *Pillars and Shadows, op. cit.*, p. 37).

repatriated to their home villages and benefit from rehabilitation programs established by the Government. Malaita and Guadalcanal provinces would receive more autonomy in order to allow the people “to look after their own affairs” (Part 3, paragraph 1). Donor funds would be designated to compensate all those who had lost property (see Annex 3 for the full text of the TPA).

Two independent monitoring bodies, the Peace Monitoring Council (PMC) and the International Peace Monitoring Team (IPMT) were set up to supervise the collection of surrendered weapons. The PCM was made up of eminent Solomon Islanders, including ex-combatants from both factions, while the IPMT consisted of Australians and New Zealanders, with smaller representations from Vanuatu, Cook Islands, Tonga and other Pacific island states.

## **9. After the TPA: turning against co-ethnics**

The TPA was greeted with euphoria in the streets of Honiara, but it did not bring peace to Solomon Islands; rather, it initiated a new stage of the tension. The first stage of the tension, between 1998 and 1999 is the only period rightly described as an “ethnic tension”: when ethnicity was the driving force of the conflict. In 2000, when the Malaita Eagles Force appeared on the scene, especially after the Rove armory raid, ethnic hostility had begun to disappear. Instead, the IFM started to target people from Guadalcanal, often accusing them of being “spears” for the MEF as an excuse for extorting material goods.

On 9<sup>th</sup> August I was in my house at Tanamao and about 8:00 p.m. at night, three men came to the house and called me to go out. When I came out I could see another four men coming, they all had high powered guns, LMG, SLA, SLR. I was marched along the road, all guns pointing at me. They led me down to the main road and when we got there one of them started to butt me on my back with his gun. They butted me twice on the road to Vila. When we got to Vila they were given orders to tie me up, they said I was a spear for the Malaita Eagle Force: “Tie him up, he is married to a part Malaita woman and he is a spear,” then they used abusive words at me. They led me to a cat-nut tree and they tied me against that tree until 5:00 a.m. in the morning. Then I was released and was asked to pay a fine of \$500. They took me back to my house at Tanamao and I went and got \$500 and gave it to them. They also took my 25 HP Suzuki outboard motor and canoe; it was only three months old. After a while I started to look for my OBM canoe and someone told me that my engine was at Tiaro. I gave him \$500 and he brought the engine back to me. Unfortunately the canoe was left at Tiaro. I enquired again and they told me that the canoe was with a man from Maravovo. So I gave another \$500 and I went and took back my canoe. That was how I was treated during the ethnic tension because they said I was married to a half-Malaita woman.

**Statement N° 0559**

On the other hand, when the Ceasefire Agreement suspended Operation “Eagle Force”, the Malaita Eagles in Honiara turned their attention to the public Treasury. The MEF was also interspersed with criminal elements who were only interested in short-term material benefits and not the ethnic identity of their victims.

After the TPA, violence towards co-ethnics started to prevail unequivocally. Although Harold Keke formed the Guadalcanal Liberation Front (GLF) and continued to fight against the Government on the Weather Coast, he mostly terrorized the local Guadalcanal population. Some of the most horrific atrocities of the armed conflict were committed by the GLF between 2001 and 2003, and the victims were often local villagers. Another demonstration of the violent split-up of Guadalcanal leaders was Keke’s attempt to kill Ezekiel Alebua in June 2001.

In 2002, the Kemakeza Government tried to capture Keke by merging a deflated police force with ex-militants both from Malaita and Guadalcanal. Violating the agreements of the TPA, a group of former IFM and MEF militants led by Andrew Te’e, former commander of the “eastern front” on Guadalcanal, were re-armed, sworn in as a “special constables” and sent out to capture their former leader. Instead of forging peace, this “Joint Operation” caused a considerable increase in violence. Chapter 3.2.2 gives a detailed account of Keke’s reign of fear and the Joint Operation’s response on the Weather Coast.

A local leader in the Gold Ridge area of Guadalcanal, Stanley Kaoni, formed a new militant group which he called “Central Neutral Force” to fight Keke: “After the ethnic tension I formed a group to chase Harold Keke out from our area because he is not from our area and his group committed criminal activities. That’s the main reason why I had to fight for the right of my people after the ethnic tension”.<sup>165</sup>

However, the group became generally known as “Satan’s” group, following Kaoni’s *nom de guerre*. Satan’s group soon became infamous for imposing an excess of forced compensation payments and other harassments – including sexual violence – against local villagers. Most of the statements collected by the TRC in the Gold Ridge area were given by victims of “Satan”:

The militants came and destroyed our properties. They lined up some of our things and destroyed them, they urinated in our cups, cut up our pots and plates and cut our bags of rice and poured them out. We were frightened and ran away into the bush. When we came back there was

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<sup>165</sup> Stanley Kaoni in an interview with TRC statement taker.

nothing left, they also destroyed our beddings and other things including boxes and kitchen trays and others things they could get hold of.

*Which group was this?*

This was Satan's group.

*Did you say they urinated on the cups and plates?*

Yes, they did, they lined up the cups and urinated in them and said they were cups of tea. They pulled down our houses and cut our boxes and after destroying all our properties they came and looked for us so that they could kill us too, but we already had fled into the bush.

*Why did they do this to your village?*

They did this to us because they said that we were supporting Harold Keke.

**Statement N° 1346**

Shortly after the TPA my son Christopher was on his way home from school. Along the way Stanley Kaoni saw him and accused him of joining up with Keke's men; he assaulted my son but he managed to escape into the bush. Stanley Kaoni fired several shots at him but he was unharmed. He returned quickly home and told me that his life was at risk. The whole of that time he lived in fear and on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 2003 my son fled over to Weather Coast and he died there. They got lost out at sea and I never saw him again.

**Statement No. 0633**

The following statements give evidence of how Guadalcanal villagers were pushed around by IFM/GRA/GLF militant groups claiming to represent their interests:

We only took with us what we could carry but the rest were also left behind. When we got to Gold Ridge, we stayed at a place called Bita. We thought we would settle okay at Bita but then we were asked to move out again. We moved from Bita to a place called Verahuraa. When we got there and started to settle, then Harold Keke's group came to the area. During their stay we could not speak loudly, most of the time we only whispered to each other when we wanted to say something. We stayed at Verahuraa until peace was achieved in the Solomon Islands. This was in the year 2000.

We came back and settled down here thinking everything was over. Then came Satan's group. They came and demanded things from us. Each family had to contribute money, so my family managed to raise \$230. Other families at Bemuta and Buvi did the same thing and we gave the money to them. After giving our contributions to them, they asked us to move out from the village, so we moved out again.

*Why did they demand compensation from the villages?*

I am not sure of the reason why they demanded money from us. We had not done anything wrong. We ran away from Buvi and we lost all our things for the second time. We did not know what to do so we just left all our things lying around then we ran away to the next village. When the militants came they took most of our things with them. This also applied to our gardens: they harvested all the gardens. When they did this to us we were frightened of guns so we ran away to the bush. When we ran away from here to Katihana they also demanded money from us.

*Who demanded money from you when you got to Katihana?*

This was Satan's group. One day we were at home and one of the militants came and demanded that we should give him \$80. We were frightened so we gave him the money.

We ran away to Katihana but still they were after us and this time they demanded \$4,000, two pigs and two red shell-money. We contributed until we got the amount and we gave it to them. From Kitihana we came to Buvi to our gardens and then went back to Kitihana. After living at Kitihana and everything came back to normal then we went to Buvi and since then have been living here at Buvi.

**Statement N° 0554**

There was going to be a fight between Malaita and Guadalcanal. They started to destroy our schools and other things. When we saw this we ran away and we ended up here. We lost almost everything: our boxes, pots, plates, spoons and other household items. We came and stayed for a while and we heard that the fighting had reached CDC 1, and then we ran away again. This time my boss hired a truck and we went up to Bita and stayed there. We stayed at Bita and then we were told to run away up to Tataona. Harold Keke told us to move from Bita up to Tataona.

*Why did Harold Keke ask you to move out from Bita?*

He wanted us to move out to clear the area so that he could come down to carry out his operation. When we were at Tataona we were living in fear, we could not talk loud but just whispered all the time. Most of the time we only whispered and after peace came back to normal we kept on whispering because we had got so used to that. We could not move freely. We were frightened because we saw him tie up two men and this made us really scared.

One day we went down to the river and were having our bath when a militant went and saw Visu. He had a gun with him said to her, "Visu, come up". Visu came out from the water and he asked her to sit and he said to her, "we heard that you were in love with one of Harold Keke's boys." Visu said "I don't know anything about that," but he said, "Harold Keke said that you have to pay a fine, if you don't pay a fine we will have to shoot you." When I got back home I told my husband about what the militant had said to Visu and that we had to give about \$500, red money and one pig. If not Visu would have been shot. My sister and her husband and my husband and I contributed some cash, red money and one pig and we handed them to Harold Keke and his men and so Visu was saved.

When Harold Keke moved back to the Weather Coast we moved back to Bita at Gold Ridge. We stayed there and then the RRU came and started to carry out their operation at Gold Ridge to chase Harold Keke and his men out from the area. We could hear continuous gun shots at Ngalikasia. We were living in the valley and decided not to run away.

One day while we were at home we could hear gun shots. This was Satan's group. They fired warning shots three times and when we heard this we started to run away. We did not run too far but just hid near the river. We ran up the hill and stood there, then we looked down at Bemuta, we could see three houses were set on fire by the militants.

That day my sister and other women had gone to town. We stayed near the river until evening then we came back home. So when my sister came home she told us another piece of news from CDC 1 that we must go away from our village because we are spears.

*Which group passed the news that you were spears?*

This was another group from Doku with Ernest. They thought we were supporters of Satan. We did not want to take sides with any of those groups, so we decided to move to another location. But when we were just about to leave, Satan's group came and demanded us to give them pigs, red money and cash. So we contributed and gave them what they requested. We left Bita and

went up to Katehana. The militants went after us and demanded more money, pigs and red money. We could not help it, so we contributed and gave them what they wanted. We stayed at Katehana for a long time and we came back to our village when RAMSI arrived in the country. That is the end of my story.

**Statement N° 0555**

After the signing of TPA Agreement, there were in-fightings amongst the militants in the area. There were three militant groups: one was Stanley Kaoni's group, Harold Keke and Selwyn Saki. After peace had resumed again, then these groups were formed and started attacking our own people. This affected me a lot.

I had a cousin brother who came from the Weather Coast to stay with me, and they [Satan's group] demanded that I should give them ten thousand dollars. They said that if I did not give them the money they would shoot me. In fact I did not give it to them. I took the truck with my cousin brother and went to town. I told my cousin that he should leave for the Weather Coast or stay with some relatives. I left the truck with a friend, but they found it and brought it back loaded with guns. They drove the truck right to my house and demanded \$10,000. They pointed the guns at me and pulled me out from my house and asked me to board the truck and we went up to Gold Ridge. I had been buying and selling gold and I left some money with a relative there. So they took me up to Gold Ridge and I went and got \$10,000 which was kept with a relative. I also had 250 grams of gold. They took the \$10,000, the 250 grams of gold and the truck itself and went their way. I was dropped at Obo Obo and found my own way home. I was so upset but I did not know what to do. I just let go of everything.

In another incident, my other truck was held up by Selwyn Saki and his group. They forced me out of the truck and demanded money from me, too. They also forced other passengers from the truck to go out, so they grabbed the key and started the truck and sped off. This was a new truck I just bought at the cost of \$172,000. I did not give them what they demanded but just \$1,000 and so when they received this amount, they left. But later they came back again and demanded another \$5,000. They said to me that if I gave that money they would release my truck. They slapped me, stepped on my head, shoulder and stomach and they released me. One of them pointed his gun at me and said that I must give the \$5,000. I said to them, give me time to look for the money. So we came back to the house. Early the next morning I took \$5,000 and went down but when I got there, the truck was completely dismantled. I gave them \$5,000 and they told me to take back my truck, all the tires and other parts were removed. I did not know what to do with the truck because all the parts were removed so I just left it, hoping that one day I would fix it if I got the money. The militants took away a lot of things from me, my generator, video screen and deck, icebox, chainsaw plus other tools and tires.

After this I came back home. Although I had met all their demands they were still not satisfied. They kept on asking for some more basic items like sugar, tealeaf and biscuits. I had to give it to them in order to save myself.

This had caused me a lot of headache and I have been traumatized with all these problems. Finally we ran away to the Weather Coast and stayed for about nine months. We only came back when RAMSI came in July 2003.

**Extract of Statement N° 0543**

The situation in the Gold Ridge area calmed down after some reconciliation ceremonies between Kaoni and a follower of Keke, Willy Tara, in February 2002. The ceremonies were fostered by village leaders of the Turarana communities and the Peace Monitoring Council.

Meanwhile in Malaita, people were being harassed by returning MEF militants who got involved in armed clashes among themselves and oppressed villagers with arbitrary compensation claims. The story of Malaita after the exodus is told in chapter 3.2.3.

In the Western and Choiseul provinces, local quasi-militant groups and militants of the BRA generated an environment of uncontrolled violence whose victims were also local people. Chapter 3.2.5 presents the story of Solomon Islands' West during the tension.

Ethnic antagonisms between Guadalcanal and Malaitan militants threatened to re-surface briefly after the murder of Selwyn Saki in September 2001. But the tension had already taken a different direction: there was no longer any component of "ethnicity" in the conflict. Civilians suffered increasingly from both sides, caught between a rock and a hard place:

At first our own group, the GRA, came to our place and they gave us a lot of hard times. They forced us to do whatever they wanted, and if we failed to follow their instructions they threatened to kill us.

Then came the Joint Operation and the MEF group, consisting mostly of police officers. They arrived at ICLAM area at Aruligo and pointed a gun at me. I tried to run and one of them chased and threatened to kill me if I refused to tell him of the location or the whereabouts of Harold Keke and his men. I told him that I do not know; they threatened to kill me if I refused to cooperate. I somehow managed to trick them by giving all sorts of information which was not true and they released me. After a while we all fled over to our home on the Weather Coast.

**Statement N° 0641**

With MEF and IFM formally disbanded after the TPA, the conflict disintegrated into a plethora of *individual* criminal acts aimed to make the most in *individual* material benefits. At the same time, compensation claims presented to the Government, mostly by disgruntled police officers and MEF or pseudo-MEF elements who dominated Honiara, emptied the public Treasury. The following statement, given by a former security officer who worked for Allan Kemakeza while he was Minister for National Unity, Peace and Reconciliation and later when he was elected Prime Minister, is a vivid testimony of those times:

The first few months on my job were very difficult for me since having people standing around with guns was a new experience for me; the sound of guns could be heard everywhere. While sitting with the Minister in the office I encountered a lot of hardships, especially from people who came and demanded that their property claims be processed quickly. Some of them were militants; they came with guns and threatened the PM, and they demanded money for house rent, vehicle hire and other services they claimed to have provided.

Towards the end of 2000 the local police along with the prison officers started to become very frustrated. They would often come around the Minister's office firing shots in the air. One of the

former senior police officers came one day and fired shots and threatened all the people in the office. I approached him and managed to calm him down; he was a very close relative.

At that time a European was the Permanent Secretary, his name was Lloyd and he was from New Zealand. The militants were angry at him, thinking he was the one who wanted to control the money in the Finance office. He was targeted by the militants because he tried to balance and control the money acquired by the EXIM Bank. In the end I had to step in and protect him as well. One day prison officers came and threatened to kill Mr Lloyd. They demanded the Government pay their claim of 2.5 million dollars as danger allowance for working through the tension. They followed him from his house and they entered the office premises. He tried to explain to them the financial situation of the country, but these men did not want to listen. The officers fired shots at the notice board in front of the Minister's office. When the PS [Permanent Secretary] came out, the officers pointed their guns at him and wanted to shoot him on the spot. Again I managed to calm them down. That was in 2001 around the month of February.

Not long after that another group arrived at the office. This time it was the Marau Eagle Force. They came and fired shots at that notice board exactly on the national emblem writing "To Lead is to Serve". The Marau Eagle Force claimed for 2 million dollars for their service in assisting the local police while patrolling around the Marau Area, trying to capture Harold Keke. In fact, they were not engaged by the Government, they tagged along with the local police on their own will. So when they demanded money from us we did not know what to do since the Government did not engage them in the first place. We tried to explain everything to them but they would not listen and maintained that the Government should pay them for their service. The same thing happened after the ten Kwaio men were killed by Harold Keke. The relatives of those killed came and demanded that the Government compensate the lives of these ten Kwaio killed by Keke and his men.

Another case I remember was by those militants from north Malaita. It was shortly after the national general election. A supporter of Kemakeza was drinking at Honiara Hotel and was attacked by two men from To'obaita. They fought and a boy from To'obaita dislocated his arm. The militants from north Malaita demanded the Prime Minister pay compensation on behalf of his supporter since he dislocated the arm of that militant from To'obaita. They demanded \$50,000 from the PM. He wanted to give \$15,000 but I told him that the amount he wanted to give was unethical. I will take one shell money and \$2,500 cash and solve the problem. I met up with the To'obaitan men at Kukum Market, explained the nature of the whole problem and gave them one shell money plus \$2,500 cash. They accepted and the problem was solved.

I have a lot of stories to tell. I normally carried the cheques for the MP to sign for payments. I witnessed a lot of payments. It was a very tiring job moving to and fro between Treasury and the PM's office. Most of the men who threatened the government office at that time were not militants but merely people who took advantage of the situation to extort money because they had guns. We were left in an awkward position to control such men. I was providing security and in the end I had to become a carpenter. I had to repair the doors broken by the police officers and militants who were angry when their claims were not quickly processed.

#### **Summary of Statement N° 2014**

Minister for National Unity, Peace and Reconciliation Kemakeza himself was also involved in irregular compensation payments when he allegedly approved a disbursement of \$851,000 for himself and \$750,000 for his Permanent Secretary, Lucian Kii. Both were removed from office by Prime Minister Sogavare in August 2001. Just four months later, Kemakeza was elected



Member of Parliament for his constituency in the Central Province and not long after became Prime Minister.

In 2002 the Kemakeza Government replaced the IPMT and the PMC with the National Peace Council (NPC) which undertook a range of peace-building and reconciliation activities, including the operation of a “Weapons Free Village Campaign”. Even through the campaign received positive assessments, a decisive breakthrough towards peace was not achieved. On 5 June 2003 Solomon Islands Government asked, once more, Australia, New Zealand and other regional countries for military assistance. This time their plea got a hearing. On 24 July 2003, the Australia-led Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) arrived in Honiara to assist in the restoration of law and order following years of internal chaos. The conflict in Solomon Islands had come to an end.

## **10. Conclusions**

Towards the year 2000, the emerging of different factors aggravated political instability in the Solomon Islands. As mentioned in the previous chapter, those were the years when corruption and mismanagement began to surface, while the country was affected by external factors such as the Asian financial crisis of 1997 and the decline of prices for local products on the world market. But perhaps the most important factor was the inability of succeeding Governments to establish a policy of development capable of diminishing regional inequalities. Concentration of investment in the northern plains of Guadalcanal and the Western Province left structurally underprivileged areas like Malaita and the Weather Coast behind. The collision of these two disadvantaged groups created a volatile and unpredictable situation: Malaitan migrants, who had left their island because land and employment opportunities were scarce, augmented the pressure on land resources of the Guadalcanal people. The tension began thus as a clash of “have-nots”; it is no coincidence that the conflict had its origin on the Weather Coast, and it is no coincidence that the first victims were Malaitan settlers.

Yet, the Bona Fide Demands of Guadalcanal were not just the result of pressure on resources; they were just as much the expression of an ongoing prevalence of local over national identity. By the end of the 1990s, Solomon Island was – and still is – a collage of ethnically diverse localities with little progress towards one common “imagined community”.

Finally, the outbreak of violence was also a demonstration of the “problems of weak and artificial state structures imposed on diverse and fragmented societies.”<sup>166</sup> Guadalcanal militants resorted to violence because they perceived that public institutions did not know how to deal with their demands. Another example of the weakness of institutionalism was the breakdown of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, when ethnic allegiances took primacy over institutional loyalty.

However, while these factors might count as the background of the tension, the conflict was not a logical, self-sustained outcome of structural features. It needed political agency, or what some would call “political entrepreneurs”, and a political mobilizer. The political agents behind the tension of Solomon Islands were leaders from Guadalcanal, and the mobilizer was ethnicity.

As we have tried to show above, the tension went through different stages. The first stage comprised more-or-less the time between the beginnings in 1998 and the Rove armory raid on 5 June 2000. It included the eviction of settlers, mostly Malaitans, from Guadalcanal by the GRA/IFM and the retaliation of the Malaita Eagle Force. During this stage, ethnicity was clearly the main driving force of the conflict. The armory raid at Rove initiated a period of transition where the importance of ethnicity was declining, but still present. The last stage, roughly between the Townsville Peace Agreement and the arrival of RAMSI, was characterized by the application of violence against co-ethnics in pursuit of *individual or group* material benefits.

The role of ethnicity during the tension is thus controversial and has been assessed differently: while colloquial language refers to the conflict in general as “ethnic tension”, some analysts deny its usefulness for explaining the course of events and its underlying causes.<sup>167</sup> The Commission has come to the conclusion that both characterizations are mistaken. The term “ethnic tension” applies fully only to the first stage of the conflict, but disregarding ethnicity in the assessment of the conflict and reducing peace-building to the elevation of living standards through development projects would be myopic both in both analytical and political terms.

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<sup>166</sup> Benjamin Reilly: *Democracy and Diversity: Political Engineering in the Asia-Pacific*; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 41.

<sup>167</sup> See for example UNDP: *Emerging Priorities in Preventing Future Violent Conflict. An independent study commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with the support of the Department of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace and the National Peace Council (NPC)*, Honiara, 2004, pp. 33-34.

Even though the importance of ethnicity as a “mobilizer” diminished in the course of the conflict, it should not be underrated. Yet, as Reilly states, “the mere presence of ethnic differences does not mean that these will necessarily become the basis of political competition.”<sup>168</sup> Politicization of ethnicity must be understood in specific socio-political and economic contexts and in its relationship to material interests; in other words, the roots of ethnic conflicts may not be ethnic at all and in fact they hardly ever are.<sup>169</sup> But the mere fact that ethnicity could be activated as a political weapon and channeled towards violence shows the inherent conflict-generating potential of ethnic stereotyping. Ethnicity was the only “mobilizer” available to Guadalcanal militants to give shape to their demands. Ten years after the tension, focus groups carried out by TRC researchers with young people and children in rural Guadalcanal and Malaita revealed unawareness about the “other” in the best and worst case of ethnic stereotyping.

Sustainable peace in Solomon Islands requires without doubt a well-balanced distribution of development investment and political institution-building; but it also requires the overcoming of prejudices and indifference. It requires, in other words, the building of a nation where ethno-cultural diversity is perceived as an opportunity rather than an obstacle.<sup>170</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, this is not an easy task; but it is an important one.

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<sup>168</sup> Reilly, *Democracy and Diversity*, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>169</sup> We will return to this point in chapter 3.2.4.

<sup>170</sup> There is by now an ample bibliography about topics such as “multicultural citizenship” or “multicultural states”. Even though they refer for the most part to the integration of ethnic minorities in developed countries, it might be worthwhile to test their conceptual adaptability for a country like the Solomon Islands.

### 3.2.2 TASIMAURI: THE WEATHER COAST OF GUADALCANAL

*The Weather Coast is unique in all of Solomon Islands.  
Other regions have high rainfall but not as high;  
other regions are remote but are not without roads or regular shipping;  
they are isolated but not locked in by steep mountains and shores  
that dip precipitously to meet huge seas that make anchorage dangerous or impossible.  
This is a perilous place to live: tsunamis, earthquakes and flash floods  
have taken their toll within living memory.  
So has the conflict around the recent ethnic tension.  
This is the Weather Coast, and the weather costs the people dearly.<sup>171</sup>*

#### 1. Introduction

The Weather Coast, locally known as *Tasimauri* (“rough sea”), is the southern region of Guadalcanal, reaching broadly from Oa on the southeast to Marasa on the southwest. By many standards, the area is isolated, remote and under-developed. There are no regular shipping services for passengers or cargo, telecommunications are limited to the occasional mobile phone tower and two-way radios, and formal representations of government are limited. The research team and statement takers of the TRC reached the villages along the south east coast in four hours, in a boat carrying little weight for its size with a 60 horsepower engine. The journey followed the coastline west of Honiara around to the south of Guadalcanal, following grassy hills and inlets of white sand coast. Approaching the Weather Coast the coastline becomes rocky and dramatic, with occasional rocky outcrops causing potential hazards for unknowing boats and ships.

The Weather Coast strikes its visitors as vivid, dramatic and wild. Steep, green mountains descend sharply to the coast, meeting the deep blue and turquoise waters. The vibrant colors of the mountains and clear sea are broken by a wide coastline of black sand. The shore is covered in large pebbles and stones and small pieces of smooth coral rocks. Villages are just visible from the ocean, settled in the foothills of the steep mountains which dominate the backdrop and are surrounded by lush vegetation. They are large, neatly landscaped with paths and fences made of stones from the shore, and densely populated with numerous leaf houses and occasional

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<sup>171</sup> Kastom Gaden Association: *People on the edge: A report on the assessment of food security, agricultural pests and diseases, small scale food processing and village energy options along the Guadalcanal Weather Coast, Solomon Islands*, April 2005, p. 19.

permanent houses. Traditional structures are used for houses, kitchens, additional sleeping rooms, and bathroom facilities.

This is the region with the largest concentration of poor people in the Solomon Islands. The physical environment is difficult for agricultural production, with excessively high rainfall (about 5,000 mm. per year), steep topography and infertile soils. The economy is mostly subsistence, with gardens behind the villages for food, firewood and building materials; but even food from gardens is often scarce during the wetter months (May to September), and shortages are particularly pronounced in very wet years when people have to survive mainly on dry coconuts, ferns, or leaves of sandpaper cabbage.<sup>172</sup>

A little copra is produced and small quantities of betel nut are sold to Honiara. However, cash income is minimal. Aside from a limited number of canteens in some villages, there are very few commercial enterprises on the Weather Coast. Very minor amounts are derived from the sale of copra, betel nut and fresh food, but most people are effectively outside the cash economy.

Transport is another constraint to development on the Weather Coast. There is no longer a functioning vehicle road. Of the three airstrips at Avuavu, Mbabanakira and Marau, only the latter is currently in use. That means that transport to and from Weather Coast relies entirely on shipping.

The Weather Coast is the home of the main leaders of the Guadalcanal militants: Harold Keke, his brother Joseph Sangu, Andrew Te'e and George Gray. In a way, then, the origin of the tension is to be found on the Weather Coast.

## **2. The Moro Movement**

In the 1950s, immediately after the decline of the Maasina Rule Movement (see chapter 2), the Weather Coast saw the rise of a social movement that unified anti-colonial and anti-modern attitudes with the striving for development: the *Moro Movement* (also known as *Gaenalu* meaning “octopus”), named after its founder Pelise Moro, a local “bigman” from Makaruka village.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> *Solomon Islands Smallholder Agriculture Study*, Vol. 4: Provincial Reports. Canberra: AusAid, 2006.

<sup>173</sup> Most of the information about the Moro Movement is owed to W. Davenport & G. Coker: “The Moro movement of Guadalcanal, British Solomon Islands protectorate”, *Journal of Polynesian Society* 76, 1967, p.

In 1956, while seriously ill, Moro had a visionary experience which – in Davenport and Coker’s translation – he described thus:

I saw a bird, but it was a man. At first it was a bird, it came out of some swirling dust like that behind a truck on the roads of Honiara. The bird changed into a man who spoke and instructednYou must do the things I tell you. Everything in this land and sea belongs to you. You must ignore all those who scoff or tell you not to do it. The thing you should start is an association [*kampan*, Pijin, “company”] to make money. All the things that are yours should be used, not allowed to stand unused or to be exploited by others. Your people own it and control it.<sup>174</sup>

During the several months he needed to recover from his illness, Moro recounted details of his vision which were written down by his followers. The most important document that was produced was a creation myth of Isatabu, the traditional name of Guadalcanal. The document proclaimed Moro as the legitimate successor of Tuimauro, the mythological first paramount chief of Isatabu, which gave him the right over the island of Guadalcanal. These mythological records and the collection of traditional artefacts – mostly wood carvings and tools such as stone axes and weapons – were in the “custom house” in Makaruka and used to establish Moro’s leadership and build a common memory and identity for the island of Isatabu.

The Moro Movement held a strong anti-colonial sentiment and emphasised the return to traditional culture and customs. As Kabutaulaka states, “in a sense, adherents were torn between a desire to change and modernize their way of life and a wish to return to old ‘custom’ ways of their forefathers. This is described as ‘*Sai lima horohoro tuali*’, ‘putting lands together in living as before.’”<sup>175</sup> Apart from the gathering of oral histories and traditions, the recollection and safekeeping of artefacts, the emphasis on “custom” included the re-adopting of traditional clothing. Usually (though not exclusively), followers of the movement could be easily identified by their dress code: the use of *kabilato* (loin bark cloths) for men and *chada* (grass skirts) for women.

In more practical terms, Moro’s vision was reworked into the charter of a social movement that was concerned mainly with the launching of collective economic enterprises aimed at elevating

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123–175; and Tarcisius Kabutaulaka Tara: “A Socio-political Pressure Group: A Study of the Moro Movement of Guadalcanal”, available at: <http://www.comofinquiry.gov.sb/Articles/Moro%20movement%20Tarcisius%20K.%20Tara.pdf>

<sup>174</sup> Davenport & Coker, p. 141.

<sup>175</sup> Kabutaulaka. *A Socio-Political Pressure Group ...*, p. 8.

the standard of living of followers of the Moro Custom Company, as it was officially called by its leaders. In spite of its anti-colonial stand, the movement did not address the political power required to achieve Solomon Islands' independence from the Britain. Its main project was rather to finance economic programmes. Moro called on every adult to contribute one shilling in a so-called "census". Besides, a "collection" was instituted that demanded one pound for each adult man and ten shillings for each adult woman. Another contribution was shell-money, most of which was kept in the custom house, or House of Antiquities, as it was also called. In Makaruka, the Moro Custom Company maintained a profitable store. A "chain" of Moro Custom Company stores was planned in other villages, but could not be implemented. All profits from the business were supposed to be added to the treasury of the Moro Custom Company. A piggery was set up in 1964, but it did not yield any profit as most of the pigs were killed during small ceremonies such as welcoming guests. Nevertheless, income generated by the "census", the "collection" and the store was estimated to be more than two thousand pounds.

By the mid-sixties, the Moro Movement was exerting a strong influence over about one-half the area of Guadalcanal, widely dispersed around the island but with a heavy concentration in Moli and Vulolo wards. However, lack of quick achievement of the economic aims finally caused the slow disintegration of the movement, which by the seventies had declined to a local level, even though Moro still continued to enjoy the status of a "bigman". Currently there are still some remnants of the movement, but it has completely vanished from public life.

Chief Pelise Moro, who died in 2006, was still alive when the tension devastated much of Guadalcanal. However, no statement from him regarding the conflict is known. In his autobiography, Peter Kenilorea remembers:

Moro was a very old man when the crisis years began in the late 1990s and was no longer capable of direct participation; but his influence was important, particularly through his many alleged spiritual and ancestral miraculous powers of invincibility. According to one of my Guadalcanal colleagues and confidants, who was close to the perpetrators of the recent militancy, social unrest, and ethnic cleansing, Chief Moro was allegedly named as the Commander-in-Chief of the Guadalcanal militants' army. Apparently, his powers were guaranteed by witchcraft, enhanced by the power of the spirit world, and this was considered an important component in the victory for his men in this war.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Peter Kenilorea: *Tell It As It Is. Autobiography of Rt. Hon. Sir Peter Kenilorea, KBE, PC, Solomon Islands' First Prime Minister*. Edited by Clive Moore. Taipei: Center for Asia-Pacific Area Studies, RHCSS, Academica Sinica, 2008, p. 349.

Even without the personal involvement of its leader, at least in the beginnings of the conflict, there was still a strong influence of the Moro Movement on the GRA activists who wore the *kabilato* and returned to old traditional practices.

### **3. Reign of Terror: Harold Keke and the Guadalcanal Liberation Front (GLF)**

Harold Keke was the most radical and daring of the Guadalcanal militant leaders. Before becoming a militant, Keke worked as a plumber for the RSIPF. During this time he was deployed to the border with Papua New Guinea to carry out maintenance and building of new barracks for PFF personnel at Lofung base, where he received basic weapon training. Little else is known of his background.<sup>177</sup>

Keke's first military action was the raid on the Yandina Armory. In December 1999 he was injured at the Bungana shoot-out and spent time in custody until he was bailed out by Alebua and Fr. Norman Arkwright. He later escaped to the Weather Coast but was known to prowl the island, while his fight against the Government and Malaitan settlers drew him deeper into criminal activities. In a raid he destroyed the resort of the then Deputy Prime Minister Allan Kemakeza on Savo Island, kidnapped his brother and demanded one million dollars. The hostage was released by Keke's brother Joseph Sangu. In September 2000 he hijacked a Solomon Airlines plane at Mbabanakira:

As a scheduled flight the plane left Honiara for Mbabanakira on Saturday. We contacted Henderson and they confirmed that the plane already took off and on its way. We took the folder and the manifest and we went down to the airstrip. The plane arrived and Nathaniel took the manifest and handed it to the pilot. I opened the cargo hold and took out luggage. The pilot and Nathaniel discussed the manifest and when we looked two kilometers down the airstrip we could see the militants coming up. They came with a three-legged gun and two higher powered guns. There were fifteen of them. When they got to us they said, "Don't move, surrender." We did not move. My colleague stood at one side, the pilot stood at the front and I was on the other side. When they got to us they fired three shots. They went to the pilot and demanded that he should contact the Airline to give \$500,000. When the airline office was contacted they said they would not give that \$500,000. They told us to look after the pilot. Upon hearing that, they tied up Captain Eric and took him to the other side of the river. Then they chased us that we must go back. They told everyone at the airstrip to leave the site and go back home.

#### **Statement N° 6019**

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<sup>177</sup> Attempts by the TRC to speak with Harold Keke in Rove Prison were not successful. Clive Moore describes Keke as a high-school dropout who was brought up a Roman Catholic and later converted to the SSEC faith (Clive Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis*, p. 191). This has not been confirmed by our interviewees closely acquainted with Keke. According to one, his grandparents converted to the SSEC faith while in Queensland during the blackbirding times; but Keke's parents and Keke himself were raised SSEC.



The pilot was later released thanks to the intervention of the Melanesian Brotherhood and a payment of SBD\$200,000 in ransom;<sup>178</sup> the plane was destroyed.

After the Townsville Peace Agreement, tensions between leaders from Guadalcanal escalated into open hostility, culminating in Andrew Te'e's defection to the Joint Operation in 2001-2002 and in Keke's attempt to kill Alebua in June 2001. Separating himself from the other militants who attended the peace conference, including his brother, Keke formed the Guadalcanal Liberation Front (GLF) and demanded absolute loyalty from villagers on south Guadalcanal:

Harold Keke did not agree to the TPA. He formed a group called GLF and advised every single person in the South Guadalcanal Constituency not to follow the Government. If anyone followed the Government, he would chop off their heads and put them in a canoe and float them out to sea.

**Statement N° 0725**

The splitting up of Guadalcanal militants limited Keke's mobility. The group of Stanley Kaoni, for example, blocked the movement of the GLF into the plains of northeast Guadalcanal. Confined to the Weather Coast, Keke now developed an obsession with security and control, and enforced a system of rigid social rules upon the villagers. People's movements were severely restricted. A trip to Honiara *could* get a man killed:

We did not have any freedom of movement to Honiara. This was really forbidden. If we went to Honiara and came back he would call us "spear", that was the common word used during that time. If you were called a spear and could not pay any fine you would be shot dead.

He forbade us to go over to Honiara or even to visit a nearby village or to talk to with other villagers from the same area. We did not have salt, kerosene or soap.

**Testimonies taken in the village of Inakona**

Keke allegedly received food supplies from businessman Yukio Sato, who had been appointed as peace negotiator by Prime Minister Kemakeza, while villagers began to suffer from lack of basic needs:

We did not have any salt, so we had to fetch salt water. We had to go very far where the water was clean before fetching it. We did not have any kerosene, soap, sugar and salt, taiyo, noodles and other basic food. We had to go back to the olden system; we had to use bamboo and coconut for lighting. One of the things we were surprised at was his supply of food. He seemed to

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<sup>178</sup> During an interview in Rove Prison, Cornelius Galasa from the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (see chapter 3.2.5) told TRC researchers that the ransom money was used to buy bullets in Bougainville, a 75 HP engine and a ray boat.

receive lots of rice and other things from town. We did not know who brought these to him and at what time of the day or night he received them.

**Statement N° 0475**

Always on the run from real or imagined enemies, Keke changed the location of his camps several times. The longest period he spent in Inakona, where he stayed from April 2001 after the arrival of the first patrol boat of the Joint Operation to the Weather Coast until the beginning of Operation Liberation Strike in October 2002. At the beginning, he was welcomed by the villagers:

It was because of our support that he came to our area. We did not oppose him to come here. That was when he escaped the patrol boat shelling at his home. We helped in building his home, his garden, his bunkers and we offered ourselves to provide security.

**Testimony taken in the village of Inakona**

The peaceful cohabitation between villagers and militants, though, came to an end when Keke changed his initially “friendly” attitude (an expression used by a villager during an interview) and imposed a system of total control, based on surveillance and fear:

He slowly ruled our lives, bit by bit, until our people found it very hard to live normal lives. We the people only controlled two things: our breath and going to the toilet. Anything he said, villagers must abide by it. We were not allowed to travel beyond that point, so no one here was able to go to town. Everything we said was closely monitored by his followers so we became used to whispering to each other. There were blockades along our roads; we had to follow the beach when we moved around. At nighttime we had to have a fire to be identified as locals, if not you will be shot.

As weeks passed by we all suddenly found ourselves within the domain of his power. His approach to people began to be very tough. This was all due to his fear. He was a very scared man. He was so scared that he tended to be mistrustful, although he knew we were on his side. We paid compensation for any mistakes a villager made in modern currency, traditional currency, pigs and so forth.

**Testimonies taken in the village of Inakona**

After Keke’s surrender, the village chiefs of Inakona claimed compensation from the Government and stated the militants killed 300 pigs and 520 chickens during their stay in the village.<sup>179</sup> Compensation had to be paid to the militants for a countless number of reasons and

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<sup>179</sup> “Inakona Information Sheet”, attached to a letter from village chiefs of Inakona directed to Solomon Islands Government.

“no one had [any] rights to complain”.<sup>180</sup> Men were obliged to engage in security; young girls had to prepare food for the militants and were called to Keke’s camp for “massaging”:

When we heard that we thought it could be just a normal massage to be carried in front of a group of people but that was not the case. After Harold Keke was captured then the girls revealed those stories. They said when they massaged him he was only wearing his pants. He had his gun and another man would be keeping watch at the door with his gun. His wife would wait outside with the security guard.

*Did those girls ever come out to say that he had sexually abused them?*

They did not say anything like that; he could have done something to them but they did not reveal it because of their own privacy.

#### **Statement N° 0475**

Villagers in Inakona disclosed that they did not know “what type [of] massaging took place”.<sup>181</sup> One statement-giver declared to the TRC that several young women were raped at gunpoint, including his own daughter (Statement N° 0474).<sup>182</sup>

Keke’s attitude became more and more abnormal; he turned into a “moody person”, as one interviewee described him.<sup>183</sup> This gave rise to rumors about his mental unsteadiness:

During Keke’s time here I saw him as a very stressful man who kept on changing his mind and plans. He was indeed a very unstable person in what we should do. He gave one order and then he would change his mind. He just gave orders. We did not have long discussions, if we discussed anything.

#### **Testimony of Simon, a former GLF militant**

Fieldwork on the Weather Coast revealed that Keke’s attitude became increasingly dominated by a mix of Christian fundamentalism, traditional beliefs and a personality cult. He obliged the villages under his domain to reserve three days a week for prayer:

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<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> Testimony of a villager from Inakona.

<sup>182</sup> For further details on sexual violence, see chapters 4.2.4 and 5.1.

<sup>183</sup> “While following him around I noticed that he was frustrated because he knew that there were people coming to kill him and because of that he became a moody person. At times you could see that he was happy, and on most occasions he put on a stern and aggressive look, but he was a simple person and normally smiled to everyone. He talked well with everyone, he fiddled and played around with people and laughed out loud when he was happy. While he was still with us the people around the Weather Coast supported and relied on him, he gave food to everyone around. When he was about to be apprehended he told me that one day you will go against your own brother, father and your mother. Most of the boys and men he helped in giving food and money were the very ones that came later and wanted to kill him, but it was very difficult because he was well informed and protected”.

#### **Testimony of Samuel, a former GLF militant**

He declared the space under a big koilo tree as holy ground. We had to gather there every Tuesday, Friday and Sunday to pray. He told us to treat Tuesday and Friday the same as Sunday; it must be a time of worship and prayer. Anyone found going fishing or gardening on these days would be killed without any warning.

We here are SSEC, but when Keke ruled these villages we had to pray three Sabbaths a week. We only know one and that is Sunday. Under Keke we had to pray on Tuesday, Friday and Sunday. As I have said, if one was caught not attending these prayer times, we had to save him by paying compensation, if not he would be punished severely or even murdered.

#### **Testimonies of villagers from Inakona**

On Sundays, fishing and gardening was forbidden. Again, disobedience was mercilessly punished:

My name is Jerome and I am from Raeavu. This incident happened to us while on a fishing trip one Sunday. At that time Keke had enforced strict rules for people to follow, especially during Sundays; no one is allowed to go out fishing. While out in the sea fishing, we saw Keke's boat approaching. They came straight to us and pointed a gun at us in our canoes. There were six of us from the same village in separate canoes. They told us to paddle our canoes over to their base at Inakona; it was quite a distance and it took as around one hour before we got there. Arriving there his boys were already waiting for us at the beach. They instructed us to sit in a circle and they stood around with their gun. They butted us, took stones and threw them on our heads, bodies, legs and knees. Later Harold came and told his boys to set us free; he instructed us to leave our canoes and walk back to our village. We walked home all night and we arrived at our village at 3:00am. Luckily we had a nurse in our village and she assisted in nursing our wounds and bruises.

#### **Statement N° 0835**

To protect himself against any supposed "evil spirit", Keke employed "prayer warriors" or religious leaders who gained considerable influence in the GLF:

Once he called more than 20 men from Pechoakuri to go over to his camp at around 3 a.m. and he threatened to kill all of us. He wanted to kill us simply because our boys went to his camp at an odd time. As a result he demanded that we pay him one thousand dollars, shell money and two pigs. I gave one of the shell monies and another was given by my brother. Then he went over to Komate and when he returned he accused us of casting an evil spell on the shell monies. According to him one of the women prayed and claimed that she saw in a vision that the shell money we gave him carried an evil spell. He ordered all of us, including women and children, to go over to him and we had to explain ourselves that we do not have any black magic powers or "vele". He told us to go and stand in front of the altar of the church and swear to God that we do not possess black magic powers.

#### **Testimony of a village elder, Inakona**

Almost three hundred statements were collected by TRC on the Weather Coast from victims of the tension. Few talked about human rights violations committed by Keke and his GLF. The absolute majority spoke of patrol boat incidents caused by the Joint Operation. The reason for

that is probably because it was not always necessary for Keke to resort to overt violence against villagers and his dominance on the Weather Coast was essentially based on *fear*:

Whenever the militants came they would order us to remain silent at all times. We were instructed to watch only with our eyes and say nothing. Whenever sitting together in groups to tell stories, we often whispered because we were afraid to speak out loud.

**Statement N° 0839**

We were not allowed to talk about anything and during the nights his supporters would come and listen under the houses to hear what we would talk about and go back and report to him.

**Testimony of a villager from Inakona**

Here we were to observe rules and we were not allowed to fish at night and walk around, and we had to be on guard on the beach when our turns came. We were about two years in this situation.

**Statement N° 0806**

No single person can impose total social control over a long period, relying solely on fear and violence, without some level of social support. Keke's dominance on the Weather Coast was no exception. As one of our interviewees stated, "lots of people hated him and lots of people too supported him." Keke obtained a cult-like status mostly among his younger followers:

And one thing I saw is that he began to build a kind of cult character and many of the boys believed in him. Many of the boys respected him as if he were a god and so the villagers who supported him and the cult of his personality certainly grew as many his predictions in certain ways came true.

**Testimony of Simon<sup>184</sup>**

Trying a more rational explanation, others justify their support for Keke by isolating his *ideas* from his *actions*:

A lot of us stayed with Harold Keke because he fought for the rights of Guadalcanal.

*What do you mean by the rights of Guadalcanal?*

The right of Guadalcanal means being liberated from the hands of foreigners.

*What do you mean by "hands of foreigners"?*

What I mean by that is mostly Malaitans who stay around Guadalcanal, especially the Malaitans. During that time I was supporting what Harold Keke was preaching. He told us that he was fighting to liberate Guadalcanal so that the island of Guadalcanal could live peacefully and be for the people of Guadalcanal. I supported his ideas, as did some of the other people at Haliatu, then

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<sup>184</sup> In his books about the Melanesian Brothers, Fr. Richard Anthony Carter quotes his diary from August 2002:

"When Keke appeared at the Theological College last year the students were all rushing to shake his hands as if a saint rather than a psychopath had just arrived" (Richard Anthony Carter: *In search of the lost. The death and life of seven peacemakers of the Melanesian Brotherhood*. Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2006, p. 90).

Inakona, Duidui and Mbiti area, those places, not all but some of them. I did not support Harold Keke's killing, but I supported his idea that he wanted to develop this island in a way to benefit the people of Guadalcanal. The riches or the resources of this island should be for the people of Guadalcanal. That's why I supported Harold Keke's ideas. I did not support his ideas of killing.

**Testimony of J. I.**

In hindsight, it is evident that it was Keke's violent turn against his own people that made him lose much of this support. When the Joint Operation arrived on the Weather Coast in October 2002 (see below), many of his followers deserted and switched sides:

When he first arrived we worked together. Later we all hated him because how can you support him when he asked you to kill your own relatives. When we knew what he was doing, we started to look for ways to move out. He asked us to make gardens for him, even built houses for him, asked us to look after him in case the police came and arrested him. We did all the best we could for him but in the end he threatened and harassed us and in some cases he shot some of our relatives.

**Testimony of Moses, a former GLF militant**

We supported and followed Keke. We disbanded from him when he started to kill, threatening and demanding money from us. We decided to move out from him when his men started to ill treat us.

**Testimony of John, a former GLF militant**

**4. The Kwaio armed men murdered**

On the night of 7 June 2002, ten heavily-armed men, nine Kwaio from Malaita and one Bougainvillean; under the command of Kalisto Geni'ufaria from east Kwaio; left Honiara in a boat with a mission to take Keke into custody. In the afternoon of the following day the platoon approached Veuru, a village east of Marasa, because their boat had run out of fuel. Sighting of an unknown vessel spread fear among the local population. By the time the ten men reached the Weather Coast the news had also reached Harold Keke.

Towards the evening, six GLF militants led by Keke approached the Kwaio men's boat between Marubo and Ravu and ordered them to surrender. There was an exchange of fire in which Andrew Piko, one of the GLF militants and uncle of Keke, was hit in the chest and died instantly. Kalisto Geni'ufaria also died from a gunshot. Finally, Keke seized the Kwaio men and forced them to surrender.

The scene was reconstructed during a trial against Harold Keke and Ronnie Cawa in the Solomon Islands High Court. According to the court file,<sup>185</sup> the Kwaio men were required to stand in a row at Ravu beach. One of them and the Bougainvillean were held while the other seven who were still alive were told to kneel on the beach with their hands behind their backs and were shot to death. The eighth Kwaio man was later killed by Ronny Cawa at Inakona Beach and the Bougainvillean managed to escape, the only survivor of the ill-fated trip.

Among the documents of the former National Peace Council, there is a transcript of a radio conversation between Harold Keke and some Kwaio representatives. Here, Keke takes responsibility for the killings and accuses members of Parliament for masterminding the mission:

This afternoon I want to let you know that I heard that you want to remove the bodies of 10 men back to Kwaio. If you want to do this, you must pay me the amount that each man would have received if they had captured me and taken me to Honiara – that is, \$300,000 per head.

The mission was initiated and masterminded by Alfred Sasako, John Garo and Robert Soekeni.

I am sending a letter explaining everything with the Tasius [Melanesian Brothers].

Kwaio representative (Lee Silamao): *How did you know the names of those who masterminded the mission?*

I had already decided to keep them alive and ask the Government for compensation, but unfortunately, one of the members of the mission, Mr. Kalisto, shot and killed my uncle. I responded by killing them all.

I advise everyone not to listen to any rumors.

A handwritten communication (probably the “letter” Keke referred to in the radio conversation, although he did not sign it) with the logo of the Guadalcanal Liberation Front, dated 16 June 2002, claims that the names of the parliamentarians were revealed by the Kwaio men before they were killed. The message shows the ten men themselves identifying the initiators of the mission as Hon. Alfred Sasako (MP for East Kwaio), Hon. John Garo (MP for West Kwaio) and Robert Soekani a Kwaio leader in Honiara. It also detailed the purpose of the failed mission and that had it been successful, the three organizers would demand the Government to pay \$300,000 each to the ten men.

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<sup>185</sup> High Court of Solomon Islands, Criminal Case 557 of 2004, *Regina v. Keke and Cawa*.

Almost one year after the incident, the National Parliament of Solomon Islands established a Special Committee, chaired by Hon. Japhet Waipora, to investigate “who sent the ten Kwaio men on their fateful mission to the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal in 2002.”<sup>186</sup>

On 21 May 2004, the Committee submitted its report in which the Bougainvillean man who survived the mission provided a video interview with Prime Minister Sogavare confirming “that the organizers and financiers of the trip were two members of Parliament John Garo (MP for West Kwaio) and Alfred Sasako (MP for East Kwaio), a senior east Kwaio man Robert Soekeni and a local businessman Bobo [*sic*] Dettke” (p. 7). When questioned by the Committee, Sasako, Garo and Soekeni denied any involvement in the mission.<sup>187</sup> Dettke however, refused to appear before the Committee.

In its conclusion, the Committee did not find enough evidence to establish the identity of the individuals who may have made the promise of a reward of SBDS\$300,000 each for the group that undertook the mission. However, the report was very clear in establishing that “money was the biggest motivating factor that drew and lured these individuals to participate in the mission.”<sup>188</sup> The report also make reference to antecedents in “mercenary behaviour” by the leader of the mission and the involvement of public institutions:

1. The expedition was a mercenary mission, undertaken by the ten men involved primarily for financial reward.
2. This first finding is supported by a pattern of mercenary behaviour uncovered by the committee particularly in relation to the leader of the expedition, Kalisto Ganiufaria.
3. The committee has heard evidence which either confirms or strongly suggests the following occurred:
  - that Kalisto Ganiufaria received \$20,000 from Treasury after allegedly apprehending a gunman following an earlier shooting at West Kola Ridge.
  - that Kalisto Ganiufaria first approached the Prime Minister in 2001, offering to carry out such an expedition for a price.
  - that Kalisto Ganiufaria was paid \$100,000 from Treasury just prior to the expedition,

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<sup>186</sup> Solomon Islands National Parliament, Special Select Committee: *Report on the Findings of the Special Select Committee*, 21st May 2004.

<sup>187</sup> Sasako and Soekeni sued the local website *Pipol Fastaem Network* for defamation because it stated that “these are not MEF boys but Kwaio Medal seekers used by Soekeni and Sasako in Honiara”. The case was dismissed (Sasako v. Kemakeza [2003] SBHC 22; HC-CC 290 of 2002 [17 January 2003]).

<sup>188</sup> Solomon Islands National Parliament, Special Select Committee: *Report on the Findings of the Special Select Committee*, p. 4.



- that a payment in the form of a large sum of cash was made to his father, Inisusu, just prior to the expedition.
4. The Committee finds that the weight of information points to considerable police involvement although it reserves judgment as to whether, given the chaotic nature of the police force at the time, this involvement was sanctioned in any formal or official way.  
The evidence before the committee suggests heavy police involvement in the planning and operation of the mission. One of the ten, Jim Banjo, was a serving police officer and is named repeatedly by eye-witnesses as having been responsible for procuring the guns and ammunition for the mission and training the other men in their use. At least three other senior police officers are named by several witnesses as having played key roles in the execution of the mission. These individuals' names have been referred to the police.
  5. The Committee finds evidence of a broader conspiracy involved in dispatching the mission to the Weather Coast, which led intentionally or otherwise to the death of the ten Kwaio men.
  6. The committee believes that the architect of this conspiracy needed to be a person or persons able to access sufficient funds to meet the promised \$3.3 million payments to the 11 men or alternatively a substantial compensation payment to the dead men's families as was indeed subsequently paid by the government via the Guadalcanal Special Service Grant.
  7. The committee believes there are a number of private individuals, businessmen and politicians in Solomon Islands who could conceivably access such a large sum of money.
  8. The committee finds its best recourse of action is to refer all transcripts of its hearings to the police currently investigating the deaths of the ten men.

**Solomon Islands National Parliament, Special Select Committee: *Report on the Findings of the Special Select Committee*, p. 11-12**

Some relatives of the Kwaio men killed gave their statement to the TRC, expressing their belief that the Government was responsible for the mission. Some of them relied on the letter in which Keke tried to explain the incident. One relative claimed he was present when the group departed:

My story will begin when the ten men from Kwaio were ready to take off to Weather Coast; they were on a mission to capture Harold Keke. I was present during their take off at the seaside, it was during the night. Besides the ten men and me and other men were present at the seaside including Robert Soekeni. This was around eight in the evening and one of the ten men who was my brother, his name was Leslie, told me before departure that it was a Government-planned mission; if they succeed they would be paid SBD \$300,000 each from the government. They left that night and the next day news reached us that Harold Keke had killed all of them. During that same week we received a photocopied letter from Harold which was addressed to him from the Government, stating that the ten men were sent to capture him and bring him to Honiara and not to kill him; it also mentioned some names of men in the Government. This was during the Kemakeza Government and the names stated in the letter with their signatures were Snyder Rini, John Garo and Sasako.

*What was your brother's name who was also a victim and why do you think that the Government sent them on this mission?*

His name was Leslie Diko and I know that the Government sent them because Leslie told us before they left and it was clearly evident in the letter that Harold sent to us; the letter was from the Solomon Islands Government. Harold sent one to each of the families of the ten men who were sent to capture him. He wanted us to know that the men were sent by the Government and that he murdered all of them. One of my main concerns is with the Government; if they plan to reconcile with the families of the ten men then we would like them to pay up the money they promised them if they captured Harold. This is because they went on a mission from the Government and ended up dead. If the Government does not pay up then we will not accept reconciliation with the Government or anybody else.

**Statement N° 2242**

No direct involvement of SIG or any other public entity in the Kwaio Mission could ever be proven. Requests of the TRC to access the investigations were delayed by the Police Force and have gone unanswered. Even so, the TRC is concerned about findings of the Special Select Committee that public institutions had resorted to mercenaries on previous occasions.

Fr. Richard Carter states,

... the Kwaio operation blatantly destroyed any hope of building trust for disarmament. Perhaps that was the intention of its backers. From this point onwards Harold Keke's paranoia and his conviction that the Prime Minister and his cabinet are evil and corrupt will grow unbounded, as will our Community's fear that we are not being told the whole truth.<sup>189</sup>

In 2004, Harold Keke and Ronne Cawa faced trial for the Kwaio Murders in the High Court. hile Keke was acquitted on charges of murdering seven men because Judge Sekove Naqiolevu was not satisfied with the evidence, Cawa was convicted with life sentence for murdering one man because of evidence given by two eyewitnesses.

## **5. The murder of Father Augustine Geve**

The murder of Father Augustine Geve on 20 August 2002 was another emblematic incident of the GLF's control of much of the Weather Coast. Father Geve was an ordained Catholic priest who came from Raeavu Village on the Weather Coast. In December 2001 he contested the national general election and won the seat for the South Guadalcanal constituency with the support of the GLF. Indeed, Harold Keke claimed to have paid for his contesting fees. Upon the formation of the Government headed by Kemakeza, Geve was appointed Minister for Youth,

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<sup>189</sup> Richard Anthony Carter: *In search of the lost. The death and life of seven peacemakers of the Melanesian Brotherhood*. Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2006, p. 88.

Women and Sport. As a sitting member of Parliament and a Cabinet member, he lived in Honiara following his appointment.

In mid-August 2002, Father Geve was invited by Keke to come to the Weather Coast on the pretext of being a mediator in a reconciliation ceremony. He left Honiara on 16 August 2002 and upon arrival realized that Keke's invitation was to lure him to the Weather Coast with the intention of forcing him to resign from Parliament. He was accused of having misused funds designated for his constituency.

On the morning of 19 August a meeting was held at Fr. Geve's home village Raeavu. In the trial against Harold Keke, Ronnie Cawa and Francis Lela,<sup>190</sup> the High Court of Solomon Islands made a meticulous reconstruction from the interrogation of more than 30 witnesses. According to the findings of the court, the meeting was arranged in a circle with Harold Keke and Fr. Geve in the center. While Fr. Geve sat down, Keke was on his feet next to him. Then Keke asked the persons present whether or not they wanted Father Geve to continue being a Member of Parliament for South Guadalcanal. The High Court transcript says in part:

Harold Keke asked the question twice but no response came from the people. He asked the question the third time in a threatening tone and there came the answer he wanted. The first Crown witness recalled the answer being, "We don't want that con man". The second Crown witness put it as "No, we do not want Geve because he is a con man". The third Crown witness put the answer as, "We shouted, con man", "We don't want that con man". The fourth Crown witness put the answer as, "We don't want a con man". The fifth Crown witness put the answer as "yes, we don't want a con man". The other Crown witnesses said more or less the same thing in terms of the crowd's response to Harold Keke's question.

Eventually, Keke turned to Father Geve and told him that the people had spoken and he must resign. He then gave Father Geve a piece of paper and told him to write his resignation letter which was to be delivered to the Prime Minister by two Melanesian Brothers. Having done so, Keke and his followers took Father Geve to Haliatu. The next day, a boat brought his dead body back to Raeavu.

The TRC collected a statement from one of Father Geve's nieces who was an eyewitness to the meeting at Raeavu and whose family received his corpse:

This incident happened in the year 2002 when Father Geve was killed. At that time Harold Keke sent news for my father to go and get Fr. Geve along with other men he had grudges with,

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<sup>190</sup> Regina v. Keke [2005] SBHC 48; HCSI-CRAC 254 of 2004 (18 March 2005).

including Victor Ngele. As he instructed, Fr. Geve was to be the mediator in their reconciliation ceremony. My father accepted the request to arrange for the reconciliation ceremony and went over to Honiara. During his reign, Keke had enforced strict rules on all the people living around the Weather Coast area; if you were found breaching any of his rules the result could be fatal or punishable by death, or if you failed to accept or follow his instructions you would be killed without any warning.

Fr. Geve and my father returned on board a ship, arriving at Tangarare. Keke sent a boat to go over and pick them up. That was on a Sunday and we were having a youth group fellowship, we were in church and heard the sound of the OBM engine. As they reached the point of Manganakolo they fired shots in the air; we were scared on hearing the gun shots. We asked around on what was that and they told us that Fr. Geve and my father had arrived. Unfortunately Victor Ngele could not come for reasons we do not know. Keke had sent news to all the leaders and elders within the South Guale constitution to come for a meeting he had arranged at Raeavu. His boat had started transporting people over to the nearby villages to prepare food for the reconciliation ceremony; he ordered the women to go over to Ngalipapa and help in preparing food for the meeting he had arranged. All of us were scared and followed as instructed; most of his followers were drunk and were using abusive language at people. All the women in our village went to help prepare food for the meeting next day. I remained home with my uncle, Father Augustine Geve.

Early next morning people started coming in for the meeting. Six of Keke's men came to our house. I was preparing tea for my uncle; as he was about to have his breakfast they came and told my uncle that they have come to get him for the meeting. I was a bit agitated and told them that it was still too early for a meeting and that my uncle was just about to have his breakfast. They responded saying that Keke had ordered them to come and tell him to start with the meeting immediately. All of them were armed, but I was not afraid to talk to them since most of these boys were related to me. Father Geve quickly got himself ready and followed the six men to where the meeting was.

The meeting was unorganized. Keke stood up and started off the meeting. He told the people who were present that the purpose of the meeting was to ask Father Geve to retire and resign from being our Parliament member. He claimed that most of the people from his constituency did not want him to be their Member anymore. He asked the crowd of people and they responded as he had been planned with them the night before. Some of them called Fr. Geve a conman; they agreed on whatever Keke had proposed, and they all wanted him to resign. They gave him no chance to speak or explain himself; they forced him to go and write his resignation letter immediately and escorted him to our house with four armed men, two in front and the other two behind. It was only a short meeting; Father Geve's parents were also there.

I followed Fr. Geve to our house and saw that the men had forced him to write his letter quickly. Not long after a ship arrived with cargoes of rations for Harold and his men; we do not know who sent the rations, I believe it was from a business man in Honiara. The boat came and the rations were unloaded at Ngalipapa beach and all the women went and collected all the rations. After my uncle finished his letter, they forced him to walk out of the house quickly and pushed him forward in a rude manner. They took him to Ngalipapa and waited until all the cargoes from the ship were unloaded before they took him to Ngaliatu.

Around 2:30 p.m. the next day, we saw Keke's boat approaching our village. We saw the boat approaching and thought Fr. Geve was still alive and they had returned him. Unfortunately when they arrived at the shore we discovered that he was killed, his body was stuffed in a copra sack; they used 3 timbers to carry his body.

There were six of them who came with the body; Harold did not come. As they were approaching all the women were happy as they thought he had returned Fr Geve alive. When the boat came ashore they called for all the people in our village to come over to the beach; upon hearing this most of the people were scared, they thought they had come to kill everyone in our village, since according to Keke that day was supposed to be his prayer day (Tuesday) and most of us had gone to our gardens. He prohibited people from doing anything on Tuesday. When they arrived they came into the village and started harassing people to go down quickly to the shore. My eldest brother came down and saw Fr. Geve's body on the beach and was so shocked. We all came down to the beach and lined up as usual. Then they gave the alleged letter to one of the men from Haliatu to read out to everyone there. After finishing the letter they told us to go and get Fr. Geve's body in their boat, and Harold gave orders through his men that none of us must weep, mourn or cry over his body, since Geve was a conman.

Both of Geve's parents were still alive at that time, but his mother was blind so she cried and identified his son by touching his face. When his body was carried off from the boat, all of us were terrified, in great shock; most of us standing there fled and ran away further into the bush and cried. Some of our boys went and carried his body over to our house; blood ran from his body as he was carried to our house since he had been killed around 30 minutes ago. One of my in-laws was a nurse, so they cleaned and stitched him up. There was a deep wound on his shoulder; later we washed him and parcelled his body. The men told us not to cry, but we couldn't hold our emotion since it was really painful. My father told them that he will arrange for a proper burial, after all he is a human and deserved to be properly buried, since Keke's men ordered us that he must be buried that same day. My father sent news for his brother to come before we could bury him; Henry Eric, his brother, came and later Father Geve was buried. We were ordered not to follow the normal church rituals for his burial.

My father kept the shirt he wore that day, however when the Police arrived they took it as an exhibit to their investigation. We requested for the RSIPF to return the shirt so that we can also put it as a memorable souvenir, but they haven't returned it until today.

#### **Statement N° 0838**

The circumstances of Father Geve's murder was investigated by the High Court but could not be completely clarified as there were no eyewitnesses at the trial. Nevertheless, on 18 March 2005, the High Court of Solomon Islands found Harold Keke, Ronnie Cawa and Francis Lela guilty of the murder of Father Augustine Geve and sentenced them to life imprisonment. The three defendants pleaded not guilty.<sup>191</sup> The sentence was based mainly on circumstantial evidence. Acting Chief Justice F. O. Kabui sustained his verdict with the confession of Ronnie Cawa during an interrogation conducted on 13 August 2003 by Inspector Darren Folau on board the

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<sup>191</sup> Their appeal was dismissed and the convictions were confirmed by the Court of Appeal of Solomon Islands on 25 May 2006; [Keke v Regina [2006] SBCA 1; CA-CRAC 008, 009 and 11 of 2005 (25 May 2006)].

HMAS *Manoora*, though the admissibility of the audio tape with the confession was challenged by Cawa's lawyer.<sup>192</sup>

## 6. The Joint Operation

After the murder of Father Geve and the ten Kwaio men, the Government intensified its use of force to obtain Keke's surrender. "Operation Liberation Strike", commonly known as the *Joint Operation*, was designed by the RSIPF to capture Keke with the assistance of former militants from Malaita and Guadalcanal and the use of state-owned patrol boats.

The first Joint Operation to the Weather Coast had taken place more than a year before, in March 2001, when patrol boat *Lata* was deployed to the southern shores of Guadalcanal. The newly formed Joint Operation consisted of police officers, militants of the MEF and, most unexpectedly, a group of former GRA combatants led by Andrew Te'e. This group was re-armed especially for this operation and acted as special constables. According to findings of the Peace Monitoring Council (PMC), approximately 200 civilians took part in the Operation though there were only eight special constables in the area. The PMC found that approximately 20-30 high-powered guns, including one machine gun, were in the possession of these men.<sup>193</sup> These weapons were never returned.

Andrew Te'e's participation in the Joint Operation was arranged by Alebua, who explained the details to the TRC as follows:

I was requested by the Prime Minister to coordinate and find some individuals who would support the coup. Again it comes back to politics. Most of those who were earmarked to be sent to the Weather Coast were from Malaita and from the Western Province. The Government had asked me to identify certain individuals from Guadalcanal, ex-militants, to go with them so that we would not create another situation, re-igniting [ethnic tension] if mostly policemen from Malaita went over to catch Harold Keke. So the Prime Minister asked me to be involved to organize Andrew Te'e and a few others. And that was how I was involved.

*Who was the Prime Minister?*

That was Sir Allan Kemakeza.

*Whose idea was it to involve Andrew Te'e?*

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<sup>192</sup> In an interview given to TRC in Rove prison, Cawa said that he had admitted the crimes "though there was no evidence" because he felt remorse. He asked the Commissioners to find relatives of his victims because he wants to plead for forgiveness.

<sup>193</sup> "Report to the Parties: Investigation of Alleged Breaches of TPA Weather Coast Police Operation, 12-16 March 2001". Unpublished document of the Peace Monitoring Council.

The Prime Minister asked me. In fact Andrew Te'e had two earlier meetings with the Prime Minister. So Andrew Te'e said, see the Premier, so he contacted me. It's a Police Operation, so they needed my help. They got more than they wanted; they almost got the whole of IFM members supporting the police in their operation against Harold Keke.

### **Ezekiel Alebua, Closed Hearing before the TRC, 13/01/2011**

A brief investigation, loaded with obstacles from official institutions,<sup>194</sup> carried out by the PMC immediately after the operation found that:

- Two male civilians were killed on Kuma Beach by armed men. They were allegedly accused of supporting Keke.
- One armed man (possibly a Special Constable – not confirmed) was killed while involved in the Operation on shore. He was allegedly killed following the burning of a house.
- 18 boys were taken at gunpoint in one area; six boys were still missing as of early April.
- Five local boys were captured by a large group of approximately 100 armed men and forced to crawl ahead of the group towards a village in search of Keke. They were beaten unconscious at the beach then awoke to find themselves on the Patrol Boat. They were taken to Honiara and questioned at Rove. Two were released after initial questioning.
- Villagers fled to mountains for approximately three weeks because of the actions and the presence of the Patrol Boat.

During TRC public hearing at Visale in June, 2010, the testimony of a victim of the Joint Operation elucidated the devastating impact of the mission on civilians:

On 13 March 2001, at around 6 a.m. in the morning, we woke up and saw the patrol boat *Lata*. It started shooting and shelled the area; it was like spraying a water hose onto plants in a garden. Everyone was terrified and we did not know where to hide. We tried to help the elderly people and our children to a safe area, without any of our personal belongings. We hid in the bush and were afraid to come down to the coastal area since the people who came in the patrol boat were fully armed and would kill anyone on sight. While there we were under strict control of the militants. We had to seek permission to go and find food or to go to our gardens. They would allow us but under strict timeframe and orders. On 17 March 2001, all our homes were burnt down and all our belongings were looted and stolen. It was done by the Joint Operation team who came in the patrol boat.

We remained in the bush for seven solid months. After seven months the militants came and ordered us to return to our village. We were treated like criminals. They warned us not to return to that place. If any one of us returns to that place, he or she will be killed without questioning. On 23 September 2001 they burnt the area where we used to hide after the patrol boat attack. When we came down to our village it was heartrending again: there was not one house standing, grasses were overgrown and we had to start all over again trying to build shelters and gardens.

### **Summary of the testimony from Gladys Voa**

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<sup>194</sup> The PMC was unable to gain access to the patrol boat or the armory to determinate if the weapons utilized during the patrol boat operation to the Weather Coast had been surrendered under the TPA.

The Joint Operation, which was severely criticised in local and international media,<sup>195</sup> represented not only the Solomon Island Government's failure to capture Harold Keke, but also an infringement of the Townsville Peace Agreement. The involvement of armed civilians for this operation corresponded to unlawful possession of weapons according to Part 2, Section 3, Clause 4 of the TPA. Also, the Operation was a major setback to the pacification process initiated by the peace negotiators of the Government and the Melanesian Brothers, whose efforts to disarm Keke were severely affected. Several former GLF militants interviewed by TRC stated that the first Joint Operation changed Keke:

To me, the change in Keke's attitude began with the police operation in 2001. Keke then took precautions to protect himself. He started to block people's movement and did not want to negotiate with the government.

#### **Testimony of a former GLF militant**

In October 2002, the RSIPF launched Operation Liberation Strike. The objective was the same as in March 2001: to get to Harold Keke and force him to surrender. Again, the Operation was supported by the deployment of patrol boats and former GRA militants converted into special constables, most of them under Andrew Te'e's command. This time, though, everything was on a much bigger scale. The promise of the Government to pay danger allowances caused a sort of gold rush among civilians and demoralized police officers.<sup>196</sup> The TRC has in its possession a list of 1,611 demands for danger allowances to the Government for participation in one of the Joint Operations on the Weather Coast. The demands are from police officers, prison service personnel and (mostly) civilians and total more than SBD\$ 6 million:

There was a mass recruitment for the Weather Coast. During the time the patrol boat loaded arms and went over to the Weather Coast and distributed them to those who were willing to be part and parcel of the Joint Operations.

*That's it, no training?*

No training, no nothing.

#### **Testimony of a Police Officer**

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<sup>195</sup> "The operation that fails to catch Harold Keke", *Solomon Star* 30 March, 2001, p. 9; Mary O'Callaghan: "Gunboat diplomacy", *Weekend Australian* 31 March-1 April 2001, pp. 21-22.

<sup>196</sup> "What happened during the Operation was different, since there was a total breakdown in law and order because our senior Police officers were implicated in the tension. The officers were not carrying out their normal police duty in upholding law. We were not carrying out our duty as mandated under the Constitution to protect citizens" (Police officer).



Andrew Te'e got 40, and over time he got 80 men, and to the end of the operation there were almost 200 men, almost everyone in the villages just joined in and everyone wanted to claim danger allowance.

*We have more than one thousand compensation claims.*

That would be true. There were not only followers of Andrew but additional groups from Mbabanakira as well. Everybody claimed danger allowances.

### **Testimony of a Police Officer**

The directive to launch Operation Liberation Strike came directly from the Solomon Islands Government: "The direction to go to the Weather Coast was given to us by Prime Minister Allan Kemakeza" (Police officer). This was confirmed by the former Prime Minister:

I called in the Commissioner of Police and I told him, "look, there is a law and order problem in the Weather Coast, Harold is killing people; he is shooting people." So I did not say to him, "Go and shoot them," but I told him to go and look after that problem. And that was the position of my cabinet. This was because there were people who had complained that Harold is shooting at them indiscriminately. So it is part of the Prime Minister's responsibility to ensure that the security of the citizens is looked after.

### **Sir Allan Kemakeza, Closed Hearing, 09/05/2011**

The planning and execution of the Operation was in the charge of the Deputy Director of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), Nathaniel "Nela" Mosese, with the support of police officers Joseph Baetalonia, James Kili and Leslie Ofu. Keke still had pockets of supporters fighting around the Honiara city boundary, so the strategy was to take the fight back to him in the Weather Coast area. Long hours were spent planning the Operation but nothing conclusive eventuated, though it was massive. Then one day Andrew Te'e and Ezekiel Alebua requested weapons and permission was sought from the Deputy Commissioner for these special constables to be armed. There were two groups, one from Mbabanakira and one with Andrew Te'e. The matter was referred to the Prime Minister who gave permission to arm the special constables. On the day the Operation Liberation Strike was launched, the two groups were issued 12 high-powered weapons: four to one group and eight to the other.

The Joint Operation's plan was to hem in Keke from different strategic points such as Pechoakuri, Kolina and Mbiti. As in March 2001, the plan failed. Thorough knowledge of the terrain and adaptation to its harsh settings, as well as ongoing support from many villagers turned out to be strategic advantages for Keke that were difficult for the Joint Operation:

[The Operation] was ineffective, many of the RSIPF officers found it very difficult because of the terrain and they later returned. Only a few of the police officers were left behind along with the

untrained officers and civilians. The GLF were hiding in the bush. They had their informants in the village and had been passing news to the GLF informing them of our whereabouts and our planned operations.

#### **Testimony of a Police Officer**

What was supposed to be a man-hunting operation has turned into a sort of guerrilla war with occasional ambushes and skirmishes that forced the Joint Operation to establish permanent camps and stay on the Weather Coast until mid-2003, when RAMSI arrived. Villagers were increasingly forced into the conflict:

Okay, for us here, although our people were for Keke up until after TPA, the harshness of GLF made our people think otherwise, that is why we decided to live in a more neutral ground. And the Joint Operation, we did not support them either. We were simply forced into a conflict and we had no chance to decide for ourselves what is best for us. Many of our boys here went out and searched for Keke. They were the frontliners in the Joint Operation, but to me they were simply used. They were not for the government neither for the GLF.

#### **Testimony of a villager at Kolina**

Untrained civilians who had become special constables of the RSIPF, Malaitans as well as from Guadalcanal, were responsible for many of the most atrocious human rights violations committed by the Joint Operation during Liberation Strike. The group of Andrew Te'e, himself a native of the Weather Coast, had the reputation of being particularly aggressive:

I think what the officers did was no match to what the civilians did. The civilians did much more than what the Police operation did. I was informed that some bodies were stabbed to death by Andrew Te'e's team and I did not go out to investigate. We turned a blind eye at the situation there. At that time Andrew Te'e's team was very aggressive. When we landed at Kolina some officers told me that Andrew Te'e's team was very aggressive and they were just across the river. It was a mistake that we brought them in.

#### **Testimony of a Police Officer**

The above testimony is the opinion of a police officer and as such might be biased. Nevertheless, it matches information gathered by TRC from victims. Consider, for example, the following statement of a woman whose husband was beheaded by Andrew Te'e's group:

*Do you know why your husband was killed and which group was involved in his killing?*

He was killed by Andrew Tee's group. He was on his way to our house when he was beaten and eventually killed. During that time my children were small. Since then I find it very hard to cope with life and so when I see you are here I decided to share my story with you regarding my situation.

*Did you witness when they killed him?*

No, in fact I looked for him and I managed to find only his head. I had to search for a while before I could find his head. When I found his head I decided to hide it because there was nobody with me.

*How was he killed?*

His head was chopped off with a knife.

*Were you there when he left the house or when the militants came and took him?*

I knew when he left the house and when he went to Kuma, but after the whole day and he did not show up to the house I went and looked for him. It took me a while to look for him but they beat him up and chopped off his head in the sea. So I managed to find his head, it was washed ashore.

*You picked up his head, where was the rest of his body?*

I don't know. It was never found until today.

**Statement N° 0062**

Common people, caught between the warring parties, or trapped in a “pull-pull situation”,<sup>197</sup> were the ones most severely affected by the Operation. As already mentioned, the TRC has collected about 300 statements from individual victims on the Weather Coast, and the great majority of them document the traumatic experiences of residents at the hands of the Joint Operation. Even for a population used to struggling against the elements, living in the bush presented unparalleled hardships. The following two transcripts illustrate the sufferings of civilians during these times:

Nobody told us anything about the patrol boat and that it was going to go to the Weather Coast to carry out its operation. It was sent by the Government and it was called the Joint Operation. So one morning the patrol boat came and then we went down to the sea. Harold Keke was running away and he went past our village and told us that we should run away to the bush because the patrol boat was coming to carry out its operation and would shoot everyone. So we ran away to the bush. We took the children and whatever we could, and then we ran away to the bush until we got to Tiromate on the top of the hill. That's where we hid, but then the militants came and chased us out, so we ran away down to the valley. We went down to the valley and after that we came back. We cooked some food and fed the children, and then we went back to the valley again.

We got tired of running away, so we went downstream until we got to Hailasi. When we hid there, we thought we were hiding in a safe place, but we could see members of the Joint Operation coming down the hill while the patrol boat was patrolling the sea. There was no way for us to run away, everybody cried because we were confused about what was going on. We were running away all over the place and did not know what to do.

We thought we were running away from the patrol boat only, but in fact the militants were also coming from the bush. Andrew Te'e put his camp at the river mouth and Harold Keke put his camp behind Veramogho Village. This made life really hard for us; when we heard gunshots we

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<sup>197</sup> Statement N° 0493.

ran away into the bush again. We had to sleep at the bottom of trees and when it rained we put leaves and just slept in the open. The next day we moved on to another location. That's how we lived during the ethnic tension.

Due to fear we did not even think about eating, we just kept running away until we could find a place to hide. The children did not even cry for something to eat, we just gave them what we could find and they accepted it. To me we survived through our faith in God. Our clothes and other household items were thrown in the bush and other people took them and used them. Our other belongings were all over the place and when we wanted to collect them we could not find them. We did not take too many things with us. We managed to take a few clothes and bed sheets to use during the nights.

Sometimes when Harold Keke's militants came they would beat up the boys whom they suspected of joining the Joint Operation. All through those times we lived in fear and when we heard gunshots at night we got up and ran into the bush.

There were quite a lot of women who had their babies in the bush during the ethnic tension. Those women who had their babies at home were forced to take them to the bush. Some of them survived; unfortunately some of them could not make it. I had a baby too that time and up until now he has been a sick child because during the ethnic tension we lived mostly in the bush, exposed to cold and rain and even to sickness. We had no access to medical facilities and our only means of medicine was lemon fruit. We boiled it and my baby drank while it was warm and we even rubbed it on his body.

What I am telling you now is just a story, but we were faced with the reality during the ethnic tension. We are thankful that we managed to survive until today.

#### **Statement N° 0979**

Early in the morning the patrol boat came and I took my child and we ran away. My child was big enough to carry her basket, so we ran away until we got to a garden house. We stayed there and spent the night there. The rest of my family did not come with us, my parents, my husband and our other child. We spent the night in the bush until the next morning. Later the rest of my family joined up with the two of us.

Then one of the members of the Joint Operation came and told us, take your basket and go back to the house, we are not here to kill, we are looking for Harold Keke. You better tell those who are still in the bush to go back to the village. When we heard this we decided to pack up and went back to the village.

Then came the patrol boat again and we ran away to the bush once more. This time we moved up to the mountains. Once again they advised us to go back to the village. We took our belongings, what we could carry and went back to the village. When we got back to our houses, we discovered that most of our belongings which we had left behind had been damaged or destroyed by the militants.<sup>198</sup> During that time we were pushed around as to where we should settle.

Then in another move they asked us go and live at Kuma. My parents went and stayed at Kuma but I, my husband and our children went to Kolokiki. We had some bad experiences at Kolokiki because we did not have enough food to eat. My husband and I had to come back to our original place to look for food, but the militants had destroyed our gardens. They had cut down the banana trees and destroyed our taro gardens and pulled some out and took them away. We managed to get some root crops and came back, but we were frightened of the militants. We hid some of our root crops in the village and took some with us and went to Kolokiki. Every time

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<sup>198</sup> "Militants" was used to refer to the GLF and to the "special constables" of the Joint Operation.

when we ran out of food we had to come and look for food in our gardens at our original village. Sometimes when we went to the garden we heard gunshots, this made us very frightened indeed.

Andrew Te'e's group came and burnt down some of the houses at Choviri. Almost every day the militants would open fire and this made us very scared. It made us really traumatized because of the noises of guns we heard almost every day.

When everything was back to normal we decided to come back to our village. No members of my family died during those hard times. We thank God for saving us all through those difficult times.

#### **Statement N° 0745**

On the Weather Coast, Joint Operation and the patrol boat have become synonyms for violence and human rights abuses committed by the state.<sup>199</sup> This is particularly true in Mbiti, where the Joint Operation had established one of its camps:

As a chief I am going to tell you the story of what had happened here in Mbiti when the two groups came in. The GLF did not do damage here in our village. When the Joint Operation and the other Guadalcanal militants who joined the Joint Operation came, they caused us problems here in our community. I was at the top of the hill in the bush when the patrol boat arrived the first day. It fired shots at Pakapo and then down to Komate and they spent the night at the Mbiti passage. And when they came ashore and came to us, they told us to return to the village and if didn't go we might have been killed as well. We came back to the village and we thought when they went past us it would be over. Instead they threatened us, the children, women and men, they pointed guns at us, tortured us with burnt wires and bashed us. They marched me from my house and they led me to the beach, there they told me to dig my grave. There were four of them, two from Malaita and the other two from Guadalcanal. They asked me about the Guadalcanal Liberation Front and I said I was not one of them; I was just an ordinary villager. When I told them that I do not know, they bashed me up. Then they chased us out from our village. We fled to Vehuru at the other side, we walked a whole day. They built bunkers here in Mbiti and they burnt our houses down, that was when we had already moved.

*Did you know the two men from Guadalcanal?*

Yes I know them and they are still staying in the bush and the other guys from Malaita have gone.

#### **Testimony of the Chief of Mbiti village**

The officers who were in charge of the Operation received reports about the violation of civil and human rights in Mbiti, but they could not or did not want to do anything to prevent the abuses. The removal of the commander of the Mbiti camp, upon reports of sexual harassment committed by his troops, was a singular act against such violations.

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<sup>199</sup> During the public hearing in Visale, Gladys Voa, who was a victim from the Joint Operation in March 2001, said: "All this was caused by the Government. From my understanding the patrol boat should be used to look after our waters for any illegal fishing. However, during that time it was used to kill innocent people from the Weather Coast, it was an awful thing to do." This is a very common perception on the Weather Coast.

A group of six villagers from Pite, Michael Vesua, George Lionel, Edmond Langolo, Franklin Tohotelana, 14-year-old Roland Pahara, and Ms. Elsie Chamola, were brought to Honiara on board the patrol boat because they were suspected of supporting Harold Keke. On board were police officers and special constables from Malaita who had been withdrawn from the Operation and called back to headquarters. During the passage, and afterwards in Rove prison, the six detained persons suffered a sequence of human rights violations committed by individuals that were at least formally, as in the case of the special constables, officials of the state. These are two of the statements by affected victims:

The Joint Operation suspected that we were involved with Harold Keke's group. We did not know anything about Harold Keke because we were just living our normal life at home. They told us that the whole community had to move to Mbiti. When we got to Mbiti they tied us up with only one rope. All the time we were tied up and there were seven of us. They treated us like animals; whenever they had their meals they would throw some food just in front of us. We could not move because we were tied up with a rope. The next morning they started to beat us up again. They beat all of us, and this was the type of beating that would result in death.

The patrol boat was waiting to take us to Honiara. When we got on board they started to beat us up again. I was told to urinate and drink it, if not they would shoot me. I thought of my own life so I had to drink it. Then we got to Rove.

*What happened when you got to Rove, where did they place you?*

When we got to Rove they started to beat us up again until we got to the prison.

*How long were you in custody at Rove?*

We were in custody for four days.

*You mentioned that you were released from the punishment room, what happened next?*

This time they took us to the cell, but before we went they gave us tea, but the relatives of those who died on the Weather Coast came and kicked our tea, so there was nothing to drink.

*They beat you up because of those Malaita boys who were shot dead on the Weather Coast?*

Yes, that's the reason.

*How long were you kept in the prison at Rove?*

We were there for one and half months.

*Have you got anything else to say?*

At Mbiti one of the members of the Joint Operation kicked me so hard and I got injured and so I still have the scar on my hand.

#### **Statement N° 0167**

Early one morning, some of the Police officers headed by Manasseh Maelanga with the local militants that had joined the Joint Operation came from Mbiti to Pite which is my village. We were then forced at gun point to go with them to Mbiti where they were based. During the trip we were harassed and insulted with swearing words.

In Mbiti, they asked me to go and see one of their leaders. He asked me questions about Harold Keke and his group and I told him that I knew nothing about their whereabouts. They commanded told me and another eight men to stay with them until late in the evening. They tied our hands and legs and forced us to lie down. While we were lying on the ground, the officers were drinking and smoking. Some of them poured hot water over us and also burnt us with their cigarette butts.

Early the next morning, they asked us to sit up and then to walk around; they again hit us with their guns. Not long after that the patrol boat arrived and we were commanded to go on board. On the boat we were placed in the exhaust which was very hot. We were in the exhaust until we got to Sughu in Wanderer Bay. They called us to go to the front of the patrol boat and to wave good bye to our island because they were going to shoot us.

After that one of the police urinated and forced us to drink his urine. Only one of us drank his urine, he then was told to go back to the exhaust.

When we got to Lambi, they rang for the police van to come and take us to Rove to be kept in custody. When we were in police custody, they stripped off our clothes and bashed us up again. We were remanded in custody for fourteen days. One of the Police officers came to us with a gun and said he was going to shoot us and terminate our lives. After 14 days in custody, we were brought to court and after the hearing we were acquitted of the charges laid against us.

#### **Statement N° 0718**

Again, the evidence of victims was confirmed by a police officer who was on the patrol boat and witnessed the incidents. Haunted by remorse,<sup>200</sup> he gave TRC the following details:

It was covered and labelled as though the people were captured by the police. And when they were taken onboard they were beaten up, there were about one woman and four men and it was really scary. Some stomped on their necks and put them on the deck of the patrol boat. It's hot, very, very hot during day time. They screamed and cried as the Malaita Eagle Force on the boat continued to harass them. Everything was done in Malaitan language. The captain at that time was Alick Sarere and he was Fataleka. He has since died. We who came from other islands were not able to understand their communication. We could not bear it; we then asked our captain to tell them to stop and he did tell them to stop.

#### **Testimony of Police officer**

Operation Liberation Strike was never rightly explained to the local population. Driven by deep mistrust against the villagers, the members of the Joint Operation tried to control them instead of trying to win them over to their cause. This is probably the reason why the people from Mbuabua Village were held prisoners for ten months at Malaheti.

One afternoon the Joint Operation arrived in our village and called us for a meeting. They had come to warn us of the patrol boat operation. The Joint Operation group consisted of men from

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<sup>200</sup> “The feeling of guilt encroached on me and when you made a public hearing, I heard the only woman on board made stories about being beaten and tortured on board patrol boat *Lata*. When the woman made her testimony I was listening on the radio. I felt really guilty, the feeling of guilt never fades from me because they always said that patrol boat *Lata* came and killed us, which is true and I always felt guilty about it.”

Malaheti and Kolohoula. The next morning the men from Malaheti ordered us to move to their place. We were supposed to remain at Malaheti for three days while the patrol boat carried out its operation to clear the area.

They lead us up to Malaheti. In front of us they carried a white flag. All of these men were armed and we were in the middle. As we were approaching Malaheti we reached a river called Voiara and the Joint Operation men assaulted some men from our group; luckily none of them was seriously injured. We continued until we reached the village of Malaheti. Arriving there we learnt that all the local people there had fled into the bush, all the houses were empty. So they told us to use those empty houses and the school to rest.

The Joint Operation Group would vocally abuse us and it usually got worse when they were drunk. They would swear at us and call us “prisoners of war”. They told us that we will remain as prisoners at Malaheti for as long as 50 years. They enforced strict rules on us. We were not allowed to go out without their permission and had to be escorted wherever we went. If our women wanted to go and collect some food, they had to return before 12 o’clock midday. If anyone arrived late, she or he would be severely punished. We tried to settle down, despite the fact that we were continuously threatened and harassed and lived in fear. We were unable to make new food gardens but would go to collect bananas, kumara and cassava and then return quickly.

When RAMSI arrived we had been kept as prisoners in Malaheti for a period of ten months. If it wasn’t for RAMSI I believe we would still be held as prisoners at Malaheti. We were overjoyed with relief when they arrived and ordered us to return to our villages.

That is the story of what happened to us during the tension.

**Statement No. 1000**

The complete history of the tension on the Weather Coast is yet to be investigated. For example, the number of sexual violence cases reported to the TRC is the highest in comparison to other regions.<sup>201</sup> Women and girls were vulnerable to sexual violence by GLF militants and members of the Joint Operation residing in their villages. The presence of high-powered weapons made it difficult to prevent participants in the Joint Operation from committing abuses, and for the victims’ male relatives to defend them. There was widespread fear of sexual violence, and male relatives ordered women and children to stay together, particularly with young girls, for their protection. When discussing issues of sexual violence, many women were upset at the neglect of following *kastom* in this regard:

When the Joint Operation came and set up their camp here at Kolina, they went with some of our girls and they got pregnant.... Three of them, they took them but they did not pay bride price. They also took some others but they did not get pregnant ... The parents of the girls got angry at the boys and asked them to pay bride price but up until today they have not paid those girls bride price as yet.

**“Helen”**

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<sup>201</sup> See chapter 5.1.



One more thing: Some of Harold Keke's militants had sex with some of those girls at Haliatu, Koloula, Inakona and Boutabu and they had children. Some of the militants raped some of the girls at Peo too. ... During Harold Keke's reign the militants would take any girl at their own choice and most of them ended up having babies from those militants.

**“Jenny”**

The families (of the victims) got angry with them (the perpetrators), but they could not talk as they were fearful of the guns. They did not even demand them to pay compensation, and until now they have not paid compensation.

**“Rose”**

Operation Liberation Strike has left the Solomon Island Government with many debt claims to address. These include the pending claims for danger allowances of more than 1,600 police officers, special constables and members of a “Civilian Resistance Movement Force”.

We have been promised allowances for carrying out the Operation. Complaints have been raised because we have not received anything up until today. There is no rehabilitation program for the people who were severely affected, especially people whose houses were burnt down. We understand that previously the Government facilitated compensation for properties and lives that were lost during the tension. The situation on the Weather Coast is similar. It was the government that engaged us police officers and untrained civilians to capture Harold Keke.

**Testimony of a former Police Officer**

There are also still outstanding compensation claims from victims of the Joint Operation. The people of Pite, for example, six of whom were ill-treated on the patrol boat and later in Rove and whose village was burnt down to ashes in November 2002, have been presenting submissions since 2004 but so far have not received any recompense from the Solomon Islands Government.

The Operation not only left repudiation of and rage against the Government among the local population but also tense feelings among residents between villages and within villages; between those who had supported Keke and those who joined sided with the Joint Operation:

Most of the time, we were harassed at gun-point by Andrew Te'e's group. It was the Government that issued guns to Andrew Tee's group to fight against their own people. They burnt down my house, destroyed my belongings and I was left with nothing. It was the Government that sent the patrol boat to shoot innocent people and destroy our properties. I won't forget what Andrew Te'e and his men did to us. Lots of groups came and collected reports, just like what you are doing now but there was never any compensation. They have not even reconciled with us for what they did to us. Each time I come across these ex-militants I think of my properties and what they did to my family. I am still waiting for those ex-militants to come forward and say sorry and reconcile with me. What they did to me and my property was too much, so I am still waiting because I know these people cannot escape from our area.

**Statement N° 0847**

Although some reconciliation ceremonies have been performed since, there are still many open wounds, even between members of the same family:

Yes, those that supported the GLF movement were against me. Some of my immediate family members joined the GLF group and I along with some others joined the Joint Operation. I still have problems with my relatives over the Joint Operation issue. We organized a general reconciliation ceremony among ourselves, but minor problems and feelings of dislike and hate still exist.

**Testimony of a former member of the Joint Operation**

In hindsight it cannot be doubted that the Operation Liberation Strike was a disaster for the Solomon Island Government. Even its principal promoters now think that the Operation should not have happened at all.

It was an Operation for a good cause but it turned differently. It was not planned properly and we got civilians involved. There were lots of illegal activities at the Weather Coast by the Joint Operations.

**Testimony of a Police Officer**

To this day there are many people on the Weather Coast who consider that, compared to the Joint Operation, Harold Keke was the lesser evil.

## **7. The killing of the Melanesian Brothers**

It soon became obvious that the Operation Liberation Strike worsened the situation on the Weather Coast. Rumors of atrocities committed by both sides, including killings of civilians by the Joint Operation and the murder of Father Geve, reached Honiara. This situation led activists from the civil society and the churches to reinforce their efforts to find a solution for the conflict.

The Melanesian Brotherhood had an outstanding role in these peace-making efforts. They participated in negotiations which led to the Ceasefire Agreement and to the Townsville Peace Agreement in 2000. They collected weapons from combatants and mediated between Guadalcanal and Malaitan militants at Alligator Creek. They also tried to approach Harold Keke and convince him to join a dialogue for peace.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> About the peace-promoting activities of the Melanesian Brotherhood, see Richard Anthony Carter: *In search of the lost. The death and life of seven peacemakers of the Melanesian Brotherhood*. Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2006.

In February 2003, Melanesian Brothers Nathaniel Sado and Alfred Tabo travelled to Pite on Weather Coast together with Father Francis, the parish priest from Kolina, carrying a letter from the Anglican Archbishop Ellison Pogo for Keke. They were not able to meet Keke but received a reply to their letter from his secretary on behalf of the GLF. Brother Alfred and Father Francis then departed for Honiara. Brother Sado insisted on staying on so as to meet with Keke whom he knew well personally.

For several weeks nothing was known of Brother Sado's whereabouts until a follower of Keke deserted and reported to the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC) that Brother Sado had been murdered. He reported that the GLF had accused Brother Sado of being a spy for Prime Minister Kemakeza who, like Sado, was from the island of Savo. They also claimed that he was carrying a passbook proving he had received money from Kemakeza.<sup>203</sup> According to the witness, Brother Sado was held in a cage and had been so badly mistreated that he had asked to be killed. A post mortem performed by RAMSI forensic pathologist Dr. Malcolm Dodd in October 2003 found that almost 20 ribs, collar bones and shoulder blades were fractured. These were consistent with hitting and kicking. Brother Nathaniel Sado had been cruelly beaten to death.<sup>204</sup>

The murder of Brother Sado and why he stayed back on the Weather Coast are still shrouded in mystery. Several former GLF militants told TRC that Sado had visited Keke previously in his hideouts both at Kuma and Inakona. Both camps were shelled by the patrol boat shortly after his departure. This made them suspect him of spying and informing the Government of Keke's whereabouts.

*What about the murder of Nathaniel Sado?*

I was there when they questioned him and later killed him. They found a passbook with him and he himself said that he was sent by the Government. But another reason why he was killed was that he became a very suspicious figure during the operations in the Weather Coast. See, Sado was Keke's friend and he visited Keke when he was still at his home in 2001. Two weeks after Sado left, then the patrol boat came and bombarded Keke's home. This was the same at Inakona. So when the boys saw him at Mbiti, they held him and tied him.

**Testimony of Simon, a former GLF militant**

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<sup>203</sup> Carter, *In search of the lost*, p. 127.

<sup>204</sup> For the court file on the murder of Brother Nathaniel Sado, see Regina v. Cawa [2007] SBHC 6; HSCI-CRC 315, 329 of 2004 (15 March 2007).

Yes, Brother Sado was seen as a spy. Two weeks after he left Kuma the patrol boat came and shelled the area. When he came over to Inakona the police came and shelled the area as well. Keke then fled over to Mbiti and hid further up in the bush. While he was there Brother Sado came again. When Keke saw him he accused him of being a spear since two weeks after he had left Kuma the patrol boat came and shelled the area. So he accused Sado of giving information to the Government. Then Keke ordered his boys to apprehend Sado for questioning. He was interrogated and admitted being sent over by the government to locate and report the whereabouts of Keke. After that Keke decided his fate. He was to be executed.

**Testimony of “Andrew”, a former GLF militant**

On 3 April 2003, six Melanesian Brothers, Robin Lindsay from Papua New Guinea, Francis Tofi from Tikopia, Tony Sirihi from Makira, Alfred Hill from Isabel, and Patteson Gatu and Ini Paratabatu from Guadalcanal, left Honiara by canoe for the Weather Coast. Their official mission was to visit the Brotherhood Households on the Weather Coast and bring equipment back to Honiara.<sup>205</sup> Actually they were to find out what had happened to Brother Nathaniel and, if his death was confirmed, to try and bring his body back for burial. However, they headed straight to Keke’s camp near Horabau Village upon arrival on the Weather Coast.

On their way there they were surrounded by a group of GLF militants commanded by Ronnie Cawa.<sup>206</sup> This group shot Brother Robin Lindsay and Brother Francis Tofi dead. Brother Alfred Hill was shot in the arm and beaten to death.<sup>207</sup> Questioned by the police after the arrival of RAMSI, Cawa admitted that they killed the three brothers on the day they arrived because “they had come without obtaining permission and they were government spies.”

Upon arrival they were asked to be searched and refused and the three brothers, Brother Sirihi, Brother Tofi and Brother Hill had tried to retaliate and advanced towards them with their religious sticks, which prompted him to shoot them. Two of the brothers died instantly and the

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<sup>205</sup> This is how the mission was explained to the Archbishop of the Church of Melanesia who, contrary to the statement in Richard Carter’s book (p. 50), says he never was informed about any attempts to search for Brother Sado. In his testimony before the TRC, Archbishop Ellison Pogo said he would never have authorized such a mission because he knew that the lives of the Brothers would be at risk (Archbishop Ellison Pogo, closed hearing before the TRC, 28/06/2011).

<sup>206</sup> A radio message from the police position nearest to Keke’s camp reported that the Brothers arrived at Mbiti village on Thursday, 24 April. They left their belongings in the canoe and walked along the beach towards Keke’s camp. The police watched them through binoculars and saw Keke’s men, carrying guns, surround them. Carter, *In search of the lost*, p. 128.

<sup>207</sup> One of the assassins, Owen Isa, said during the interrogations after being arrested: ‘We told them to surrender but they didn’t surrender. They don’t want to follow the order. Then we shoot. Two were shot dead and a third was wounded’. With respect to the wounded man Hill, Isa said: ‘And he fell down and then we beat him and then he died’. He admitted to beating him (Kejoa v Regina [2006] SBCA 6; CA-CRAC 028 & 031 of 2005 [31 May 2006]).

other brother, Brother Hill after being wounded in the forearm, fell on the ground wherein Cawa subsequently ordered the second accused [Owen Isa] to kill him which he proceeded to do.<sup>208</sup>

The remaining three brothers were kept overnight in the GLF camp. During the night they were forced to make confession on a tape recorder saying that they were enemies of Harold Keke. “You can hear Ronnie Cawa shouting at them what to say”.<sup>209</sup> The next morning they lined them up in front of a single grave and Ronnie Cawa gave the order to shoot them. One of the assassins was only 14 years old.<sup>210</sup>

For three months Keke claimed that the *Tasius* were held hostage but were alive and well. The Melanesian Brotherhood tried to negotiate with him for their release. It was not until 8 August 2003 that the Melanesian Brotherhood was officially informed by Police Commissioner William Morrell that Keke had admitted that Nathaniel Sado, Robin Lindsay, Francis Tofi, Tony Sirihi, Alfred Hill, Patteson Gatu and Ini Paratabatu had been killed on their arrival at the Weather Coast.

However, a few people were already informed about the death of the seven *Tasius* even before Keke’s confession. Among the first to learn about the killings had been the peace negotiators Y. Sato and Kamilo Teke.

I also received an order from the Prime Minister to check if the Melanesian Brothers were killed. There were stories in town that they were killed. I went over there to a place called Mbiti. When

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<sup>208</sup> R. v. Cawa [2005] SBHC 18; HCSI-CRC 320 of 2004 (2 October 2005).

<sup>209</sup> Carter, *In search of the lost*, p. 160. The existence of the recording was confirmed in an interview with an informant that was close to Keke’s brother Joseph Sangu at that time:

Joseph Sangu, myself and one of the boys went over to the Weather Coast to advise Harold Keke not to kill the Melanesian Brothers, but when we got there they had already been killed. We went up to the bush to Harold Keke and he turned on a cassette and I heard what was said in the cassette, like the Melanesian Brothers were screaming and yelling and he stoned them and each Brother had to say his name and each of them had to say sorry. What I heard was only the recorded voices of the Melanesian Brothers. I do not know what happened to the cassette now, maybe it has been damaged but all the events that took place during the killing of the seven Melanesian Brothers were recorded in that cassette. I also saw Harold Keke’s wife, his kid, his father and his sister were all there. They turned the cassette on and I heard everything and they were laughing and I was feeling very bad because these Melanesian Brothers were from the same church as me. I heard everything, I saw where the Brothers were buried but I had to keep my mouth shut to protect my own safety. Anyway I just had to bear it. All I knew and heard was in the cassette and I would say that you should try and find out the where about of that cassette.

(Informant does not want his name to be disclosed)

<sup>210</sup> Regina v. Keke [2006] SBHC 35; HC-CRC 419 of 2005 (4 August 2006).

I got there and I asked Harold Keke about the Melanesian Brothers, he said to me, “oh yes they are here.” Then I found out that they were already dead.

#### **Testimony of Mr. Y. Sato**

The peace negotiators decided not to disclose the information because Keke had taken more Melanesian Brothers hostage. In June 2003, five novices and two brothers were detained for more than a month. They were mistreated but eventually released with the help of Y. Sato and Kamilo Teke.<sup>211</sup> Because Y. Sato needed two trips to bring the novices back to Honiara, he decided not to say anything that could jeopardize the lives of the remaining hostages:

The required number of passengers on the boat should be eight people so we took four and left three. I went and discussed with Keke and he told me he was going to look after them. So I took out four of them but I said three are still there. So I said until the seven of them come back here, I do not want to tell anybody about the previous seven brothers being killed. We should not go to the public on what had happened; there was already a rumor there. If we tell everybody about the news Harold Keke would change his mind to kill the three remaining. I knew there would be more bloodshed. After three months I received a letter from Harold Keke to go and pick the three of them.

#### **Testimony of Mr. Y. Sato**

All the novices and the two Brothers of the second group taken hostage by Keke arrived back in Honiara by the beginning of August 2003. The bodies of the seven Melanesian Brothers who were killed were exhumed after RAMSI’s arrival and buried at Tabalia, the Melanesian Brotherhood headquarters, on 24 October 2003. Their funeral day was declared a national day of mourning.

### **8. Marasa**

Any collaboration of villagers with the Joint Operation, like the recruitment of local scouts, was ruthlessly punished by the GLF:

At that time my brother also joined the Joint Operation. He was leading the members of the Joint Operation to hunt down Harold Keke. He was like their scout boy because he was well versed with the surrounding areas. During the hunt for Harold Keke my brother was leading the Joint

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<sup>211</sup> Fr. Richard Carter, who went to receive the released Novices at the wharf in Honiara, noted in his diary: “The Novices were paranoid, fearing to say anything lest they endanger the lives of the other hostages. Keke and his men had indoctrinated them with fear, so that they no longer knew to whom they owed allegiance or what was right or wrong. But Brother Andrew was different; he had refused to be intimidated, refused to beat up his fellow Novices when ordered to by Keke’s men, refused to dance on demand or take part in their own humiliation. He had therefore suffered most and his body was covered in bruises from the beatings and rifle buttings” (Carter, *In search of the lost*, p.146).

Operation with a man from Malaita by the name of James. He did not have a gun at that time; he was only holding a bush knife with him. He was shot and killed by Harold Keke's men at Pite Village. After he was killed, some members of the Joint Operation came to me the next morning and told me that my brother was shot and killed by Harold Keke's men. My family members went over to see his body and eventually arrangement was made for him to be buried while the other Malaitan man was transported to Honiara for a proper burial.

After my brother died the GLF came after us to attack us and our village. The GLF members only knew that a member of our family joined the Joint Operation when they shot my brother. By then the people and whole of our village were not safe anymore from the Harold Keke's men because some of young men joined the Police Operation.

**Statement N° 0720**

Marasa was the last community harassed by Harold Keke's GLF for supporting the Joint Operation. The incident occurred only a month before the arrival of RAMSI in the country. In mid-June 2003, a group of GLF militants led by Ronnie Cawa, Moses Pitakaka and Michael Kaptendou arrived at Marasa Beach and prepared to ambush a vessel that was expected to deliver cargos, arms and payments for the Joint Operation group at Poisugu.<sup>212</sup> Members of the Joint Operation knew of the presence of the militants and withdrew before the GLF entered the village:

The GLF militants were around the area ready to attack that boat coming from Honiara to deliver the money and bullets. The members of the Joint Operation came and whispered to them that the GLF militants were in the bush. They told us not to sleep, so this made us very frightened because those who were supposed to defend us already ran away and we felt unsecured. They told us to gather together in certain houses and to stay awake. We went to a house close at Kohabuha and spent the night there. We did not go to sleep but told stories until 5:00 am. Not long after that the GLF militants came and shouted "don't move".

**Statement N° 6087**

The boat approached Marasa towards the evening of 15 June 2003 and opened fire along the coast for clearance. Since there was no response from the GLF, the members of the Joint Operation assumed that it was safe to land. Upon landing, the GLF opened fire and killed Police

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<sup>212</sup> "We had a wireless two way radio, and one day we switched on the radio and we heard the group at Poisughu trying to contact Regional Billy. At that time Regional joined in with the Joint Operation and was the person who masterminded the operation to come and hunt Keke. He advised the Joint Operation men to come down and wait for him at Marasa, telling them that he will bring more ammunition, about 500 bullets. After hearing their plan, Keke told us to that we must go and intercept the group and take the ammos since we need them. He told us that we must clash with the Joint Operation to get all 500 plus ammo. His boys went but on that day the boat did not arrive. They stayed hiding in the bush for three days waiting to ambush the group that brought the ammo. On the third day the boat arrived, and they clashed with them and took the ammo."

**Testimony of "Andrew", a former GLF militant.**

Constable Davidson Vaiverana. There was a shoot-out which finally forced the Joint Operation to retreat. Afterwards the people of Marasa were harassed by the GLF for three days.

When the GLF arrived they hid themselves at Marasa River. On Sunday evening the Joint Operation went to the beach to wait for the boat and they would also collect some money and ammunition. Harold Keke's group had already been informed and on Sunday before the boat arrived they came and took up positions at Mbabanakira and Marasa. There was a shootout between Harold Keke's group and the Joint Operation. That was on Sunday evening. After the shootout the Joint Operation retreated to the other side of Tina River. We in the community thought nothing would happen.<sup>213</sup>

The whole thing took us by surprise. We heard it in the early morning but we decided not to run away since we are all innocent. We were neutral; we did not support the Joint Operation. We were really shocked at what happened to us. We were not from the other side of the river, it was they who did it then we became the victim.

Early on the morning of 16 June 2003, the GLF took control of Marasa village and ordered the villagers, some 400 people, including women and children, to move down to the beach:

On Monday morning at 5:30 a.m. they came to our houses and pointed guns at us and ordered us not to move around. They tied us all and they told us to go to the beach to meet Harold Keke. The men were all tied with their hands behind their backs and only the children and the women with little ones were not hand tied. They marched us to the beach. We could see Ronnie Cawa and Moses Pitakaka, they were part Choiseul. Moses Pitakaka told us that he was a man who had killed men by himself. "And I don't care if I meant to kill you, I could have you all killed."

Under the eyes of the whole community, two young men, Adrian Bilo and John Lovana, were accused of cooperating with the Joint Operation. The GLF tied their hands to their backs and took turns kicking, punching and bashing them with stones in front of the people. The people were warned not to shed any tears for the young men. Before they beat them cruelly to death, the GLF militants stuffed money in their mouths and forced them to swallow it. In July 2011, TRC received the statement of John Lovana's sister who witnessed the killing of her brother:

On Monday 16 June 2002 we went to the seaside at ten o'clock in the morning. I could see my brother, his look had already changed. A boat came and the militants went to pull that boat ashore. My brother wanted to escape down to the river but they chased him down and got him. They partly cut his head and dragged him back to where he was. They took him close to where we were and they cut another part of his head. I could tell the person who did it; he was a boy from Veuru. My brother cried and called for mum. [*Statement giver was crying*] He recognized our mum and called her but we could not do anything. We were advised not to cry for them. If we did they would kill us.

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<sup>213</sup> If not indicated otherwise, all quotations regarding the Marasa case are taken from interviews carried out by the TRC research team during fieldwork in Marasa, November 2010.



They took money and they tore it in pieces and pushed it into their mouths. This money was part of what was paid by the Government to the Joint Operation and was confiscated by the GLF militants. They took some of the goods that were meant for the people of Marasa for their canteens, like cartons of noodles and other things and pushed them in their mouths and told them, “eat this, this is what you want and you did not worry to fight for this island”. By then one of them died because he could not stand those whips. My brother was still alive and he was still standing and they continued to torture him. By six o’clock in the evening he was still alive but one of those militants took a log and threw it at him and then he attacked him with big stones. He died by six o’clock that evening.

My dad asked my mum and me if we could lift our heads to see him for the last time before they could take the boys away for burial. Before they took them away one of the militants took a bush knife and to cut my brother again even if he was already dead. My mum and I shut our ears with our hands because we did not want to hear when the knife hit his bones. We discussed quietly if we could hold a little prayer before they could bury him. Nobody could talk during those times, but my uncle was brave and he asked them. My uncle asked them if we could give them a proper burial and they said they could not allow that because war deaths were not supposed to deserve proper burial. As we sat and watched we could see six boys coming and they carried my brother; another six boys came and carried the other boy. They were buried in one grave without wrapping them.

#### **Statement N° 6023**

Father Lionel Longarata, the Anglican priest of Marasa, was supposed to be the next victim because of derogatory remarks he had made against the militants in the past. He was tied up and was freed on the third day only because Keke himself let the militants know that “God had spoken to him that he was to be released.”<sup>214</sup> For three days and two nights the whole population had to stay on the beach, exposed to the bright sun during the day and the cold during the night.

It was a terrible experience for me and the entire community. We were left under the sun all day long for three days and we had to sleep on the pebbles for two nights. We did not eat anything on the first day, on the second day we were given a potato each to eat.

When the Joint Operation patrol boat passed by again, the community members were used as human shields:

The patrol boat came in the early hours of the morning and Harold’s group sent us to go down to the seashore and they were using us a defence. The patrol boat passed us and the group fired gun shots to the patrol boat and the bullets flew over us as there was a slope and we were lying on the slope.

Kaptendou ordered the GLF militants to set fire to the entire village because the people of Marasa were “supporting the government”, so all the houses were burnt down.

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<sup>214</sup> Public Hearing, Visale 23/06/2010.

In the evening of the next day they planned to burn the whole entire village. The person by the name of Michael Kaptendou was the one who declared that they would only be satisfied if they burnt the Marasa Village. We were silent. They came and burnt the village and they left two of the boys with guns to look after us. That evening we saw flames and ash flew all over the sky.

During the TRC's Public Hearing in Visale (western Guadalcanal), Father Longarata remembered what occurred during these three days:

On 15 June 2003 there were rumors that members of the GRA had been hiding at the bay of Marasa and had been there for several days. They were preparing to ambush a boat that was bringing ammunition and rations for the Joint Operation team on the Weather Coast. The boat arrived in the afternoon and we heard gunfire exchanges. Marasa is about a mile inland from the beach yet we heard gunfire.

As a priest I tried to do my best to ensure that everyone was safe by gathering them together and warning them to keep away from the main road in case they were caught in the crossfire. In the evening on the 15<sup>th</sup> the shooting continued and suddenly I met several members of the Joint Operation running up inland on our road leading up to Mbabanakira. I asked them what's wrong and they told me that they had run out of ammunition and they went to get some more ammunition. We waited but no one from the Joint Operation team returned. From that moment I knew exactly what will happen next.

That night we moved to where we could be secure from the GRA militants, hoping that nothing bad will happen to us. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of June 2003, very early in the morning, I was surprised that we had been surrounded by a large group and all armed. We were warned not to react or to move away from where we were. They rounded everyone up and instructed us to march down to the beach. Our hands were bound together, including women and children, and we started walking down towards the beach. I was called to stay out from the group with another chief and to go further inland and tell other villages there to come down to the beach. We were only given one hour to get them down to the beach or they will start killing people. Knowing that it was difficult to get everyone down within the time given, we attempted and managed to get to only two villages within an hour. We told them of the order and they followed us down to the beach.

Arriving at the beach with the other villagers I could see that everyone had been gathered together by the GRA militants. The militants ordered that nobody is allowed to talk or cry, and they were to answer all the questions asked in a manner that pleases them. There were two boys in the midst of the militants; they had been tortured in an unspeakable manner. They were bashed, butted with their rifle and stoned, streams of blood were running down from their faces, they had tied both hands at their back and were ordered to dance while blood ran from their bodies. Eventually on the beach the younger one died on the spot, then the elder one tried to escape but he could not do it. They continued to butt him with the bottom of their rifles, they stoned him and he fell, while on the ground one of them with a machete cut his back open. All this happened while everyone was watching, young and old, women and children witnessed everything. After being killed their bodies were dragged further down the beach to where the sun was shining and the heat of the gravel of Marasa heated their bodies.

They finished with what they did and looked around and saw me sitting down amongst the crowd, and they said I will be the next victim. They came towards me and pointed guns at me and tied both of my hands behind my back and I was pushed down to stay between the two dead bodies. After two hours the bodies were taken away and buried in a shallow grave.

I was taken away further from the main group and the rope they tied me with was also tied to a boat pulled up on the beach, and was covered with a huge canvas: I was finding it hard to breath.

They used to check me up every 30 minutes by poking the canvass to see if am still there. We spent the whole night there with all the people still sitting down in their different groups, except for me still tied to the boat under a canvas. I could see that there was nowhere to escape, so I remained patient and prayed the whole night and I believed that God will release me, I never stopped praying that night

Morning came and I was told that the boat was going to leave Marasa with some of their commanders, to meet with their boss to decide my fate, whether I am going to be killed here at Marasa or at their camp. I was lucky to join up with the whole group and we were moved to a shady area between the coconut trees. There was no food or water and the children started crying for food; their parents resorted to coconut fruits to feed them. The elders had no choice but to drink from the dirty polluted Marasa River. All of us were under great fear and the people decided to form themselves in prayer groups, all members of different religions groups, Anglican, Roman Catholic, and the SSEC church and they prayed for me.

Some of the chiefs from the inner part of the Marasa valley came down and discovered that I was waiting for my sentence. They decided to collect money from the surrounding villagers; they collected \$10,000 to pay for my release. When they went over to give the money, the militants refused; there was nothing anyone could do but to wait patiently. We waited until 5 p.m. in the evening when we saw a boat in a distance coming towards Marasa, and we knew that the decision on my fate is near. They came on shore giving orders and gathering people together and started talking; some of the Melanesian Brothers were there with us and they told us that the Melanesian Brothers are going to be released and they have to leave Marasa immediately. They were taken to Wanderer Bay and to find their way back to Tabalia. The next order that came was to give me some kind of warnings, I was very surprised because the actual word they said was, "God spoke to the boss that you were to be released." Before they did that they read out all my charges. The charges were that I had called them murderers, and Christians should not be murderers and arsonists.

One of the commanders came and untied me. After being untied we were still under their control; we were told to come together and they warned us that they will burn our village down. We were worried so we decided to pay them some compensation according to our custom, a pig and a custom shell money; they returned the shell money but they killed and ate the pig.

After enjoying their feasting, they went up to where we lived and burnt down our homes. At around about seven o'clock in the evening we saw the brightness of the fire further up where our homes were. There were more than fifty homes burnt down with nothing left, the whole village of Marasa was left in ashes.

That night they kept on firing their guns in the air, and early next morning we saw the patrol boat go past, and again they used us as human shields. They told us to line up and sit on the beach, and they hid behind and watched the patrol boat. One of the GLF commanders was watching the boat from the top of the hill; he watched closely until he gave orders to his boys to leave our area immediately since there were too many officers coming on shore from the patrol boat. They left quickly and we were free from their control. We rushed to where our homes were and to our dismay they were in ashes. Luckily they did not burn down our chapel building, so women and children slept in the church and us the men and boys slept outside. After going through those hard times we decided we have to continue on with life. My story ends here.

**Fr. Lionel Longarata, Public Hearing, Visale 23/06/2010**

On Wednesday morning, a GLF militant arrived in Marasa and told the group that Keke had ordered them to return as there was a patrol boat approaching and he needed manpower. After

the militants’ departure, some of the victims left to live in Honiara; others got some help from the Member of Parliament for West Guadalcanal, Laurie Chan, the Red Cross, relatives or one of the churches.

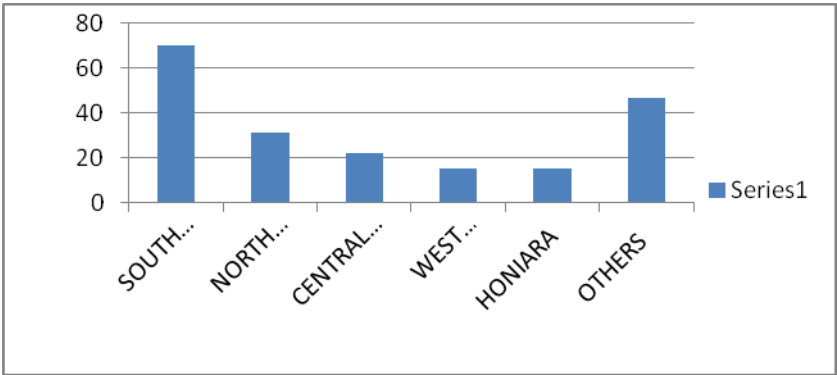
In 2007, Ronnie Cawa, Michael Kaptendou, Geddily Isa and Owen Isa were convicted to life sentences for the murders of Adrian Smith Bilu and John Lovana.

Two months after the harassment of Marasa village, Harold Keke surrendered to RAMSI at Mbiti. Almost one thousand persons witnessed this, and many of them, it is told, had tears in their eyes.

**9. Death on the Weather Coast**

The total number of persons killed during the tension on the Weather Coast was around 70, which is 35 percent of the total number of fatal victims of the conflict (see Figure 3.2.1). Most of the victims died during the incursions of the Joint Operation.

**Figure 3.2.1**  
**Number of victims who died in Guadalcanal by zones (n=200)**



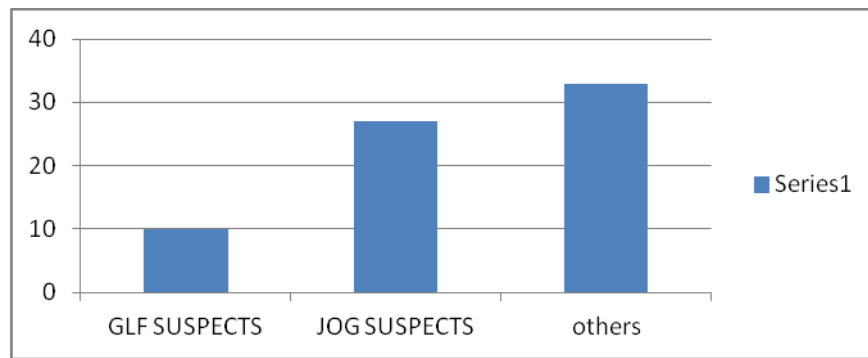
**Source: TRC, Exhumation Unit<sup>215</sup>**

The victims included real or alleged members of the GLF and of the Joint Operation, as well as others (see Figure 3.2.2). Others in Figure 2 refer to civilians who were not members – real or

<sup>215</sup> In Figure 1, “others” refers to victims where nothing is yet known about where they were actually killed, and those that died in other provinces.

alleged – of the warring parties. They include Father Augustine Geve, the ten Kwaio men and the seven Melanesian brothers killed by the GLF.

**Figure 3.2.2**  
**South Guadalcanal victims by category (n=70)**



**Source: TRC Exhumation Unit**

## 11. Conclusions

The conflict left tremendous fissures between the people of the Weather Coast and the Government. The use of state-owned patrol boats is clearly seen as the offence of a Government turning against its own people:

I would like the Government to look at our suffering and especially to assist my family because we lost our houses and other things. It was the Joint Operation that did this; instead of protecting its people they were killing them with the Government's weapons.

**Statement N° 0457**

While Harold Keke and many of his followers serve lifetime in prison, the villagers direct their demands to the state because they feel that their life situation has not improved since the tension.<sup>216</sup> As one victim from Patikeni Village affirms:

“We are still waiting and want to see the Government compensating the people who had been affected and since then nothing had happened”

**Statement N° 0493**

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<sup>216</sup> Requests of the TRC research unit to the Guadalcanal Provincial Government about public investments in development projects on the Weather Coast were never attended to.

There are still many open wounds and grievances among the Weather Coast population that could, if not adequately treated; generate outbursts of violence again:

The government is blaming us for everything that had happened. If you analyze the whole phenomenon, you see that the root cause of all this is the Government. We the people of South Guadalcanal want the Government to be honest with us, because currently the former combatants from our area here are still together and are waiting and watching the Government closely. We want the Government to be honest and show respect towards us.

**Testimony of Andrew**

### **3.2.3 MALAITA AFTER THE EXODUS**

#### **1. Introduction**

The sudden and unexpected arrival of thousands of families from Guadalcanal as a consequence of forced displacement had a tremendous impact on social life in Malaita. First of all, the displaced families themselves found it difficult to reintegrate into the local communities. Many of them were born in Guadalcanal, some of them had never been to Malaita nor knew what their ancestral land rights were and in some cases they did not even speak their own language or particular dialect.

As a rule, though on no account in all cases, strong blood ties (usually referred to as the *wantok system*) helped alleviate the situation of the displaced. Members of the extended family who stayed back home helped the arrivals to trace their lineage and to identify which tribe or clan they belonged to. Relatives and friends often provided essential needs such as food or accommodation. This generosity, of course, impacted on the resources of villagers who suddenly had to take care of family members they had never met before.

At the same time, the Provincial Government and the provincial representatives of the National Government faced big problems, especially in the provision of adequate health, education and security services. Particularly harmful was the sharp increase in violence in Malaita owing to the presence of undisciplined militants in possession of high powered weapons who returned to their villages after the Townsville Peace Agreement.

The conflict shifted in 2000 when Malaitan militants turned against their own people. The following paragraphs describe the situation on two hot spots: the capital, Auki, and Malu'u on the northern end of the island.

#### **2. The impact of forced displacement**

Forced displacement meant not only leaving behind properties, but a whole way of life. Many, probably most, of the displaced Malaitan families had lived and worked for decades on Guadalcanal. Some of them had married Guadalcanal spouses and most of them lived alongside their neighbours for decades. They had bought land to secure their future and their children were born on Guadalcanal and attended school in Honiara. In short, the migrants had made a *life* on

Guadalcanal; and as one of our interviewees stated, “Life on Guadalcanal was good” until the tension happened.<sup>217</sup>

A great number of testimonies to the disruptions caused by the forced displacement were collected by TRC. The following are a few of those randomly selected:

In the 1980s I bought an alienated piece of land in Malatoha from the landowners and settled there with my family. I lived there for almost 16 years until the outbreak of the ethnic tension on Guadalcanal in 1998.

On this piece of land I operated my family businesses. Everything was well between us and the landowners and generally amongst everyone in Malatoha. Two years before the ethnic tension broke out we began to hear stories from the people we lived and worked with that Ezekiel Alebu was masterminding an army to chase everyone who was not Guale back to their own island. I could not believe it as most of our Guale neighbours treated us well.

We lost everything we owned during the tension: three houses, 200 pigs, two buses and a half-ton truck, as well as other valuables. We moved to Honiara before the tension reached its peak and from Honiara we boarded MV *Memory* to Malu’u. At Malu’u our family lived with an in-law while we built our new homes. We found life very difficult as there was no space for new settlements and the sudden influx of people meant demand for land and timber quickly exceeded the limited supply of these resources. Money was also hard to find, especially in rural areas.

For someone like me who had owned and lost many things, I was sad to restart life again from scratch. Regardless of the situation, I appreciate the fact that all our family members were alive. I managed to build homes for my family members, send my grandchildren to school and plant around our house for our daily survival. We are now settling at home and, although we do not own a truck, pigs or big land areas as in Guadalcanal, we are satisfied with what we own today. And we will never go back to Malatoha anymore.

#### **Testimony of Paul**

The company [SIPL] chartered ships and we were transported back to our home province. Arriving in Auki we boarded a transport truck and went straight over to our village. In the village we had no house so we took refuge with an elder sister. We used the money we had been saving while working for the SIPL until it ran out. From then on we discovered that life was pretty tough. We had to struggle to grow food and to complete building our new house. We had to start from scratch again. Life was tough; we had to struggle to survive. It was not easy to earn money; many times we did not have even kerosene for our lights. When we fled from CDC we left most of our things behind: cooking utensils, beddings, gardening tools, cutlery and other items such as furniture.

*Did you come across any land problem when trying to cultivate food gardens?*

That is a common problem that every displaced family faced when returning home. People tended to want to deter us from making food gardens claiming that we cultivated on their land. But we made food gardens, after all it’s all about survival; you cannot stop someone from cultivating a food garden to feed his family when he does not have any job to support them. We often ended up in arguments but we continued making food gardens.

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<sup>217</sup> Statement N° 1664.



*Was your children's education affected?*

My eldest was in his final year in primary school, however, because of the tension, his education was affected. My children were supposed to continue with their secondary education but because there was no money to pay for the school fees they stayed back in the village and could not further their education.

**Testimony of "Ellen"**

My family and I settled on the CDC 6 area at the Okea division. Both my husband and I were employed at SIPL, my husband was a supervisor and I worked in the pesticide department. We had been living there for more than ten years until we heard that Guale militants were chasing, harassing and killing Malaitan people along the Mberande area. Not long after we witnessed people being transported over to Tetera Police Station. Our employer then informed us that we too will have to gather our belongings and prepare to leave. At that time fighting was already happening around the Ngalibiu area. All we managed to collect were some of our clothes and several cooking utensils. I had planted a huge food garden on land my husband and I had bought from the landowners for \$3000 and we were in the process of building our house there. We had bought the roofing iron and were halfway through the building when the fighting started and we fled leaving everything behind.

The company vehicle helped in transporting us over to Honiara. We were accommodated at Panatina Campus where we found life very hard due to overcrowding and not having enough food to eat. The company helped in giving us food and we stayed for a month until ships were chartered to take us over to Malaita.

We had to pay our own transport expenses from Auki to our village. In our village life was very hard. We struggled to survive and it took us almost a year to adjust to the new environment. My children were affected because of the change of environment. We first settled with relatives and after a month we moved to an empty house and struggled to rebuild our lives, new homes and grow food. People came and accused us of cultivating our gardens on their plot of land; they chased us out from the areas where we planted cocoa and coconut. We did not get much help from relatives; we struggled on our own until we settled down.

*Did it affect your children's education?*

Yes, we found it very hard to meet our children's school fees; we went around finding small jobs from other people in our community to earn some money.

**Testimony of Ms. T.**

The displaced families usually disembarked at the nearest port to their home village. Auki received refugees mainly from central, east and west Kwara'ae, Langa Langa, east and west Fataleka, as well as some from Lau, Baelelea, Baegu, and Asifola. Between 1998 and 1999, and again in 2000 when lawlessness reigned on Guadalcanal, shiploads of people that had to abandon their settlements with nothing more than the clothes on their back and some hastily grabbed utensils inundated the capital of Malaita. Much of Auki town resembled a refugee camp. The lucky ones found a place to live with relatives or in one of the resthouses or church buildings, but many had to stay for weeks or even months in tents provided by the Red Cross or one of the

churches. For those who could not get a tent, the store front and market area canopies provided them temporary impoverished shelter.

A number of displaced people did not even know where to go. Among them were migrants who had left Malaita long ago and settled on Guadalcanal for decades; they barely remembered the names of their relatives in their ancestral village. Others were the “castaways”, i.e. people who had been told to leave their village on Malaita because they had done some wrong. Also those who were married to Guadalcanal women were not always welcomed in their community. Those were the ones who got stuck in Auki and had to be resettled by the Provincial Government.

Those displaced families who decided to stay in Auki were not only from Kwara’ae but included people from almost every part of Malaita. Members of the same tribal background formed new settlements, creating small ethnic enclaves around the town. They did not want to go back to their ancestral land because their villages lacked road accessibility and other basic important infrastructure like schools for their children. They usually settled in plots of land given to them by their *wantoks*; only the monied could buy a piece of land. Some of them still live in temporary homes and lack proper sanitation, health, education, employment and other basic needs.

The National Census of 1999 reported 12,676 displaced persons on Malaita (see table 3.2.1), while files from the Red Cross processed by the TRC account for 11,361 displaced people (see table 3.2.2). However, both sources are incomplete. In addition, an unknown number of persons were counted twice, while others were not taken into consideration at all. The Ministry for National Unity, Peace and Reconciliation, churches and some accommodation places had their own records which have been lost since. As a result of the June 2000 events, there was a second wave of displacement that has most certainly caused another jump in the population of Malaita.<sup>218</sup>

This means that even an approximation to the number of forced displacements is based on suppositions, which explains why assessments of displaced people vary between 20,000 and 35,000. Our own inquiries make us believe that 18,000 would be a realistic number; obviously referring only to Malaita. On the other hand, the data of the Census and the Red Cross give us a

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<sup>218</sup> Ministry of Provincial Government and Rural Development, Rural Development Division: *Malaita Province Development Profile*, August 2001, p. 15.

fair idea of the *dynamics* of the population movements. They show which wards or regions received most of the refugees and that the bulk of them did not stay in Auki but settled in their home villages.

**Table 3.2.1**  
**Report of National Census 1999**

	<b>Total population</b>	<b>Displaced</b>		<b>Total population</b>	<b>Displaced</b>
<b>Malaita province</b>	<b>122,620</b>	<b>12,676</b>	17 Gulalofou	4,676	272
01 Auki	4,022	413	18 Waneagu/Taelanasina	3,598	211
02 Aimela	6,747	914	19 Aiaisi	2,922	211
03 Buma	5,389	422	20 Areare	2,815	87
04 Fauabu	8,252	1,126	21 Raroisu'u	4,081	164
05 West Baegu/Fataleka	2,541	336	22 Aba/Asimeuru	4,349	248
06 Mandalua/Folotana	2,410	411	23 Asimae	2,793	144
07 Fo'ondo/Gwaiiau	4,140	345	24 Mareho	2,254	122
08 Malu'u	4,828	548	25 Tai	3,773	111
09 Matakwalu	2,503	347	26 Kwarekwareo	1,623	47
10 Takwa	9,616	1,726	27 Siesie	2,888	38
11 East Baegu	3,922	654	28 Waneagu Silana Sina	4,093	256
12 Fouenda	2,456	134	29 Keaimela/Radefasu	8,466	1,181
13 Sulufou/Kwarande	1,603	91	30 Langa Langa	2,098	316
14 Sububeni/Burianiiasi	4,925	543	31 Luaniuua	1,307	47
15 Nafinua	3,663	805	32 Pelau	488	9
16 Faumamanu/Kwai	3,099	355	33 Sikaiana	280	42

**Table 3.2.2**  
**Displaced persons – Red Cross files**

Northern Malaita	5,087
Eastern Malaita	1,137
Central Malaita	3,716
Southern Malaita	1,324
Malaita Outer Islands	97
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,361</b>

Blood ties could cushion much of the pressure, but not all of it. The necessity for meeting the basic needs of the displaced families, like housing and food, generated pressure on local resources. Conflicts over land, common in overpopulated Malaita even before the tension, worsened during those years. Some of them were taken to court, but too often there was also violence as the use of guns had become a habit. Land disputes involving displaced families

continue today. In 2010, shortly before the visit of the TRC research team, there was a shooting incident at Ulukwalo Village resulting in a young man being admitted to the National Referral Hospital sustaining leg injuries. The Auki police recovered a home-made gun.

Virtually all of the displaced families that were interviewed by our researchers reported that they found life in Malaita very hard compared to the times on Guadalcanal. “Life is tough here on Malaita” was a common expression among the interviewees.

I struggled to cope with life here on Malaita. At times I wanted to go over to Honiara again to find a job but I felt that age is quickly catching up with me. So I declined and decided to remain on Malaita until today. I always think of the things I lost on Guadalcanal but there is nothing I could have done to salvage them since I was more worried in getting my family quickly to safety.

To start again in life is a very hard thing. It is harder where I have settled because there is no coconut or cocoa plantation, land is scarce and infertile, trees for housing are insufficient and work to generate money is hard to come by. I also live on land that belongs to other people because my ancestral land is far in the bush. All my children are struggling with their families; they experience the same hardships I face. As a result two of them went back to Honiara looking for jobs to sustain our family here. Our lives have not much improved since being evacuated from Guadalcanal.

#### **Testimony of Mr. B.**

When we arrived we relied on the Red Cross, other international organizations and the Catholic Church. We lived with relatives but it didn't get any easier because they had their families and commitments to meet. We felt it wrong to be overcrowding their homes. Thinking back, I do not want to go through that experience again, it was tough. When we wanted to make food gardens we did not even have working tools, we had to borrow them from other families and be cautious when using them to avoid cruel remarks from the owners.

In 2000 I was employed as a chef at Traveller's Motel and from then on I began to earn money and to slowly rebuild my family's life. Up until now I have not received any support from the Government but have supported myself. I am proud to say that I am self-sufficient as I have not received any form of assistance from anyone.

#### **Testimony of John Eric**

I find life very difficult because we left all our belongings and properties back on Guadalcanal, especially my small canteen, piggery farm, chainsaw and our huge food gardens. Life in the village was tough because we arrived empty-handed and had to start from nothing. When we tried to clear areas to make gardens people came and told us that we were cultivating on their land. Life is tough here on Malaita and I reminisce the days on Guadalcanal where the soil is very fertile and we always had more than we needed. We earned good money from selling produce from our gardens. On Guadalcanal we hired a tractor to cultivate the soil for us. I had three huge food gardens, one melon farm and planted potato and cassava and corn. I used to supply the National Referral Hospital with potatoes and cassavas. I earned good money from selling my produce.

#### **Testimony of Mostyn**

We found life very tough. It was a complete new setting and we had to start all over again since we lost everything back on Guadalcanal. My father came over to Honiara after we heard of the lost property payment. We submitted our claim of SBD\$300,000 for the value of all our properties but we have not received a single cent. We survived on our own and had gone through a lot of tough times. Luckily we were in our village so relatives helped and assisted us with food. We cultivated food gardens and built temporary shelters. But there is not much land to grow food. We made small food gardens around our house but with rising costs, for instance, school fees, it cannot support us fully.

#### **Testimony of Clifford**

Particular hardships were experienced by refugees from Langa Langa who had refused to join the Malaita Eagle Force and were accused by the Malaitan militants of organizing an underground group called “Seagulls”:

When we arrived at Ailau, the people of Kwara’ae came to harass us practically every night. They said we are Seagulls. We thought life would get easier by escaping from Guadalcanal and finding shelter in Malaita, but it was worse when our own people from Malaita treated us like foreign criminals.

#### **Testimony of Mr. S.**

We thought that by establishing a bottle shop in Auki we would be able to recover. On the contrary, the Malaita Eagle Force raided my bottle shop and took 90 cartons of beer and took all my earnings of the day, accusing us of being members of the Seagulls. I was in tears when I was held at gunpoint because this was the third time I was held at gunpoint after the GRA chased us out from Tangarare. Knowing that the Malaita Eagle Force was dominated by people from North Malaita and that I am married to a woman from north Malaita, I thought it would be safe if we handed responsibility over to my in-laws. It got even worse; we were left with barely anything.

#### **Testimony of Mr. D.**

Another location in Malaita where many displaced families arrived during the tension was the port of Malu’u, from where they spread out to their home villages in the northern part of the island. Located in the To’abaita region, Malu’u is a small town near Suava Bay with about 4,000 inhabitants. It had been slowly progressing with some development projects before it became the place in Malaita that was probably most severely hit by the tension.

As in Auki, most of the displaced families lived in temporary houses and tents upon their arrival. Some found a place with relatives, in resthouses or in church buildings while working on their new homes. And as in Auki, life turned out to be a lot harder than it was on Guadalcanal. In and around Malu’u land for gardening is even more scarce and infertile than in central Malaita. Space for housing is limited especially on the coastal areas. There is shortage of trees, building materials are very expensive, and money is even harder to earn than in the provincial capital.

However, it seems that the *wantok* system worked better in northern Malaita than in Auki to ease the situation of the displaced families. The majority of the refugees who arrived in Malu'u recognized their tribes and family members and were aware of their corresponding land rights. Their *wantoks* built temporary houses for them and provided food and other essential services. Empty places were filled with houses, swampy places were dried out for settlements, some coconut and ngali-nut plantations were cleared for new homes.

But in spite of the attention they received, many younger members of the displaced families, who were born on Guadalcanal, found it difficult to speak, or even understand, the To'obaitan language. It was hard for them to adapt to the cultural code of dressing, talking, and ways of doing things, including gardening, housing, marriage ceremonies and memorial services. Lacking such knowledge resulted in negative stereotyping among the displaced.

Feeding the families was a major problem. Most displaced people, especially those living in the heart of Malu'u where land was scarce, survived by growing small gardens around their homes or in coconut and ngali-nut plantations. Over the years these land have become exhausted and no longer fertile forcing people to go for some cash with activities like betel nut hawking in the streets of Malu'u. Many of them opted to return to Honiara when the situation became safe again; others joined one of the armed gangs that terrified the neighbourhoods during the tension years (see below).

But not only displaced families were affected. The massive displacement caught Malaita in a moment when domestic migration within the island had already caused considerable internal problems. Many families from the inner parts of the island had migrated to the coastal towns where public services like health and education were concentrated, augmenting the population pressure on scarce resources. For decades out-migration to other islands had somewhat mitigated but never completely resolved the dilemma which was now, with the abrupt arrival of thousands of displaced families, greatly intensified.

The standard of living of local families declined as the number of people they had to feed increased. Ensuing strained relationships between locals and arrivals was unavoidable because the displacement pressured people not only materially, but it also highlighted the differences in lifestyles and mentalities. Most of the refugees had worked for years in plantations on Guadalcanal and were habituated to a cash economy and the yearning to make "fast money".

They were used to an urban lifestyle with television, tape-recorders and flush toilets. Their children were accustomed to bread, butter and tea and would vocally pine for those things. Adolescents who had spent all their lives in urban Honiara had no gardening and fishing skills; they were bored and spent most of their time being idle and drinking *kwaso*. One witness states, “Kwaso<sup>219</sup> was not known in the communities, it came in during the tension and it brought many troubles.” All this created tensions *within* families that could not be quickly resolved.

Private lives and communal resources were not the only things affected by the tension and forced displacement. Development projects in Malaita were halted and the Provincial Government was forced to make big cuts in its budget (see table 3.2.3).<sup>220</sup> As the Malaita Development Profile 2001 states, “a considerable factor in this may have been as a result of the ethnic tension” (p. 35). All this happened in a situation where the demand for services had increased because of the arrival of thousands of displaced families.

**Table 3.2.3**  
**Malaita Provincial Government revenue (SBD\$)**

	<b>2001 Budget</b>	<b>2001 (until March)</b>	<b>2002 Budget</b>
Admin Division	13,000	3,677	4,903
Basic land rates	33,030	12,514	16,685
Fisheries	11,010	356	475
Sport gate takings	16,500	10,215	13,686
Hire of machinery	64,050	2,830	3,773
Business licenses	400,000	86,815	115,753
Petrol licenses	8,000	7,600	10,133
Passenger levy	80,000	15,321	20,428
MIB fees	8,000	4,134	5,512
Property rates	25,000	2,914	3,885
Housing tenancies	25,000	14,949	19,932
Town and country planning	6,000	4,840	5,973
Auki market	12,000	2,874	3,823
Building permits	10,000	4,480	5,973
Other	919,704	29,291	31,393
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,631,294</b>	<b>202,810</b>	<b>262,327</b>

**Source: Ministry of Provincial Government and Rural Development,  
Rural Development Division: *Malaita Province Development Profile*, August 2001, p. 15.**

<sup>219</sup> Home-brew alcohol.

<sup>220</sup> “So during my time this ethnic tension was a stumbling block for the Malaita Province. We were just about to implement some development projects. One of them was the Malaita Shipping Company, it was about to operate its shipping services at that time. And then the feasibility study of Bina had just finished at that time. We had signed a contract with a Spanish company to build at the Bina Harbor. Another was the Auluta Project where we had just finished surveying the Auluta Basin. All these projects were ready to get off the ground when unfortunately the ethnic tension happened”.

**Testimony of Mr. David Oeta, former Premier of Malaita**

### **3. The breakdown of social norms**

The Malaita Eagle Force was a disjointed group with different factions and competing leaderships (see chapter 3.3.2). Nowhere was this clearer than in Malaita itself where there was no common enemy like the GRA that could weld together splinter groups organized from local or personal friendships. Besides, many of the weapons from the armory raids in Auki and Rove ended up in the hands of criminals that used the name of MEF to pursue a wide range of lawless activities. Public security became a major problem in Auki and even more so in Malu'u due to violent and disruptive actions committed by competing factions within the MEF or criminal free riders – the so-called “Mafia” – that passed themselves off as militants. The high-powered weapons that were taken during the Rove armory raid were never returned.

The “Mafia” was commanded by two brothers, from a tribe called Fautharo which means “stone bird”. The “Mafia” was actually a family gang in that most of its members were closely related and only a few associates from other tribes could join. In northern Malaita, consanguinity was also common among members of other militant gangs.

Group differences and individual rivalries among particular factions within the Malaita Eagle Force worsened during these years; not only between regional factions (central and north Malaita) but also between individual members. On one occasion a militant from To'obaita was attacked in Auki by a MEF group from central Kwara'ae because he had caused disturbances by shooting around in the town under the influence of liquor. The Kwara'ae combatants retaliated because they saw this as an unacceptable intrusion into what was supposed to be “their” area. The To'obaita militant managed to escape with some bullets hitting his vehicle. The next day a group of MEF militants from To'obaita in north Malaita arrived into Auki firing shots in the air and demanding compensation from the Kwara'ae group. The Kwara'ae group eventually compensated the attack with five red shell money and SBD\$10,000 in cash.

In northern Malaita, there were occasional clashes between two “Mafia” leaders and MEF field commander Jimmy Lusibaea, who was from the same village and was related to them. Rumor had it that Alfred, who had joined the MEF, was jealous about Lusibaea's position as commander. In reality, the conflict sprung from an ongoing land dispute. Lusibaea had migrated from the inland to coastal land claimed by the family of the “Mafia” leaders to be their land.



Boundaries between tension-related militancy and personal interests were totally blurred. On many occasions the name of MEF was used for personal paybacks and there were armed clashes and forced compensation demands over issues related to land, bride price arrangements or simply individual enmity. The tension was an opportune time to settle old conflicts and outstanding issues with the barrel of a gun:

The incident that happened to me was a result of an argument with some men who were not members of the MEF. I argued with them and later they went over and informed their brothers who had joined up with the MEF group. I used abusive words simply to stop them from walking through our area. Some days later two vehicles loaded with men with arms wearing camouflaged clothing came to my house and demanded that we give them compensation or they would shoot everyone in the village. They demanded a shell money plus SBDS\$200 cash. Our women and children all fled into the bush terrified. They left after we managed to collect the money and gave it over to them, but not before destroying some of the things in our house.

**Statement N° 7361**

Very early in the morning of the 5<sup>th</sup> of December 2001, as we were sitting down having our breakfast, a vehicle came and parked in front of our house. We saw three men jump out wearing camouflage pants and walking straight to our house. They sat down and told us that we have to give them three shell money and a thousand dollars. My husband and I started asking them why they demanded these things from us and they responded that it has something to do with tribal land disputes. My husband tried to explain the situation to them, but they insisted that we must give them what they demanded. I was so angry and wanted to continue arguing with them since it was not right for them to demand money from us. However, my husband told me not to say anything but to give in to their demand, basically for our own safety. He took a thousand dollars from our family savings and three shell money and gave it to them. These men were members of the so called Malaita Eagle Force.

**Statement N° 7348**

One case that attracted much attention in Auki was the burning down of the Auki Refilling Station in January 2001 by some militants commanded by James Tatau from Kwara'ae. At the heart of the incident was a tribal land dispute that dates back to the 1930's. In an act of retaliation, Tatau was battered and severely injured by another group of Kwara'ae militants led by Moses Su'u. Both Tatau and Su'u were founding members of the MEF (see chapter 3.3.2).

One of the biggest problems was the arrival of heavily armed and drunk militants of the Malaita Eagle Force. In June 2001, Anglican Bishop Terry Brown wrote in one of his periodic "Malaita updates" to his Archbishop:

The MEF presence in Auki seems to be increasing with each trip of the MV *Ramos* full of Eagles coming home for a rest and to collect food. They frequently arrive drunk and their behaviour on the ship, on the Auki wharf and in town is becoming a problem. (How is it that the Joint Operation/MEF have instituted a liquor ban in Honiara, yet the MEF members return to Auki with cases of beer?) The MEF have taken over security on the MV *Ramos* and the wharf,

threatening passengers with their guns. A few weeks ago they shot into the air at the Auki Wharf, frightening passengers and everyone in the market. There are reports of girls being arranged for the returning Eagles to drink and have sex with as Auki is the “rest and recreation centre”. There is increasing fear here among the Langa Langa community, especially store owners (both Langa Langa and Chinese) about the MEF intentions in Auki.

Gun-wielding men dominated public life in Auki and even more so in Malu’u. They looted shops, harassed people, damaged properties and demanded money from unsuspecting victims. Gunfire was commonplace:

We could not sleep well at night; the sound of guns went on nonstop till morning and even during the day. We were afraid of moving to the garden and we minded the way we talked and just kept quiet all the time.

### **Testimony of Ellen**

Militants loafing about the streets of Malu’u fired their weapons into the air for fun or shot cats, dogs, pigs or whatsoever animal they saw roaming their villages. Reckless driving was another favourite pastime as some of the militants had come back from Guadalcanal with stolen vehicles which they decorated with defiant slogans and martial symbols like cow skulls. A stream of stolen vehicles and possessions like outboard motors or chainsaws passed through Auki.<sup>221</sup> In July 2000, the To’obaita MEF chartered a ship to carry stolen vehicles to north Malaita and unloaded them at Suava Bay, near Malu’u.

Armed militants swore at people, robbed gardens and looted business companies whenever they were in the mood to do so. As a result many shops had to close down. Only stores that belonged

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<sup>221</sup> Consider for example the following statement:

Another incident happened when they spotted my son’s Range Rover parked underneath our house. Rumors had it that they had been looking for the Range Rover for some time. They came and threatened us to release the vehicle over to them. They also knew we ran a small shop underneath our house so they regularly came to demand money and food from us and our store broke down.

My *wantoks* found out that I was trying to retrieve the vehicle, they then swooped it with a militant from To’obaita, *K.*, a former Telecom employee. I followed up and caught up with *K.* at Skyline; he stopped over and I approached him and told him that the vehicle belongs to my son. He then opened the door from the back of the Range Rover, pulled out a semi-automatic rifle and raised his voice in an angry manner, pointing his gun at me and said “your vehicle or your life!” I froze for a few minutes and I told him, “Okay, you can have it, since it is only a vehicle and that my life is more valuable than the vehicle.” I pulled back and he left. Later we got a phone call from Auki and some relatives confirmed seeing the vehicle there and they told me that the MEF militants had sold it to a local businessman in Auki. We tried to retrieve the vehicle from him but the militants were still in control. We tried until RAMSI intervened, then we were able to repossess the vehicle, but by that time the engine was already malfunctioning. We tried to take it onboard the ship but we could not move it. My daughter-in-law was so sad, as it was her father’s vehicle and was given to her when she got married. In the end we decided to leave it in Malaita and we returned to Honiara.

**Statement N° 0611**

to some of the militants or their relatives were safe, as an attack on them would have surely resulted in retaliation and paybacks.

A well-established regional organization funded by Japanese Aid at Malu'u, OFCF, was pulled down in a single day by a group of militants. They removed all valuables, including outboard motor engines and the company vehicle, and burnt the building to the ground, leaving only its shell. The administrator of the company remembers:

One day around 3 p.m. in the afternoon, MEF militants came and demanded that I give them the keys to our office so they can take the vehicle and parts of our truck which they had taken earlier. They arrived in a large group and I was afraid, so I gave them the keys. They looted our office; they took all the vehicle parts and other valuable things, like our OBM. They even removed the sinks, the louvers and other items attached to the building. We could not do or say anything. We were surprised that this was done by our own *wantoks*. After that we left Malu'u and went back to our village, never to return.

**Statement N° 2082**

A similar incident happened to a mini cassava chip factory near Manakwai village, a coastal community within the Malu'u area that was destroyed by opposing tribesmen from a nearby village with the backup of tribal members who had joined the "Mafia". The factory was never rebuilt. Other establishments like the Malu'u butchery, Malu'u milling factory, Malu'u rice factory, Malu'u copra shed, Malu'u ice block processing factory, and Malu'u soap factory shut down and have remained closed until now. In Gwou'ulu in the Lau area, one landowner was killed and two were severely injured because they tried to stop the Suava International Port project, conflicting with the interest of some MEF leaders. All these incidents were based on personal jealousies and land issues, with so-called "militants" making use of a situation of generalized lawlessness and anarchy. Those were times when economic interests were imposed with the force of arms.

The following statement gives an example of how enterprises broke down because of the tension:

In 1998 we established a company at West Fataleka ward. Our financier gave us USD\$50,000 which was equivalent to SBD\$300,000 and we managed to buy two bulldozers and other equipments for logging. Towards the end of 1998 we continued working and completed the first phase of the project. At the beginning of 1999, while going towards the second phase of the project, the tension reached its climax. Our financier asked us what are the possibilities of our operation is closing down because he knew that several parties from Fataleka had strongly opposed our operation.

Legally my father bought the land in the 1980's from the landowners from Fataleka, which included also the concession of our logging operation. The majority of the tribe agreed on the

purchase, but a few disagreed and opposed our operation. Because of the tension, some of those who disagreed were also members of the MEF group and were in possession of guns and had been continuously issuing threats on our operations. Our financier was well aware of the situation.

We made road access through some of the people's land and they had been submitting their claims for the damage. Since we were still in the first phase of the operations we told them to wait until we enter into the second phase, thus money will be available and we can pay out the claims submitted for the damage. However, because of the Tension we had to pay out money from our own pockets until we were left with nothing. All our machines were damaged by the disgruntled parties. We tried to retrieve the machines but all the parts were stolen. In 2001, the operation was closed down because we did not have any funds left. It was a big loss for us and we incurred a lot of debts from other companies. We are still trying to sort out these issues in other ways, but we still propose to continue on with the operation. However, that is what happened to us as a result of the Tension.

*Can you roughly estimate the total amount of loss you incurred?*

It was roughly more than SBD\$150,000. The money was used to pay for the damages claimed by other tribes for constructing our access road through their land.

#### **Statement N° 2365**

Compensation claims were most prevalent in the northern region. Many of them were related to land matters, while others were more bizarre in nature as shown by the following testimonies:

I gave compensation, five traditional shell money, to militants who demanded it from my family with guns because of an issue that was solved long ago, where my son was having an affair with one of their sisters while at secondary school. [Patty]

I paid compensation to militants because I brewed *kwaso* and one of their younger relatives got drunk and caused problems to his own family [John].

At Kwaiana community in Bita'ama some men with guns from the mafia group and ex-militants demanded about ten traditional shell money (*tafulia'e*) from the people. claiming the village was established on their land destroying one of their taboo places [Charles].

I gave two red shell money because my husband opposed the development of a cassava factory on his land because he did not consult the ex-militants though the land belonged to him ("Evelyn").

One time it was demanded that our tribe at Mbita'ama pay the court expenses spent by the opposing party in a land dispute as it was claimed that the losing party will also meet the costs of the winning party. But that time the court decision was not yet made. The opposing party used the name of the militants and demanded our tribe to pay their expenses. That time our tribe gave two red shell money.

The criminal elements normally used Jimmy Lusibaea's name, claiming that he sent them and we must give them the amount demanded before a certain date. They always threatened to kill us if we failed to meet their demands.

#### **Testimony of Ms. O.**

During the period of the tension I was threatened at gunpoint with my family. I had two children at that time. One Saturday morning we were returning home from church service when the militants came and started threatening innocent people around our community. They knew that I own several assets and they targeted me. They came onboard a Hilux in front of my house and fired shots in the air; they fired shots at my house. When I came out from the house to approach them, they held me at gunpoint and they took my OBM engines, an 18 Horsepower engine and a 30 Horsepower engine, a Yamaha ray boat and all my fishing gears.

**Statement N° 2081**

According to some, even to mention MEF Commander Jimmy Lusibaea's name was reason to demand compensation in northern Malaita:

One day in 2001 my husband and I were at home when, to our surprise, a group of men arrived and demanded compensation. The MEF militants prohibited people from even mentioning Jimmy Rasta's name. If you were found uttering his name the militants would come and demand money from you at gunpoint. I was sitting and telling stories with another woman and we mentioned Rasta's name. Somehow someone leaked the story and the militants came and demanded money from us. They said that Jimmy himself had sent them and that if we didn't give them what they wanted we would be killed or our properties would be destroyed. They even fired shots in the air causing a lot of fear. They demanded one red *tafulia'e* (shell money) plus a pig, but we did not have what they demanded. We wanted to seek help from relatives but they did not allow us to leave. Early the next morning one of our relatives heard what was happening to us, he came to us with a *tafulia'e* and gave it on behalf of our family to the militants. We gave one red shell money plus SBD\$200 cash to replace the pig they were asking for. Personally, I think they did this to us because they needed money to buy beer.

**Testimony of Ms. M.**

On one occasion a passenger truck on its way to Fouia was stopped by militants. They fired some warning shots, harassed the driver and demanded compensation because the name of an ancestor of one of the militants was written on the truck. The passengers were chased out from the truck and had to find their own way home. The truck was taken by the militants until the compensation was met. There were cases where no reason was given for a compensation claim:

In October 2001 I was attending a Sunday church service and was returning home. I was walking along the road when a truckload of MEF militants from my own area, To'obaitan region, stopped in front of me. I then saw one of them jump out of the vehicle, come straight to me and demanded that I give them three shell money or he will shoot me. I was so frightened and quietly prayed asking God to protect me. He told me to go over to his boss, a MEF commander, who was sitting in front of the vehicle. I went over to him and he mentioned the same demand. I told him I had no money and they said that they will go take my husband for a "panel beating". I told them that my husband was in church. They insisted that I give them three shell money or they will shoot me right there. I told them that they should just shoot me since I have no money. They moved on to my house and then the pig pen and shot one of my bigger pigs. They carried it to their vehicle and continued to demand one shell-money from me. I was so scared; somehow I put all my trust in God. So I went over to my nephew; he assisted and gave me a shell-money. I took the money and gave it to them and they left. However, they warned that they will return on Tuesday to collect the remaining two shell money. They returned on Tuesday and asked for the

remaining money. My children collected two shell money plus a hundred dollars, gave it to them, and they left.

**Statement N° 2090**

As in other parts of Melanesia, compensation is a social action designed “to restore some social stability and at least a resemblance of peaceful coexistence with the party of the offender.”<sup>222</sup> Kwaio, for instance, recognize six distinct named types of compensation: sexual trespass, theft, desecrating someone’s ancestors, insults or infringements of personal or group rights, causing injury, and causing death.<sup>223</sup> Each one of the offences has its respective “price”. Some of those interviewed said most of the compensation payments demanded by the militants were clear breaches of *kastom* and tradition, a sort of cultural eclipse.<sup>224</sup>

The amount demanded by the militants during that period was not according to *kastom*. They demanded more than the usual amount permitted by our culture. For offences that warranted one shell-money, they demanded between three and ten shell monies and even hard cash. The situation at that time was unethical according to our culture.

Besides, they demanded money from people over things that happened way back in the past, such as land disputes or tribal disputes dating two generations back. On most occasions their demands were unfounded; they demanded money from people based on rumors without any proof. When consuming *kwaso* they would become more violent and there was nothing anyone could do since they were always armed.

**Testimony of Mr. S.**

During that period our cultural norms were not followed. The conflict on Guadalcanal altered people’s minds completely. People became more violent, their attitudes towards others changed, and they developed the habit of demanding money from people. They went around demanding much more money than culture dictated. On some occasions they demanded money from people without any proof, based only on unfounded rumors. They were always under the influence of liquor and would always become aggressive. They expected people to give them that whatever they demanded on the spot, without any hesitation. They did not approach people respectably according to our cultural way of sorting out problems.

**Testimony of Chief J. K.**

In summary, by the year 2000 the breakdown of social norms in Malu’u – and to a somewhat lesser extent also in Auki – was comparable to the situation in Honiara after the TPA. The conflict was no longer ethnic as militants began to turn on their own people: Malaita militants against civilians of Malaita. Uncontrolled gangs used the label of the Malaita Eagle Force for

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<sup>222</sup> David Akin: “*Compensation and the Melanesian State: Why the Kwaio Keep Claiming*”. *The Contemporary Pacific*, Vol.11, N° 1, Spring 1999, p. 46.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid, p. 44.

<sup>224</sup> See also chapter 3.4.1.2.

personal interest and recklessly made use of their weapons to harass neighbours, shopkeepers and whole communities. People had learned to be mindful of what they say and do because of *fear*:

Fear was evident among everyone in our communities simply because of guns. There was no freedom of expression and movement. People saw that everything revolved around guns at that time, everything was unlawful and unethical; but we could not speak out because of fear.

**Testimony of Mr. S.**

The situation caused fear among people in the northern region. It completely changed people's attitude, we were afraid to speak openly and it affected the cordial relationships we had with other communities, tribes and families. There was widespread fear of intimidation by the militants if one was to say anything bad against them. We had mixed feelings, we were afraid to visit our relatives and most of the time we were confined to our homes. We advised our children to be mindful of what they said.

**Testimony of Mr. M.**

There were very little social activities like sports, marriage ceremonies, church meetings and educational programs. Militants could walk into any gathering and help themselves to food and beverages. Many social activities such as church anniversaries or school carnivals had to be cancelled because attending them would be too risky. Parents warned their children to hide in the bush from trucks because most of them belonged to militants; some even decided to stop their children from going to school.

Those who had guns had the power. As one person said, "people with arms were in charge of people's lives at that time." Nobody could do anything about it; certainly not the police:

During that period reports continued to come in from various areas on the outskirts, but we could not attend these reports simply because people were in possession of firearms, including officers who defected to the militia. The militants were not trained and did not have the discipline to properly handle weapons. They were in full control since they were armed and we remained in our offices or stayed at home. Most of the time you could not find officers in the stations because they chose to stay at home. We encountered a lot of problems while on duty. People would walk by the police station and swear at us officers. The militants had the upper hand at that time; they had no respect for anyone.

**Testimony of a Senior Police Constable in Malu'u**

When the boys were still in Guadalcanal we heard about the ethnic tension but we did not experience it ourselves. We felt the effects of the ethnic tension in Malaita when the boys returned from Guadalcanal. We police officers who were supposed to keep law and order could not do anything; we could not maintain law and order. When militants got drunk they would come and threaten us or swear at us. Some members of the community felt sorry for us and would cry when they saw them mistreating us.

**Testimony of former Police officer in Auki**

The Malaitan members of the Auki Police Station were mostly MEF supporters. Indeed, the MEF used the holding cell in the station to keep their prisoners. In Malu'u, some militants and former police officer John Taloi tried to form a sort of vigilante committee and established monitor posts, but they were too involved in the skirmishes to be able to help the situation.

On the other hand, there were also police officers who found a common cause with the criminals. On 10 February 2003, Sir Frederick Soaki, a member of the UNDP Delegation for the Demobilization of Special Constables and former Commissioner of Police, was gunned down at Auki Motel while having dinner with other members of the delegation. The gunman was identified as Edmond Sae, a Sergeant in the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force.<sup>225</sup>

The MEF opened an office in Auki where people could report complaints, but even the responsible core group of the militants was powerless against the criminal elements. Fights over stolen goods between militants were common on the Auki wharf.

As a result of his refusal to support the MEF, the Premier and other members of the Provincial Assembly were exposed to threats by the militants:

When MEF was formed they approached me, as Premier, to request assistance and backup both financially and in recognition of their existence, goals and objectives. They wanted the Province to fully supply and support them for providing security for the Malaitan people. The SI Governor General had declared the GRA, IFM and MEF unlawful societies. As the Malaita Provincial Assembly is a legal entity of Solomon Island Government, I declined and refused to accept a working partnership with the MEF and refused to recognize it. Because of this I started receiving threats from its leaders and founders.

The first threat I received was in Auki from a former police officer who joined the paramilitary. He came to ask the use of a vehicle which I refused since it was a property of the Province. He was furious and discharged his firearm in front of my gate entrance, threatening to return and kill me. It happened in 1999, an upsetting time for my family.

The second incident occurred when I was away in Vanuata to attend a meeting. The RSIPF rang me up and said that the MEF militants had burnt my vehicle and advised me to be more careful when I return from the trip since the MEF militants had made threats to my family. They told my family that if I was at home at that time, I would be torched in a similar manner to my vehicle.

#### **Statement of Mr. David Oeta**

The delegation of the Malaita Provincial Government that was supposed to attend the peace talks in Buala, in May 2000, had to cancel its participation after receiving threats from the MEF that the ship they were about to use would be burnt before it left Auki passage.

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<sup>225</sup> Solomon Islands High Court, Regina v Oeta [2004] SBHC 123; HC-CRC 173 of 2003 (3 June 2004).



The tension between MEF and the Provincial Government peaked when the Solomon Island Government decided to give SBD\$6.8 million to compensate the killings of Malaitans and the use of abusive language by Guadalcanal militants. The MEF leaders claimed that they were the legitimate representatives of Malaitan people and demanded that the money be transferred to their organization. Instead, the SIG assigned the funds to the Malaita Provincial Government, which compensated the families of 18 Malaitans killed during the tension with \$100,000 each. The remaining \$5 million was supposed to be put into development programmes but the MEF continued demanding the money with threats:

One night one of the militants from north Malaita rang me and ordered me to release the money. If I failed to do so he had put aside a bullet for me and further threatened that he will stick the barrel of his gun up my ass and fire the bullet and it will come out from my head. That was the threat I received. I was so scared that I called Andrew Nori and Maelanga and asked them to talk to the militants and intervene on my behalf.

**Statement of Mr. David Oeta**

A meeting between the militants and the executive members of Malaita Provincial Government was arranged at Lelei Beach Resort but led to no agreement. After the meeting, shots were fired at the bus in which Malaita Provincial Executive were travelling:

Luckily the bus was moving so the bullet did not hit any of us. Arriving at Honiara Hotel, Patteson Saeni approached me and said that he was responsible for firing shots at us since he was not allowed along with his field commandoes to participate in the meeting to talk about the compensation money.

**Statement of Mr. David Oeta**

In the end, the SBD\$5 million dollars were taken violently by an armed group of militants commanded by MEF leader Leslie Kwaiga; the money was deposited on a trust account of the MEF Supreme Council, whence it was withdrawn a few days later. No final destination is known.

Around the month of September, a MEF group came over to the provincial office to collect the money from us. The group was led by Leslie Kwaiga. They came and demanded that Malaita Province give them the five million dollars.

They entered the headquarters and even my residence was occupied by militants. I had to convene a quick meeting of my Executive and in fear of our lives we had to make the drastic decision to release the amount over to them. They took the money and left. We had to give the MEF the five million dollars since our lives were at risk.

**Statement of Mr. David Oeta**

Finally, traditional community leaders like village chiefs, elders and church leaders were prevented from taking action against the militants. Years of life on the plantations had changed attitudes towards mechanisms of social control that to a great extent were in charge of the churches and their leaders in the communities. Traditional authorities also became victims of compensation claims, threats, guns, damage to properties and other intimidation:

Tobaitan chiefs are quite influential<sup>226</sup> but at that time they were afraid to carry out their duties. It was risky to solve problems during the tension since chiefs were not able to deal with conflict-related matters; sometimes they declined to make decisions because they were afraid of the guns. In 2001 a chief was whacked with a knife because one of the parties considered his decision unfair. It was difficult to resolve matters because of the breakdown of law and order.

Community leaders declined and cancelled the yearly social activities fearing that they would only attract problems. Communal activities no longer happened; all social activities we used to have were cancelled. We found it very hard to control our youth, especially when they were under the influence of liquor.

**Testimony of Mr. D. T.**

Being a chief myself I found it difficult to deal with problems because almost all the problems involved guns. Fear of intimidation prevented me from helping resolve problems. The young people who were involved in the fighting did not want to listen to their chiefs. It was even more difficult because the sons of the To'obaitan chiefs also joined the MEF group.

**Testimony of Mr. M.**

#### **4. The impact on education and health services**

Education in Malaita was enormously affected by the tension.<sup>227</sup> Classrooms became too small as students from Guadalcanal and other provinces flooded into Malaita schools. No official data on the matriculations of 1998 and 1999 in Malaitan schools is available from the Ministry of Education, so we have to rely on impressionistic testimonies like the following, given to the TRC research unit by a Principal Education Officer:

The tension had a huge impact on the lives of student and teachers. There was a sudden influx of students from Guadalcanal and other provinces. Desks and facilities we had at that time could not accommodate everyone. We had to maximize our capacity at the management level to provide education for everyone. We tried to identify extension schools to lessen the problem of overcrowding classrooms and to deploy additional teachers to these extension schools. Teachers combined two streams of classes together and shortened their teaching lessons rather than teach

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<sup>226</sup> The To'obaitan Council of Chiefs was established in 1996.

<sup>227</sup> See chapter 3.6.2.1 on the general impact of the tension on the education services.

each class separately, sometimes sharing in teaching these classes. It contributed to a poor academic performance by students as teachers were overwhelmed by the number of students and amount of duties. The attendance of students and teachers was poor.

#### **Testimony of Principal Education Officer**

Parents found it very difficult to pay their children's school fees. Schools often had to accept anything that was offered by families. For example, land owners gave trees while others offered shell money. Sometimes the schools kept these items as a sort of warrant; other times they sold them to get cash, but even this did not offset many unpaid bills for fuel, rations and stationeries.

We tried to compromise by giving special consideration to parents who wanted to pay school fees with shell money or timber. We took these valuable items and converted them into their children's school fees. At the end of the day it affected the whole school program since we could not sell these items easily to buy stationeries and things the school required.

#### **Testimony of Principal Education officer/Inspectorate Division, Auki**

Their payment of teachers' wages was usually delayed for months, affecting their attendance in class. The breakdown of communication between the schools and the Ministry of Education had the effect that curricula and lesson plans were not updated so teachers attended classes without properly planned lessons. In northern Malaita, the academic performance of displaced students was also affected because communication was mainly in the To'obaita language and not all could understand or speak it.

Worst of all, the collapse of social norms also affected the schools. School buildings and properties were ransacked and looted by juveniles from the surrounding villages. Aligegeo Secondary School was raided several times by unidentified people, resulting in the removal of important equipments from the science laboratory for brewing *kwaso*. The school truck and important textbooks from the social science department were also stolen:

My husband was the principal of Aligegeo Secondary School when a group of militants came and threatened us and demanded that we should give them the school truck. They made two attempts to seize the truck but were unsuccessful. Finally, at the third attempt, they succeeded. They came to my husband's village on Oibola and took the vehicle. They came in two vehicles and were all armed. They claimed that they were sent by their commander. They ordered my husband to give them the truck and he was to go with them to Travellers Motel at Auki to see their commander. I asked them why they are doing this to my husband since as far as am concerned they should be fighting the Guadalcanal militants, not us Malaitans.

After that incident my husband was unable to carry out his responsibility as the school principal for Aligegeo Provincial Secondary School. He was assigned to Arabala Secondary School but he refused because the commander that ordered the militants to come and seize the vehicle was from

a village next to Arabala. He was terminated because he failed to take up the post assigned. He is very ill today. He had a stroke and had been bedridden for five years now.

**Statement N° 2185**

There were also cases of weird compensation claims to school personnel:

In 2000 I was posted to Adua Secondary School and witnessed several incidents where one of the militants, Alick Fefe, and his brothers entered the school premises and threatened the whole school. It had a huge impact on the school body.

*Did they demand money from the school?*

Yes, at one stage it was done by Patrick Fefe. The problem started when he assaulted his girlfriend and the girl escaped to one of her close relative who was a staff member of the school. Patrick came after her and demanded money from the school just because she was hiding there.

**Testimony of Mr. D. L.**

Teachers were afraid to enforce school rules because many students had relatives among the militants who might take revenge for the punishment given. Female students in Aligeo missed classes whenever militants arrived at their school and invited them for rides in their Hilux. As one teacher stated:

We were cautious on how we approached our students simply because most of their immediate family members – brothers, uncles and fathers – were part of the MEF group. We feared that if we punished or disciplined these students we could be intimidated by Malaitans later.

Many schools had to close down. Saint Paul's Kindergarten in the heart of Auki was one of them; it had to close for a full year because teachers felt their security was no longer guaranteed. Nearby Auki Community High School opened and closed sporadically. Whenever shootings happened, the school closed for a few days until the situation calmed down.

The tension also had a devastating impact on health services in Malaita (see chapter 6.2.1 for more detail). One of the main problems was the shortage of drugs. Sometimes patients were only given prescriptions and had to buy the medicine themselves. Sometimes even food for the patients was not enough.

Shortage of staff also became a problem as non-Malaitan nurses and doctors left for security reasons. According to interviews conducted, only two Malaitan doctors were serving in the hospital, while the number of patients was increasing, as thousands of displaced families arrived back in Malaita. Nurses had to take over the responsibilities of doctors. As with teachers, the

salaries of health workers were usually delayed for months so they needed to grow food for a balanced diet.

In the hospital there was also a general atmosphere of fear as militants caused trouble everywhere they went. When they needed help, they demanded attention above everybody else. They would enter the hospital, usually drunk, and helped themselves without consulting the staff:

We tried our best to maintain the basic health services that our people required. However, the risk was high since the militants entered the clinic and hospital with guns. So the working environment at that time was not good and the service we provided insufficient as there was a shortage of drugs. Whenever the militants were sick and we were not at the hospital they would come straight for us at our homes. They had no respect for anyone. Apart from that they would come and demand whatever they wanted from the hospital: generators, outboard-motor boats, truck tyres and other things. They even came and removed all parts of a medical vehicle until all that was left was a wreck. Most of the health staff declined to take up night duties, and several staff from other provinces left because of fear. Apart from that our salary did not come on the expected time and it demoralized the staff.

#### **Testimony of Principal of Malu'u Nursing School**

### **5. Conclusions**

Forced displacement brought a lot of problems to Malaita. Families had to rebuild their lives from scratch in very difficult circumstances. Not all of them could make it. Many of them decided to go back to Honiara where Malaitan settlements like Burns Creek or Barama are over-populated. Although the situation seems to be calm at present, however it is a situation that must be closely watch.<sup>228</sup>

Meanwhile, Auki and Malu'u seem to be once more the sleepy and undisturbed towns they were before the tension. But that might be a misleading impression. Many wounds caused by the disturbances between militants, mafias and civilians during the tension are still open and reconciliation is still a pending issue. Unsettled people and disputes are still unresolved. On the

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<sup>228</sup> Consider the following testimony of a former IFM militant:

If we look at the town boundaries, the movement to customary land is at an alarming rate and I don't think the Government can control it; RAMSI can't control it. After the signing of the TPA, we just sat and watched the situation. What else we are going to do? It could go back to the same thing again. What we are talking about is reality. We had a house at the outskirts of town and they came and demarcated the same piece of land where I lived and chased me out. I could not do anything, it was done with the trustees and I did not have anything else but to leave the place even if the land had belonged to my grandfather; I had to go because that was the law. The land was then registered and the land belonged to them according to the law of the land.

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other hand, there are thousands of unattended compensation claims to the Government. There is still the demand for development of the island, an island overpopulated and less blessed in natural resources than Guadalcanal or the Western Province.

### 3.2.4 ETHNIC TENSIONS IN MARAU SOUND

#### 1. Introduction

There is uneasiness amongst some commentators that the Solomon Islands conflict is termed as “ethnic tension”. They argue that defining the conflict along ethnic differences is too simplistic and does not contribute effectively to its resolution because it detracts from the real causes of the conflict, insisting that these lie in broader socio-economic and political issues.<sup>229</sup>

The question raised is an important one because each type of conflict requires particular solutions. In ethnic conflicts opposing parties are not defined according to their economic status or according to any particular ideological affiliation but on the basis of their belonging to a group with an alleged or real common ancestry. While in peaceful times boundaries between those groups are fluid or even irrelevant, in a violent conflict they become vital and who is “in” and who is “out” becomes a question of life and death.

The Marau Sound presents a unique opportunity to understanding whether the tension was indeed “ethnic”. Marau Sound is located on the southeast end of Guadalcanal and features lagoons, small islands, coastal strips and offshore islets. The indigenous settlers of this region are the Birao people who occupy the mainland of Marau. The coastal area was settled some hundreds of years ago by ‘Are‘Are language speakers originally from Malaita. Over a long period both groups have inter-married, learned each other’s language and shared a broad range of cultural traits and religious practices.

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<sup>229</sup> Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka: *Beyond Ethnicity: The Political Economy of the Guadalcanal Crisis in Solomon Islands*. Canberra: The Australian National University. State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Working Paper 01/1, 2001. Available at <http://dspace.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/41949/1/tarcisiusworkingpaper.htm> (date of access 20/10/2010).

For a different point of view, see James Stratford: “Re-Problematizing Ethnicity in Solomon Islands”, unpublished paper, available at: [http://unimelb.academia.edu/JamesStratford/Papers/256936/Re-Problematizing\\_Ethnicity\\_In\\_the\\_Solomon\\_Islands](http://unimelb.academia.edu/JamesStratford/Papers/256936/Re-Problematizing_Ethnicity_In_the_Solomon_Islands), 2004 (date of access 16/06/2011).

Tension-related ethnicity is also discussed in Matthew Grant Allen: *Greed and grievance in the conflict in Solomon Islands, 1998-2003*. Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Australian National University, August 2007; David Hegarty “Peace Interventions in the South Pacific: Lessons from Bougainville and Solomon Islands”. Paper for Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies Conference Island State Security 2003: “Oceania at the Crossroads”, Session IV: “Ways Out”. Honolulu, Hawaii, 15-17 July 2003; and Warren Karle: *Conflict in the “Happy Isles”. The role of ethnicity in the outbreak of violence in Solomon Islands*. Canberra: Australian Defence College Monograph Series, No. 5, 2004.

What seemed to be an ongoing process of mutual acculturation was violently interrupted when the tension broke out. This chapter shows how Guadalcanal militants, intending to press forward an *ethnic* agenda, forced a sort of “ethno-cultural cleansing” between the Birao and ‘Are’Are communities.

## 2. Ethnic relations

In their study on the Moro Movement published less than half a century ago, Davenport and Croker presented the ‘Are’Are immigration to Marau Sound as quite a recent history:

The people living on islets in the Sound and in adjacent villages on the main island for a short distance westward along the Weather Coast are relatively recent immigrants from the ‘Ari’ari districts of Malaita. The Marau people think of themselves still as Malaitans, and the indigenes of Guadalcanal, none of whom speak ‘Ari’ari, regard them as foreigners and intruders.<sup>230</sup>

The authors’ affirmation is based on fieldwork carried out on the Weather Coast in the mid-sixties and presents a striking contrast to early written accounts that date the ‘Are’Are immigration back to times even before the first contact with Europeans. French anthropologist Daniel de Coppet, for instance, refers to the diaries of two of Álvaro de Mendana’s crewmen when he wrote: “After a few weeks of coastal trade, the Spaniards brought their ships to anchor in the strait of Marau and there, on the 24<sup>th</sup> May 1568, the Are’Are people saw these people for the first time.”<sup>231</sup>

Judith A. Bennett also states that “the ‘Are’Are speakers of Eastern Guadalcanal settled hundreds of years ago on the offshore Islands of Marau after leaving their homes in West Malaita.”<sup>232</sup> According to anthropologist John Houainamo Naitoro, Marau Sound was part of what he calls “Greater ‘Are’Are” during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> W. Davenport & G. Coker: “The Moro movement of Guadalcanal, British Solomon Islands protectorate”, *Journal of Polynesian Society* 76, 1967, p. 132.

<sup>231</sup> Daniel de Coppet: “First exchange, double illusion”. *The Journal of Cultural Association of the Solomon Islands* Vol. 5, 1977, p. 26.

<sup>232</sup> Judith A. Bennett: *Wealth of the Solomons. A history of a Pacific archipelago, 1800-1978*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987, p. 8.

<sup>233</sup> John Naitoro: *The Politics of Development in ‘Are’Are, Malaita*. Thesis submitted for the degree of masters of arts in Anthropology, University of Otago, Wellington, 1993. According to the author, “Greater ‘Are’Are also included part of Arosi in Makira Province, the southern one-third of the main island of Malaita and the northern portion of Small Malaita (*ibíd*, p. 26).



Even though written sources about the ‘Are‘Are immigration to Marau Sound are extremely scarce, there seem to be enough indication that it is not as recent as the statement of Davenport and Coker would have us believe. Bennett, for instance, wrote that back in 1879 a Marau agent to the early traders in tortoiseshell was killed by an ‘Are‘Are *ramo* (warrior).<sup>234</sup> During the fifties, Naomani from West ‘Are‘Are was a leader on Marau Sound who refused to hand over tax money he had collected to anyone but the Malaita Council. Around this time Marau villages dominated by ‘Are‘Are immigrants resisted inclusion in the Guadalcanal Council and formed their own entity, the short-lived Marau-Hauba Council. The biggest island in Marau Sound is called Marapa which is an ‘Are‘Are term for “land of the spirits” or “land of the dead”. According to ‘Are‘Are tradition it is the place where the spirits of the ancestors reside.

The people of Marau Sound remember their history through oral folk lore, further highlighting the long duration of the settlement. Both ‘Are‘Are and Birao communities consider the ‘Are‘Are immigrants as “Guadalcanal people with Malaitan blood”:

Our great grandfathers came and settled here on Marau about 500 years ago, and through intermarriage we are related to each other one way or the other. Basically we are Guadalcanal people ourselves but historically we have Malaitan blood. As far as the Guadalcanal custom is concerned we also have primary rights over the lands we settled on here at Marau.

**Testimony of Felix, an ‘Are‘Are community leader from Marau**

According to the stories we learn from our grandfathers, the Marau people were settlers, they came to settle and married to Guadalcanal people and they settled down on the areas. However, we do understand that some of their relatives came and settled along with them, and we understand that and Guadalcanal people recognize only those through intermarriage, not those that came and settle along with relatives. Currently, most of the people living on Marau are classified as Guadalcanals. Today we recognize them and class them as Guadalcanal people.

**Testimony of John, a Birao community leader from Marau**

Another aspect in Davenport and Coker’s paper that is under scrutiny is their statement that none of the indigenous Birao people spoke the “‘Ari‘ari language”. Sources regarding the cultural interaction between the Birao and ‘Are‘Are people are even scarcer than information about their history so they do not know for sure if this was true at the time that Davenport and Coker were writing. However, they do know for certain that the same is no longer true today; communities now speak both languages:

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<sup>234</sup> Bennett, *Wealth of the Solomons*, *op. cit.* p. 57.

All of us on the island can speak Birao and likewise the Birao people can also speak our ‘Are’Are dialect, simply because of intermarriage which happened way back in the past. Most of us the people settling on the island are pure Guadalcanal because of intermarriage, although we have Malaita origin historically.

**Testimony of Felix**

Marau people can speak Birao, and likewise Birao can also speak Are’are. We speak each other’s language.

**Testimony of John**

To a certain extent, a long history of shared residence and of intermarriage has brought about a fusion of the Birao and ‘Are’Are cultures. This merging is also seen in religion. The Roman Catholic faith is the dominant faith due mainly to the strong influence of the Roman Catholic station at Makina . A few belong to other Christian denominations like the Anglican Church or Seventh Day Adventists.

One of the most significant cultural differences that still persist is the hereditary system. While the Birao, like most Guadalcanal tribes, are matrilineal, the ‘Are’Are people define their ancestry through both the father and mother’s lineage. In other parts of Solomon Islands, intermarriage between patrilineal men and matrilineal women has generated problems because of the mixture of land rights determined by the hereditary systems. This with other factors such as the development of the cash economy, European emphasis on patrilineal descent and the influence of the churches has led to an “erosion” of the matrilineal systems.<sup>235</sup> However, TRC found no evidence of ethnic land conflicts occurring in Marau Sound before the tension.<sup>236</sup>

A further way to distinguish Birao and ‘Are’Are communities in Marau Sound is residence. Historically, the areas of Sukiki, Mbirao and Longgu on the mainland were occupied by indigenous people of Guadalcanal, while the ‘Are’Are settlers occupied the off-shore islets and

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<sup>235</sup> See Ruth Maetala: “Matrilineal Land Tenure Systems in Solomon Islands: The cases of Guadalcanal, Makira and Isabel Provinces”. In Elise Huffer (ed.): *Land and Women: The Matrilineal Factor. The cases of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu*. Suva: Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2008. Available at: <http://www.forumsec.org.fj/resources/uploads/attachments/documents/Land%20and%20Women.pdf> (date of access 12//06/2011).

<sup>236</sup> Morgan Wairiu and Gordon Nanau from the Honiara based Islands Knowledge Institute describe a post-tension logging conflict in Marau Sound that produced physical confrontations between Marau ‘Are’Are and Birao speakers over a proposed site for the log pond; but there were also violent clashes *within* Birao speaking communities involving village elders who supported the logging proposal and youths who opposed it. The conflict was about logging, not about ethnicity. See Morgan Wairiu and Gordon Nanau: *Logging and Conflict in Birao Ward of Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands*. Honiara: Islands Knowledge Institute, IKI Working Paper 1, 2005.

coastal strips. This is why they were known as the “Marau sea people” or “salt water people” while the Birao people who lived inland were called the “bush people”.

Where, then, does an individual member of one of these communities, offspring of several generations of intermarriage, situate him or herself in terms of ethnic identity? This is a difficult question that requires much more research than the TRC is able to carry out. It may well be that in peaceful times no one gave ethnic identity a second thought; it just was not an important issue.

For quite a long time ethnic boundaries have been fluid in Marau Sound. The history of this unique region has resulted in a situation rather different from other parts of Guadalcanal where Malaitan settlers usually formed communities separate from the Guale host communities. In Marau Sound “one cannot easily differentiate the Marau people<sup>237</sup> from those of Birao” (John, Birao community leader). Daily life is a fusion of culture on all levels: economic, cultural and religious:

We were all right. We came together in sports, Church festivities, Church programs, paying bride price, feasting at deaths, attending someone who had died. Intermarriage ties were very strong and the relationship was solid. There was no problem at all.

#### **Testimony of Joseph, Manekaraku Station**

This situation was to change dramatically when the tension started.

### **3. Ethnic tensions**

In 1998, GRA/IFM militants from the Weather Coast started to visit Birao communities and to force villagers to wear *kabilato* and grass skirts. Even though many were reluctant because of their Christian beliefs and perception that “*kastom*” clothing was synonymous with backwardness, they assented because they feared the militants. Male community members were urged to join the militant group; if they refused they ran the risk of being labeled “spears”:

They had adopted all the Moro Movement beliefs and ideas, telling us all to wear traditional clothing, *kabilatos* and grass skirts. They strongly enforced this on us, but most of us refused since we were Christians and opposed any ideas of ancestral spiritualism or other cultural beliefs. However, we still feared the GRA militants and listened to what they said.

#### **Testimony of John**

At that time we began to hear stories of the emerging militant groups and saw some unusual behavior amongst some of the Guadalcanal boys. We continued with our daily routine until that

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<sup>237</sup> “Marau people” is another expression that denominates long term ‘Are‘Are settlers.

day when some of the militants came and told us that we have to start wearing *kabilato* and learn to eat wild taro leaf (*kaichui*). They enforced rules to follow and that all the males in our community must join in the movement. We were confused whether to join or not since we were unclear of the real objectives of the movement. In the end, however, we had to fall in since all the others had joined. We found it quite difficult to cope since we hadn't been wearing *kabilato*. In the end we decided to be part of the group providing security for the community and began wearing our new traditional dress which we ourselves found funny, especially when walking around in front of other people.

**Statement N° 0904**

Whether they were forced, persuaded or felt some thrill from doing so, many young men agreed to be recruited by the IFM. On his way to Honiara from the Weather Coast in a patrol boat, a former police officer who passed Marau Sound during these times declared in his statement:

We came around to Marau and what I saw was that the people were already under threat by a group which was dominated by Harold Keke. Most of the people whom I came across were already wearing *kabilato*. Most of the men were also armed with weapons and they wanted to attack me but they realized I was not a Malaitan but a man from Makira.

**Statement N° 5240**

Among the villagers who joined the militants were men of Malaitan descent, knowing well that the GRA was about to chase Malaitan settlers out of Guadalcanal. Duress might have been one cause for their involvement; however, interviews carried out in Marau indicate that there was also readiness to fight for the “rights of Guadalcanal people” because they considered themselves part of them. Their main reason to join the IFM was *not* ethnic affiliation but residential affiliation; that is, the place where they lived was more important than their ethnic ancestry. Willie, for example, of mixed Kwaio and Birao origin, decided to take sides with the IFM militants because he had lived with Guadalcanal people for a long time and felt that he belonged to them

We were the last community to be visited for recruitment by the Isatabu Freedom Movement. Our community consists of a lot of part Malaitans, however we joined up with the Isatabu fighters and we carried out the directives from them to provide security.

**Testimony of Willie, mixed Kwaio and Birao origin, former IFM militant**

At the early stage almost all of us supported Keke and his boys since they told us that their movement was to fight for the right of Guadalcanal people and the island as a whole. So we agreed to join, though we were quite reluctant when it came to kill someone.

**Testimony of Sam, mixed ‘Are‘Are and Birao origin**

This situation changed drastically when the IFM imposed a separation based on ethnic criteria such as language or descent. People of full or partial ‘Are‘Are ancestry who lived along the

coast became the subject of harassment and intimidation by IFM militants who extorted money, shell valuables or goods from their shops. Later they were given an ultimatum to abandon their Malaita customs, particularly the bilineal kinship system, and adopt the matrilineal system of Guadalcanal. The militants also insisted that ‘Are’Are language had to be removed from the Birao communities. Finally, they tried to divide the Birao and ‘Are’Are speakers:

Harold Keke disliked Malaitans and did not trust us. He told us that if you are from the coastal area you must remain with all the ‘Are’Are speakers and if you are from the mainland you must stay on the mainland.

#### **Testimony of Willie**

In this way, a sort of “cultural cleansing” was set off by the militant leaders, and a conflict that was basically about resources, mainly land, was articulated as an ethno-cultural one. By 1999, Marau Sound was flooded with unforeseen ethnic antagonisms instigated by militants from the Weather Coast.

Ethnic conflicts usually do not allow for “in-between” identities; one is either a Guadalcanal person or Malaitan. This sharp categorization is what happened in Marau Sound: there was no longer room for “half”, “quarter” or other “part”-Malaitan.

*When fighting took place, what was your relationship with the Birao mainland people?*

They viewed us as Malaitans, which was wrong on their part. Even most of those on the mainland are quarter-blood Malaitans. However, they were brainwashed by the militants and somehow they viewed us as Malaitans. Most of the elders and leaders recognize our rights over these lands through the Guadalcanal custom, however since most of their youths joined in with the movement and were threatened to join or be killed, they had to carry out the task delegated on them by their so leaders.

#### **Testimony of Felix**

Yes, they viewed the ‘Are’are speakers not as indigenous people of Guadalcanal and they had to leave. We were divided simply because of the languages that we speak, although most of us had similar rights as the local indigenous people through intermarriage.

#### **Testimony of Sam**

The ethnic division imposed by the IFM took villagers by surprise, as they were used to considering their communities as amalgamations of different cultural roots. Nowhere else in the Solomon Islands had the slogan of independence – “Unity in Diversity” – been more deeply rooted than in Marau Sound.

When the ethnic tension started we thought that the Birao and the ‘Are‘Are speaking people would stay together. That was what I personally expected. Instead they separated us. Before the ethnic separation between the Birao and the Marau people we were taught to be one people and all of us are Guadalcanalese. The Marau people at that time were with us on the mainland and ready to join the GRA. But after some time they started to separate the people . They told us that the Marau people belong to ‘Are‘Are and they had to send them back to Malaita.

**Testimony of Francis, Manekaraku**

We then saw them burning all our houses, they damaged our plantations and we felt they were our people as we had been staying in Guadalcanal for many years. I actually had nothing against them as I felt they are my people. We were fortunate to come to Honiara; otherwise they might have burned us with our houses.

**Statement N° 0016**

Ethnic separation went hand in hand with escalation of violence. When the RSIPF abandoned the police station in Marau in June 1999,<sup>238</sup> it became obvious that the state was not able to protect its citizens. Houses were burned down, people were ill-treated, and families were forced to leave their homes. On one occasion, the IFM detained six young ‘Are‘Are men at the Marau Police Station on suspicion of possessing firearms, explosives and firecrackers; the boys were brutally assaulted. In 1999 they raided Tuvanipupu Resort. Mixed-married families were divided because the Malaitan spouse was forced to leave:

We were living on Marau during the period of the tension. One day the Guadalcanal militants came and demanded compensation from my husband, since he was from Malaita. They demanded a pig and some shell money from him. Then the militants passed on the message through my brother to leave our area. He told me to pack a few of his belongings and boarded the ship without proper farewelling us, since the militants had planned to come the next day.

**Statement N° 1592**

There were also cases of sexual violence reported to the TRC statement takers:

[The GRA boss] grabbed one of my granddaughters. She was very young and he yelled at us, saying “this is mine”. The young girl cried and he took her with him through the plantation to the other side to one of the houses. She cried all the time. The couple who owned that house were there but they could not say a word. I tried to approach her but he ordered me to go back or he would fire his rifle. He slept with her the whole night and then he left the next day.

**Statement N° 0347**

In Makira, TRC received a statement of a woman whose daughter was raped at Marau in 1999 by a group of militants wearing *kabilato*:

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<sup>238</sup> See the testimony of police officer Neboti Turukevu during the public hearing in Gizo for a detailed account of the GRA assault on the police station in Marau.

We obtained a piece of land at Marau through the Province and we built a house there and our daughter was looking after it. One night my daughter was asleep when the militants came. They pointed their guns at her and told her not to talk or shout, if she did they would shoot her. They raped her one by one and there were quite a number of them. After that they told her not to say a word, if she spread the news she would not see the sunset. She cried all night and by morning she could not keep what happened to her so she told Mrs. Gower that she had been raped during the night and she wanted to see her parents. She came to Marau Police Station and told the Police Officers that she wanted to speak to her mum. She insisted that we should pay for her fare; otherwise she would not see the sunset. So her father went and paid for the airfare and she boarded the plane and we went and met her at the airport.

**Statement N° 5239**

By the end of August 1999 about 80 villagers of Malaitan background, most of them part-Birao and 'Are'Are, were evacuated from Marau Sound. All of them had been living at Warahara village for more than 20 years and were taken by police in the patrol boat *Auki*. One of them declared to the *Solomon Star*:

Because of our strong Guadalcanal background, we were not immediately forced out from the village but we were asked to pay compensation if we want to remain on Guadalcanal. We contributed and came up with \$500 which was paid as compensation to the militants.

***Solomon Star* N° 1439, 31/08/2011, p. 1**

On 20 September a further 108 Marau people of Malaita origin were evacuated to Honiara after continuous threats from the militants (*Solomon Star* N° 1453, 21/09/1999, p. 8). Many living on the coastal settlements fled their homes to join other displaced Malaitans at a crowded Holy Cross Cathedral and the Multipurpose Hall in Honiara. Others fled to the uninhabited island of Marapa which is very hard to live on as the soil is not suitable for growing crops. The Solomon Islands Red Cross had to help the refugees with food rations, clothes and tents:

It was a sad moment for us because we had to abandon all our things and got to Marapa. There was no fuel and we had to paddle to Marapa. We found it very hard at Marapa because there was no food. The soil is not very fertile. So we had to travel to the mainland to grow food at our old garden sites. We had to paddle to the main land for food, even though it was bad weather we had to come, otherwise our children would die. We stayed there for about two years.

We left all our properties back at the village thinking nobody would go and destroy them. We took all our belongings and put them in the church building. We stayed at Marapa and we thought our belongings would be safe. One day we decided to go back and check for our belongings, unfortunately nothing was left. They were stolen and some of them were destroyed. We did not know whether it was the militants from around here or those from the other side.

**Statement N° 0365**

While the refugees stayed on the island, the properties they left behind were destroyed by militants. The IFM established different bunkers along the coast of Marau: at Manekaraku

station, at the airport side, at Paruru and at the Catholic station in Makina. By mid-2000, Guadalcanal militants dominated the area. Then the Malaita Eagle Force raided the armory in Rove.

#### **4. The Marau Eagle Force**

On 5 June 2000 the MEF seized hundreds of high-powered weapons from the police armory. A few days later they mounted a Joint Operation with some police officers to rescue 115 men, women and children who were held hostage by IFM militants on the mainland of Marau.<sup>239</sup> One of the hostages remembers:

The MEF along with the paramilitary group mounted their operation for the rescue and used the MV *Daula* and the RSIPF patrol boat. They camped on Marapa Island. At first the patrol boat cleared the area by shelling the areas along the coast. The IFM militants fled into the bush, leaving us behind. The MEF arrived at the area where we were detained and they took us over to Marapa.

##### **Testimony from Felix**

This operation saw the emergence of the Marau Eagle Force, a local militant group closely related to Malaita Eagle Force. When Guadalcanal militants began to harass those of Malaitan descent, some of the Marau leaders began meeting behind closed doors to find ways to counter the situation and to protect themselves. In attendance were leaders like Pastor Johnson ‘Apeo who, despite his Guadalcanal ancestry, would eventually become the Supreme Commander of the Marau Eagle Force.<sup>240</sup> Another, Jerry Futa, testified in the public hearing for ex-militants in Buma, Central Malaita. Attempts to get help from the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force were partly successful. After being provided with high-powered weapons by the MEF from the armory raid, the Marau Eagle Force launched their own militant group.

When the Marau Eagle Force appeared on the scene, many young men with Malaitan origins who had supported Harold Keke switched sides.

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<sup>239</sup> The militants claimed payment of SBD\$30,000 per person from the Government for this mission, for a total of SBD 3,450,000. On 5 January 2002, Cabinet approved payment of \$30,000 each for 38 militants for a total of SBD 1,140,000. It noted that it was for “the role played by the claimants in discharging an important responsibility to protect lives” (see chapter 3.4.1.1).

<sup>240</sup> “My father is a pure Guadalcanal man and my mother is quarter Malaita and because of this I did not think they would raise anything against us. As time went on things went out of what we expected. The half Malaitans and Guadalcanal who lived there started to be harassed as well”.

**Johnson Apeo, public hearing, Burna (Malaita), 02/05/2011.**



*At the early stage we heard that some of the boys on the island joined Harold Keke and later switched to the Marau Eagles' side?*

Yes, many of us including the 'Are'Are speakers joined Harold Keke at the early stage but later decided to move over to the Marau Eagle Force because they saw a lot of ill-treatment and things that were not right according to our cultural beliefs and what we knew that the GRA stood for at the early stage. For example they ordered us to carry out tasks and if we failed we would be killed. They even demanded compensation from us even though we had joined them.

#### **Testimony of Sam**

MEF support for the Marau Eagle Force was not limited to weapons. Using a state-owned patrol boat taken during the coup of 5 June 2000, the MEF-RSIPF Joint Operation shelled the IFM bunkers and forced the militants out. Within a few days the domination of the Isatabu Freedom Movement in Marau Sound came to an end:

It took us three days to rescue the eastern side of the Marau area. We broke through their bunkers and rescued the whole village. We moved the civilians to the eastern Island. The second day we did another operation at the west side of Marau and I received five bullet wounds. At that time I was crippled.

#### **Interview with Johnson 'Apeo, former Supreme Commander of the Marau Eagle Force**

### **5. Escalation of violence**

Statements of leaders during the public hearing in Buma highlight the fact that the Marau Eagle Force was formed out of the necessity for self-defence. According to them, the militant group was organized to save the lives of innocent people:

Marau was vulnerable to the escalating atrocities done by the Guadalcanal militants during the three years period of the ethnic tension. A total of 18 villages, 71 family houses and other valuable properties were burned down and destroyed. Our girls and women were raped and our people were harassed, tortured and forced to pay money and give pigs at gun point. The Royal Solomon Islands Police Force was not there to protect us. Officers manning the Marau Police Station had fled because there were threats and overpowering by the Guadalcanal militants. We were defenceless and were at the mercy of the militants. The Marau Council of Chiefs requested help from the Bart Ulufa'alu-led government, but help was not forthcoming. We were denied protection by the state as provided under the national Constitution.

#### **Testimony of Jerry Futa, Public Hearing with former Malaitan militants, Buma, 02/05/2011**

The Police and the government could not help us out of this situation and so as we could not stay back and see the militants burn down the houses, rape our girls and loot our properties. At that time I was not only thinking about myself, I was trying to think about everyone in and around Marau. I was thinking about the people and how we can protect ourselves, the women and the Marau speaking children, how can I save them. There was no law and the action I took saved many lives in Marau. Otherwise if I did not take this action there would be no soul alive in Marau.

#### **Interview with Johnson Apeo**

However, the operations of the Marau Eagle Force went beyond legitimate self-defence. There can be no doubt that the IFM militants committed dreadful atrocities against innocent people in Marau Sound and that the state failed to protect them. Provided with high-powered weapons and supported by state-owned patrol boats, which were now under the command of the MEF/Paramilitary Joint Operation, they quickly rid the area of IFM militants, only to start a reckless wave of violence. Instead of moving towards peace, aggression escalated. The Marau Eagles fitted seamlessly into this spiral of unlawful violence that characterized the conflict after the Rove armory raid. During the first public hearing of TRC in Honiara, Ms. Shaniella Talasifera from Pia Pia Village in Marau testified:

As I recall, the 7<sup>th</sup> of July was the first operation of the Marau Eagle Force in our area. They came and they destroyed the Catholic Mission Station which is less than a minute's walk from where we live. They came through the station at about half past six in the morning when we were still asleep. When the shoot-out occurred our men were helpless for they had nothing to defend themselves with. They could only tell us women to run away and they ran away themselves. Hence we ran away and stayed in the bush for three months. I had not seen any of my family members since then which made me wonder whether they were still alive or whether they were dead already. This led me to go to the other island to check for my family members. My husband agreed and my elder son and I went.

As we reached the other island we met with the Marau Eagle Force who were my own brothers, cousins, nephews, uncles and in-laws. They started accusing me of spying for the GRA and pointed a gun to the bottom of my chin. My son asked me why his uncle was trying to kill me. While the gun was pointed to my neck they asked questions about the GRA; but of course I knew nothing and I could not reply. They persisted accusing me of trying to get information for the GRA. My own uncle then threatened to kill me saying that he would break all my teeth with his fist and that if my husband was there he would cut off his head.

Then the militants went away to meet with their superiors to decide our fate, on whether to beat us or kill us. One of the boys that they left to guard me and my son had noticed some of the bunches of betel nut that I had left in my canoe and said to me that if you give me some betel nut then I will help you escape. So I told him to take the betel nut from my canoe. We then waited for the boy to bring our canoe and we paddled to the next island. Having reached the other island we made our way through a plantation of coconuts there and then we noticed two 40-horse powered canoes approaching and they asked the people there whether they had seen me and my son.

An old man came over to us and told us to go to the next village and that I would meet my mother there. I was overjoyed to see her there and as she held me I cried for I had not seen her for three months and thought her dead already. She then told me that she was scared stiff of the guns and told me I should go soon. She told me how the Marau Eagle Force was treating the civilians there so unjustly and that it was really stressing her out.

**Testimony of Ms. Shaniella Talasifera, public hearing in Honiara, 09/03/2010**

The Marau Eagle Force, backed up by members of the Malaita Eagle Force, destroyed buildings at the Manekaraku station, including residential houses and even the clinic which belonged to

Guadalcanal Province. The Catholic Station in Makina was looted after a shoot-out with IFM militants; surrounding houses were burnt to ashes:

There was crossfire between the GRA and the Marau Eagle Force; that was the second shooting incident. We then fled into the bush again we went to the area where we first hid; unfortunately we discovered that our temporary shelters built previously were in a bad condition, so we fled further on top of the hill, arriving we rested and as we looked down towards the area of Makina. We could see the members of the Marau Eagle Force chasing and rounding up the cows owned by the church priest. That same day they came towards our area at Mangautu and started burning down the houses, we saw black smoke and flames rising in the air. From our position we watched helplessly in heartache as our houses were consumed by the fire, most of the mothers watching cried helplessly. After that my husband told us that we all must move over to Kolutina.

**Statement N° 0922**

The shoot-out took place on the area of Makina, all the people in the surrounding communities fled to the bush, people ran to save their lives, leaving all their properties and belongings behind. We were on top of the hill and heard the sounds of gunfire; shortly after the shooting we started seeing smoke coming from the areas where our houses were. They had started to burn down all the houses there. As the flames and smokes were going up in the air, gunfire also continued. Most of us cried from the moment we learnt that our houses were burned, since we left all our belongings in the houses.

**Statement N° 0915**

People who were suspected of collaborating with the IFM had to hide in the bush and watch their properties being destroyed:

We witnessed all the criminal activities done by the Marau Eagle Force, we hid and watched from a distance how they killed our cows, pigs, chickens and cut down our betelnut trees. At that time we could not taste salt, use soap and have kerosene for our lamps; we continued to stay in the bush until we got used to it. It was quite difficult to get fish from the sea and even dry coconut for cooking. If we wanted to get food from our gardens or plantation, we had to be very cautious and avoid being seen at all cost since it could result in severe repercussion or death.

**Statement N° 0904**

It was the Marau Eagle Force that came and burned down our properties; they came along with the patrol boat *Lata* and shelled our area. I tried to get my parents out from the danger zone, but my mother died of shock and fright at the spot when she heard the sound of the 50 calibre machine gun. I carried her body and buried her at her parents' place. My father was also helpless, so I carried him all the way to safety. We fled away further inland, hiding and settling on a place called Kolutina. The shoot-out continued along the coastal areas between the two groups for some time.

**Statement N° 0913**

In August 2000 two teenage boys<sup>241</sup> and a child from the village of Savekau were killed by the Marau Eagle Force in a leaf hut which they used as hideout during the tension:

The tension reached another worst stage in June 2000, when the MEF group took over the armory at Rove. The feeling of insecurity among the people in the areas escalated after we heard of the takeover on the news. During that time gunshots were like a form of amusement, it could be heard during day and night. We fled and hid in the bush after we heard of the takeover.

We remained in the bush until the Marau Eagle Force arrived at our hiding place on August 2000. They arrived at around 5:30 in the morning and killed three young boys who were sleeping in their house. When the shooting took place I could hear it from the place where we were hiding; I thought they were giving warning shots. Unfortunately three of our boys were killed. I was also threatened at gun point and my uncle was also assaulted with the butt of a rifle. They demanded compensation from us and we gave them SBD\$650 cash. After giving them the money they left and burned down all our houses along the coast. We collected the three dead bodies and buried them properly. After the burial we had a meeting and we decided to move to a safe area.

*Do you know of any reason why the militants did this?*

It is quite a difficult question to answer, since I was not fully aware of their intentions. However, according to my knowledge the killing of the three boys was connected to a land dispute, they also claimed to be looking for GRA militants.

#### **Statement N° 1134**

Indeed the accused who faced trial later alleged that the boys who were killed were members of the IFM, an allegation which relatives of the deceased strongly deny.<sup>242</sup> A father of one of the victims recalled the event to the TRC:

They arrived very early in the morning, it was still dark. They walked in and shot them in cold blood. They shot the first one while he was sleeping right on the head splitting it into half and his brain splattered onto the walls of the house. They shot the other in the leg. My son attempted to save the boy but he was warned and told to clear out or he will also be shot. The boy then bled to death. My son managed to jump out of the window and felt unconscious on landing, he lay for some time. Later he got up and tried to run but it was too late, they had spotted him. He was shot and died at the spot. At that time it was almost daybreak. It was the most heartbreaking moments for my wife and me.

#### **Testimony of Mr. Alex Porongo, Kadevaru Village**

The following statement shows how, with the formation of the Marau Eagle Force, villagers were squeezed between the rivalling militant groups:

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<sup>241</sup> One of them was 12-year-old Sebastian Luluna. His mother and his brother gave their statements to the TRC (Statements N° 0910 and N° 0924).

<sup>242</sup> Regina v. Maoma [2008] SBHC 48; HCSI-CRC 300 of 2006 (8 August 2008). During a closed hearing at Rove prison where he serves a lifetime sentence for the killings, Willie Maoma insisted that three had been IFM militants (“we know each other very well”); he also denied that they were minors when they were killed.

One day the RRU came and started shooting in our area. Early one morning we heard the patrol boat firing to the shore. When we heard this, we started to run away without any belongings. After the shooting, we came back to our house and collected a few things and then we went back to the bush.

Later one group of militants from the Weather Coast came and took our boys and held them as hostages. After a few days one of our elders in the village died due to illness. During the funeral of this old man, Harold Keke's group arrived by boat. They came and occupied the village, by then everyone had to run away in the bush again. We built small houses for shelter in the bush, but they were not good enough to keep the rain off.

I went back way to check my house so I could get some of my belongings out. When I got there I could feel that something was around; I could see some of the militants or the Marau Eagle Force was in the house. I started to run away but they shot at me, but I just kept on running. In my mind I only prayed to God for his protection. It was a big group, I could see some of them going into my house and taking some of my properties out. Then my house was burned down at Onetete and we moved to another village, Ponetasi. We then decided that we should move to Oa village. We stayed at Oa but still in the bush. When we stayed at Oa we felt that we were safe. We returned to our villages after the Marau Peace Agreement was signed.

### **Statement N° 0923**

The Marau Eagle Force was also involved in extortion. Member of Parliament Hilda Kari (whose village had been burned and whose vessel had been destroyed by Harold Keke in 1999) was forced to pay SBD\$10,000 to two members of the Marau Eagle Force in a way very similar to the ways MEF militants extorted compensation from public officials in Honiara:

At one stage I had two Marau Eagle Force members and I was here at the Vavaya Ridge and they came with two high-powered guns and told me to pay them \$10,000 because people of my constituency had burned Marau settlements. If I did not do that they will burn the whole constituency from Marau to Ruavatu, and that is my constituency. I went to late Bart Ulufa'alu and I told him look, I do not want this people to burn my constituency down. By Friday I have to give them \$10,000 otherwise they will destroy the whole constituency. So they went to Treasury and they gave me \$10,000, they got it from the Constituency Funds or whatever, and then I paid the two militants. They never shot me, you see.

### **Testimony of Ms. Hilda Kari, Closed Hearing before the TRC, 07/05/2011**

## **6. The Marau Peace Agreement**

The particular situation of Marau Sound made peace negotiations even more difficult than between Guadalcanal and Malaitan militants. When the MEF and the IFM started negotiations, which finally would culminate in the Townsville Peace Agreement, the Marau Eagles stayed behind. One of their major concerns was to retain political autonomy from the Guadalcanal Province. This would require a separate constituency for Marau:

The reason why I decided to separate the Marau Peace Agreement from the Townsville Peace Agreement was that the Malaitans would sign and then they would go back to their Island. But we

[had to stay]. So after considering this issue I decided that Marau had to be a separate constituency and if that is not granted then I would not lay my arms down.

### **Interview with Johnson ‘Apeo**

The demand for a separate Marau constituency was finally included in the Marau Peace Agreement that was signed on 7 February 2001 in Honiara between the Marau Eagle Force, the Isatabu Freedom Movement, the Guadalcanal Provincial Government and the Solomon Islands Government.<sup>243</sup> Clause 14 states:

Within 60 days of the signing of this Agreement:

- (1) The question of the creation of a separate constituency within Guadalcanal for the Marau area shall be referred by the SIG/GPG to the Constituency Boundaries Commission for determination in terms of Section 54 of the Constitution.
- (2) Subject to Section 13 of the National Parliament (Electoral Provisions) Act, a separate ward or wards in respect of the Marau area shall be established within the Constituency.
- (3) Subject to paragraph (1) of this cause there may be established for the Marau area a constituency development committee (“CDC”) which shall be responsible for deciding on socio-economic development matters for the constituency.
- (4) The Marau CDC shall consist of the Member of Parliament for the area and at least five members appointed by the MLC.
- (5) The SIG and the GPG shall recognize the Marau CDC as the development agent for the Marau area and shall consult with it on matters affecting development in the constituency.
- (6) Until such time when the CDC is established the SIG and GPG shall deal with the MLC in relation to matters of development affecting the Marau area.

Another important point of the Marau Peace Agreement was amnesty for all known militants both of the MEF and IFM (clause 6). Clause 9 of the Agreement established relief supplies and rehabilitation payments for the Marau area “within reasonable time”, and Clause 12 resolved that all MEF and IFM soldiers shall be repatriated within 30 days and that the SIG shall take measures to:

- (i) launch public works programme to engage the services of MEF/IFM soldiers
- (ii) provide through accredited non-government organizations and churches counseling services for the soldiers.

None of these commitments have materialized and it is these pending issues that are causing discontentment among former Marau militants.

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<sup>243</sup> For the full text of the Marau Peace Agreement, see volume 4, annex 5.

## 7. The legacy of the tension

Since the peace agreement, the Marau communities have engaged in many initiatives to return peace and normalcy to the region. On 12 to 14 of December 2001, community leaders, chiefs, church leaders and former combatants of the Marau Eagle Force and the Isatabu Freedom Movement met at Makina Catholic Station for dialogue and peace building in the region. The leaders who attended the meeting agreed that peace had to come from the people themselves. A Community Reconciliation Committee (CRC) was formed as a strategy for dialogue and mediating reconciliation at individual, family and community level within the region. There were three CRCs established according to geographical locations and membership to the opposing parties during the Marau crisis. However, they did not last long.

Another institution that emerged during this time was the Marau Leaders Council (MLC), consisting of prominent community members of Malaitan heritage living both at Marau and in Honiara. The body was set up to execute the outstanding issues with the national and provincial governments on behalf of the former Marau Eagle Force and 'Are'Are-speaking victims. These include the creation of the Marau constituency as stipulated in the Marau Peace Agreement. There were also claims to the Solomon Island Government for a "reconciliation package" for lost and damaged property of SBD\$ 2.8 million, out of which the MLC received only SBD\$200,000.<sup>244</sup>

Currently, the MLC is no longer active, leaving both the compensation package and the Marau constituency outstanding issues that have delayed the reconciliation process. For the Marau

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<sup>244</sup> On 6 March 2002, the MLC presented a Press Release that stated:

Marau Eagle Force signed the MPA after assurance of payment of the Reconciliation Package in writing by SIG (copy of letter attached). It is now 14 months after the signing of the MPA and SIG has not paid us the Reconciliation Package. Unlike the TPA where payments were made up front before signing, the MPA was signed after SIG promised us in writing that it will issue the payment after.

This press release is significant because the Marau Eagle Force signed the Marau Peace Agreement because they were promised these payments. Clause 10 of the Marau Peace Agreement establishes a reconciliation package, but does not mention any amount:

(1) For the purposes of reconciliation between the parties to the Agreement, the SIG shall appoint a committee as determined by the leader of the SIG delegation to examine and assess a reconciliation package to be granted to the people of Marau and people living in the Marau areas.

The amount of 2.8 million is acknowledged in the letter (Ref: 10/4/4, MNURP) attached to the press release, which is dated 6/0/2001 [*sic*] and signed by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace Hon. Allan Kemakeza:

In respect of clause 10 of the Marau Peace Agreement, the Solomon Islands Government shall pay in instalments the outstanding reconciliation package of \$2.8 million payable to the Marau people.

people, their own constituency is seen as the only opportunity that would enable them to have a voice in the Provincial and National Government and access financial assistance for development:

When the Government gives financial assistance to the Guadalcanal Province we do not benefit from it. We did not enjoy assistance as everybody else in other provinces and also we do not have a voice in the Parliament or even in the Provincial Assembly. No one is there to represent us. If this cannot be addressed, I do not see any possible reconciliation.

**Interview with Johnson ‘Apeo**

However, former militants from Guadalcanal saw a separate constituency for Marau as a political division of their island they would never accept. This was made very clear by Joseph Sangu and other former leaders of the Isatabu Freedom Movement during the public hearings in May 2011:

Demarcating Marau into a separate Constituency for the reasons related to the Ethnic Tension would be a gross mistake for the purpose of peace building and future development of our people. Such a proposal encourages and further deepens divisions of people along ethnic lines. It symbolises the notion of disintegration and is not in the best interest of lasting peace in Guadalcanal and Solomon Islands. It should be noted that Marau was, is and will always be an integral part of Guadalcanal and so are our good people of Marau, including the ‘Are‘Are speakers.

**Joseph Sangu, Public Hearing for ex combatants, 12/05/2011**

Ten years after the signing of the Marau Peace Agreement, there are still outstanding issues that require well-considered solutions. So far reconciliation in Marau seems to be rather fragile:

The signing of peace occurred more than ten years ago, but still the feeling, pain and effects of the tension remains in the minds of people. If you go around you will hear stories from people; it clearly speaks out for itself, people still did not recover from what had happened.

*Do you have any recommendations that you would like to forward to the national government or the responsible bodies concerned?*

Yes, that is one of our main concerns. If you go around and seek the views from women, youths, and other business set up, they will tell you that what we need now is a proper reconciliation ceremony for all the people settling on the Birao region, especially with those on the island. This has to happen first before furthering into any minor or major development. It is only after such reconciliation ceremony before those on the main land and those of the island can live in peace once again.

**Testimony of John, Birao community leader**

We require that a proper and more meaningful reconciliation should take place, thus we can be reunited despite the differences that came about during the tension. At this stage things are still quite sensitive. The boys from the mainland often speak out openly telling those on the island to go back to their home on Malaita since they are ‘Are‘Are speakers. I believe peace here is still in a very fragile state.

**Testimony of Sam, mixed Birau and ‘Are‘Are descent**



## 8. Conclusions

Marau Sound is probably the most outstanding situation of *how*, in Solomon Islands, ethnicity became “the avenue through which frustrations were expressed.”<sup>245</sup> Leaders from Guadalcanal pulled ethnic differences between Birao and ‘Are’Are speakers that already had lost most of their significance in daily life into the political scenery; they used ethnicity as a political weapon.

Certainly, ethnicity does not explain *why* the tension happened. “Identity and ethnicity do not, *sui generis*, cause people to do things”, says sociologist Richard Jenkins from the University of Sheffield, “they must always be understood in political and economic contexts, in particular with respect to the pursuit of local material interests.”<sup>246</sup>

But the fact that “the roots of ethnic conflict may in fact not be ethnic”<sup>247</sup> does not lessen the importance of ethnicity. Identity conflicts are based on the politicalization of *difference*. To the extent that this particularism asphyxiates the common base that is necessary for the functioning of democracy, it represents a special challenge to any democratic government and it requires special solutions. Unfortunately, the Marau case and the delays in resolving it demonstrate also that the Solomon Island Government apparently has no means to address this problem.

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<sup>245</sup> Kabutaulaka, *Beyond Ethnicity*, *op. cit.*

<sup>246</sup> Richard Jenkins: *The limits of identity: ethnicity, conflict and politics*. *Sheffield OnLine Papers in Social Research*, no. 2, 2000. Available at [http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly\\_fs/1.71447!/file/2jenkins.pdf](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.71447!/file/2jenkins.pdf); date of access 25/04/2011.

<sup>247</sup> Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd: *The roots of intense ethnic conflict may not in fact be ethnic: categories, communities and path dependence*. Dublin: University College Dublin. Institute for the Study of Social Change (Geary Institute), Working Paper 2003/17, 2003. Available at <http://hdl.handle.net/10197/1920>; date of access 15/04/2011.

### 3.2.5 THE TENSIONS IN THE WEST

#### 1. Introduction

This chapter describes how the West of the Solomon Islands was affected by the tension. “West” here refers to the area termed the “Western District” under the colonial administration and which today comprises Western and Choiseul provinces.

Western Province covers the New Georgia group and the Shortland Islands. The National Census recorded a population of 62,739 in 1999 and 76,649 in 2009, making it the second most populated after Malaita. The bulk of the population lives in and around the urban areas of Gizo, Kolombangara, Noro and Munda.

This region possesses rich natural resources and over the years has been an important contributor to the national economy of Solomon Islands through logging, fisheries, and, more recently, tourism. Between 1995 and 1996, just before the tension, Western Province provided 51 percent of all log exports; Guadalcanal, Choiseul and Isabel around 11 percent each, Malaita just six percent, and the others even less. As for fish exports, Solomon Taiyo Limited (STL) in Western Province was the largest local player, taking 29 percent of the 1998 catch.<sup>248</sup> During the 1990’s STL’s Noro-based cannery and fishing fleet was also the largest private-sector employer in the country.

Choiseul was traditionally known as Lauru and until 1991 formed part of Western Province. Nowadays the province consists of Choiseul Island with an area of 3,294 sq. km. and small surrounding islands like Taro, Vaghena and Rob Roy. The National Census reported a population of 20,008 persons for Choiseul in 1999, which increased to 26,732 in 2009. While more than 90 percent of the population is involved in subsistence gardening, the major commercial activity undertaken in the province is logging. There are about 20 log ponds along the coast, and about the same number of logging companies in operation.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Ian Scales: “The Coup Nobody Noticed: The Solomon Western State Movement in 2000”. *The Journal of Pacific History*, Vol. 42, N° 2, p. 189.

<sup>249</sup> Government of Solomon Islands and UNESCAP Pacific Operation Centre: *Choiseul Province. A Report on the Rapid Participatory Rural Appraisal Findings, in Preparation of Medium Term Choiseul Rolling Development Plan 2008-2010*. Honiara, December 2007.

People of the West have a strong sense of identity due to a unique political history, distinctive dark skin color, the Roviana lingua franca, specific Christian affiliations, and, last but not least, their relative economic prosperity. They suffered ill-repute for headhunting and tribal warfare until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>250</sup> Fortresses built of coral rock along the coast in the Roviana and Marovo Lagoons serve as reminders of the headhunting days.

The churches played an important role in the development of the Western Province and Choiseul. They helped settle disputes and cultural infringements that frequently arose between tribes, clans and families. In Choiseul, the intervention of Methodist missionaries settled the last war between the Vurulata and Senga tribes and ended with the peace treaty of Sasamunga on August 8, 1921. This event, called Kulabule, is still a holiday on Choiseul.

The churches also created an identity.<sup>251</sup> The Methodist and Seventh Day Adventist missions, who in their early days operated exclusively in the West, adopted the languages of Roviana and Marovo respectively as their lingua franca. Regional identity based on faith was reinforced when the Christian Fellowship Church broke away from the Methodist church in 1961 and in the following years became an important indigenous social and religious movement that provided funds for separatist activities.<sup>252</sup>

Interneine warfare contributed to political fragmentation and the establishment of local rather than provincial or even national identities.<sup>253</sup> Even so, in 1972 local leaders came together and formed the Western Council, trying to drive the impending independent state towards a federal political structure. In late 1977, the so-called “Western Breakaway Movement” claimed for a

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<sup>250</sup> See Caroline Mythinger: *Headhunting in the Solomon Islands: Around the Coral Sea*. New York: Macmillan, 1942.

<sup>251</sup> For churches in the Western Province, see Debra McDougall: *Religious Institutions as Alternative Structures in Post-conflict Solomon Islands? Cases from Western Province*. Canberra: The Australian National University. State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Working Paper 2008/05, 2008. Available at: <http://westernsolomons.uib.no/docs/McDougall.percent%20Debra/McDougall.percent%20percent%282008percent%29percent%20Statepercent%20societypercent%20governancepercent%20Melanesia.pdf>. Date of access: 25/04/2011. For Christian churches in Choiseul, see Lynne McDonald: *Choiseul and the Missionaries. The Methodist Mission on Choiseul, Solomon Islands, 1905-1941*. Thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Philosophy at Massey University, Albany, December 2009. Available at: <http://mro.massey.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10179/1284/01front.pdf?sequence=2>. Date of access: 25/04/2011.

<sup>252</sup> Ralph Premdas. Jeff Steeves and Peter Larmour: “The Western Breakaway Movement in the Solomon Islands. *Pacific Studies* Vol. 7, N° 2, 1984, p. 54.

<sup>253</sup> Christine Dureau: "Decreed Affinities. Nationhood and the Western Solomon Islands". In *The Journal of Pacific History*, Vol. 33, Mo. 2, 1998, p. 205.

separate state and led to Western Province boycotting Solomon Islands' independence celebrations.<sup>254</sup> Eventually the movement declined to declare sovereignty, but Western Province was among the first regions to embrace the idea of a federal system or “state government” for Solomon Islands.

## **2. The Bougainville crisis**

There is a close historical relationship between the Western Province, Choiseul and the island of Bougainville. Bougainville politically forms part of Papua New Guinea (PNG), but has land that is only a few kilometres away from the Shortland Islands. Bougainvilleans share a strong sense of a separate ethnic identity from that of other Papua New Guineans, “identifying more strongly with Solomon Islanders who share their dark skin color rather than the lighter ‘redskins’ of the mainland.”<sup>255</sup> A long history of interchange and intermarriage between Bougainvilleans and natives of the Shortlands and Choiseul has produced strong *wantok* bonds across the border. At PNG independence from Australia, Bougainville resisted incorporation into the nascent PNG state and called for a separate union with the Western Solomons.<sup>256</sup>

Towards the end of 1988, resistance of local landowners to the open-cut Panguna Copper Mine developed into a ten-year violent conflict known as the “Bougainville crisis”. In November of that year, the leader of the New Panguna Landowners Association (New PLA), Francis Ona, along with many young Bougainvilleans, stole the mining company's explosives and began destroying strategic company structures. Within weeks, this group grew into a full-fledged militant force known as the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA).

The BRA quickly gained support under the banner of secession from Papua New Guinea. In April 1990, the rebels established the Bougainville Interim Government (BIG) and announced a declaration of independence. The Government of PNG reacted by deploying their Defence Forces, destroying entire villages and causing mass displacement. Thousands of civilians, including women and children, were tortured, raped, or murdered.

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<sup>254</sup> See Premdas. Steeves and Larmour: “The Western Breakaway Movement ...”, *op. cit.*

<sup>255</sup> Antony J. Regan: “Case Study Bougainville”. In Peter Harris and Ben Reilly (eds.): *Democracy and Deep-Rooted Conflict: Options for Negotiators*, Stockholm: International IDEA, 1998, p. 171.

<sup>256</sup> Christine Dureau: “Decreed Affinities ...”, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

Internal skirmishes among Bougainvilleans worsened the crisis. Armed opponents of the BRA and dissident BRA groups formed what became known as the Bougainville Resistance Force (BRF) that was commanded by a former Police Minister and supported by the PNG Defence Forces. The PNG government tried to diminish support for the BRA by establishing in 1991 the South Bougainville Interim Authority (SBIA). It disintegrated only one year later after some of its members were killed by BRA militants. The acronym “SBIA” became “spear,” an expression extended to mean “spy” to denounce supporters of the PNG government. In the Solomons, the term was used during the tension by IFM militants for suspects accused of collaborating with Malaitans.

By the time the Burnham Truce was signed in October 1997, the Bougainville crisis had destroyed almost the entire economic and social infrastructure and, indeed, the lives of more than 10,000 persons on Bougainville.

In December 1994 the Government of Solomon Mamaloni tried to avoid spill-over effects and announced its intention to establish a military force, the Solomon Islands National Reconnaissance and Surveillance Force (SINRSF), which combined the resources of the Police Field Force, the Police Maritime and Surveillance Force, and the Police Force Surveillance aircraft.<sup>257</sup> Later, many of these military-trained police officers would raid the armory in Rove and take sides with the Malaita Eagle Force.

The connections between Bougainville and the western Solomons resurfaced dramatically when Bougainvillean refugees flooded into the Western Province for shelter and medical treatment.<sup>258</sup> In addition, Western Province partly supplied militants to the BRA. These events formed links of friendship and sympathy between Bougainvillean and Western Solomon peoples during the 1990s, a time when PNG Defence Forces launched several attacks on Solomon Islands civilians in the Shortlands and Choiseul as part of their counter-insurgency operations.

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<sup>257</sup> Dureau, “Decreed Affinities ...”, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

<sup>258</sup> According to the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants Survey 1999, since 1988 several thousand refugees from Bouganville fled to neighbouring Solomon Islands where some of them settled permanently. At the end of 1997, only 800 PNG refugees remained in Solomon Islands and there was considerable return movement because of the peace process. However, no reliable estimated of refugees remaining at the end of 1998 were available as the refugees were not registered.

[http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/publisher\\_USCRI\\_PNG\\_3ae6a8ce3c\\_0.html](http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/publisher_USCRI_PNG_3ae6a8ce3c_0.html), date of access 16/05/2011.

However, according to the 1999 Census (Table 5.1.a), there were 9,448 “inmigrants” [*sic*] registered in Western Province.

### 3. The uneasy relationship between the West and Malaita

The relationship between the West and Malaita has always been complicated. In her study of nationhood in the Western Solomon Islands, historical anthropologist Christine Dureau mentions some deeply-rooted socio-cultural differences between the two regions, including gender relations, constellation of power, and religious practices.<sup>259</sup> These differences, and the fear of being subjugated to politically powerful Malaita in independent Solomon Islands, are presented as the underlying cause for the appearance of the Western Breakaway Movement:

Western Solomons' discontents have usually focused on their incorporation into a country which they regard as politically dominated by the large, heavily populated island of Malaita, which is described in terms of cultural and religious difference and political domination.<sup>260</sup>

Much of this fear emanates from historical incidences like the Sito and Binskins killings in the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>261</sup> Another incident that exacerbated animosities was the publication of the infamous "Ode to the West Wind" poem on 9 June 1978, just a few weeks before independence, in the government newspaper *News Drum*. The poem ridiculed the Westerners' aspirations for greater control of their destiny and refers to their color in a racist manner:

Ode to the West wind, you carry in  
Your bowels the Westerners  
Black and ugly, proud and lazy  
Manpower they have none.

Not unexpectedly, the poem caused much fury and was taken as further proof that the West needed special constitutional guarantees lest it become a victim of more powerful ethnic or regional groups. At first, it was widely but erroneously believed that the poem was written by

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<sup>259</sup> Dureau: "Decreed Affinities ...", *op. cit.*, p. 206-207.

<sup>260</sup> Christine Dureau: "Decreed Affinities ...", *op. cit.*, p. 198. Premdas, Steeves and Larmour also think that the backing for the Western Breakaway Movement comes in great part from fear of "Malaita domination" (Premdas, Steeves and Larmour: "The Western Breakaway Movement ...", *op. cit.*, p. 62).

<sup>261</sup> In 1909, state authorities sought to capture the Vella Lavella warrior Sito, who had been involved in quarrels with a trader some years earlier. Sito himself managed to escape, but his wife and children were shot. In an act of revenge, Sito killed the Malaitan wife and children of another local trader named Binskin who had participated in an earlier raid on Sito's village. The murder of Binskin's family resulted in a punishing expedition described by Christine Dureau as a "frenzied mob of 'government officers, revenge-crazed traders and undisciplined Malaita militia [who] swept over Vella Lavella in a random wave of killing and destruction' which lasted for a fortnight" (Dureau, "Decreed Affinities ...", *op. cit.*, p. 211; see also Judith A. Bennett, *The Wealth of the Solomons*, *op. cit.*, p. 108).

the Prime Minister's special political secretary who was a Malaitan. The author turned out to be a government agriculture officer who was charged with sedition. The central government had to pay SBD\$9,000 compensation to the Western Council.

Western fear and prejudices towards Malaitans were similar to those of the Guadalcanal people, centered on immigration from Malaita and an increase in crime<sup>262</sup> and illegal occupation of traditional land. Even before World War II, writes Judith Bennett, “Westerners had resented the drift of land-hungry Malaitans into their islands by migration and marriage. They considered Malaitan plantation laborers wild man and troublemakers, only useful when there was hard work to be done”.<sup>263</sup> In 1999, there were officially 2,400 Malaitans registered in the Western Province, by far the most numerous immigrant community next to expatriates, most of whom probably were Bougainvilleans from PNG (see Table 3.2.4).

**Table 3.2.4**  
**Migration to Western Province before the tension**

<b>Born in</b>	<b>1986</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>Increase between 1986 and 1999</b>
Western	48,929	51,917	2,988
Choiseul	nd*	1,842	1,842
Isabel	281	484	203
Central	276	452	176
Renbel	nd*	32	32
Guadalcanal	579	822	243
Malaita	1,811	2,400	589
Makira	173	431	258
Temotu	266	660	394
Honiara	1,315	2,325	1,010
Immigrants	4,701	9,448	4,747

\* In 1986, Choiseul was still part of Western Province and Renbel part of Central Province

**Source: National Census 1999, Tables 5.1a and 5.1b**

<sup>262</sup> In 1982, member of Shortland Area Council A. Kiriaku made a request that immigrants from Malaita Province living at Tapokai should be ordered by the Council to return to their island because they were stealing coconuts and yams. The Council decided that this was a matter for the Police. (Minute of a Shortland Area Council meeting in 1982, no date).

<sup>263</sup> Judith Bennett: *The Wealth of the Solomons, op. cit.*, pp. 327-28.

A number of factors made the relationship between the West and Malaita a negative and controversial one:

In contrast to Bougainville, relations with Malaita are seen as imposed and are negatively portrayed. Of all Solomons ethnic groups coming to the West, historically Malaitans have been the most contentious, with a long history of disharmony between Malaitans and locals.

However, by the 1990s, Malaitan settlements were dotted around the West, often on the so-called Alienated Land areas. Title to these has been held by the Crown since colonial times, but often the land has been left dormant. Although all these areas are subject to indigenous claims stemming from various versions of pre-colonial ownership, development by people who regard themselves as the traditional landowners is frustrated by the crown title. In the ensuing hiatus, Malaitan groups occupied some of these areas. It is resentment over these settlements that sparked conflict in the West in 1998.

Westerners often explain their resentment of Malaitans as due to Malaitans' aggressive response if their customs are offended; and in some cases their ensuing demands for large sums of compensation money, which is not generally a western Solomons practice. Justly or not, many Westerners also perceive thieving and sometimes sexual assault to be a trait of Malaitan settlers.<sup>264</sup>

#### **4. The tension in the West**

Fears arose that anti-Malaitan feelings in the West would set off a spill-over effect of the “ethnic tension” into the region, a repetition of what happened in Guadalcanal, when in 1999 clashes between young locals and Malaitan settlers took place in Munda and Noro, while landowners put pressure on the provincial government to remove Malaitan settlers:

Munda landowners in Western Province are calling on responsible authorities to repatriate settlers residing on their customary land.

“We want the settlers, regardless of their ethnic background, to peacefully vacate our land before the next millennium,” a concern [*sic*] landowner told Solomon Star from Munda yesterday. Speaking on condition of anonymity, the man who claimed to be a landowner, said they are particularly concerned with the occupation of the Ziata customary land, a plot of land between Noro and Munda in New Georgia.

The man said the landowners are planning to develop their land in preparation for 100th anniversary of the arrival of Methodist Church scheduled for May 2001. “We cannot proceed with our plan unless the settlers move out from our land,” he said. He claimed that the settlers have been illegally squatting on their land following permission from illegitimate landowners.

***Solomon Star* N° 1430, 18/08/1999, p. 1.**

There were also some hostilities between Malaitans and Guadalcanal people in the Western Province that caused concerns about a possible a spill-over effect of the Guadalcanal crisis:

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<sup>264</sup> Ian Scales: “The Coup Nobody Noticed”, *op. cit.*, p. 193-194.



I was in the Western Province in 1999 during the tension. I was working at Noro and some of the people from Malaita came and threatened the Guadalcanal people there. Some of us were frightened, so we ran away and hid in the bush during the nights. I heard that a youth group from Guadalcanal had come to Munda led by Hilda Kari so I joined them and I came back to Guadalcanal.

*What did those Malaita people do to you?*

Sometimes they would come and shoot and the other times they would swear at us, so we thought the next thing they would do is kill us. Because of their actions we decided to come home.

**Statement N° 6022**

Trying to calm the situation, in August 1999 the Premier for Western Province and his Malaitan counterpart signed the Munda Accord. In a joint statement, the Premier for Western Province, Clement Base, agreed “to abide for a peaceful repatriation of undesirable settlers who have caused pain and suffering to his people,” and the Premier for Malaita, David Oeta, “called for these undesirable elements and settlers” to return to Malaita Province, especially those people that “are not engaged in formal employment, nor in any productive activities and who are staying without proper legal arrangements.”<sup>265</sup> At the same time, the Government of Western Province decided to expel students from other provinces from local schools.<sup>266</sup>

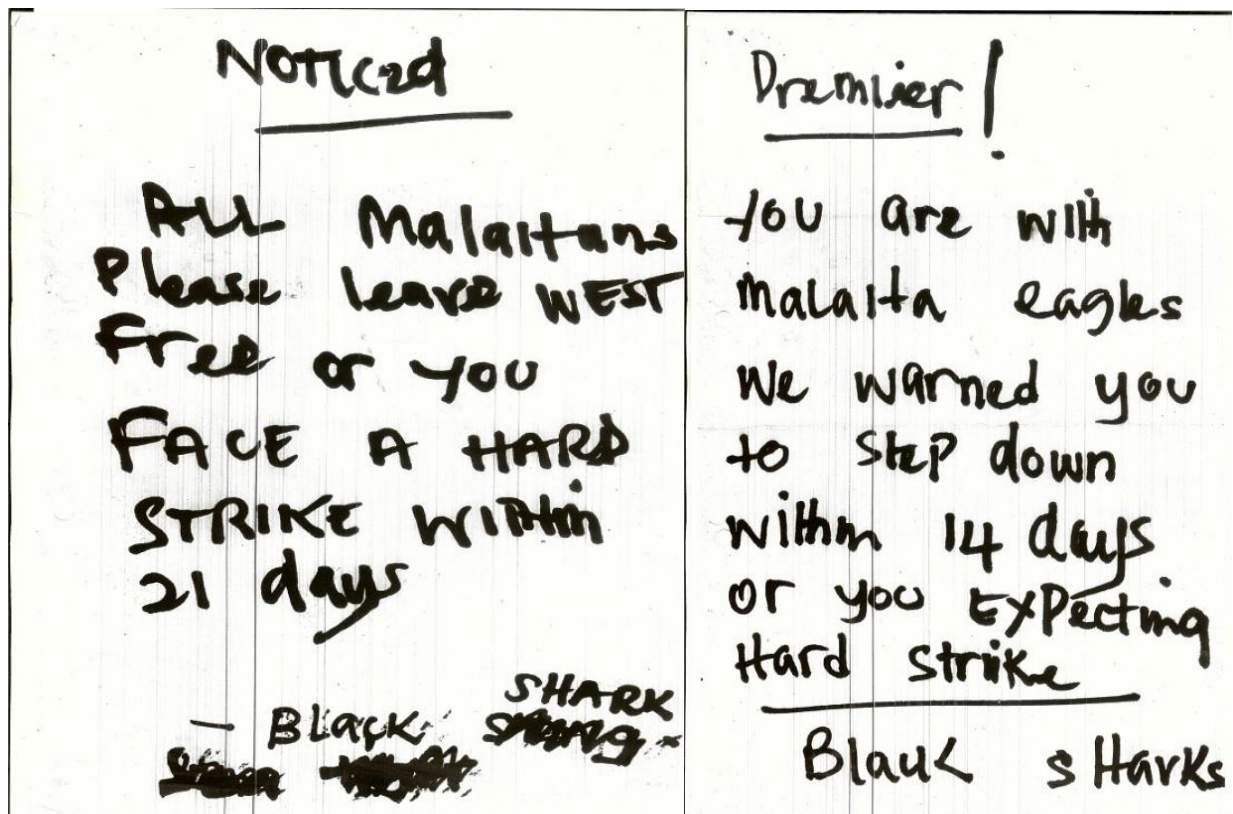
In mid-2000 the situation began to take a more violent turn. In May, handwritten pamphlets signed with “Black Shark” appeared in Gizo giving Malaitans a deadline of 21 days to leave Western Province. Premier Reuben Lilo, who some months before had succeeded Clement Base, was given a period of two weeks to step down.

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<sup>265</sup> Communiqué: The Western Province Ethnic Tension, Malaita Western Premier Excursion, 18/08/1999, signed by Hon David Oeta, Premier for Malaita Province, and Hon. Clement Base, Premier for Western Province.

<sup>266</sup> “1999 was the year when we started expelling students from other provinces studying in schools on Western Province. . . . I started to feel uneasy and knew that it will escalate to a state of havoc and will have a severe impact on the education sectors. In the Western province, we had a lot of students simply because we had an influx of students coming in from other provinces. At that time under my leadership we had to make the drastic decision not to accept students from other provinces; simply to solve this problem of our own WP students and children. There was a lot of criticism on that regard in the media, but we felt that the decision was logical on our part.

**Clement Base, former Premier of Western Province, Closed Hearing before the TRC, 29/03/2011.**



After receiving threats from the Black Sharks, more than 50 Malaitan families gathered in the Community Hall of Noro to discuss their situation with local and regional authorities and, in case there was no solution, prepare to leave for Honiara or Auki. A meeting with community leaders was held at the Town Council on 1 June where the Malaitan representatives expressed their wish to return home peacefully as soon as possible. A representative of Solomon Taiyo Ltd. informed the meeting that if the Malaitans had to leave, this would “badly cripple the company’s operation and the national economy”.<sup>267</sup> Other leaders also spoke on the negative impact of the threats to Malaitans for the Western Province. The meeting encouraged Malaitans to stay, but acknowledged that security could not be guaranteed<sup>268</sup> and agreed to render “any assistance where possible” to families who decided to leave.<sup>269</sup> Another meeting “to discuss the threat issue” scheduled for 8 June was frustrated by the armory raid on 5 June.

<sup>267</sup> Minute of Noro Town Community Leaders Meeting, 1 June 2000.

<sup>268</sup> Noro had only four police officers for an estimated population of 3,000.

<sup>269</sup> Minute of Noro Town Community Leaders Meeting.

The Rove armory raid re-activated and exacerbated longstanding Western fears and aversions towards Malaitans and generated a new situation. The following weeks saw the *Black Sharks* intensify their harassments of Malaitan settlers in Noro and Munda, forcing many of them to leave. They ransacked and burned the houses of Malaitans in Ziata. A Solomon Taiyo vessel was hijacked and forced to travel to Honiara by Malaitans claiming to be MEF.

The following two statements refer to events that happened in June 2000 in Noro:

During the period of the tension I was living in the Western Province. At that time another militant group known as the Black Sharks had also emerged. One day we were at our house when the Black Sharks arrived. They came in a truck all the way from Munda. They broke into the shops, removed goods and beer and they fired shots in the air causing a lot of fear amongst us people from other provinces. At night we could not sleep properly and all the other Malaitan families would come and we would be gathered together in one house. Some of our boys would help in providing security and we would take turns. The whole of that time we lived in fear.

Life in Noro during that period was not good. We were surprised since only we Malaitans were targeted by the Black Sharks; people from other provinces were not threatened so we felt really out of place. Even our children could not eat properly and our home was far from Noro.

Our company provided us with packing cases so we could gather and store our belongings inside while waiting for MV *Tomoko*. We waited until *Tomoko* arrived and we sent our women and children on the first trip. The men and boys remained back and waited for the next trip. Luckily the company hired another boat for us and we came over to Honiara. Shortly after peace was signed the company requested for our service but I refused to return and work in Western Province again. We stayed in my village up until today.

**Statement N° 1723**

I am a woman from Malaita; my husband was employed by the Solomon Islands Ports Authority and was posted to work in the Western Province. We were given a house at Noro. During the time of crisis my husband went over to Honiara to attend a workshop. However, during that time there was a group emerging in the Western Province known as “Black Sharks”. While my husband was away I remained and looked after our children. We were waiting for him to come and get us over to Malaita as soon as possible, since the effect of the crises on Guadalcanal was also felt in Western Province.

One day I went over to my sister’s house; we sat down on the veranda and were telling stories and cracking jokes, when all of a sudden a truckload of armed men with camouflaged uniform pulled over in front of the house. It was a frightening scene. About five men jumped off and surrounded my sister’s house. Seeing this we ran into the room. The men came and blocked the main doorway, one of them called for me to come over to them. I was so scared since they were armed. One of my daughters told me that it was unwise to go over to them, but trying to be brave I went down to meet them. They asked me what was I doing here and I told them that I have come to visit my sister and her family. One of them responded angrily saying I was a foolish woman since I was from Malaita. We talked for some time; they questioned me if my husband was in possession of a gun. I told them that he does not have anything of that sort. They went to the nearby houses and asked them the same question. There were so many of them; it was a frightful moment since I could see that mothers and children started crying since they were afraid and confused seeing the armed men.

After that incident we saw these armed men moving around our areas night and day. The Black Sharks often fired shots in schools and market areas, provoking and threatening people from other provinces. They entered people's homes chasing everyone outside and searched the rooms for rifles. Most of the time, we would switch off the lights in our house and sit quietly in the dark. We were so scared since my husband was not with us, we were alone. Sometimes we could not go out to cook food in the kitchen since we were afraid of the armed men.

We fled to Honiara shortly after leaving our pigs, gardens and other valuable belongings and properties behind. My husband told me to bring our children and whatever we can carry. He then later resigned from his work and we all returned back to Malaita.

**Statement N° 7321**

Meanwhile in Honiara, the Malaita Eagle Force deployed retaliation for the exodus of Malaitans from Western Province. Their spokesman explained and justified this as follows:

During the three weeks following the coup, a chain of events occurred which very seriously led to the worsened law and order situation in Honiara. In the Western Province a quasi-militant group called the "Black Sharks" emerged. The formation of this group was encouraged by the Western Provincial Government together with some prominent businessmen in Gizo and in the Noro/Munda area. According to the official provincial government position, the Black Shark group, which later was joined by criminals and mercenaries from South Bougainville, was formed to provide security for the people of Western Province from any imminent attacks by the MEF. They had reason to fear: during the preceding five weeks the people of the Western Province – especially in the Gizo, Kolombangara, Noro and Munda triangle embarked on silly acts of harassment – chased and evicted innocent Malaitans in the area, which was wholly unjustifiable. The result of these unlawful activities was that more than 500 Malaitans fled to Honiara from the Western Province and started joining the camps of the MEF in and around Honiara. This was when many innocent people from Western and Choiseul Provinces were harassed and threatened by members of the MEF, now joined by many young men unlawfully chased out from Gizo and Noro.<sup>270</sup>

Western people returned home by boat loads and many left employment or school on the island of Guadalcanal. Melvina Hilda was one of them:

During the period of the tension I was a student at St John's High School in Honiara. I cannot remember the exact date and time when the incident happened to me, however, early one morning as usual I was on my way to attend school. After break time we returned to class and heard news that there was a shootout in Gizo and a boy from Malaita was killed. Police officers entered the school and advised the students to return home for safety reasons. They feared that the relatives of the person killed might retaliate and kill anyone who is from the Western Province. We stayed at home until leaders from Western and Choiseul province chartered ships to take everyone back to our islands in Western Province.

*Did you return to resume studies in your school in Honiara?*

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<sup>270</sup> Andrew Nori: "5th of June 2000 in perspective". Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation, 3 January 2002, p. 11.

No, we were unable to return back to Honiara. However, while back in our province we were offered a chance to sit for our SISC Form 5 exams in schools in Western Province. They gave us the option if we want to sit for the exams or withdraw and resume class when normalcy returns. I went and sat for the exams in the end. I did not pass my exam because of the situation and disruptions to our studies.

**Statement N° 4233**

Security had become the main concern in the Western Province. Morale was low among the 80 or so police officers in Western Province and Choiseul because of outstanding payments and rumors in Gizo, Munda and Noro that MEF would “smasem iufala lo West”<sup>271</sup>. Vigilante groups formed: the Black Sharks in Munda and Gizo, the Black Cobras created in Vella Lavella, led by a former police officer, and the Bravo 1 and Bravo 2 groups in Munda.

Less than a week after the Rove armory raid, two outboard motor boats crammed with heavily-armed combatants of the BRA arrived in Gizo, allegedly to protect the Western Province from any incursion from the MEF.

#### **4.1 The Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) and Black Sharks**

On Sunday 11 June 2000, Senior Superintendent PPC Philip Homelo informed the Premier of Western Province about the arrival of the Bougainvilleans:

About 45 men from Bougainville landed here at Gizo at about 5 a.m. this morning. These men are heavily armed with SLR & M16 weapons. These armed men were on the road and were seen by our foot patrol (Gizo Watch – a volunteer community group assisting the Gizo Police) who ran and informed the Police Station. . . .

Following is a reconstructed statement taken from these men. “We came here to carry out security in the Western Province. We will stay here a bit longer to give security and carry out patrols as far as Marovo Lagoon. [*Illegible*] of the people of the Province has been threatened by the Eagle Force (MEF), therefore we will stay here and protect the people. Malaita people who live here or married, work and settled can remain, except for people who are members and joined the MEF must leave the Province. Those are the people we are looking for”.

Police told them to leave Gizo and go back to their home islands, but their response was negative. They said that they would stay here and patrol the Province. They said that Police have no power.<sup>272</sup>

Leading the group was Cornelius Solomon, also known as Cornelius Galasa, a commander in the BRA. Cornelius is a native of Sagi Village on a small island in South Bougainville, only a

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<sup>271</sup> Pijin, destroy you in the West.

<sup>272</sup> Copy of fax in possession of the TRC.

stone's throw away from the Shortlands. During two interviews held at Rove prison with TRC, Galasa gave his version of the mission which is summarized here:

In early June 2000, four boys from the Solomon Islands came over to Bougainville. They were Willie Amalo, Jack Martin, Harry Wickham and the last one I can't remember his name. They brought a letter from the Western Province Police Commander Mr. Aloysius Ora, the Premier of Western Province Mr. Reuben Lilo, and some businessmen from Gizo. In the letter they said that Western Province wanted to engage us because they did not want the problem to spill over, they would like us to come over and provide security for them because the country was in chaos and the MEF had raided the armory.

The correspondence was addressed to the Bougainvillean Revolutionary Army, so I took it over to the BRA headquarters. My commanders agreed that I should go and I left with about 80 boys. When we got to Gizo we saw the operation was on a small scale and did not need to have too many boys, so some of them had to go back with most of the guns.

I did not come on my own choice, I came because I was requested to come and assist.<sup>273</sup>

Questioned by TRC, both Reuben Lilo<sup>274</sup> and Aloysius Ora deny having invited the BRA to provide security for Western Province, indicating that the above letter may have been forged. On 15 June, only four days after the arrival of the BRA platoon in Gizo, Lilo sent this letter to the High Commission of Papua New Guinea in Honiara:

Your Excellency, I write to convey to your office my Provincial Government's concern on the involvement of Bougainvilleans on the ethnic crisis in Solomon Islands especially their activities in Western Province.

From eye-witnesses, I gather that there is a significant presence of armed Bougainvillians in my Province that have caused fear to the Malaitan Communities, especially after the death of a part-Malaitan here in Gizo, on Sunday morning 11<sup>th</sup> June 2000, allegedly killed by this group.

While there might be some elements of collaboration with some citizens of Western Province, my Government and the great majority of my people would not like to see the ethnic crisis prolonged and complicated by further disturbance in this Province.

I therefore call on your Government to urgently liaise with authorities in Bougainville to identify the concern people and re-call them home.

On 28 June, Lilo sent another letter to BRA Supreme Commander Ishmael Toroama, asking him "to instruct your men to be very cautious about their association with our Westerners as I would not like to see a situation where some of our own people would be the cause of dragging the

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<sup>273</sup> Cornelius Galasa also told TRC researchers that he had also been asked by MEF leaders Jeremy Rua and Roland Timo if he "could track down Harole Keke" (interview at Rove Prison).

<sup>274</sup> Reuben Lilo was at the time of writing of this Report Deputy Executive Secretary of the TRC.

BRA into starting a war for us when actually nobody has declared war on the Province as yet”.<sup>275</sup> While this might indicate that the government of the Western Province did not in fact invite Cornelius Galasa and his “boys”, it does not prove that the two operated separately; besides, for several months the provincial government paid, though allegedly under duress, for food, accommodation, fuel and other operational expenses of the BRA (see below). Subsequently, for the public it was, and still is, “common knowledge” that the BRA was invited by the Government of the Western Province:

At that time there was a rumor that the Malaitan Eagle Force was planning to invade the Western Province. At that time they were loading MV *Olifasia* and it was said to be bound for Gizo purposely to kill people in the Western Province. Consequently, Western Province decided to quickly seek outside assistance. Hence it was common knowledge that the Western Province had written a letter to Ishmael [Toroama, Supreme Commander of the BRA] requesting them to provide protection to the Western Province. This was accepted, hence the arrival of the first group of Bougainvilleans into Gizo.

#### **Interview with a former manager of Gizo Hotel**

Before leaving for Gizo, the BRA combatants had approached the PFF station at Lofung in the Shortlands to try to convince the officers to hand over their weapons. The objective was “to prevent them from bringing the weapons to Honiara where they might be used by the MEF.”<sup>276</sup> The officers refused and the Bougainvilleans left only to return the following day heavily armed and determined to raid the police station. By this time, however, the police officers had already left for Honiara taking all the weapons with them. The platoon split up and while most of them headed on to Vella Lavella, William Amalo led a group to Choiseul and raided the police station armory in Taro. Two of the police officers who were on duty at that time gave their statements to TRC:

This incident happened on the 10<sup>th</sup> of June, shortly after the Rove armory raid on 5<sup>th</sup> of June 2000. We were taken by surprise. Six armed men stood around the station. I identified most of them from Bougainville and only two of them were from Western and Choiseul Province.

#### **Statement N° 4001**

I was on duty with two other officers. It was approximately around 1:30 in the morning when the armed group raided the Taro police station armory. The group was headed by late William Amalo. When they arrived they told us to surrender, they were armed with M16 assault rifles and SR88 weapons. They instructed us to lie down on the floor, then they escorted our Provincial Police Commander PPC Senior Sergeant John Smith Pitabelema, they opened the armory and

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<sup>275</sup> Copies of the letters are in possession of the TRC.

<sup>276</sup> Interview with former BRA militant Cyril Hoala.

emptied all the weapons which included five .303 rifles plus 400 rounds of ammo, plus several licensed .22 caliber and shot gun rifles. They were led by William Amalo and claimed to be providing security for Choiseul province; they claimed to be Lauru Security Task Force.

**Statement N° 4002**

The two groups then joined again in Vella and together continued their expedition to Gizo, where they arrived at dawn of 11 June. A confidential report on the security situation in Western Province states that the initial reaction of the people to the arrival of the BRA was positive:

The initial reactions of the local people however, were that of relief, they feel that someone is out there with the appropriate equipments to safeguard their lives and properties in the event of any armed incursions by the warring Malaitans on Guadalcanal. Some have the feelings that indeed Bougainvilleans have begun to reciprocate the assistance Westerners gave to their people during the ten years of conflict on Bougainville.

The optimism that the BRA would provide security for Westerners, however, was short-lived. Only a few minutes after their arrival in Gizo, a group of Bougainvilleans and some of their allies from the Western Province entered a workshop near the KHY building, allegedly in search for weapons. The owner of the workshop was John Fougau, a Malaitan who repeatedly had announced, in a threatening tone, the imminent incursion of the MEF to Western Province. No weapons were found during the operation, but a young man – Bobby Sae Nare, a part-Malaitan – was shot to death, allegedly while he was asleep:<sup>277</sup>

We were at KHY gambling at night and all of a sudden we heard gunshots at the back of the building. We wondered what had happened, and then we saw six boys walking towards where we were. We did not recognize the rest of them except for Willie Amalo. We went to where the shooting took place because we heard screaming, and when we got there we were told someone was shot. When we went to the scene we could see the deceased that he was shot under his neck through his head with a big hole. When we saw this we were frightened and we ran away too and we also went and reported the incident to the Police. The deceased was Silas Nare who was part Malaita and Simbo.

**Statement N° 4413**

Police officers who arrived at the scene were intimidated by the militants. One of them declared in his statement given to the TRC:

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<sup>277</sup> The medical report regarding the death of Bobby Nare states that the “deceased was lying supine, in a natural position of repose, on a bench-style car seat.” “The cause of the death was a gunshot, fired with the barrel in direct contact with the deceased’s head”.

In 2007, Cornelius Galasa was found guilty of the murder of Bobby Sae Nare and sentenced to life imprisonment, although Judge Goldsbrough acknowledged that “he did not shoot him himself” (R. v. Galasa [2007] SBHC 166; HC-CRC 204 of 2006 [20 July 2007]).



We could not say anything disparaging to them otherwise they would shoot us too. It was really a bad situation. We police officers could not strike back or make any arrest at those times.

**Statement N° 4258**

During the following weeks the combatants from South Bougainville mingled with local vigilante groups to such a degree that they were often mistaken for members of the Black Sharks. The Black Sharks originally consisted of loosely organized groups made up of local men mainly from Munda, Noro, Kolombangara and Gizo, whose most notorious leaders were Sugaray Bennett and Harry Wickham. The presumed reason for the establishment of the Black Sharks was to act as a security force for the province and avoid any spill-over effect of the Guadalcanal crisis. In practice, however, they were more like a criminal gang, and more so after their merging with the South Bougainvilleans. The confidential security report from the Western Province mentioned above listed the following “emerging problems” with the BRA/Black Sharks militia:

- Bougainvilleans and local militants demand goods and fuel without proper authority from Police;
- Private properties were confiscated from suspected armed infiltrators and supporters of MEF;
- Provincial assets, e.g., rations, canoes were seized and used without permission;
- People’s properties were also seized and used without permission;
- Raids were carried out in local villages causing great fear to the local people, especially women and children, e.g., one carried out in Nazareth Village, Marovo on 29<sup>th</sup> July 2000, where guns were pointed to the villagers and assets of one family were seized;
- Raids carried out on Police in charge of Noro Police Station and some Police Officers were threatened with guns pointed against their head;
- Armed Bougainvilleans and local militants intruded into Solomon Taiyo premises in Noro fully armed;
- Sexual harassments of local women by South Bougainvilleans in Gizo and the surrounding islands;
- Unnecessary firing of guns during the night at Munda and Gizo by South Bougainvilleans and local militant groups;
- Excessive drinking in public places and along Gizo roads by South Bougainvilleans.

This list is in full accord with the findings of TRC. Most of the statements and interviews collected in the Western Province refer to human rights violations committed by the BRA/Black Shark group between June and December 2000.<sup>278</sup>

- Property violations like larceny of outboard motors (Statement N° 4201); burning of gardens (Statement N° 4220); taking food and market products under threat without paying for them (Statement N° 4409); shooting a cow for its consumption without consent of its owner (Statement N° 4229);
- Sexual harassment and rape cases in Gizo and Noro (names of victims interviewed by the TRC are withheld); one woman was threatened at a night club dance, taken to Bougainville and then returned to Gizo (Statement 4411);
- Harassment and threatening of workers of the Gizo Hotel (Statements N° 4225, 4228);
- Forcing Malaitans to leave their settlements (Statements N° 4218, 4616);
- Raiding of Varingado Island in Marovo by “two boats full of BRA’s or they claimed themselves as Western security force” in August 2000, stealing properties valued at a cost of SB\$190,000 (Lost Property Claim presented to the Western Province by Ms. Isirele Sae).

This is only a selection of all the cases. A member of the BRA/Black Shark group interviewed by the TRC acknowledged that within a very short time the Bougainvilleans endangered the Western Province.<sup>279</sup> Militants entered shops and fuel stations and took whatever they wanted, telling the owners that “the Province will pay” – and the provincial government paid. In one case, it disbursed \$15,000 to the Black Sharks in order to prevent the closing of telecommunications in Gizo:

I had a call from Honiara, from one of the managers, telling me that they had gathered information from the Police that militants from Honiara are planning to come over and sabotage Gizo Telekom. I was advised to implement some security strategies to secure the communication facilities. I discussed these with the boss and they agreed that I should engage a security group here in WP. It then happened that there was another militant group called the “Black Sharks” operating in Gizo. After meeting with my staff they all agreed that we should engage them to provide security for the company. Such approach was taken in Honiara during the period of lawlessness, where the management engaged militants to provide security at all the senior staffs’ residence. It was a time when people made the best out of a situation, to engage militants or whoever is helpful at that time.

However, apparently there was no such thing as alleged by the information given by the Police in Honiara, no militants from Honiara came over to Gizo. After three days I scaled down the security group manning the Gizo facilities.

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<sup>278</sup> Due to logistic and time problems, the number of statements collected by the TRC in the West is very small: only 100 statements in the Western Province (about half of them in the Shortlands) and 32 statements in Choiseul.

<sup>279</sup> “I admit that during that period we were making a lot of nuisance around the township, causing fear among the people around Gizo, especially on women and children” (Cyril Hoala).

After a few days they (Black Sharks) brought me a bill of SBD\$25,000 for the three days for providing security. I was so shocked and did not expect people claiming to provide security for WP should also extort their way through and charge us for the service I thought should have been free or reasonable. My boss called me up and asked for my opinion, I told him that the amount is not appropriate and I refused to pay and that I am only willing to pay if the amount is relatively reasonable at the maximum of SBD\$3,000.

The militants sent over one of their members to my office. He was from Choiseul and he approached me in my office and asked for the keys to the company vehicle. I told him that I will not give him the keys to the vehicle and he left. I was not scared since I had experienced a similar situation in Honiara with the MEF militants. The afternoon the next day a real militant came. I also could have refused him but I knew that he had guns with him. I sensed his hostility and gave him the keys. He went out and drove off with the company vehicle.

News reached my boss in Honiara and he decided to close down the Telekom operation in Gizo. I called up our Premier and explained the situation and that Gizo Telekom will close and all form of communication will shut down if the vehicle is not returned. I passed the same message to other influential high ranking figures of Gizo Telekom. Our Premier was very worried since all the communication necessities in the provincial government and other business houses will be at a standoff. Eventually after a few days the province paid some money to the militants and the premier personally returned the vehicle and handed over the keys to me.

**Testimony of Mr. Rolance Hilly, Public Hearing, Gizo, 14/07/2010**

Fear of the BRA/Black Sharks was particularly strong among the remaining Malaitan communities in Gizo. Settlers from Fishing Village and Kongulavata on Gizo, who had legally purchased their land, approached the Provincial Government asking for repatriation. Western Province bought their properties for \$98,900 and \$111,593, respectively, and the Government of Malaita supported them with boat fares. After the tension some of them came back to Gizo:

In 1962 I settled at Kongulavata until the ethnic tension. At first I heard rumors of the fighting and later we learnt that a Malaitan was killed at Gizo. That incident caused fear in us and people from West came and told us that the Black Shark group will come and chase Malaitans out from the Western and Choiseul provinces. I was so scared since I was concerned for the safety of my family. One day I met the Premier of Western Province Mr. Reuben Lilo at Gizo and he called me into his office. He told me that he will arrange the ship MV *Tomoko* to take us back to Malaita since fighting had started and we heard guns being fired around our communities. I then took my family and we boarded MV *Tomoko* over to Honiara. He also gave \$100,000 for all the property we owned at Kongulavata; unfortunately the amount he gave did not match the actual value of the property we owned. We came over to Honiara and later moved to Malaita. It was really heartbreaking since we did not sell our properties according to the amount we expected. Besides losing a lot of my properties, I lost a Yamaha 30 horse power and a ray boat 23 feet. I do not know who stole and looted my properties, but there was nothing I could do since I was in Malaita when all this happened.

*How long did you live in Malaita?*

We lived in Malaita for a period of seven years. After that we decided to return since my children are part-West and I am married to a Western woman. They did not feel comfortable living in Malaita since they were born and raised in the Western Province. They found it hard to adjust to

the environment in Malaita. It was because of this that we returned back to Western Province.

**Statement N° 4614**

On 25 July 2000, the clerk of Noro Town Council informed the Premier that a few days earlier “seven gunmen stormed the official residence of OCS/Noro Police, raided it and took off with Police weapons and ammunitions for normal Police operations.”<sup>280</sup> Of special concern was that they claimed to be Western Province security officers:

According to one of the gunmen (whom I believe is a PNG national), they were Western Provincial Security officers and they were acting under orders from superiors. Sir, if this had been true, my office should have been formally notified. Better still, they should not have threatened public officers like myself and two policemen. Further, to have caused great fear to the public.

The complaint shows that the relationship between the Provincial Government and the quasi-militant group was not clear even to public officers.

On 10 August 2000 a meeting was convened at the PT 109 Restaurant in Gizo between members of the provincial government and various militant groups including the BRA combatants from South Bougainville. During the meeting the militants were asked to suspend all activities and allow the Police to carry out their duties. Although the provincial representatives made it clear to the South Bougainvilleans that they were not officially invited by the Provincial Government, they acknowledged, however, that their presence was a deterrent to those who wished to enter its territories and cause problems. They were offered an “honorarium” for their activities and requested to return home. The following day Cornelius Galasa and his “boys” received SBD\$77,000 as support for their repatriation and towards the end of August they obtained another SBD\$32,400. In October, South Bougainville BRA Commander Thomas Tari received SBD\$50,000 supposedly for providing a high-speed boat to the provincial government. This, however, had never happened.

The Bougainvilleans were not the only militants that received an “honorarium” from the Western Province. Local militant groups like the Black Sharks, Black Cobrsa and the Bravo groups, as well as some individual militant leaders, were also paid token figures to go back to their respective homes (see Table 3.2.5).

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<sup>280</sup> Fax No. 60154, 25/07/2000.

**Table 3.2.5**  
**Payments from Western Province to militant groups and leaders**

11/08	Black Shark	Honorarium	SB\$	77,000.00
11/08	Bravo 1 & 2	Honorarium,	SB\$	39,827.50
11/08	Bravo 3	Honorarium	SB\$	10,500.00
18/08	Morovo Boys	Honorarium	SB\$	10,000.00
28/08	Black Cobra	Honorarium	SB\$	9,000.00
29/08	Bougainville	Honorarium	SB\$	32,400.00
29/09	Sugaray Bennett	Allowance	SB\$	2,000.00
02/10	Black Cobra	Honorarium	SB\$	2,570.00
16/10	Thomas Tari	OMB/Canoe	SB\$	50,000.00
23/11	BRA	Allowance	SB\$	3,400.00
21/12	William Amalo		SB\$	4,500.00

**Source: Western Provincial Assembly, Transaction Detail by Account  
April 1, 2000 through March 19, 2001.**

“Honorarium” expenses, however, corresponded to only a small part of the funds spent on “security operations” by the Provincial Government between 2000 and 2001. The total amount totalled \$771,889.92 and included payments for fuel used by the BRA/Black Sharks, allowances, accommodation, and food, etc.<sup>281</sup> The money was set aside from a SBD\$3 million sinking fund that was provided for the Western Province by Solomon Island Government.<sup>282</sup>

The payment under duress of an “honorarium” to militants shows that, though on a much smaller scale, the rationale applied by the Government of the Western Province was basically the same as the one used by the Central Government: both tried to soothe the situation with money. The Solomon Islands Government paid millions of dollars in compensation to members of militant groups, mostly the MEF (see chapter 3.4.1.2). The state was no longer in control of the situation,

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<sup>281</sup> Western Provincial Assembly, Transaction Detail, Security Operation.

<sup>282</sup> The money of the “sinking fund” was originally designated to a task force put together to form a state government for the Western Province. The task force was composed of some of the most prominent leaders in the West like Francis Billy Hilly, Warren Paia, George Lilo, to name only a few. The vision was to “*lift the west into new heights of economic self-sufficiency. To cultivate, sustain and maximize stakeholders return from the full utilization of natural and created assets through effective and efficient management in safe and conducive economic/financial environment*” (Report on State Government 2000-2007). On 7 July 2000 Premier Reuben Lilo launched the constitution of the “State of Western Solomons”, which was interpreted by Ian Scales as “the coup that nobody noticed” (see above, note 110). This is an exaggeration; according to the former Premier, the Western “State” did not use up more funds than the Western Province, nor was there more political autonomy.

not only in Guadalcanal and Malaita, but also in the Western Province. This lack of state control applied definitely for the Royal Solomon Island Police Force which was in charge of law enforcement. Police officers who tried to perform their job properly risked their lives. The following testimony was given during the public hearing in the Western Province by an officer who had helped evacuate a Malaitan colleague from Gizo after he was severely beaten by the BRA/Black Sharks:

They questioned me if I was the one who helped evacuate the Malaitan and I told them that it was me. I also told them that I had no interest in supporting any of the two parties that were at conflict with each other. They then accused me of being an informer for the MEF which I denied and told them that I was not involved in any of the two groups in any way and that I was a neutral person. When I said this they hit my mouth with a pistol and left a permanent damage to one of my teeth. I began to cry in the vehicle and told them that they won't get anything out of killing me. They just drove on and told me that they were taking me to Paradise Lodge to kill me. Luckily for me the road was not smooth, it was a bumpy ride there so the driver drove slowly, I then took advantage of it and opened the door and jumped out of the car. I managed to run away from them because they were drunk so couldn't come after me.

**Testimony of Mr. Lemek Tovavaki, Public Hearing, Gizo 15/07/2011**

The payments to the militants did not change anything. Only two weeks after the meeting in PT109, the following report was submitted to the Provincial Police Commander:

Re: Continuous Militant Activities in Munda Area

On 29<sup>th</sup> August 2000 the village organizer for Dunde, Derrick Gasimata informed this office that recent activities by armed youths have caused fears to the people of the area.

I. Last week about 6 young men from Kindu and 3 Bougainvilleans led by a Bougainvillean named Peter, while under the influence of liquor, fired shot into the air along the road from Kindu, Lambete to Ilangana. Their disorderly activities caused fears to the residents of the area.

II. They demanded drums of fuel from people with claims that the Province will pay for them later.

III. At the weekend, 3 Bougainvilleans and 2 locals led by Peter boarded MV *Liofai* and threatened crew members thus resulted in the ship having to leave without unloading cargoes at Munda.

Sir, the allegation that these youths claimed to be Western Solomons Security personnels will undesirably tarnish the image of the Government and people of the West.<sup>283</sup>

In an assessment of the security situation in the Western Province, the government had to acknowledge that “honorarium” payment did not improve the situation. A request was therefore made to BRA Supreme Commander Ishmael Toroama “to recall their boys home”.

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<sup>283</sup> Memorandum to Provincial Police Commander by the Secretary of the State of Western Solomons, 30/08/2000.

Despite the fact that they have verbally agreed to go home and that repatriation costs have been paid, the South Bougainvilleans continue to remain in Gizo, and slowly/gradually recommenced their militant activities in harassing Malaitans etc. etc. The local Militias with the aid of South Bougainvilleans also resumed their activities.

The Militants among themselves also had arguments resulted in the shooting and wounding of one South Bougainvillean by a Solomon Islander. The Province did pay compensation for this.

As these South Bougainvilleans claimed to be members of the BRA, requests were made to the Central Command of the BRA to recall their boys home. Nothing happened as far as I know until the shooting-incident in Gizo Hotel in which four people died.<sup>284</sup>

The situation remained unchanged until Sunday 12 November 2000. The night before, Saturday 11 November 2000, another platoon of BRA combatants arrived in Gizo, this time comprised of Central Bougainvilleans. Their leader, Gregory Luavex, had instructions from BRA Supreme Commander Ishmael Toroama to disarm the “Black Sharks” in Gizo and bring them back to Bougainville. According to Luavex’ declaration in an interview with a RAMSI police officer, they responded to a formal request from Western Province.<sup>285</sup> Shortly after midnight four armed and masked men led by Gregory Luavex entered Room D at the Gizo Hotel. In the room were about eight persons including four women. One of the occupants tried to grab the rifle barrel of one of the masked men and others reached for their guns.<sup>286</sup> In the following shoot-out three men – Bari Otuna and Ivan Dimas Reve from Bougainville and Ian Chapangi from Guadalcanal<sup>287</sup> – were shot dead. Another man, Brianly Java, from the Western Province, was killed outside the room when he came to see what was happening.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> “A Guide to Joint Security Operations in the State of Western Solomons”, internal report.

<sup>285</sup> “We’ve had a formal request from the Solomon Islands Government. And at that time I was in my village in South Bougainville planting cocoa in my plantation. And I was recalled to Arawa BRA Headquarters and I was told that the boys that they will go . . . and order everybody back in Gizo town. We have a written letter from the Western Province” (Gregory Luavex, Interview with Senior Sergeant John McGrail at RAMSI Guadalcanal Beach Resort on Friday 12<sup>th</sup> December 2003).

<sup>286</sup> Statement of Ms Bettylina Kafole in Munda RAMSI Police Station, 4 December 2003.

<sup>287</sup> Chapangi allegedly was in Gizo to buy weapons from the BRA for Harold Keke’s group. On 14 December 2000, Keke sent a letter to Premier Reuben Lilo:

Dear Hon Lilo

This Letter serves to inform you of who or where you’re heading to.

Since you came into Political scene you terribly failed to invite the almighty God of Heaven to provide you with his wisdom that has aims.

A Malaitan young man (Nare’s son) was the first victim. Ian Chapangi and a Western man in the same raid were also victims of your decisions and leadership ability. I must remind you my honourable and lotu leader you need heaven in your political arena or your province will become a killing field.

You need God for your Hands are full of Blood.

Cornelius Galasa, who was in Room 208 when the shooting occurred, was urged by Luavex to surrender. He was later brought to the Police station and locked up in the cell together with three other members of the Black Sharks. Galasa spent about one month in prison and another two months under house arrest in the Green Motel before he was taken by boat to Aropa Airfield on Bougainville and from there immediately flown to Townsville in Australia.

In Townsville, on 24 February 2001, the BRA factions from South and Central Bougainville that were involved in the Gizo incident elaborated a Joint Declaration that was signed by Greg Lua [Luavex], Thomas Tari, Damien Koike, Koni Solomon [Cornelius Galasa], and Ishmael Toroama. Among other points related to the settling of the conflict between South and Central Bougainvilleans, the declaration established that:

- All ex-combatants not married in the Solomon Islands must return to Bougainville with their weapons. Ex-combatants married in the Solomon Islands must return their weapons to Bougainville.
- Where ex-combatants wish to move between Bougainville and Solomon Islands they shall obtain approval from the Reconciliation Officer prior to travelling and then shall observe notification requirements of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force.<sup>289</sup>

The shooting at the Gizo Hotel caused an immediate diplomatic protest from the Solomon Islands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade Relations.<sup>290</sup> The BRA put the North Bougainville Peace and Liaison Committee (NBPLC) in charge of the investigation of the killings. In its "Report on the Gizo Killing", the NBPLC found that:

The Security Council of Solomon Islands was very concerned for its citizens and as a result it wrote to the Central Command to recall its South Bougainville BRA members. The Gizo killing is the result of that request and those involved have returned home.

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Please take my humble advice for Heaven Sake.

Your Faithfully

Harold Keke

<sup>288</sup> Luavex v Regina [2007] SBCA 13; CA-CRAC 31 of 2006 (18 October 2007).

<sup>289</sup> Extract from *Bougainville Revolutionary Army: Joint Declaration of Personal Commitment to Peace and Reconciliation*, signed in Townsville on 24/02/2011

<sup>290</sup> "[The] incidents that have been happening in the Western and Choiseul Provinces over the last few months, involving Papua New Guinea nationals, are disturbing and counterproductive to the peace and nation building initiatives the Solomon Islands Government is trying to achieve.

"The Ministry in this regard strongly calls upon the Government of Papua New Guinea and other relevant authorities to exercise control over its citizens, especially the control over illegal intrusion of its nationals into Solomon Islands, causing unnecessary fear and insecurity to the people."

**Extract from Diplomatic Protest Note N° 24/00, 13 November 2000**



### (3) Confirmation

The team that went there on January 22<sup>nd</sup> interviewed one Greg Lua of the Central Command. Greg Lua's party went to Gizo on request from the Solomon Islands Security Council and the government of Western Solomons. Greg Lua's party was supposed to have disarmed the Black Sharks and have them repatriated home.

However, the Sharks when located at the Gizo Hotel, resisted, and tried to shoot their own Central colleagues. Lua's group retaliated and shot 2 Western Solomon islanders and 2 Shark members. The rest escaped, including Cornelius Solomon who has been charged under Solomon Islands laws and is awaiting court proceedings.

#### **Extract from "Report on the Gizo killing as per findings of the investigation by the North Bougainville Peace Liaison Committee".**

After the departure of Cornelius Galasa and his "boys" the situation in the Western Province calmed down, though not entirely back to normal. In April 2001, for example, the Dunde Council of Elders expressed concern to the Premier that the Bougainvilleans that had been deported to their island had returned to Munda and continued with harassment of local people:

Before the Easter weekend break, his [refers to BRA militant Peter Rapin] gang attacked a household at Kindu and demanded beer from their store. Also broke and entered two residential buildings at Noro and stole several properties. He was in possession of firearm at that time though he has been disarmed just before the Easter break.

His presence in Munda has caused concern and threat to the general public but the Police here failed to deal with his case as expected. Now, what can the Provincial Government do to protect his people and properties?

#### **Extract from a letter of the Dunde Council of Elders to the Premier of Western Province, 19/04/2001**

On 22 February 2002, Fred Fawcett-Kay and Rex Dalia were shot dead while travelling on a boat near Noro by BRA/Black Sharks because they were suspected of collaborating with the MEF.<sup>291</sup> These were the last tension-related deaths in the West, but harassment of civilians continued until RAMSI arrived:

The Black Sharks remained for quite some time before going back to Bougainville. The BRA went back a month after the arrival of RAMSI.

#### **Testimony of a police officer**

Gregory Luavex and Cornelius Galasa were apprehended in 2003 and 2005 respectively and convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment for murder: Luavex for the killings in the Gizo Hotel and Galasa for masterminding the murder of Bobby Nare.

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<sup>291</sup> Regina v. Noneke [2006] SBHC 75; HCSI-CRC 67 of 2004 (27 March 2006).

## **6. William Amalo and the Lauru Civilian Security Force**

While South Bougainvilleans and local Black Sharks terrorized much of the Western Province, people in Choiseul were haunted by another quasi-militant group that called itself Lauru Civilian Security Force (LCSF).

The decision to establish a defence force for Choiseul was taken by local leaders. The first objective was to oversee the safety of people from Choiseul living in Honiara and, after the Rove armory raid, to protect the Province against any spill-over effects from the Guadalcanal crisis. TRC researchers interviewed one former member of the LCSF:

As we all knew the situation in Honiara was uncertain at that time so I came home [to Choiseul]. Those leaders came down too and we organized various meetings and some plans were made. We were called to a house in Vavudu, that is, in Sasamunga. The group comprised those of us who came from Honiara, some boys from home and some of the leaders. There were also some police men in the group and there were about 20 of us. We were briefed and given a mandate and assurance that things were discussed at the provincial level and they were given the okay to proceed.

*Who were those leaders?*

Those leaders were late Allan Gurusu, late Randall Biliki and the other one was late Jerry Pitisopa. These were the three who came and organized and convened the meeting. We received the guns after our meetings with those three gentlemen who are now dead.

*Where did you get the guns from?*

We got them from [a police officer]. In the group there were some former Field Force officers and . . . I presume that they had access to weapons. He gave the group seven guns to use. He was the one who gave us briefing on how to use the guns.

*Was it before the armory raid or after the raid?*

It was after the raid at Rove.

### **Interview with K. T., a former member of the Lauru Civilian Security Force**

William Amalo was appointed as the leader of the group. Amalo was part Choiseul and part Lord Howe of the outer islands of Malaita; his father was a police officer who spent most of his life in Honiara where William was brought up. Later he was adopted by his grandfather who was a businessman in Gizo. He married a woman from Choiseul and settled in Sasamunga. People who knew Amalo remember him as a very hostile and violent person.

Amalo was part of the group that delivered the letter to Cornelius Galasa asking the Bougainville Revolutionary Army to protect the Western Province against possible incursion by the MEF. His first militant act was the armory raid at Taro the day after he arrived with Cornelius Galasa's

group in Gizo where he got mixed up with the BRA/Black Sharks group and participated in much of their harassment.

In Choiseul, most of the statements collected by the TRC recount violations of human rights committed by the Luru Civilian Security Force under the command of William Amalo. The statements demonstrate that Amalo's attitude at that time was totally out of control and burdened with a blind, reckless use of violence:

In the year 2000, when the tension reached its height, William Amalo came to our village along with one of his boys. He approached me and my in-law while we were sitting under a tree. He came and started assaulting us. He took his gun and pointed it at our neck, he then took his knife and attempted to cut our eyes out, but somehow his conscience returned and he pulled back and left. After the incident we were so scared thinking that he might return, so we spent most of the time hiding in the bush. At one stage when I was walking with my uncle and we came past his house he chased us and gave two warning shots; we run quickly back to our village. These were the first two experiences we had with Amalo. The third one was when we drove past his area along the coast in an OBM. He fired two shots at us and when we arrived at the river mouth he came with a knife and threatened to kill us again. We explained ourselves and apologized to him and he left.

**Statement N° 4017**

One Sunday William Amalo sent a letter. The contents of the letter showed that he was angry with me and one of the local leaders Mr. Nanavolo. I took the letter and went over and approached Amalo. Arriving there I noticed that he was very angry, his eyes were red with anger. I talked and tried to calm him down but he told me to go away and that he will come and kill us in our village. I talked politely and then he invited me into his house. He told me to sit down and he told me straight forward that my name and Nanavolo's were on his death list; he will come and kill us anytime he wishes in our village.

*Why did Amalo want to kill you and Nanavolo?*

Nanavolo and I arranged our boys to mill some timbers and for that he was so angry. He claimed the trees we milled belonged to him.

**Statement N° 4032**

[Amalo] married a girl from our village. He came and settled with us and all through the period of the tension he ordered us to do whatever he wanted. I was doing my Grade Five in primary at that time and I was unable to continue with my education because he always used me as a messenger and forced me to follow him. One day he assaulted some of the boys from a nearby village; my father then approached him and tried to calm him down because he was his brother-in-law, but Amalo pointed a gun at my father and threatened to kill him. He took his gun and put it next to my father's ears and fired it in the air. Another day he took my father's 30-horse power engine and sold it. My father then wrote a letter to Amalo asking him to return our engine. When Amalo received the letter he was so angry he threatened to kill my father again. My father was so scared that he fled and hid in the bush for three weeks. He remained hiding until news reached us that Amalo was killed by the Police.

**Statement N° 4037**

During that time Amalo came to our store and demanded that I must give them whatever they want; he entered the door and butted me with his rifle.

**Statement N° 4045**

A boy who was 12 years old when his brother stole Amalo's gun was taken hostage and left on a small raft in the open sea:

I was on my way home from school when I met with the rebel group from Choiseul. They were all armed with guns. I was only 12 years old at that time and was in Grade Two. These men pointed their guns at me along the way. I was so shocked and trembling with fear at that time since I did not know of the purpose of their intention. I was abducted and taken to their place at Taravara Village and there I was tied onto a chair with fishing ropes. They told me that I will be released after my brother agreed to hand over the gun. I spent the night and they gave me no food or water. I cried the whole night thinking of my mother and father, the fate of being killed in the end was already tormenting my mind. After some time they decided to take me along with them to Gizo, but they dropped me off a raft out in the middle of the ocean between the islands of Vella and Lauru.

They left me there and they set off towards the island of Vella, my hands were still tied. I managed to get on to the raft somehow, as I was standing on the raft and looking down I saw large sharks circling around. I cried because I was so scared and I thought that day would be my last. I was totally hopeless and I thought so much of my parents and could help myself from stop crying. I stood on the raft until I saw a boat approaching, they had returned eventually and I was again picked up. They hauled me roughly onboard again and we came over to Gizo. Arriving there other members of their group who were closely related to me came and rescued me. They untied the rope from my hand and helped to transport me back to my village.

**Testimony of Winston Pitavoka, Closed Hearing, Gizo 16/07/2010**

The most notorious incident of Amalo and his group was the killing of Brian Majapeso in Barabarakakasa village, Choiseul, on 5 October 2001:

On 5<sup>th</sup> October 2001 I was in my village Barabarakakasa. I saw a boat coming. At that time we were doing community work and after that we stopped and had a rest. The boat came ashore and fired two shots; one warning shot was fired at the village. Everyone in the village ran out from their houses. One of my brothers went towards the five men in the boat and asked why they had fired those shots. The men attacked my brother. My brother tried to escape and they shot at him but there was only one bullet left and they missed him. They went back to the canoe and loaded the guns and when they came to the village again they started shooting at our engines and water tanks. They damaged our water supply and other properties like houses. One of the elders in the village, my first cousin by the name of Brian, went to the militants and told them not to harm us. Women, men and children had run away, all ran away to the women's sacred place. One of the militants shot my cousin brother, he then fell down to the ground and died instantly. Then the militants took most of our valuables, burnt most of the houses, including the church buildings. They kept on shooting and all the people in the village fled into the bush to hide. While they were running away in fear of being shot, a mother with a three-month-old baby fell to the ground and the baby died. After the shooting, the militants left our village. Some of the people came back from their hiding places after two days for the burial.

No assistance whatsoever was received from our Provincial Member, the Government, or our Parliament for North Choiseul since 2001 up until today. It seems that no one cares about us.

**Testimony of Felix Kojamana, Public Hearing, Gizo 14/07/2011**

The reasons behind the assault on Barabarakakasa were never entirely clarified but there are some indications that it was because of conflicts between people of the village and some persons from the neighbouring island of Moli<sup>292</sup>

All I know is that before he went to Barabarakakasa somebody from Moli came and called him to go. During that time those boys at Moli and Barabarakakasa were not in good terms.

*Who was that person?*

He was an ex-prisoner; he was half Malaita and Choiseul. I did not know his name, but he was Amalo's third cousin.

**Testimony of Pastor Solomon Major**

In the national elections in November 2001, Amalo supported the candidate Jerry Pitisopa, who was one of the three leaders that had initiated the Lauru Civilian Security Force, and intimidated followers of his rival, Rev. Leslie Boseto. Again, not even children were spared from his atrocities:

One Friday morning I was on my way to school and was half way there when I thought of picking some mangoes. I was with my other two brothers and while we were picking mangoes, William Amalo came and asked us to put up our hands. He asked us what time Rev. Leslie Boseto comes around for his campaign. I replied that he was coming around on Sunday to our area. He asked us again if we heard anything about who would be the favorite candidate and I told him that it could be the Rev. Leslie Boseto. He was very cross and he told the other brother to strip off and pull back the skin of his penis. One of the boys peeled his mango, took the mango skin and rubbed it to other boy's penis. The two boys were afraid so we decided to go back to the house. So we were absent from class that morning.

**Statement N° 4670**

In an act of rage after Leslie Boseto's electoral victory, Amalo's group assaulted the Government station at Malangono:

The morning after the national election a group of seven men came from Sasamunga; they were Kevin, Daniekek, David, Kenny, John Wayne, William Amalo and Songio. They were armed with six rifles: one M16, one SR88, one shotgun, one .303, one .22 caliber, and a homemade gun. They destroyed our office and removed all the equipment such as petrol drums; and they took our

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<sup>292</sup> In 2005, the High Court of Solomon Islands found Joseph Miavana, Paisi Miavana, Roboe Ligibatu and David Hicks Honitele guilty of the murder of Brian Majapeso (Regina v. Miavana [2005] SBHC 25; HCSI-CRC 123 of 2004 [7 December 2005]). William Amalo was killed in December 2001 in a police operation (see below). According to the findings of the High Court, the platoon arrived at Barabarakakasa "to find and kill a person by the name of Lukeson."

canoe and engine over to their camp. It happened on Sunday morning [9 December 2001] around 8 a.m. Towards evening I approached one of the elder chiefs there and asked him to go over and ask the boys to return the items they had removed. The chief went over and talked to them, but their boss told him to go and see the newly elected Member of Parliament Mr. Leslie Boseto if we really wanted them to return all the stolen items.

#### **Statement N° 4022**

On 10 December 2001, the day after the raid on the Malangono station, a Police unit arrived from Gizo in Sasamongo with an order to arrest Amalo. He refused to surrender and fired several shots to the officers. In the shootout that followed, he was hit fatally by a bullet. Amalo's death marked also the end of the Luru Civilian Security Force.

### **7. Conclusions**

The Western Province and Choiseul were affected by the tension in a distinctive way, intensified by long-held antagonism between the West and Malaita. At the beginning of the Guadalcanal crisis there were signs of a spill-over effect when hostilities against Malaitan settlers and workers emerged in Munda and Noro. In response, most of the islands formed local vigilante groups; some of them like the Black Sharks converted into quasi-militant groups. The situation was brought under control, albeit an unsteady control, when the Governments of Western Province and Malaita agreed to return first the unemployed Malaitans, and later Malaitan settlers who had purchased land in Western Province.

After the Rove armory raid, however, past mistrust against Malaitans in the West intensified by way of fear of a MEF incursion, fuelled further by irresponsible comments made by some Malaitans residing in the West. In this situation, people in the West sought to take advantage of their close relationship to Bougainville. Even though *who* invited the Bougainville Revolutionary Army for protection cannot be established beyond doubt, there can be no doubt that *they were invited*.

The presence of the BRA and Black Sharks in the Western Province, and William Amalo's Luru Civilian Security Force in Choiseul, created a *sui generis* situation where not only Malaitans but also the local population was terrorized by the very people paid to protect them. The crisis in the West turned out to be more of a homemade problem than a spill-over effect from Guadalcanal to the extent that the BRA and local quasi-militants' course was no longer

driven by ethnic cleavages but became more and more dominated by intra-regional prejudice, personal adversities and greed.

## 3.3

### THE MILITANTS

*It is not only the victims whose world one has to enter  
if one wishes to understand modern war,  
but the world of the gunmen, torturers, and apologists of terror.  
The horror of the world lies not just with the corpses, not just  
with the consequences, but with the intentions, with the minds of killers.*<sup>293</sup>

The conflict in Solomon Islands has usually been explained in structural terms. “Root causes” such as illegal squatting and use of customary lands, the undermining of traditional authority, impacts of the global economy, corruption, the breakdown of law enforcement or the colonial legacy, among others, have been identified as the essential underlying causes of the tension. Little attention has been given so far to the driving force of its *key players*: the militant groups and their members.<sup>294</sup>

Social conflicts entail human relationships. Understanding the conflict *only* in terms of structural features would be too narrow an assessment of the tension. The examination of the motives of human decision-making is also essential to exploring the dynamics of social violence. What has to be explained, in other words, is human *intention* and *agency*. In our case, therefore refer primarily to the militant groups from Guadalcanal and Malaita as the key players of the conflict. The present chapter tries to address this issue.

#### 3.3.1 GUADALCANAL REVOLUTIONARY ARMY (GRA) / ISATABU FREEDOM MOVEMENT (IFM)

When Guadalcanal men started evicting Malaitan settlers from their island in mid-1998, they became known as the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (GRA). This name was given to them by outsiders who noticed a resemblance in their activities with the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) whose ten-year war against the PNG Government at the time had just finished.

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<sup>293</sup> Michael Ignatieff: *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*. London: Vintage, 1999, pp. 24-25.

<sup>294</sup> An exception is the doctoral thesis of Matthew Grant Allen: *Greed and grievance in the conflict in Solomon Islands, 1998-2003*, submitted to The Australian National University in August 2007.



The name Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army came from Bougainville Revolutionary Army. The people then used the name, you see. Guadalcanal Liberation Front, that's the name we were supposing to use. The name was decided when we had a meeting. Guadalcanal Liberation Front (GLF) was the name we had decided in a meeting, Andrew Te'e, Harold Keke, Alebua and there were many of us, but I just got to the big ones.

**Joseph Sangu, Closed Hearing before the TRC, 17/11/2010**

The militants were also referred to as the Isatabu Freedom Fighters (IFF). They finally changed the official name of their group to Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM) although informally they still call themselves *malahai* ("warriors"). However, in the memory of the people of Solomon Islands, "GRA" is the term that prevails when they refer to Guadalcanal militants. In this chapter, we will refer to it as synonymous with IFM, but distinguished from the Guadalcanal Liberation Front (GLF) that was formed by Harold Keke on the Weather Coast after the Townsville Peace Agreement:

The first name was GRA, Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army. This name was not the inception by the boys but by others, imitating the BRA, the Bougainville Revolutionary Army. Later our commanders decided to rename the group Isatabu Freedom Movement. The name described our Island and what we want. That is Isatabu, the name of the island and the aim to free our island so that we can have more freedom ourselves. So yes, there is nothing different between these two names, there is only a change of name.

**Testimony of "Alfred", former GRA militant**

**1. Aims and targets**

According to their leaders, the aim of Guadalcanal militancy was to fight for the implementation of the *Bona Fide Demands of the Indigenous People from Guadalcanal* (see chapter 3.2.1). Their main aim was a "state government", the decentralization of state powers in a federal system (though its actual outline has never been clearly defined in the Bona Fide Demands). This aim has been highlighted many times by militants in interviews and the public hearing organized by the TRC for ex-combatants in May 2011. While willing to apologize to their victims, they were unambiguous in blaming the inactivity of the Government as the main cause of the tension. To them, the target of their uprising was the Solomon Island Government, *not* Malaitan settlers:

The aim of this movement was to fight for the federal system of government, to consider our issues and to change the system, and that's the real thing; to force the Government to go into the federal governing system.

*How do you do that?*

Through violence, as non-violence was not working and we had forwarded many petitions and the Government does not listen, so we have to take the law into our own hands and find means. There we raided the Yandina armory; we resorted to violence because we thought it would work and that's the thing. Non-violence did not work and we turned to violence to force the government to listen.

*So the target was the Government?*

The Government, not the Malaitans.

*How did the chasing of Malaitans come in then?*

That's a good question. Some people had personal problems with the Malaitans. For example, the land, and at times they fought. One argument was the Malaitans do not respect them and there were many Malaitans settling around the [Guadalcanal] Plain and they killed some of the indigenous people. So really these are some of the frustration and arguments. And this is a clear picture, and actually some people had personal problems, particularly with land. Malaitans are hard working people, so when they settled here they worked. The main intention was not to fight the Malaitans, and I am sorry to say the Malaitans got caught in the fight.

**Joseph Sangu, Closed Hearing before the TRC, 17/11/2010**

In this statement, Sangu blames the inability of local communities to understand the true motives of their leaders for the emergence of hostilities against Malaitan settlers. Ethnic hatred is portrayed as a negative though accidental side effect of what were genuinely *political* demands. Triggered by local quarrels between indigenous Guadalcanal people and Malaitan settlers, things just “got out of hand”. This position is shared by other Guadalcanal leaders and militants:

One of the big issues in the world is land, tribal land and all that. A lot of people think that the people of Guadalcanal want their land back. It's not the land that they want back; it is the title of the land that was problem. They would like the Government to lease the land to them and the Government could lease to others. They do not want their land back; they want some benefits out of their land, the perpetual title. If not, a share of the rental of that land. Only the Commissioner of Lands on behalf of the Government holds the perpetual title to all alienated registered land. That's what the people of Guadalcanal wanted, the perpetual title of the land; the Government leases it to the people and they sublease to the company or private sector. The Government pays rent for the land.

*I do not understand. Chasing out Malaitans was to get the land back; it was not so much about titles. Why are you thinking it's about the title?*

That I could not answer for you . . . I have nothing to say, all I say is it was a civil unrest, the civil unrest just got out of hand. . . . The land we are talking about here is registered land, the perpetual titles which the Government holds, not so much small transactions that took place between families and individuals, not those. It so happened, the whole thing went out of hand, so they started chasing everybody out. What they wanted was registered titles.

**Ezekiel Alebua, Closed Hearing before the TRC, 13/01/2011**

Our target was the Government; the Bona Fide Demands were submitted to the Government and not to the Malaitans. We resorted to violence because the response was slow.

*But you did not attack the Government, you attacked Malaitans. . . ,*

I won't answer you that one. We took the demand to the Government first and the chasing was done later on. The incident [referring to the killing of a Guadalcanal woman] happened in 1998, nothing was done so we took it in our own hands to chase these people out.

**Former IFM militant, Closed Hearing before the TRC, 10/05/2011**

The claim that ethnic violence was an unexpected and unintentional side-effect of political demands does *not* accord with the research of the TRC. Dozens of formal interviews and informal conversations with former IFM leaders and “foot soldiers”, as well as hundreds of statements given by their victims, proved that Malaitan settlers were targeted from the very beginnings of the tension:

There were cases of 25 people who were murdered in cold blood and we felt as though we did not have any freedom of movement within our own island. Most of our resources were utilized by the Malaitans. With this in mind the boys formed up a militia group. We came together and discussed and we finally came to a conclusion to move these people out from our land.

**Interview with former IFM commander Francis Kennedy**

*What were the causes of your fighting?*

As I told you, we were fighting against the Malaitans. We were told that we have to fight in order for us to have freedom, protect our rights and so forth.

**Interview with JK, ex-militant**

*Did you actually know that time what you were fighting for?*

Yes, we knew that we have to chase away the Malaitans.

**Interview with WT, ex-militant**

The fact that settlers from other provinces, especially Malaitans, were the target of Guadalcanal militancy is also acknowledged by former IFM commander George Gray in his paper “*Habuna Momoruqu* (The Blood of My Island)”, a personal account of his involvement with the militant group. Here, the eviction of immigrants occupies first place among four major demands:

For people outside of the core group that started the Guadalcanal militancy, the reason for the uprising was not very clear. People were uncertain about the agendas of the group. For those who were involved however, the objective of starting a militant uprising was clearly defined:

- (i) To chase settlers out of Guadalcanal, especially Malaitans;
- (ii) To payback for the Guadalcanal people murdered since the establishment of Honiara;
- (iii) To ensure that Guadalcanal Province and people benefit equitably from the income that they contribute to the state;

(iv) To ensure that settlers respect the local people and their cultures.<sup>295</sup>

Even though the tension was not merely the result of a longstanding “hatred” between the peoples of two islands, as Kabutaulaka rightly states,<sup>296</sup> Guadalcanal leaders from the very beginnings of the conflict relied on the drive of ethnic sentiments. Nowhere was this more evident than in the violent separation of those of Malaitan descent in Marau Sound (see chapter 3.2.4).

Ethnicity, as sociologist Daniel Bell stated, “can combine an interest with an affective tie.”<sup>297</sup> Ethnic sentiments engender more loyalty from their members than other groups,<sup>298</sup> and this

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<sup>295</sup> George Gray: *Habuna Momoruqu* (The Blood of My Island). Violence and the Guadalcanal Uprising in Solomon Islands, p. 4; Available at [http://www.vanuatu.usp.ac.fj/sol\\_adobe\\_documents/usp%20only/pacific%20law/tanis.htm](http://www.vanuatu.usp.ac.fj/sol_adobe_documents/usp%20only/pacific%20law/tanis.htm),

date of access 25/04/2011.

In declarations to Australian media during the height of the tension, George Gray expressed strong anti-Malaitan sentiments. The following quotations are taken from Clive Moore’s *Happy Isles in Crisis*, p. 117; their authenticity was confirmed by Gray during a Closed Hearing before the TRC in May 2011:

They are all in town. They are living behind a fence. It is very easy to wipe them out. We are fighting a holy war. The trees are fighting, the stones are fighting, and the women and children are fighting (*Pacific Islands Monthly*, August 1999).

We are willing to attack Honiara if this fails. From here we can mount an attack on Honiara and kill all the Malaitans, wipe them out, in just three hours. It will take us just three hours to do that (*Sidney Morning Herald*, 25 June 1999, p. 7).

In retrospect, Gray sees Malaitan settlers as accidentally involved in the tension due to a misguided policy of the Government:

What happened was that the Malaitans were caught in the situation. The majority of them lived in Honiara. As I have stated there had been problems with them, in terms of our relationships, in terms of our interactions, that’s why they were caught. It just so happened that we had an issue of relationship between us and them. One has to understand that from the very beginning, it was the Government who brought the Malaitans to Guadalcanal. From 1910s, 1930s and 1900s, they took lands from Guadalcanal and they brought these Malaitans to Guadalcanal. When these Malaitans came and lived on Guadalcanal, problems came up.

**George Gray, Closed Hearing before the TRC, 10/05/2011**

<sup>296</sup> Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka: *Beyond Ethnicity: The Political Economy of the Guadalcanal Crisis in Solomon Islands*. Canberra: The Australian National University. State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Working Paper 01/1, 2001.

<sup>297</sup> Daniel Bell: “Ethnicity and Social Change.” In Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, eds.: *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975, p. 168.

<sup>298</sup> Donald L. Horowitz: “Structure and Strategy in Ethnic Conflict”. Paper prepared for the Annual World Bank Conference on Development Economics, Washington, D.C., April 20–21, 1998.

makes ethnicity a powerful political weapon. Consciously or not, but in any case irresponsibly, Guadalcanal leaders made the most of this, channelling ethnic antagonism – which undoubtedly was present in many rural communities on Guadalcanal – towards violence.

## **2. Origins**

On 27 April 2000, RSIPF Rapid Response Unit Officer John Taloi presented a statement to ACP Crime in Rove Police Headquarters, with copies to Commissioner of Police, ACP Operations, Prime Minister's office, Minister of Police and National Security, DPP, the media and BAR Association. In this statement, Officer Taloi – whose father is from Malaita and mother from Guadalcanal – accused Premier Alebua and police officer John Gatu of inciting the tension during a meeting in Visale on 14 March 1998. The statement reads:

Hon. Alebua stated in strong terms that he wanted all Malaitan people be they full-blooded or half Malaitan even Malaitans who were married to Guadalcanal men or women to leave the island of Guadalcanal. He stated that for too long Malaitans had over the years killed and murdered Guadalcanal people. He said “We, the Guadalcanal people must find a way to expel all Malaitans from Guadalcanal and to rid us of all Malaitans once and for all”. Mr. Alebua called on all attending to come up with a solution or method how to get rid of Malaitans. There were about two hundred attendants, mainly leaders including Harold Keke and Joseph Sangu. Hon. Alebua went on to advise that we might have to use knives, clubs and spears or just ordered Malaitans to leave the Island. I had no doubt that Mr. Alebua was the master architect of the GRA and head of the IFM. . . .

Mr. Alebua instructed that we had to (1) turn Militant like the BRAs of Bougainville (2) we would be named or called Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (GRA). Alebua gave the name to the newly formed group at their meeting.

The second person to address the meeting was the head of Police Operations Mr. John Gatu. . . . Mr. Gatu gave instructions that he would assist the Militants if they needed assistance within the Police rank and file. Mr. John Gatu gave instructions that the Guadalcanal Militants were to take up arms and to use force to threaten Malaitans and to get rid of them from Guadalcanal.

In my presence Hon. Alebua and Mr. Gatu discussed the plan to raid Yandina Police Station and obtain high-powered arms. It was they who master minded the arms robbery at Yandina Police Station.

Officer Taloi's statement mentioned a second meeting held at Ruavatu on 23

August 1998:

The purpose of the meeting was for Hon. Alebua to further brief the people and in particular the Militants of East Guadalcanal on the progress of the plan to expel Malaitans from Guadalcanal. Some 600 (Six hundred) people attended including women and children. It was not a long meeting as it started at about 2 p.m. and ended at about 3 p.m. This meeting closed in prayer by a Catechist called Manegaua a Catholic.

Hon. Alebua was the only speaker at the meeting. I was present at this meeting as Talaura village [Mr. Taloi's home village] is not very far from Ruavatu. The people who attended were from Aola to Gorabau.

At that meeting, Alebua gave instructions that Guadalcanal Police officers should resign and join to assist the GRA movement.

Confronted with these allegations, Alebua gave evidence in a closed hearing before the TRC that the only meeting he participated in at Tambea Resort was a "political camp out" the night before 1 April 1998, to launch his candidacy for Premiership of Guadalcanal Province. Referring to the meeting in Ruavatu, Alebua said:

The only function we held at Ruavatu was the Second Appointment Day. There was nothing there too, it was a public gathering and I was there to celebrate that Second Appointment Day. There was never a meeting to discuss about the ethnic unrest.

**Ezekiel Alebua, closed hearing before TRC**

In his closed hearing, Joseph Sangu also denied the existence of any particular meeting in Visale to decide the eviction of Malaitan settlers and establish a militant group, as did Mr. Gatu in his statement to the TRC.<sup>299</sup> Explorations of the TRC researchers among villagers from Western Guadalcanal, among them former militants, could not confirm either that such a meeting took place. Nonetheless, Taloi reaffirmed the truth of his statement when asked by TRC staff.

What was proven beyond doubt is that there was a series of village meetings organized by Harold Keke and Joseph Sangu. Before the first violent acts occurred, Keke and Sangu visited communities and organized assemblies to gain social support and recruit future militants.<sup>300</sup> Malaitan settlers usually were not allowed to participate in these meetings:

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<sup>299</sup> The allegation that we had a meeting to chase the people of Malaita out of Guadalcanal is not true, there was no such meeting. I was never involved in any meeting and I never was involved in planning anything as far as the ethnic tension is concerned.

**Statement N° 0288**

<sup>300</sup> "There were people who went around Guadalcanal to gather information on the situation of the Malaitans. They were Harold Keke and Joe Sangu. They had gone around the whole island giving awareness talks to the people, advising them that something was going to happen."

**Francis Kennedy, former IFM commander, closed hearing before TRC 20/11/2010**

One statement giver involves also Ezekiel Alebua in these meetings:

Towards the end of 1998, I began to see youths from Guadalcanal behaving in an unusual manner. They often attended small meetings, and I witnessed Ezekiel Alebua and Harold Keke chairing those small gatherings. I was not aware of their agendas, but on one Sunday evening I went out to observe the meeting. That Sunday I took my young son Joe and we went over to where they normally held the meeting around 8

*How was the GRA formed, how did you plan your strategy etc.?*

We had meetings with everyone in the communities. During discussions we shared ideas and when necessary we sought advice from the leaders of the communities.

*During those meetings held in the villages, what about the Malaitans? Did you ask them to stay out of the meetings, or what happened?*

Yes, this was a sensitive issue and only Guadalcanal people talked to Guadalcanal people, but sometimes we were friendly and forewarned Malaitans and others that something was going to happen, that Guadalcanal was going to fight against Malaitans. We told them that we were going to fight and if you have to prepare yourselves to move out to your respective islands.

We started having meetings in 1998 and 1999 when GRA was formed. The women and the children in the community were not aware about the formation of the GRA, only the men and young boys who were brave to join the militancy and they supported the movement. Later on the women and children knew what was going to happen and they started to work together with us.

**Charles Vangere, former IFM commander, closed hearing before TRC, 17/11/2010**

Meetings of this kind were held both in western Guadalcanal where many Malaitan settlers lived, and in the northeast plains of Guadalcanal where many Malaitans worked in the plantations:

Turarana Village was the main center for the GRA militants to hold their meetings to discuss all the militancy activities. They brought their guns with them and they came and told the people they were to host their meetings at our village.

**Statement N° 5019**

The following statement was taken in Temotu from a former employee of SIPL. That even outsiders were aware of these meetings shows that violence against Malaitan settlers was not an abrupt, unforeseeable outburst of rage but was planned and coordinated openly:

One day we heard that the Guale people started organizing meetings. They were frustrated over the manner in which the Government failed to address their concerns in relation to Malaitan settlers on Guadalcanal showing no respect for the indigenous people and killing Guales. I did not attend their first meetings; however some of my workers and good friends from Guadalcanal updated me of the planned uprising.

*What did the GRA want you to assist them with?*

They would like us to support them in whatever plans they were to carry out, but in fact we did not know what their plans and their activities were and how they were to carry them out.

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p.m. in the night that was in October. My son and I went up close to where they were, hiding a few meters away in the nearby bushes simply to try and listen to what they were saying. During that particular meeting I could listen what they were saying, since they held the meetings out in the open, not inside a building. I heard Harold Keke saying, "We must all work together to chase all Malaitans out from Guadalcanal, they live on land and make a lot money out of it, they must all go!" It was from then I realized that what they had been saying was true.

**Statement N° 2148**

Anyway, due to fear of guns we just assisted in whatever we could at that time. This was in 1998 and since then and onwards people started to know about their intentions.

**Statement No. 0549**

One of the few Malaitans who were present in these meetings commented:

The truth is that I attended a meeting held at Visale. The meeting was one of those many meetings held to rally the support of Guadalcanal people to support the uprising. They told us that the Guadalcanal GRA was going to chase out the Malaitans from their land; that they must fight for their right.

*Were there many people at the meeting?*

All the elders and chiefs of Guadalcanal were present at Visale. Only David, James and I were outsiders amongst them. They told us that the land we lived on is theirs and soon they will repossess all the land that people from other provinces occupy.

*Who was the main speaker? Did you recognize who spearheaded the meeting?*

All the chiefs that made up the House of Chiefs under the Moro Movement were present. They discussed the matter and they spoke in their dialect, so I could not really decode the content of their conversation. When we returned after the meeting R. D. [full name withheld by TRC] told us that fighting will take place and every Malaitan will be forced to leave Guadalcanal.

**Statement N° 2412**

One of the first tension-related incidents that took place was at Maravovo where a local quarrel broke out between a few villagers and a Malaitan settler. It was after this incident that news of a Guadalcanal militant group in formation began to spread:

The crisis first burst open here at the Western front. It was during those times when our people were already aware that fighting the Malaitan was emerging. But the outbreak in the late 1998 was premature; we did not wish it to go that far. It was only an incident between us and a Malaitan who was married here. But as he decided to take in Malaitans from Honiara in truckloads for payback, he realized to his surprise that all of us were now on the Guale side. So this is how the news came up that we the Guadalcanal people were forming a militia.

**Interview with HR, Tambea**

Statements like the above make the formation of the GRA appear more the result of a process than of a single meeting as described by Taloi; the loose organization of the militant group (see below) would also speak in favour of this argument.

At its early stage, Guadalcanal militancy was greatly influenced by remnants of the Moro Movement, particularly in eastern Guadalcanal which was controlled by Andrew Te'e and his followers who tried to impose *kastom* elements upon the villagers, often against their will:



According to their rules we had to wear grass skirts and *kabilatos*. To us we could not do that because we were Church goers. I told my mum's sister that we could not wear those grass skirts because we did not get used to wearing those. But we just had to follow whatever they said.

**Statement N° 0596**

Another incident happened when the GRA commanders came and demanded that we all must give money to contribute in buying traditional shell money from Chief Moro. I gave \$5 and they went and bought the shell money. It was for spiritual protection, if ever we encounter threat or danger we could hold onto the shell money and utter the name of Moro and nothing will happen to us. I find this ridiculous since it goes against my Christian belief, since Moro is just a human like myself. I threw the single stringed shell money away. The militants discovered this and were angry. They came and demanded money from me.

**Statement N° 1130**

In western Guadalcanal, the militants were commanded by Joseph Sangu who, like his brother Harold Keke, represented the “Christian” wing of the Guadalcanal militants. Leaders there were reluctant to adopt the traditionalism of the Moro Movement and tried to reduce its influence once the fighting had started.<sup>301</sup> Sangu even blames followers of the Moro Movement for the killings of Malaitans, allegedly without his knowledge and against his orders:

The followers of Moro movement were the ones who killed the Malaitan people, as they thought it would make their power strong. These people were . . . just like a cult group. It was like Christians fighting the Moro movement: Harold was representing the Christians and Andrew was taking the place of the Moro movement, so all the people in Guadalcanal had to wear traditional clothing. A lot of people started to realize that they would come and kill you if you do not wear traditional clothes.

There were always conflicts between the Moro movement and the non-Moro movement. There was no [milk of] magnesium to harmonize the rival parties and the non-Moro movement did not want to follow what the Moro movement wanted. The Moro movement believed they could obtain more powers when they killed innocent Malaitans; they also hid that from me. Later we got control over them.

**Joseph Sangu, Closed Hearing before the TRC, 17/11/2010<sup>302</sup>**

Apart from the transitory influence of Chief Moro's doctrine (which actually was not much of a *political* doctrine; see chapter 3.2.2), the GRA/IFM was not influenced by any ideology; nor was

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<sup>301</sup> According to one of the early followers of the movement, Keke broke with the Moro Movement only after he was apprehended:

We were all in *kastom*, all Guadalcanal militants. If you went around Guadalcanal that time you would see all the people were in *kabilatos* and some even got back to worship the traditional gods. However after we were apprehended, Keke and many of us in the GRA did not respect Moro anymore. Keke was the first, and then all of us followed him. Keke even threw the magic stick blessed by Moro and swore at him.

**Testimony of HR**

<sup>302</sup> According to one statement giver, there was a clash between supporters of Sangu and followers of the Moro Movement in September 1999 in Sukiki village (Statement N° 0295).

it interested in capturing state power, which makes it unusual compared to most of the militant groups in the world. Its demand for a federal system (“state government”) made it a political movement in entirely pragmatic terms, though the way they presented their demands reveal disrespect for political participation and representation. No attempts were made, for example, to implement the Bona Fide Demands through the institutional path of elections. Government was, and still is, perceived as an autonomous political entity disconnected from the will of its citizens, and the only way to address it is by petitions. When this failed route, Guadalcanal leaders exploited local grievances for the mobilization of villagers all over Guadalcanal, and in doing so ethnicity turned out to be a useful “force multiplier”.<sup>303</sup>

Some analysts see the tension as a result of greed and criminality rather than grievances.<sup>304</sup> While this kind of generalization cannot fully explain the conflict, compensation demands were a significant hallmark of the conflict; GRA/IFM militants were no exception. In the early stages of the conflict Malaitans could buy themselves free from hostilities when they were married to a Guadalcanal spouse.

We had some people from other parts of the country married to Guadalcanal and the target were the ones from Malaita Province. The Guadalcanal youths were targeting this kind of people and they started to go from village to village to get rid of these groups of people. And then we Guadalcanal people had to pay our spouse’s heads. We had to pay for their heads so that they would not disturb them.

**Hilda Kari, Closed Hearing before the TRC, 07/05/2011**

The militants demanded money from us since I am from Malaita and married to a Guadalcanal man. The money was simply to pay for my head, thus we could remain on Guadalcanal without being harmed.

**Statement N° 0169**

Children of mixed Guadalcanal-Malaitan marriages, or “part-Malaitans”, were victims of compensation demands too:

The GRA militants demanded compensation from us because we were also part-Malaita. There were twenty of the militants who came that night and threatened us by pointing their homemade

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<sup>303</sup> David Hegarty: *Peace Interventions in the South Pacific: Lessons from Bougainville and Solomon Islands*. Canberra: The Australian National University. State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Working Paper 04/2003, p. 7.

<sup>304</sup> An example would be Jon Fraenkel’s book *The Manipulation of Custom*. For a discussion of the “greed and grievance” hypothesis, see Matthew Grant Allen: *Greed and grievance in the conflict in Solomon Islands, 1998-2003*. Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Australian National University, August 2007.

guns at my head and my sister's head. They demanded that we should give them \$500; if not, we were going to be shot. They asked for our dad but we told that he already fled to Malaita. We did not have any money, so I had to go and borrow \$200. I gave it to them then left.

**Statement N° 0320**

As the conflict evolved, the range of compensation claims increased drastically and it gradually moved from being imposed on Malaitans or “part-Malaitans” to fellow Guadalcanal people. This practice applied particularly for Harold Keke's GLF on the Weather Coast (see chapter 3.2.2) and the group of Stanley Kaoni, in the Gold Ridge area (chapter 3.2.1). Whether the militants were motivated more by greed or by grievance is debatable, but they certainly displayed an inclination for both.

To avoid hostilities, another option for Malaitans was to join the Guadalcanal militants. Not all were willing to leave what they considered to be their home on Guadalcanal, where their economic basis was and where they had established families with local women:

I talked to some Malaitans who joined the GRA group to find out why they wanted to fight against their own people. They told me that they were married to Guadalcanal women and did not want to return to Malaita since they had their own family now. If they did return they would have to start from scratch again. A lot of half-Malaitans, including some from other provinces joined the GRA.

**Statement N° 5019**

This applied also to immigrants from other provinces that joined or at least collaborated with the GRA/IFM to avoid hostilities:

I was 28 years old when I joined the GRA. I grew up in Makira Province and married at a very young age to a girl from this place where I now live with my family. I came here in 1996 so when the tension started I was already here in West Guadalcanal. In fact we were the ones who started the ethnic tension right here before everything reached its worse.

**Testimony of WR, Visale, Western Guadalcanal**

### **3. Militancy**

When asked why they got involved with the GRA/IFM, former “foot soldiers”, like their leaders, usually mention the non-attendance to the Bona Fide Demands. But while the heads of the movement were more concerned with “state government”, villagers in the communities were worried mainly about issues such as access to *land*, disrespect for local *culture* and exclusion from *job opportunities*:

*What were the root causes of the ethnic tension and what caused the militants to fight?*

The root causes of the ethnic tension were very clear: land issues, Bona Fide compensation demands, killing of our people by the Malaitans, Government reluctance to respond accordingly and their attitude towards us. The cause of our fighting is very clear; we were fighting for our people's rights in many issues affecting them. Issues of land, killings, Malaitan disrespect of our culture, Government negligence of our demands and so forth.

*Why did you decide to join the militant group?*

Everyone was told to stand up and fight and the reason for our fighting was valid and therefore I have to fight. The security of our community became an essence and required immediate attention to curb any probable attack from the enemy. Furthermore, I got angry with the enemy because they came and pleased themselves with our land and they did not respect us, so I wanted to chase them out. It was my personal interest to join the militants.

### **Testimony of “Hugo”, former militant**

*Land* is a central issue in the Pacific Islands and threats to land rights often evoke emotions and anger.<sup>305</sup> The influence of *culture* upon the formation of Guadalcanal militancy is more difficult to establish because the term is too vague.<sup>306</sup> For some analysts, though, culture was the real source of the tension:

From the viewpoint of Guadalcanal people – men, women and militants alike – land is not the main issue but is used to draw attention to their real grievance: the imposition on them of another island's traditions, customs, and laws by settlers who use the national constitution to justify imposing their own ways and not respecting the customs and property of the host province. Many Guadalcanal people claim that when they opposed such cultural impositions they were ignored, harassed, threatened and at times murdered. They say that this is the real cause of their disagreement with Malaitan settlers.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> See the consultancy reports for the “Customary Land Management and Conflict Minimisation” project of the Pacific Islands Secretariat at <http://forum.forumsec.org/pages.cfm/political-governance-security/conflict-prevention/land-management-conflict-minimisation.html>; especially Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka and Ponipate Rokolekutu: *Review of the Role and Dynamics of Land-Related Politics and Political Parties in Conflict and Conflict Escalation in the Pacific Islands*. [http://www.forumsec.org.fj/resources/uploads/attachments/documents/LMCM%202\\_5%20COMPLETE.pdf](http://www.forumsec.org.fj/resources/uploads/attachments/documents/LMCM%202_5%20COMPLETE.pdf) (date of access 05/05/2011); and Chris Wilson: *Land and Conflict in the Pacific Region*, available at [http://www.forumsec.org/resources/uploads/attachments/documents/LMCM%201\\_1%20COMPLETE.pdf](http://www.forumsec.org/resources/uploads/attachments/documents/LMCM%201_1%20COMPLETE.pdf) (date of access 05/05/2011).

<sup>306</sup> There is a huge sociological and anthropological bibliography of works that try to understand what “culture” actually means.

<sup>307</sup> Ruth Liloqula and Alice Arehue'ta Pollard: *Understanding Conflict in Solomon Islands: A Practical Means for Peacemaking*. Canberra: The Australian National University. State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Discussion Paper 00/7, 2000, p. 6.

A similar point of view is expressed by Fr. Norman Arkwright: “From the beginning of the current ethnic tensions, the most significant of the demands on the Guadalcanal side was to be shown more respect by Malaitan people.”

During our research, we were unable to find out which specific issues from Malaitan “traditions, customs and laws” were actually considered as threatening by indigenous Guadalcanal people. Many Malaitans who settled on Guadalcanal went through the corresponding local rituals and lived in their host communities for a long time, some of them for decades; and this made them change their culture(s), too. In his memoirs, former Speaker of Parliament (1978-1989) Lloyd Maepeza Gina remembers:

You find a great difference between the Malaita people actually living on Malaita and Malaitans living elsewhere. You hear other people say, “A Malaita man did this, he did that, he spoke like That.” That is because Malaitans, when out of Malaita, have come away from their tightly restricted environment and they suddenly have the freedom to do, more or less, what they like.<sup>308</sup>

Usually cultural differences like language or ancestral traditions between indigenous people and immigrants did not much affect daily life before the tension. It was growing pressure on resources that transformed “culture” into a public, and eventually militant, issue. Awareness about cultural distinction was exacerbated, sometimes even invented, and converted into a *political* matter in the development of the tension. This is a very common issue in ethnic conflicts.

An aspect often mentioned by former militants, even more so than the dispossession of land or the disrespect for local culture, was the killing of Guadalcanal people by “foreigners”, mainly Malaitans, which was also part of the Bona Fide Demands. Even though these murders of indigenous Guadalcanal by Malaitans have no irrefutable evidence,<sup>309</sup> the stories proved to be a

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Fr. Norman Arkwright: “Restorative Justice in the Solomon Islands“. In Sinclair Dinnen (ed.): *A kind of mending. Restorative Justice in the Pacific Islands*. Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2003, p. 179.

<sup>308</sup> Lloyd Maepeza Gina: *Journeys in a Small Canoe. The life and times of a Solomon Islander*. Edited by Judith A. Bennett with Khyla J. Russell. Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2003, p. 84.

<sup>309</sup> According to paragraph 3 of the Bona Fide Demands presented in 1988, “over a time span of 20 years, 15 people have died in the hands of non-indigenous persons.” Appendix A of the same document mentions 17 cases where people from Guadalcanal have been attacked between 1963 and 1988; ten of them died though the aggressors are not always identified as “non-indigenous”. At least one case relies plainly on rumors: case 5 states that a mother and two children were hacked to pieces in CDC in the 1980s and “their assailant [*sic*] was never located, but hearsay suggests that he was an Are Are person”. The documents states that “this is by no means a comprehensive account of all the cases that had occurred,” but presents no further evidence.

Among the documents found in the archive of the National Peace Council there is a letter signed by a W. B. Tabusasi to the chairman of the Commission of Inquiry which reads, “I was asked to find out names of the 25 murdered victims of Guadalcanal that caused the indigenous people of Guadalcanal to petition the Government in 1988. I only managed to find 17 names”.

The letter carries no date, but the number of 25 murder victims was mentioned only in the Bona Fide Demands of 1998. The list attached to the letter includes the name of Ishmael Panda; it might be a case of homonymy,

powerful incentive for recruitment of militants. Most importantly, it helped to reinforce ethnic stereotyping, peaceful and indulgent Guadalcanal indigenous people against aggressive and voracious Malaitans, around which a militant “in-group” was constructed and mobilized against another group. These stereotypes were expressed in the Bona Fide Demands and other official documents,<sup>310</sup> and they are still present in the mind of former combatants:

*Would it be make a difference if a person is killed by a man from Guadalcanal or from another island?*

We do not have the motives to kill people senselessly like the Malaitans do. We have never done brutal killing like that, not in my time. When the number of killings got to twenty five, we just could not sit back and watch.

**Statement of former IFM militant, Closed Hearing before the TRC, 10/05/2011**

So while the “killing cases” might have been included in the Bona Fide Demands to evoke emotions that would be useful for political targets, it demonstrates the poor legitimacy of state institutions transferred from the colonial administration to independent Solomon Islands. Identified murderers were usually detained and sentenced according to law, but Guadalcanal militants and their followers were not much interested in punishment (or what experts call “retributive justice”), nor was there the conception of *personal* liability that defines modern law. Responsibility for the crimes of individuals was extended to people of their respective island. This sort of generalization, too, is common in identity-based conflicts. What prevailed was a traditional “Guadalcanal perspective” that highlighted the collective, and not a modern perspective based on law and individual rights:

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but this is the name of the GRA militant who was shot to death during the Bungana incident. No perpetrators were identified in any of the cases.

Efforts of the TRC to find evidence about the killings of 25 indigenous people from Guadalcanal in the archives of the courts did not bring any results, as the files are not complete and there is usually no information about the origin of the perpetrator.

Clive Moore even states that “some of the murders during the 1980s and 1990s were performed by Malaitans hired by Guale to perform “pay back” killings amongst their own people” (Clive Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis*, *op. cit.*, p. 104).

<sup>310</sup> A committee organized by Premier Ezekiel Alebua “to prepare a submission on behalf of the indigenous people to the SIAC Government of the intentions and demands of the people” in 1998, when the tension had already started, states:

It is a fact that we the indigenous people of Guadalcanal, top the list for our gentleness, generosity, peace loving and law abiding citizens of this country, as compared to people of other more aggressive background. The document, a letter to Premier Alebua, dated 29 January 1999, is signed by Hon. N. Leni, Deputy Premier Guadalcanal Province; Hon. David Vouza and Hon. Victor Ngele, Members of Parliament for North and South Guadalcanal, respectively; D. Thuguvoda, community leader; and Billy Gatu, Chief of Guadalcanal.

*You mentioned the murders. Actually most of the murderers were detained and convicted. Why was it necessary to take more measures? I ask this because you are a lawyer. Why was it not enough to apply the law?*

There could be a number of points I want to trace in respect to the question. It seems that these killings were not going to stop, that's from a Guadalcanal perspective as a Guadalcanalese. It seems that the laws were not tough enough to address or to stop these killings. That could be the real problem.

#### **George Gray, Closed Hearing before the TRC, 10/05/2011**

According to George Gray, “the age of militants ranged from very young teenagers to elderly men in their 60s and 70s.”<sup>311</sup> In one way or another, entire communities (not counting immigrant settlers) were involved in the preparation and eventual organization of the militant group:

*How was the GRA organized?*

When GRA was formed only the brave men joined the militancy; back in the communities people continued to work in their gardens or went about doing their normal activities. When the militants went out, the communities prepared food, and the commanders gave instructions to the chiefs to arrange for food to be brought to their specified location.

*Did the community decide who should go with the militants?*

No, only those who were brave showed up to the camps, the rest remained back in the community. By doing this, we had support and also the community co-operated.

#### **Charles Vangere, Closed Hearing before the TRC**

In my region [Tangarare] you cannot say who joined the movement and who did not. Everybody joined the movement. As long as you lived there you got involved in one way or another. All of us supported the movement, either in providing food, or you provided security, or you joined the boys who came over to the front. All of us got involved.

#### **Testimony of “Daniel”, ex militant who joined the IFM when 16 years old**

How I would describe it is that the tension involved all people from Guale. How I would put it is: as long as you are from Guale you had to contribute in one way or another to protect this island. That was what the militants were preaching that time: as long as you are from Guale you have to protect the rights and the land in any way possible.

#### **Focus group with former militants, Honiara**

Everyone must get involved, men and boys. Only those who could not walk far had to remain in the village but those who were capable had to join the security group. Those who were strong enough to walk around during the night were matured men and married men. Those who remained in the village were women and children and the men who were responsible to take care of them.

#### **Focus group with former militants Tambea**

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<sup>311</sup> George Gray: *Habuna Momoruqu ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

Youth participation in the GRA/IFM was important, though irregular. Many of the young men stayed in their villages where they did security work or dug for World War II relics to get ammunition (see chapter 5.2 for more detail).

The great majority of former militants interviewed by the TRC said they joined voluntarily, though there were also a number of cases of forced recruitment and, above all, social pressure:

During the tension two of the commanders came and handpicked our boys to help out in the fight against the Malaitans. During that time my family and I hid in the bush away from the main road. My dad was selected to follow the two GRA commanders; they had to obey otherwise they would be shot.

**Participation in focus group with women, Western Guadalcanal**

I lived on my village at Hapare when the Guadalcanal militants came to our place and threatened us demanding compensation from everyone in our communities; that was in 1999. They came to our house and we paid them compensation. They forced us to join in with them; if we did not join they will kill everyone and will burn down all our houses. I was left with no option but to join up with them, I did it for my family's safety. Seven of the boys from my village joined in with the militant group.

**Statement N° 0914**

**A:** It would not make any sense if I did not join while the rest were fighting in the bush. The rest of the men in the bush would think we we're women and that's why we did not join the fight. If in my family the boys would just sit down the other boys would tease us for doing nothing and this would cause us problems as well. This too made us get involved with the group.

**D:** In the village all the boys were involved. Everyone had to be involved. Our parents would say that we could die but they could not do anything. We could not talk us out of it; if we did not join we feared that something would happen to our families.

**Focus group with former militants, Tamba**

General involvement of entire communities with the GRA/IFM makes it difficult to establish who actually was a "militant". It also explains the number given by Joseph Sangu of more than 10,000 IFM militants during the height of the tension.<sup>312</sup> On the other hand it indicates a high level of acceptance of the militant group among rural dwellers at least during the early stages of the tension.

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<sup>312</sup> "We had more than ten thousand men. I used to keep the data" (Joseph Sangu, Closed Hearing).



#### 4. Organization

In his above personal account, former commander George Gray describes the Isatabu Freedom Movement as a loose formation with a fluid command structure.<sup>313</sup> The main leaders were all from the Weather Coast and related. Harold Keke and Joseph Sangu are brothers, George Gray is their nephew (as is Ronnie Cawa who serves several life sentences at Rove prison), Andrew Te'e (whose real name is Andrew Toghovotu) is a distant cousin, and former Prime Minister and Premier from Guadalcanal, Ezekiel Alebua, is their uncle. Thus the "hard core" of GRA/IFM leaders were members of one single family; they were the natural and unquestioned leaders of the movement.

Working under them were area commanders such as John Damusi in Western Guadalcanal, Francis Kennedy in Tangarare, and Selwyn Saki, who had been a close friend of Harold Keke before the tension, in northeast Guadalcanal. They were appointed by their respective villages according to their capabilities and commitment to the movement:

*How did you become a leader of the group?*

During that time we had to prove ourselves that we were capable as leaders, just a like a captain of a ship; a good captain steer a ships in a rough weather to its destination. I tried my best to look after the people at that time and the militants as well. My responsibilities at that time covered few areas, like looking after the community, having meetings with them, and leading the militants. I had meetings with the people, discussed relevant issues and then I went back to the militants and informed them of what we had discussed. It's just like a chain of information.

**Charles Vangere, Closed Hearing before the TRC, 17/11/2010**

I did not know what commander means. It was others who addressed us as commanders; we did not address ourselves as commanders. We were just followers; the commanders we knew were Harold Keke and Joe Sangu. I did not feel myself as a commander.

**Interview with Francis Kennedy<sup>314</sup>**

Organization for a militant group began in early 1998 with training in fitness and martial arts for a handful of men in a warehouse provided by businessman Yukio Sato who afterwards became Member of Parliament for West Honiara (2001-2006) and chief negotiator with Harald Keke for the Government of Prime Minister Kemakeza:

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<sup>313</sup> George Gray: *Habuna Mamaruqu ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>314</sup> Vangere and Kennedy signed the Townsville Peace Agreement respectively as "Supreme Commander" and "Commander" of the Isatabu Freedom Movement, Western Region.

I was one of those boys who joined the malahai from Guadalcanal right from the beginning. During its formation there were 20 men involved. There was also a white man involved in training on fitness, and on martial arts we had training from Y. Sato.

**Interview with “Daniel”, former IFM militant**

It started in 1998 and at that time it was only on a small scale. So Harold Keke came and took some of the boys to go and train at the Malahai Club. Then we went down to Y. Sato’s warehouse. Y. Sato was the one who allowed us to use his warehouse; I also joined the training.

**Interview with “Moses”, former IFM militant**

Asked by TRC researchers, Sato said he was not aware of any use of his warehouse for militant purposes.

Camps were later established where young men gathered for military training and indoctrination:

I went to a camp and attended their meetings. I attended one of them at Wanderer Bay right in the bush. It was during that time that I wore the *kabilato*. Militants from several camps attended the meeting and we talked about were the Malaitans, the land, no respect for culture and customs and we were to fight for our rights. . . . We talked about a lot of things and one of them was the settlements around Honiara.

**Focus Group with former militants, Honiara**

From the camps, militants were deployed to the “frontline”. At the height of the tension the frontline was at Kakabona to the west and Alligator Creek to the east of Honiara:

*Did you have any camps here?*

Yes, we had a camp. The boys stayed at the camp until they were told to move to the frontline. They would collect from all the camps, five from each camp, Tambea, Visale, etc., and the truck would come along to pick them up and drop them off at the frontline. They could be there for one week and when they came back and another group replaced the first group, and this went on for the duration of the tension. All those camps had to undergo their own bush training on how to use guns. At that time the boys were excited because they thought they were real armies, so they were alert all the time to fight at the frontline.

**Focus group with former militants who joined the GRA when under 18 years old, Tambea**

A major problem was acquiring weapons and ammunition. At the beginning, GRA militants were armed with bows and arrows, small arms and some guns which they received (or stole) from their owners. According to George Gray,

They were armed mostly with homemade guns and a few commercial weapons (shotguns, .22s, etc.). Many of the men simply carried spears, bush knives, hatchets, slings and bows and arrows. There were no machine guns or other sophisticated military weapons. The only military weapon we had at the beginning was a Singapore-made SR88A assault rifle that was captured from the Police Field Force in an ambush. That weapon became the focus of our strength and we often made sure that only the brave and trusted militants carried it during battle. Even to touch the weapon was strictly forbidden and one could be severely punished for holding the rifle without

the commander's authorization. The objective then was to try and capture more weapons like that.<sup>315</sup>

Militants and supporters were instructed how to produce their own “homemade” guns. Ammunition for them was often collected from World War II relics.

At first we used bows and arrows, we placed banana trunks at the front and started shooting them, and in fact we started to aim at the target. That time we were also trained in how to make homemade guns. We collected pieces of pipes, about the size of what they used to pipe water and then we were taught how to cut them to fit 50 caliber and their frames. We started to make homemade guns but then we had to look for cartridges. We were shown the various sizes of bullets to fit the type of guns according to their sizes, and we knew how to go about finding them. We had to look for crashed planes from the Second World War, got the cartridges, cleaned them up and inserted them into the homemade guns and trained ourselves how to use them. We learned how to use them on aiming at birds, chickens and pigs. At least we got some idea on how to target at things.

Some of the men in the village had pigeon guns and .22 guns. Those were the types of guns we first used and later when we assembled homemade guns, we had 85 caliber and .303 and other types. When we made these they seemed to look real and they did the same job as the real ones. During that time only big boys could use LMG, SLR and other high powered guns.

**Focus group with former militants who joined the GRA when under 18 years old, Tambea**

The armory raid at Yandina provided some high powered weapons. Later on, in 1999, Harold Keke raided the armory of the Gold Ridge mining company. Another important source for modern weaponry was Bougainville. GRA militants bought guns from the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) which were smuggled out in logging boats to Savo, and from there to Guadalcanal.<sup>316</sup> Even some weapons from the MEF armory raid at Rove ended up in the hands of the IFM through the black market.

During a closed hearing, Joseph Sangu revealed that training in the use of those weapons was provided by police officers, most of whom had already retired but some of them still on duty:

We had a military camp for infantry and it was at Tina River; there was an airport there but it had been closed. We decided to use that place for training and if you were not trained you would not go to the fight. We were trained on weapon handling and other basic trainings.

We were given basic training on weapons by some of the police officers who had been trained in the military and been in the Police Field Force. These had finished from the Police Field Force and they were the ones that trained these boys. We trained boys and we did not force people to join, but the number of boys did turn out to be very huge.

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<sup>315</sup> George Gray: *Habuna Momoruqu ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>316</sup> According to Joseph Sangu, “a lot of boys travelled on logging ships then. This travelling was purposely to search for weapons. People in Gold Ridge had started to sell gold and then they went out to purchase arms.” Sangu himself bought a SLR from the BRA for SBD\$9,000 (Closed Hearing).

*Was there a kind of excitement for them?*

Really there was a kind of excitement for them and that's how they did it. They trained for three months; basic infantry for three months. They were being trained with infantry tactics and basic fighting, semi-jungle fighting and thick jungle fighting; those were the three main things they did here. They were also trained on how to handle arms and how to dismantle arms.

*Sorry, who trained them?*

The former police officers. One was a senior commander during the borderline crisis. And most of the senior police officers were also involved in the training of the boys.

**Joseph Sangu, closed hearing**

However, information received from former militants about training in the use of weapons, and particularly about the involvement of police officers, is contradictory. "Morris", for example, a militant who at that time was a student in Avu Avu Secondary School, recalled that he attended a "more or less tough" training, though "we did not have sophisticated equipment and it was really difficult to cope, especially when you were new to such an environment where you either complied or were left out." Similar information was given in a focus group with former militants in Honiara:

*Did you go through any training?*

Yes, they did some training. Some of the policemen did training on how to use guns and how to count rounds and what type of guns was in use. They also did training in fitness; those who were qualified in karate took them for training exercises along the seaside. . . . For me I also learnt how to use those high-powered guns when Harold Keke came and stayed with us. He was the only one who had those high-powered weapons. He showed us how to load the guns and even how to use them and how to maintain them.

**Focus group former militants, Honiara**

But there were also many others, including even commanders like Vangere and Kennedy, who said they never received any training:

For us we did not go through any training. We just started and tried to imitate it from the movies, tried to understand it by holding the weapons or with the help of a few who had a fair idea of how to use weapons. But to be trained by that time, we were never trained.

**Testimony of former militant "Daniel"**

Police support for Guadalcanal militants during the tension is an extremely sensitive issue that requires more investigation. The TRC received information that police officers and executives, still serving in the RSIPF, not only trained militants but also delivered weapons and ammunition.

The Commission is not able to confirm these statements as it would require criminal investigations beyond its mandate.

Another sensitive issue that needs more clarification is the support the militants had from prominent politicians. Alebua, particularly, is often blamed for triggering the tension with unworkable demands to the Government and seditious speeches. He was accused even by Harold Keke of masterminding the Guadalcanal uprising.<sup>317</sup> Confronted with these allegations in a closed hearing, Alebua denied any intention to initiate militant activities:

*How is it that several people from different sides accuse you of having initiated the uprising?*

Because I was a leader of Guadalcanal, I ruled the people of Guadalcanal and they would have blamed anybody there.

*As Premier of Guadalcanal you made some public statements defending Guadalcanal militants. What was actually your relationship with the GRA?*

Yes, I made a lot of statements at this at that time when both sides were really at war and we got to the situation where it went out of hand; I made lot of statements about this. I made a lot of statements as a leader of Guadalcanal and knowing that the Government failed to address these issues. . . . The first statement was misinterpreted on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1998 on the day of my appointment. I made a political statement not so much as incendiary or implying militarism or anything of that sort; what I said was that we are not cowards but we have to pick up for our own cause. I made that very clear and some people misinterpreted that statement.

#### **Ezekiel Alebua, Closed Hearing**

Testimonies given to the TRC by former militants, an important leader, as well as victims, confirmed Ezekiel Alebua's direct involvement in the creation of the GRA:

. . . then Alebua as Premier made a visit to the school by going around the island until he came to Tangarare. When he got to the school and made his way up to the dorm he shouted: "Are you going to fight or not?" "Yes, we want to fight." So the school was closed and the militants moved to another village.

#### **Focus group with former militants, Honiara**

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<sup>317</sup> "Alebua started the war, he initiated the war," Harold Keke later told David O'Shea on SBS TV. "Alebua bought all the provisions for the militants, the food, the bullets he paid for, the guns, 22's." On the same program, Alebua responded dismissively, "Harold actually for most of his young days grew up in my house here, him and his brothers. I know him well, he's always like that. He's always aggressive, looking for excitement all the time. Picking fights, but he has very little education. Like I said, he was probably watching too many Rambo movies. . . . He has no political agenda" (O'Shea, F.: "The Truth is Critical to Lasting Peace", Letter, Pacific Islands Report, 1 April 2002, quoted in Jon Fraenkel: *The Manipulation of Custom* ..., p. 222, footnote 8).

A former militant of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army testified before the TRC Commissioners that he witnessed Alebua buying weapons from Cornelius Galasa's group in Gizo (see chapter 3.2.5 on the BRA in the Western Province).

In a closed hearing, a former IFM leader identified Sethuel Kelly, Billy Gatu, the former Premier of Guadalcanal and Member of Parliament Siriako Usa as other political leaders said to have supported the militants' actively. Both Kelly and Gatu are deceased and only Usa appeared before the TRC for a public hearing. In the public hearing in November 2011 he denied any involvement with the tension.

Further to that, the militants also received support from business houses, though it is not clear if it was on a voluntary basis. One IFM leader mentioned the logging company Earth Movers, which were said to have supplied fuel and generators that were used by the militants for manufacturing homemade weapons from pipes and irons.

Despite this support, Guadalcanal militants remained generally ill-trained and ill-organized throughout the tension. It was, as is stated by a group of Australian social scientists in a recent book about the tension,

... a loose coalition of militant groups focused on different local grievances – some on the Gold Ridge mine, some on the large Guadalcanal oil-palm plantation, some on specific land grievances and some were just criminal gangs exploiting the opportunity of the collapse of order.<sup>318</sup>

The movement reached its peak between January 1999 and June 2000 when the Malaita Eagle Force raided the armory at Rove. Most of the forced displacements also occurred in 1999. These displacements owe much to Harold Keke's release on bail – paid by Alebua and Fr. Norman Arkwright – after he was apprehended during the shoot-out at Bungana. Once liberated, he intensified hostilities against Malaitan settlers and violence reached a level that prompted even many Guadalcanal people to leave their villages (see chapter 4.2.6). After the armory raid, combat effectiveness of the IFM reduced as the MEF gained military superiority. A number of peace talks were initiated that finally culminated in the signing of the Townsville Peace Agreement in October 2000.

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<sup>318</sup> John Braithwaite; Sinclair Dinnen, Matthew Allen, Valerie Braithwait and Hilary Charlesworth: *Pillars and Shadows: Statebuilding as Peacebuilding in Solomon Islands*. Canberra: Australian National University, 2010, p. 24.

After the TPA, fissures among Guadalcanal militants, which could already be detected in 1999<sup>319</sup>, intensified. Some of the TPA signatories like Joseph Sangu, Charles Vangere, Francis Kennedy and John Gereia surrendered their weapons and withdrew from militant activities. George Gray did the same, going to Fiji and Vanuatu to train as a lawyer, returning to Solomon Islands only in 2009. On the Weather Coast Harold Keke continued the fight against the Government with the Guadalcanal Liberation Front (GLF). Andrew Te'e and many of his followers were re-armed by the Government in 2001 and participated in the Joint Operation to the Weather Coast (see chapter 3.2.2 for more information on Keke's GLF and Te'e's participation in the Joint Operation).

In the Gold Ridge area, Stanley Kaoni, also known as "Satan", formed his own group, supposedly to fight Keke's GLF. However, statements taken by the TRC in the area show that his "boys" were more concerned with harassing villagers. By this time the conflict in Guadalcanal had already taken a shift and militants turned on their own people. The IFM lost most of its legitimacy, even among many of their own militants:

One of the failures lies in the fact that some of our militants started to kill our own people. The ex-militants started also to threaten our own people and took away lives, properties, girls and so forth. There was an incident where a Guadalcanal man was killed by the GRA at Tambea where he was a security guard. So you see this created fear within us. Some of the local canteens were also looted by the militants. The militants started to take advantage of the situation or name "militant" so they can just do anything they want, especially bad things in the name of militant. So instead of fighting against the enemy we fought against ourselves. I think this is the reason why we failed miserably or didn't achieve our main goal.

**Testimony of WT, former militant ("foot soldier")**

## **5. Aftermath**

There prevails a common view and acceptance among former Guadalcanal militants that their goals have not been achieved. During the public hearing in May 2011, as well as in closed hearings and interviews, they reiterate that lasting peace in Solomon Islands can only be

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<sup>319</sup> "After meeting the George Gray and Joe Sangu-led Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army at Balasuna on the northern plains, the returning journalists encountered what they described as a larger, 'stronger, more militant group of IFF fighters', who had been wary of entering the town and emerged instead from the bush outside Balasuna. Led by Andrew Te'e, Premier Alebua's nephew, these *kalibato*-clad fighters expressed some hostility to the military-fatigue-garbed GRA, led by Gray and Sangu.

Jon Fraenkel: *The Manipulation of Custom ...*, op. cit., pp 69-70.

achieved when the Government attends to their Bona Fide Demands: state government and the return of alienated land to traditional owners:

We still have unsettled problems with the Government. We are still fighting for the alienated land to be returned.

**George Gray, Closed Hearing**

*When you recall, do you think GRA/IFM achieved what they planned?*

If it was rated in terms of percentage, I would say 90 percent or 98 percent is still to be achieved as can be seen the Bona Fide Demands of the people of Guadalcanal. Their thoughts, feelings, aggressions and their true voices are all in the Bona Fide Demands which are to be fully addressed. If these demands are addressed, it's not only for the Guadalcanal Province but for the whole of Solomon Islands. I know this is not an easy task, but if the Government could settle down and have a thorough look at these issues.

**Charles Vangere, Closed Hearing**

The eviction of Malaitan settlers is often regarded as a success by former “foot soldiers” because, in their understanding, now there is “less fear”, “more respect” and “more freedom to move”:

*Did you achieve what you were fighting for?*

Yes, partially. Some other things we did not achieve. We managed to chase away the Malaitans; the freedom of the people is becoming clearer, able to travel into town without fear, going to school without neglect, controlling our own resources and so forth. Other things we did not achieve including Bona Fide Demands, Guadalcanal Province state government, and so forth.

**Interview with former militant (“foot soldier”) JK**

It is okay now. We do not fear anyone and we can sleep on the beach because we feel safe. Even when walking during the night on the road nobody will fight us. We feel more secure than before. We do not have lots of infighting between the communities. It is much easier to settle problems between our communities because we have one custom and chiefly system and we respect each other.

**Former IFM militant PK, closed hearing before TRC, 10/05/2011**

In the mind of former Guadalcanal militants, the root causes of the tension are still present. Unfortunately no substantial and enduring peace-building measures have been taken by the Solomon Island Government or any other institution; and this neglect risks violence occurring again. More than one of our interviewees was quite unequivocal in this respect:

So as I can see it, the problem of Guadalcanal is not going to be solved until the Government sets up the state government system. People from other provinces should go back and develop



their own provinces and the people of Guadalcanal take care of their own affairs. This is the only way things can work out; if we are still mixed up, the worst is to be expected like before.

**Interview with Stanley Kaoni<sup>320</sup>**

Maybe we did things the bad way but respect has to be recognized. All in all if all these things are not addressed, the Bona Fide Demands, the land issue and others, if we are putting you in our shoes, what do you think you're going to do?

**PK, closed hearing**

Solomon Islands is still a patchwork of local identities and has a long way to go to become a united nation-state. Becoming a nation-state is not a process relying simply on oneself but requires initiative both from the Government and from civil society to counteract regional mistrust and hostilities. What gives cause for optimism is that at least some of the former militant leaders are now aware of the negative impacts of violent conflict and are making amends:

Right now as I look back after all these years to what happened, stressfully; I do not want to go to another fight anymore. I want to build my life and become a person responsible to this country. That's why I decided to go back to university, just for that reason. I have realized the dangers of conflict; I realized the bad things conflict does to human lives and to human society. I am serious about this. I can go on and talk about these things, about my life, my experiences, what happened. I said good-bye, I want to take a new direction in life and I am serious.

**George Gray, closed hearing<sup>321</sup>**

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<sup>320</sup> At the time of writing, Kaoni was organizing roadblocks in the Gold Ridge area to stress the demands of local villages against the mining company.

<sup>321</sup> Other former IFM commanders got involved in peace-building activities. Kennedy, for example, worked for the National Peace Council, and Sangu was a fieldworker for the TRC.

### **3.3.2 MALAITA EAGLE FORCE**

Towards the end of 1999, Honiara was crowded with refugees waiting to go back to Malaita. Thousands of them had been forced to leave, often without the opportunity to take even their most essential belongings with them. News spread about killings, violation of women and other nameless atrocities committed by Guadalcanal militants against Malaitans who were often labelled, even by themselves, as hard-working, aggressive and trouble-seeking. Contrary to this stereotype, for almost 18 months they submissively bore this aggression; as one observer commented:

Looking back, it is interesting to see how meekly the Malaitans had left Honiara in 1998-99; it was as though they sensed it was not their land and that, faced with a similar incursion on Malaita, they would do the same as the Guale had done.<sup>322</sup>

Two reasons mentioned for this hesitancy were hope that the Solomon Islands Government or the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) would control the situation and trust in the Honiara and Panatina Peace Agreements. Whatever the case may have been, this situation changed drastically at the beginning of 2000 when the Malaita Eagle Force appeared on the scene.

#### **1. Vigilante groups and the beginnings of Malaitan retaliation**

In 1999, the Malaitan populace in Honiara put up roadblocks and organized security groups within the city. They received support from business houses, among them members of the Chinese community and Malaitan merchants at the Central Market. Non-Malaitans whose families had been harassed by the GRA joined the vigilantes as well. The aim of these groups was first of all self-defence, to avoid Guadalcanal militants' taking over the capital:

I advised our boys not to go beyond the town boundaries but they must remain back and provide security for the whole of Honiara city so that the Guale militants cannot advance further into the town to destroy all the government infrastructures and to disturb the business operations. At that time our boys started organizing themselves to providing security. They had needs while staying up all night in the cold; they needed things such as smokes and rations. During that time they would run to me and I would arrange for us to go around and collect donations from the business houses in Honiara. At that time we used a wheelbarrow to go around at each business houses to

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<sup>322</sup> Clive Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis, op. cit.*, p. 125.

seek assistance, especially from the Chinese business people in Chinatown. The business houses responded very well. They donated cash and goods towards the boys who were providing security; the old Chinese were the ones who donated huge money towards our boys.

#### **Testimony of Chief Peter Usi, Burns Creek**

Outside Honiara there were isolated acts of retaliation, although mostly spontaneous and disorganized. A number of small groups and even individuals operated in isolation from each other. One former MEF combatant recalled that in early 1999 he single-handedly engaged with the GRA at Kakabona where he ambushed a group of about ten militants. Armed with a .22 rifle he waited for them on top of a hill where militants walking from Kakabona to Kongulae used to take their rest. After taking down two of them, the rest ran away leaving behind a *Bruno* rifle which he took. He was retaliating for the destruction of his sister's house and properties on Guadalcanal. He later became the field commander of one of the MEF camps in Honiara.

Another former MEF combatant who wants to remain anonymous provided the following information to the TRC about the beginnings of retaliation in eastern Guadalcanal sometime in mid-1999:

We started what was to be the beginning of MEF in May or June 1999. I can't remember the exact month and date but it was after two events. One was the ransacking of a Kwaio man's house and properties at Lavoro plantation in northwest Guadalcanal after Easter in 1999, then the killing of Fioga at SIPL. Our group did not have any name at that time. At this early stage there was no such thing as Malaita Eagle Force. There were only eight of us, namely: Andrew Fioga, Simon Anisi, Moses Su'u, Small Mo [Moses Ako], Jimmy Lusibaea, Patrick Geko, Robert Spencer and Steven 'Oanigela. We did not have proper weapons at that time. As far as I can remember we had in our possession four .22 rifles and one pigeon gun. Others like Steven were armed with machetes. Our camp at that time was at Shorncliffe, Jimmy Lusibaea's site at Ranadi Industrial Area.

Our missions focused mainly on the eastern side of Guadalcanal, particularly Tenaru, Lungga and Foxwood. The GRA members on the eastern side were not as many as those on western Guadalcanal. We had several cross-fires with the GRA at that time. One as far as I can remember was at Foxwood where the GRA were occupying what used to be the labor houses of people from South Malaita. The other shoot-out was at Okea. There were other shoot-out incidents apart from these two.

Honiara was still fairly protected by the police force, most of whom were Malaitans. They patrolled the city and manned checkpoints at various locations around the town. At the same time the vigilante groups were growing and gradually were organized according to regional and ethnic groupings such as To'obaita, Lau, Baegu, Baelelea, Central, West and East Kwara'ae, West and East Kwaio, Auki and Langalanga, West and East 'Are'Are, including Marau 'Are'Are

speakers, Small Malaita, West and East Fataleka, and Malaita Outer Islands (Sikaiana and Lord Howe). The Malaita Eagle Force was formed by merging those vigilante groups together.

## **2. The Auki armory raid and the appearance of the Malaita Eagle Force**

It was difficult for the vigilante groups to get access weapons. Attempts at digging for World War II ammunition on the hills above Honiara were not successful, resulting in some Malaitans offering their private licensed guns.

The demand for arms prompted the raid on the police armory at Auki, the provincial capital of Malaita. The plan was forged by men who were by that time camping at Shorncliffe, Jimmy Lusibaea's yard at Ranadi Industrial Area. After two failed attempts they finally succeeded on 17 January 2000:

Before the raid we had a meeting at Ranadi Industrial Area. I came up with the idea to raid the Auki Armory in Malaita because we are Malaitans and the GRA had successfully raided the Yandina Police Armory and were using the guns to harass innocent Malaitans. At that time the tide of anti-Malaitan sentiments was high on Guadalcanal and amongst the general populace. Malaitan "bigmen" in the police force and friends from other islands were becoming sympathetic to Malaitans who were victims of the GRA rampage. We discussed the idea to raid with Malaitans who held senior ranks in the police force. They were instrumental in planning the armory takeover. The plan to raid the Auki armory was not a secret kept from them. More than 100 guns were collected from the armory.

*Who provided the boat used in the raid of the Auki Armory?*

The boat we used for the raid was a banana boat newly designed to patrol the border between Bougainville and Shortlands. Behind the boat was a double 60 horse-power engine. It was made by the UMW. We took the boat and in the evening we took off to Auki. We had contacts within UMW who prearranged for the boat to be hijacked. We took off from Honiara at about 9 p.m. on a Saturday. We arrived at Auki and then found out that it was difficult to carry out the raid that night because people were busy moving around and there were no power cuts at that time. So we went straight to a village far from Auki to wait for the next day. We raided the armory on Sunday night while everyone was sleeping at about 12 midnight and it took us less than half an hour to do the job. Our skippers for the missions were boys from Marau who would later form the Marau Eagle Force. After the raid we took off from Auki to Honiara. We arrived at about 4 a.m. Monday morning at Matapolu near Alligator Creek and then moved over to our base at Ranadi.

**Testimony of former MEF militant who participated in the Auki armory raid**

The raid, in which two women also allegedly participated,<sup>323</sup> could not have been done without collaboration from within the RSIPF. This was confirmed by officers who were interviewed by the TRC:

I was aware of the raid before it happened. We gave the plan and advised Jimmy Lusibaea to liaise with some of our officers at Auki because he knew them well. The plan was that my colleagues and I would give them the plan, the directions, the roads they should use, as we know the Auki Police Station, the armory location and how many doors there are before getting to the armory door.

#### **Testimony of Police officer**

The weapons were brought the same night to Guadalcanal where they were received by one of the MEF leaders and at least one police officer.

The Auki armory raid marked the launch of the Malaita Eagle Force. After the break-in, which provided the group with high powered weapons,<sup>324</sup> many Malaitans who had been victims of harassment by the GRA and many of their relatives enrolled in the emerging militant group. Perhaps more importantly, a group of sympathetic “high level Malaitans”<sup>325</sup> in Honiara also joined in and later held leadership roles in the Malaita Eagle Force: Alex Bartlett, a successful businessman; Jeremy Rua, a public servant working for the Ministry of Agriculture; Andrew Nori, “the most senior Solomon Islander in private legal practice” who charged his clients a fee of SBD\$900 (US\$180 at that time) per hour,<sup>326</sup> who became legal advisor and spokesperson of the MEF; and Leslie Kwaiga, also a well-known lawyer, who became the deputy spokesperson. One of the major differences from the Guadalcanal militant groups was that, on average, MEF leaders were better off socially; most of them had professional careers, some were university graduates and others had flourishing businesses.

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<sup>323</sup> On 17/1/00 MEF’s first operation took place when 13 men and two girls (a nurse and a telecommunication technician) raided the Auki armory for weapons and were highly successful.

**Andrew Nori: “5th of June 2000 in perspective”. Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation, 3 January 2002, p. 7.**

<sup>324</sup> It was not possible to establish the exact number of weapons that were taken during the raid. According to Clive Moore, the militants made off with “34 mainly high-powered rifles, a grenade launcher, and ammunition” but no source of information is mentioned (Clive Moore: *Happy Isles in Crisis*, *op. cit.*, p. 124). Fraenkel mentions the same number of high-powered weapons and adds 200 rounds of ammunition (Jon Fraenkel: *The Manipulation of Custom*, p. 82) but he also does not give his source.

<sup>325</sup> Term used by Andrew Nori in the video *A people divided. Solomon Islands*. Available at: <http://www.journeyman.tv/9288/short-films/a-people-divided.html>; date of access 12/06/2011.

<sup>326</sup> Andrew Nori: “5th June in Perspective”, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

According to Leslie Kwaiga's testimony before the TRC, the name of the group was decided at a meeting at Andrew Nori's office: "The name Malaita Eagle Force was suggested then because of the Malaita Eagles soccer team that was very successful around that time." The eagle is a symbol closely associated with Malaitan culture; legend has it that it was the most sacred totem in Malaita and most tribes and clans worshipped it.

### **3. Aims and targets**

Most of the initial members of the MEF were victims of the GRA/IFM aggression. During the public hearing in Buma, participants emphasized that this experience forced them to take measures for their security and caused them to seek revenge:

My father moved to Guadalcanal in 1952. During those years he worked for the South Seas Evangelical Church. I lived with my father at land he bought at Konga, East Guadalcanal. I became a police officer prior to the conflict. . . . In June 1998 my father was captured and killed by the GRA militants on his way to the garden to get food. He was brutally killed. I was still in the police force at that time and I tried my best to find my father. I asked the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, the Guadalcanal police, the Guadalcanal Provincial Executive for assistance but with no success. Some people from Guadalcanal I knew said to me: "Andrew, we saw your daddy blindfolded and taken away, he was killed". . . . From that situation, I decided that I should take up arms and become a militant.

#### **Andrew Fioga, public hearing, Buma, 02/05/2011**

Most of us took part because we lost loved ones. Most of us lost our dignity; this is the main reason why I took part. . . . I was working very hard for my family's survival. . . . I worked in the bush cutting timber one evening when a group of men who were fully armed approached me. I did not know anything and immediately they pointed at me with the barrel of a gun. I had not experienced this before and when I turned around I could see a gun. I thought I was going to die. The person ordered me to pack up my equipment and go home and that's why I was involved in the ethnic tension.

#### **Moses Su'u, public hearing, Buma, 02/05/2011**

When I was at Mt. Austin, GRA militants burnt down my house and chased me out. . . . This got me involved with the ethnic tension. Also people of Malaita at Aruligo were chased out of their places, women and girls were raped and men and children were harassed. Also one of my relatives was abducted at Taba'a. I also wanted to help defend Honiara town. When we look back to 1998, we expected the Government to defend Malaitans but this did not happen. They did a lot of bad things to the people of Malaita . . . The Government just watched, so we had to step in to defend our people.

#### **Moses Ako, public hearing, Buma, 02/05/2011**

The Malaita Eagle Force thus presented themselves as a “defence force”,<sup>327</sup> an outcome of what a former field commander called the “doctrine of necessity”:

Violence may not be legitimate from a political and legal perspective but application of it at that time by MEF was based solely on the doctrine of necessity. The environment at that time left us Malaitans with no choice but to take up guns and fight to defend innocent Malaitans and other Solomon Islanders living in Honiara because the forces of the Government were ineffective. We formed MEF for a good cause, to defend civilians and infrastructures around Honiara.

#### **Interview with Charles Adifaka**

The main objective of the MEF was to counteract harassment of Malaitans by Guadalcanal militants which did not let up even after the Honiara and Panatina Peace Agreements:

IFM refused to comply with a series of peace agreements and peace talks. They failed to surrender weapons; in fact they surrendered weapons only to take up bows and arrows and home-made guns. It was a total failure and they continued to harass Malaitans. By that time there were very serious and emotional talks among Malaitans and we stopped them.

#### **Andrew Nori, Closed Hearing before the TRC, 15/11/2010**

‘Stopping’ the IFM initially meant protecting Honiara from a takeover. Guadalcanal militants had reached the outskirts of the capital and there were rumors they were planning an invasion, including cutting the power and even contaminating the water supply. These rumors were spread by the IFM leaders themselves. In a videotaped statement for an Australian broadcasting station, western Guadalcanal GRA Commander John Damusi declared:

This Honiara is just like a bird in the middle of our hand. I mean we just carry it, if our questions to the Government are not well answered, it is easy for us to close our hands with the town inside because the whole island is surrounding it and watching what the Government is doing. If nothing is happening then we just clean up Honiara. I mean we have the power to close the water, we have the power to close the electricity, and that's the time when we try to chase out these Malaitans.<sup>328</sup>

#### **IFM commander from Western Guadalcanal John Damusi in *A people divided: Solomon Islands*.**

A city dweller who became a leading figure in the MEF describes the anguish among Malaitans in Honiara:

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<sup>327</sup> Expression used in a testimony of a former MEF “foot soldier” from north Malaita.

<sup>328</sup> Note also George Gray’s declaration to an Australian journalist: “We are willing to attack Honiara if this fails. From here we can mount an attack on Honiara and kill all the Malaitans, wipe them out, in just three hours. It will take us just three hours to do that” (*Sidney Morning Herald*, 25 June 1999, p. 7).

From the hilltop outside of Honiara town we could hear the GRA members shouting, “the town is ours, we will burn it! “We watched them on television standing up and holding up their hands and saying provocative remarks like “Honiara town is within the palm of our hands, as soon as we enter into it we will burn the whole town.”

**Testimony of Malcolm Lake, former MEF leader**

Honiara had been for the most part a “Malaitan” town long before the influx of thousands of displaced families.<sup>329</sup> Migrants had established businesses and a great share of the public servants – the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force being a noteworthy example – were also from Malaita:

The way we see it, Honiara is just like the backdoor of Malaita where most Malaitan people lived, own businesses, properties, houses. For those of us living in Honiara, we had our families, houses and properties as well. If we had been removed from Honiara, I believe Honiara would have been burned down to ashes, and any property we owned here that could not be removed would be burned down as well. That is the main reason why we wanted to stand and defend Honiara, rather than making any major invasion into Guadalcanal areas.

Protecting Honiara town was the major objective for the formation of MEF. Revenge and retaliation for rape, torture, killings and human rights abuses and pushing out of Malaitans from Guadalcanal were just clothed under this major MEF objective to protect Honiara city. Many Malaitan civilians lived in Honiara and their lives were at risk from any possible attack from the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army.

**Testimony of Charles Adifaka**

MEF’s second major aim was to pressure the government to pay compensation demands for lost properties and lives, as well as for the profanities against Malaitans by GRA leaders. These demands were expressed by a member of the Eagle Force in an interview to an Australian journalist in May 2000:

We want the government to pay compensation for our land, compensation for our properties and our lives. Actually the whole thing is that our lives have been f\*\*\*\*\* ripped off. We want a total guarantee from the Government that they will pay for our land, our lost properties and our lives. . . . They [the GRA] have been killing our innocent civilians. We have given them chances to solve this, like the government to step in, but the government won’t do it.

*If the government does not step in, do you think this thing will go on?*

For sure it would, it would go on until we would make it to the final stage where we would surely have to go to the end.

**Declarations of a MEF militant in the video *A people divided*.**

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<sup>329</sup> The 1999 National Census enumerated in Honiara 13,841 persons who were born in Malaita, compared to 2,522 who were born on Guadalcanal. There were enumerated in Malaita 5,893 persons who were born in Honiara (National Census 1999, tables B02f, B02g and B02j).



The Government was held responsible for many of the calamities of displaced Malaitans. In strange correspondence with their Guadalcanal counterparts, during the public hearing for ex-militants at Buma almost all former MEF members branded the Solomon Islands Government as bearing the main responsibility for the tension.

#### 4. Organization

The Malaita Eagle Force was a loosely organized group based on personal leadership and adherence rooted in the Melanesian *bigman* tradition. Leaders were formed on a practical basis, with no formal election or appointment. Ranks like “Supreme Commander” for example – Jeremy Rua’s title when he signed the Ceasefire Agreement and the TPA – did not actually express a universally accepted command chain inside the militant group, and even Andrew Nori’s role as a “spokesman” was not always unquestioned.

After the Auki armory raid, MEF activities were coordinated from various camps established around the city boundaries of Honiara. Each camp received weapons from the break-in, was manned 24 hours a day and led by a field commander. The first camps established were Tigers Camp at Gilbert Camp which was commanded by Moses Su’u, Wolf Camp at Mount Austin under the command of Moses Ako also known as “Small Mo”, and Lions Camp at Kaibia Heights under the leadership of Jimmy Lusibaea. In the end there were about 14 camps positioned around Honiara from Alligator Creek in the east to White River in the west.

The camps were organized according to the different language groups of Malaita and set up in town districts according to where the majority of their language group lived. The application of these criteria, however, was flexible. For instance, camps like Central Lions for North Malaita (To’obaita) also included members from other regions such as Kwaio and Kwara’ae, often based on personal friendships. Other camps like Rats (Kusfou) comprised Kwaio, ‘Are‘Are and South Malaitans probably because of their linguistic and cultural similarities. A description of the other camps follows:

**Baekwatolo Camp** was manned by Malaitans from Baelelea and was situated at New Zealand camp.<sup>330</sup> The camp consisted of tents. In front of the tents, facing the jungle, were stacks of bags filled with soil for protection.

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<sup>330</sup> New Zealand Camp is named after the place where New Zealand soldiers camped during World War II in 1942. It is located along the Lungga River.

**Crocodile Camp** was positioned at the Lungga seaside at an area previously owned by Tongs Corporation. A house which was owned by the company was used by militants, mainly from Suava Bay in North Malaita, as their camp. The coastline was fortified with bags of sand.

**Marines Camp** was manned by militants from Lau Lagoon in Malaita. It was located at Ranadi industrial area not far from the dump site. There were tents set up for shelter.

**Lion Heart** was located at Kaibia Heights. It was commanded by Jimmy Lusibaea from north Malaita. There were tents and soil-filled bags stacked in layers in front of the tents for protection.

Other camps on the western side of Honiara included **Iron Eagle** positioned at White River and headed by Robert Spencer. There were also camps positioned at Tasahe.

**The Rats (Kasfou) Camp** comprising militants from East and West Kwaio, ‘Are‘Are and South Malaita and was positioned at Baranamba in east Honiara. At the camp there was a bunker 21 feet long, three to four feet wide, and six feet deep. At the front, facing outward from the city were bags of soil. There was also an escape route dug towards the nearby creepers. Behind the bunker was a camp made of plastic sheets where the militants stayed for rest. The bunker was manned 24 hours daily with a regular duty routine for its members.

Close to the Rats Camp was the **Crocodile Camp** that was also positioned at Baranamba.

**Islanders Camps.** The “Islanders” were Polynesians from the Outer Islands of Malaita. They had two bunkers: one at the beach side at Kakabona and another at Sun Valley close to New Zealand Camp. “Our camp, though the majority of the boys were from Sikaiana, also included those from other islands like Isabel, Western Province and even part Guadalcanal, so sometimes I feel that the name was not appropriate for the camp” (former commander of the Islander Camp).

The number of members of each camp as shown in Table 3.3.1 is based on certificates for surrendered firearms recorded by the MPNSJ. The figures are approximate as not all militants are on the list; and vice versa, that is, names included were never permanent MEF militants. However, the table gives some idea of the character and size of the different camps in the MEF:

**Table 3.3.1**  
Camp members according to firearms surrender certificates

Camp	Commander	Members
Tiger	Moses Su’u	456
Central Lions	Jimmy Lusibaea	421
Iron Eagle	Samuel. Au Ramosaea	231
Wolf	John Iniomea and James Tatau	135
White Eagle	Eddie Maelibina	277
Leopard	Robert Kaua	72
Crocodile	Robert Buga	95
Baekwatolo	Selwyn Maesui	115
Islanders	Robert Kaetu	36
Marine		24
Black Hunters	Jerick Rade and Nathaniel Talo	49
Rats	Silas Adifaka	134
MPs	Jinny Robert	164
Marau Eagle Force	Johnson ‘Apeo	289

Source: Certificates granted by Ministry of Police, National Security and Justice

There were no criteria for the position of field commanders who headed the camps: they were not formally appointed nor were they traditional village chiefs or “bigmen”. Some of them were self-made leaders through organizing vigilante groups prior to the raid of the Auki Police armory.

Members of the different camps were delegated to take shifts in the MEF bunkers at Alligator Creek and Kakabona and to participate in operations like the one in Marau.<sup>331</sup> Cooking, washing and cleaning up of the camps’ surrounding were mainly done by young boys who had followed adult members of their family but did not carry weapons. Food was supplied by the Malaitan population in Honiara and some business houses; now and then money for provisions was also extorted from casual victims:

I was employed as a security guard for the Fiji Security Company and was posted to provide security for the ANZ Bank director at the Tasahe area. One Wednesday night he told to accompany him to a function at the Yacht Club where he was a member. When we returned around 9:30 p.m. the MEF stopped us at gunpoint. They questioned us why we are returning so late. My boss was the director for the international service exchange for the ANZ; he told me to remain quiet and that he will do all the talking. The militants then demanded \$5000 from us. He was well prepared and he gave them \$250 cash and they told us that the money will be used to buy food for the boys who were providing security for the houses at Tasahe. He gave them the money and they allowed us through.

**Statement N° 5017**

Vehicles used by the MEF were alleged to have been provided by Ela Motors and other business houses, though many of them were taken by force from government officials and individuals. When a vehicle was retained and/or damaged by the militants, the Government had to pay for it (see the facsimile at the end of this chapter).

Camp life attracted many young men from Malaita for different reasons. There is no indication of any girl or woman being a member of the MEF. Former militants interviewed by the TRC said that feelings of fear, anger, sadness, and a strong desire for revenge moved them to join. A chief in the Kwara’ae region in central Malaita said, “I believe as a Malaitan man, when a Malaitan man or woman is killed, the hunger for revenge is always the first option.” Many testimonies of former militants support this:

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<sup>331</sup> Each MEF camp sent some of its members for the operation to free 115 people who were held hostage by the IFM militants in Marau (see chapter 3.2.4).

The reason I decided to join the MEF was because what the GRA militia did to fellow Malaitans between 1998 and 1999 was really inhumane and warranted revenge and retaliation. They harassed women and girls from Malaita at gunpoint, raped them, stripped them naked, made cuts on their bodies, had sex with them in the eyes of other family members or husbands. They burnt houses, damaged properties, and even killed some Malaitans at the very beginning of the tension. We lived at Kaibia Heights with our relatives when we heard that four old men from our village in Malaita working at CDC in the oil palm plantation were killed. Since then plans were made to raid the police armory at Auki. I was not part of that mission because only a few handpicked ones were allowed. MEF was formed straight after the raid. I fought for revenge.

#### **Testimony “E”, a former MEF militant, Auki**

*Why did the Polynesians decide to join MEF?*

The majority of our boys were from Sikaiana. If we can recall, when the ethnic conflict broke out our women, Sikaiana women, were raped at West Guadalcanal by the GRA militants. Then at Red Beach a boy from Sikaiana was taken as hostage by the GRA militants to the Weather Coast. When the MEF was formed we felt that we had to give a hand. That is number one. Number two we felt that we are part of the province and we have to give a hand.

#### **Testimony of former commander of the “Islanders Camp”**

Still others joined for other reasons: many young men still in their teens joined solely for the hype:

I was a student at Panatina Community High School when the ethnic conflict occurred. In 2000 during the height of the ethnic conflict I was in Form Five. I did not have any intention to join the Malaita Eagle Force because none of my relatives was affected. However, I have cousins who got involved in the conflict for reasons only known to them. They are the ones that influenced me to join MEF. I was not an active participant of MEF but I joined other Kwaio youths in the Rats Camp at Lungga powerhouse. In fact I fought for reasons I knew nothing about. The reasons I may have shared with other Malaitan youths for getting involved in the conflict was the common sentiment to stand up and fight for Malaita, defend Honiara city from GRA militants surrounding the town boundaries and to retaliate the atrocities done against the Malaitan people on the island of Guadalcanal.

#### **Testimony of “S”, a former MEF “foot soldier”**

Being a militant provided not only excitement but also security because, as one former militant who joined the MEF as an adolescent mentioned, “as long as people saw you going around with the militants, people will be afraid of doing anything to you.”

Many young boys joined just because they saw young ones like them following the militants. If there were no young ones like them joining the militants, I think young boys like me would not have followed them. But most followed the militants just to eat, drink, and go around with them. Most joined because the militants were the only ones who had power over everything in town, so many young boys tended to follow them for their safety and security.

#### **Focus Group with former MEF militants, Malu’u**

Even though almost all ethnic groups of Malaita were represented in the MEF, there was a great imbalance in this representation. While the involvement of northern (To'obaita) and central (Kwara'ae) Malaita was very strong, people from Langa Langa desisted from joining the Eagle Force although they were actually among the first to be chased out from western Guadalcanal. The MEF accused the people of Langa Langa of organizing a rival militant group called the "Seagulls".<sup>332</sup> Kwaio involvement in MEF was also small in comparison to northern and central Malaita:

Kwaio men only joined the conflict because of the shared Malaitan identity and the feeling that a problem done against a Malaitan is against all Malaitans. For example, killing of innocent men and children, raping of Malaitan women and girls, damage to properties belonging to Malaitan settlers on Guadalcanal and so forth are factors that brought Malaitans together to stand together as brothers and fight. These are also the reasons that I took personally to join the Malaita Eagle Force.

#### **Testimony of Charles Adifaka**

According to this testimony, the conflict helped to forge a pan-Malaitan identity, as expressed also in a few of the interviews with former militants:

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<sup>332</sup> There is still much enigma around the "Seagulls" that could not be clarified by the TRC. In May 2000 one of the key witnesses of the tension described in a private communiqué shared with the TRC the relation of the group with Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa'alu:

Some of the Prime Minister's long-time *wantoks* encouraged or lured him to set up a system whereby they offered to collect sensitive information for him about the Malaita Eagles, the raid on the Auki Police Station, etc., in exchange for "a package from the government" (that is, payment). Because the PM does not trust the police or any information they provide, he took this route. Adrian Batiafasi (former MP) and Alphonse Silva, both from Langa Langa, seem to have been the primary organizers along with someone named Silimanu. The group was initially all Langa Langa, then some Kwaio, then a few ex-police, one from the West (former Director of CID, Siosi), one from Savo. According to my contact, the information they fed him was not necessarily accurate. The group's size is about 15 members. Sometime after they were first organized they drank in an Auki motel and boasted of their mission, claiming they were being paid by the government. Apparently they took on a paramilitary character with the addition of another Langa Langa man, Henry Bata, a suspected murderer, as Commander. Another close associate of the PM (and Bobo), John Garo, is also a suspected member. My contact says that the shootout at the Auki Police Station in late March, when one policeman was fired on, was instigated by the Seagulls to cause division between the police and the Malaita Eagles.

My police contact's story is to some extent confirmed by [...]. When he was auditor in the Finance Section of the Ministry of Police and Justice, he came across a case in which the PM phoned the Finance Section and authorized the payment of \$5,000 to Adrian Batiafasi "for information he has provided to me". Batiafasi then came across to the Ministry and collected the money. There was no previous Police authorization of Batiafasi as an official police intelligence gatherer or any such thing. My [source] says that this was a fairly regular thing and the suspicion was that there was no information at all but that the PM was later reclaiming the money to build his big house with a video in every room in Langa Langa. (My contact from the police says that Langa Langa people who lost properties on Guadalcanal are big supporters of the Eagles and do not support the PM.) The Seagulls seem to be a criminal gang, the PM's private security force.

Ulufa'alu himself described the Seagulls as a Police intelligence operation. Leaders from Langa Langa interviewed by TRC researchers denied categorically the existence of a militant group called "Seagulls".

I was joining the militants because men and women, boys and girls from Malaita had died and been badly treated by the GRA. Therefore I fought for revenge and to defend all Malaitans in town. Our elder brothers were fighting and I could not stay and watch. Our “bigmen” from Malaita said that we cannot stay and watch our people being killed before our eyes. We must fight and do something. Because being a Malaitan – whether you from South, Are are, Kwaio, Kwara’ae, or North – we are one.

**Testimony of “M”, a former MEF “foot soldier”**

My heart was definitely with the MEF militants. I joined them because I am Malaitan. I joined voluntarily just like others who wanted to support the militants. I was motivated because I am Malaitan, the killing and harassment done to Malaitans was like hurting me and my family. I joined because I wanted to share the burden of the militants for all Malaitans.

**Focus group with former MEF militants, Malu’u**

Malaita has a variety of languages, and even if some of them are mutually intelligible, it is not an ethnically homogeneous island. The Maasina Ruru movement in the mid-twentieth century was perhaps the first attempt at bringing the different ethnic groups together on the basis of a common political objective. But unlike Guadalcanal, where early militancy was influenced in part by the indigenous Moro Movement, the MEF cannot be traced back to Maasina Ruru. The origins of the Malaita Eagle Force are on Guadalcanal. What helped form a common Malaitan identity in the MEF was the fact that Malaitan victims on Guadalcanal were all treated the same way. The victims retaliated as Malaitans as Guadalcanal militants did not make any distinction between Langa Langa, Kwaio or Kwara’ae; they treated them all as *Malaitans*. The tension strengthened Malaitan ethnic identity.

However, this common Malaitan identity articulated in the MEF applied only to the extent that it related to a common enemy, namely, the Guadalcanal militants, and to a certain degree, at least until the coup of 5 June 2000, the Solomon Islands Government. Beyond this, ethnic factionalism was never completely lost within the militant group, and this made it much less of a unified organization than it usually is portrayed in the media and in some research reports. The MEF faced tensions between different leaders and factions from the very beginning, and even more so when millions of compensation dollars began to pour into the group.

These differences were well perceived also by outsiders. Militants from north Malaita were the ones with the worst reputation. The following statement is taken from the private records of a key witness of the tension in Malaita that was provided to the TRC:

The general consensus is that the Tobaita [North Malaita] group is the most brutal, undisciplined and the group doing most of the stealing. [All] the other MEF groups met last week and expressed their anger and frustration at the behaviour of the Tobaita group, even threatening to withdraw from the whole MEF operation on Guadalcanal if the Tobaita MEF continued their present course of action – leaving the Tobaita (and Honiara) to the mercy of the IFM.

Differences within the MEF were often solved violently, even more so after the official dissolution of the militant group following the Townsville Peace Agreement. There were armed clashes between former MEF members from Kwara'ae and To'obaita in Malaita. An ancient land conflict culminated in the burning down of the Auki Refilling station involving two of the founding members of the MEF (see chapter 3.2.3). In late November 2000, a month after the TPA was signed, the Placemakers Building in Honiara that housed the law firms of Andrew Nori and Leslie Kwaiga was burned down, allegedly by MEF members who did not agree with the distribution of compensation money. One of the suspects was severely beaten by former Malaita Eagles in the Central Police Station. The other one was shot to death by police officer Patteson Saeni at Rove Prison.<sup>333</sup> TRC researchers interviewed a former MEF commander who witnessed the burning of the building:

I want to talk briefly about the burning of the Placemakers Building in Honiara. In fact the burning took place after the Townsville Peace Agreement. Samani Ramo burned the building as a result of disagreement over the distribution of the five million dollars compensation money to the members of the former Malaita Eagle Force. He was actually a member of the Malaita Military Police.<sup>334</sup> He came over from Auki for his compensation payment, however, his payment was already sent over to Auki when he arrived in Honiara. If he had made a proper inquiry about his payment the problem would not have occurred.

At that time Romano's Restaurant that sold food and beer was situated at the middle floor of the Placemakers Building. He was drinking there and when he was drunk he went upstairs to where the MEF's office was located, climbed up to the roof and set fire to the building. I was there at that time working on the MEF's payments when the problem occurred. The problem occurred the late evening after office hours, after we closed the office. We were at the Central Market opposite the Placemakers Building when we realized smoke was coming out of the building. We ran back to the building attempting to save it but it was too late. The problem at that time was that the windows were all open and when the wind blew in, the ceiling caught fire and the whole building blew up. I ran into the building attempting to break the door to Andrew Nori's office but could not make it through due to excessive smoke that came out of the room. We could not make it through. We left the building and just watched it as it burned down. Patteson Saeni was charged with the murder of Samani Ramo.

**Testimony of former MEF field commander (name withheld)**

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<sup>333</sup> Regina v Iro'ota [2005] SBHC 7; HCSI-CRC 066 of 2004 (8 July 2005).

<sup>334</sup> Members of the MEF who were authorized to maintain order in Auki and Honiara.

A particular case was the so-called “mafia” group that had its camp at Mbokona in central Honiara. This group was led by two brothers from a tribe called Fautharo in the To’obaita region who recruited young men from north Malaita for stealing and other criminal activities under the cover of MEF militancy:

Mostly our job was “sniper”. During the nights our base was empty and during the day we just rested in our base. Nothing was hard when we went out for our missions; we had all kinds of weapons, guns, tools, many deadly objects. We did not go for killing; we went only for people’s valuables. If we entered a building, we just ordered the security or the owner to stay quiet, harassed and threatened them, and we took everything we wanted, then we went away in our vehicles back to the base.

**Testimony of a former member of the “mafia”**

After their camp in Mbokona was raided by the police, most of the “mafia” members returned to Malu’u where they got involved in occasional clashes with MEF militants loyal to Jimmy Lusibaea (see chapter 3.2.3).

Finally, there were the officers of the paramilitary arm of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force and some other general duty officers who supported MEF. Large parts of the Malaita Eagle Force and the Police Field Force merged together in the so-called “Joint Operation” after the Rove armory raid.

**5. The Rove armory raid and after**

The Malaita Eagle Force, along with officers of the Police Field Force, raided the police armory at Rove on 5 June 2000; the same day they put Prime Minister Ulufa’alu under house arrest before he was forced to resign. The armory raid and the “coup” were devised by police officers and leaders of the militants as part of a master plan that included the takeover of telecommunications, the airport and other strategic areas.

People from Malaita flooded into Honiara to join the MEF after the armory raid. According to spokesman Andrew Nori, they had to deal with “about 3,000 militants, members of the Malaita Eagle Force.”<sup>335</sup>

Following the “coup”, the MEF and sympathetic police officers formed the *Supreme Council*, made up of militant leaders such as Jeremy Rua, Leslie Kwaiga, Alex Bartlett and Andrew Nori

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<sup>335</sup> Andrew Nori, Closed Hearing.



and policemen Manasseh Maelanga and James Kili. The Supreme Council was established as a body responsible for planning the daily operations of the police and MEF militants; a collaboration that became known as the *Joint Operation*. Its members held daily meetings at the Lelei Resort, after which they instructed the leaders of the MEF camps about upcoming missions. During the months after the coup the Supreme Council took upon itself the role of *de facto* government by taking control of the security situation in Honiara:

*Did the Government have some kind of control at that time?*

No, the Government did not have any control at all since 5<sup>th</sup> June 2000.

**Testimony of a police officer who was involved in the armory raid and coup**

*People say that actually there was no government during that time, the ones who took the lead were the Supreme Council.*

Well, yes. There was no Police Force and law and order at that time, they basically did whatever they saw necessary. I was brought several times to the bush escorted with guns simply to witness the promotion of some police officers.

**Manasseh Sogavare, Prime Minister at that time, closed hearing before the TRC, 18/03/2011**

Once in possession of hundreds of high-powered weapons from the police armory, the MEF declared an “all-out war” upon the IFM. The next day they attacked an IFM bunker at Alligator Creek, the first military venture of the Joint Operation, using a state-owned patrol boat and vehicles with the help of Police Field Force officers:

After the takeover we built a bulldozer welded with iron metal around and mounted a .50 calibre machine gun taken from the patrol boat. We cleared the area manned by the GRA at Alligator Creek. We cleared the Kakabona area, Visale and Aruligo. We used the MV *Daula* to carry the armoured bulldozer around to clear the areas that were manned by the GRA. In one incident we captured a suspect from Guadalcanal and his name was Francis. On our way back he was killed by the MEF boys and thrown overboard. His body washed ashore and found a week later by his relatives.

**Testimony of PFF officer**

Another militant operation was launched immediately after the armory raid to liberate 115 hostages held by IFM militants in Marau (see chapter 3.2.4). On 7 July 2000, “Operation Eagle Storm” attacked the IFM camp at Tenaru and destroyed it. Three days later, gunmen with masks entered the National Referral Hospital and killed two IFM members admitted to the hospital.<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>336</sup> The father of one of the victims gave his statement to the TRC:

On 15 July operation “Hatsoa” was launched to attack IFM strongholds at Kakabona. On 25 July a group of more than 20 armed men set fire to several houses at Tavio Ridge, Rifle Range and Independence Valley on the outskirts of Honiara. Spokesman Andrew Nori informed the media that a “renegade group in one of the MEF camps” had been ordered to burn the houses by someone who claimed ownership of the land in question and assured that those responsible for the burning will “pay adequate compensation.”<sup>337</sup>

On 13 July 2000 MEF militants with the MV *Daula* landed in Visale where they suspected Harold Keke was undergoing medical treatment. According to some testimonies, Keke was indeed there but managed to escape before the operation. They destroyed the clinic and killed 25-year-old Hillary Labacha and an old man, Doko Vuranga, who had been left behind when the villagers fled into the bush;<sup>338</sup> both were unarmed and defenceless. Hillary Labacha’s sister gave her statement to the TRC:

Our brother came to our house to check whether we were still there. He saw the MEF around but he thought they were GRA militants. They called him and he went to them. There was another old man admitted at the clinic. They took our brother and put him together with the old man who could not run away. Our brother was very frightened and he wanted to escape; he ran away but one of the MEF militants saw that he wanted to escape and he shot him in the leg. He fell down, but he was still alive. When the MEF militant reached the bell area he looked back and saw he still alive and was trying to crawl out with his injuries. He went back and shot him in his head with the pump gun and he died. Then they saw the old man hiding in the church and one of them shot him too.

**Summary of statement N° 0671**<sup>339</sup>

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The *malahai* requested some of the boys to go and man the roadblock, so my son was willing to join in. The request came from Andrew Te’e, the leader of IFM group. So when my son heard that he went in to join and he went to the roadblock. He was manning the roadblock when the MEF carried out their operation along the Tenaru Road and he was shot along with another boy. They had bullets in the stomach and were taken by Red Cross to the Hospital. They were kept in a locked up room, but then some of the MEF members went and threatened the nurses at the Hospital and shot them at a close range in the room where they stayed. Their bodies were taken to Koleiasi for burial. That was the end of my son, he never returned home.

**Statement N° 0867**

<sup>337</sup> *Solomon Star* 26 July 2000, p. 1.

<sup>338</sup> “That old could not walk so they carried him and left him in the Church. They shot the old man while he was in the Church. He was Doko and from Lambi Bay.”

**Statement N° 0675**

<sup>339</sup> See also the testimony of Ms. Emmanuela Kilu and John Taro during the Public Hearing in Visale, 23/06/2010.

A few days later, the MEF came back to Visale and burned down many houses. A similar operation was launched soon afterwards at Aruligo in Sahalu ward, northwest Guadalcanal; this time the militants used the vessel *Muva*:

Around 6 a.m. we saw a ship approaching the Aruligo area. We thought it was a ship bringing cargoes and relief supplies for us. We went and waited at the seafront hoping to get any supplies from the ship. Sadly we realized it was the MEF and they were carrying guns. The MEF landed and started firing shots indiscriminately. A mentally ill man from our village went down the road and was kidnapped, severely bashed and stabbed to death by the militants. His body was found at the shoreline at Doma Station. The MEF looted and burned down all the houses along the coast. We were so terrified upon hearing the sound of high-powered rifles that we fled into the bush to save our children. We stayed there for more than a month, after which some of us came down and fled over to the Weather Coast in a canoe. We all fled and no one remained back in the village.

**Statement N° 0075**

Individual acts of revenge by MEF members, as well as the coordinated assaults on Visale and Aruligo, forced Guadalcanal villagers to live in the bush for several months and/or to find refuge in another village. These acts resulted in forced displacements instigated by the Malaita Eagle Force against people of Guadalcanal (see chapter 4.2.6 for more detail).

As well as militant actions around Honiara, including the Marau rescue operation, MEF leaders participated in a series of negotiations with the IFM. Peace talks that began on HMAS *Tobruk* in June led first to the Cease-Fire Agreement signed in August (and broken the very next day by the IFM) and then to the Townsville Peace Agreement in October 2000 (see chapter 3.2.1. for more detail).

The attitude of the MEF after the “coup” made it clear that they were not interested in taking state power for *political control*. They may have assisted Manasseh Sogavare to become Prime Minister by hijacking six supporters of his rival Leslie Boseto on 30 June 2000, but the 2001 General Election – when the MEF was officially already disbanded but most of their members were still in possession of high powered weapons and often recklessly using them – was assessed as “clean and orderly” by an independent Commonwealth Observers Group.<sup>340</sup> The MEF did not make any efforts to establish a system of domination of whatsoever kind; it had never been a *political* project.

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<sup>340</sup> Solomon Islands National Parliamentary Elections 5 December 2001. *The Report of the Commonwealth Observer Group*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 2002, p. 18.

While this can be affirmed for the MEF as a whole, different factions inside the militant group took different attitudes after the coup. Moderate leaders and executives of the Police Field Force who still hung on to some institutional standards tried to control the situation and guarantee a minimal level of security to civil servants, businessmen and common people in Honiara. The MEF even formed a sort of “Military Police” that tried to tame its own militants. There were cases where MEF militants prevented looting:

One day I was on my way up to Choviri when some of the men warned me not to go since the MEF men had just abducted one of my brothers. I was so scared but I braved myself and went to Choviri. To my horror I discovered that my house was set on fire. It was unbearable to stand and see our house being consumed by fire. The next day I came down to Choviri and saw men removing copper from my in-law’s house. My in-law is from Malaita and he went and collected some MEF men who accompanied him back and chased the men who tried to remove the copper. The MEF men fired shots at the people who were trying to loot the house and they all fled up the hill.

**Statement N° 1567**

Regrettably, these moderate MEF leaders and police officers were outnumbered by elements who sought to take advantage of the chaotic situation for their own material benefit:

Like the IFM, the MEF was a loose coalition of separate militant groups – some motivated by grievance over the eviction of Malaitans and other insults, others footloose young men motivated by the pursuit of excitement, others criminals more concerned to inflict injustice than to correct it. Theoretically, camp commanders took orders from the MEF Supreme Council, but they acted as local gang leaders. There was an interesting symbiosis between the MEF with more political objectives and militants with more criminal objectives.<sup>341</sup>

Extortion from the Government Treasury became the objective for most MEF members after the armory raid. The government was swamped with hundreds of “compensation claims” and demands for “danger allowances” often under duress and usually successful (see chapter 3.4.1.2 for more details). In Auki, the MEF snatched SBD\$5 million of the SBD\$6.8 million compensation package that the National Government had approved for the Provincial Government of Malaita. The Malaita Provincial Secretary deposited the money in a trust account that the Supreme Council had opened especially for this compensation payment. It was withdrawn three days later and vanished without a trace. Andrew Nori received almost half a million dollars in legal fees from the Government for elaborating the draft of the Townsville

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<sup>341</sup> John Braithwaite, Sinclair Dinnen, Matthew Allen, Valerie Braithwait and Hilary Charlesworth: *Pillars and Shadows: Statebuilding as Peacebuilding in Solomon Islands*. Canberra: Australian National University, 2010, p. 35.

Peace Agreement, which he later explained by commenting that he “was not born to serve this country free”.<sup>342</sup>

There was also a proliferation of spontaneous criminal activities by MEF militants – or those who claimed to be such. At that time it became clear that a large number of the weapons taken from the armouries in Auki and Rove had ended up in the hands of common criminals; as one police officer told the TRC:

Shortly after the takeover, we started to see a lot of men wearing camouflage clothing moving around the Auki Township. I noticed that most of the criminals I had arrested during my years as an officer in Malaita were also seen as members of the so-called MEF militia.

Statements like the following, arbitrarily picked from a great number telling similar stories, show the blurring of boundaries between a militant group and a criminal gang:

At 4:00 p.m. when I was working at the Quality Motel [in Honiara] the militants came and threatened me and tied up my hands. One of them, who was about 15 years old, came and hit me with the barrel of his gun.

*Which group was this?*

They were members of the Malaita Eagle Force.

*You mentioned that the one who hit you with the barrel of his gun was 15 years old. What about the others, how old were they?*

Their ages varied from 30 years to 40 years. I fell down and they demanded \$25,000. “If you don’t give us \$25,000 we will take you away to the camp and will hang you at 5:00 p.m. this evening”.

**Statement N° 5073**

This victim was saved by a MEF camp commander who happened to be a friend of his, but many others were less fortunate. Even the Supreme Council, which held a considerable amount of power at the time, could not avoid the explosion of criminal activities and chaos as a result of hundreds of high-powered weapons in circulation after the armory raid. This situation is acknowledged by former MEF leaders:

For the purpose of dialogue and day-to-day management after the Rove armory raid, we formed the Supreme Council. At the top we have people like Andrew Nori and Leslie Kwaiga, two prominent Malaitan lawyers who helped us keep in touch with the law. Also, prominent Malaitans like Alex Bartlett, Rolland Timo and Jeremy Rua. Then we have members of the Paramilitary Force who advise us on warfare tactics like differentiating civilians from enemies. The senior members of the MEF and the camps commanders had to regularly attend Supreme

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<sup>342</sup> Andrew Nori: “5th of June 2000 in perspective”. *op. cit.*, p. 17.

Council meetings for orders and directives. Unfortunately the MEF was not a disciplinary force and things sometimes went out of hand.

**Testimony of a former MEF commander**

The testimony given by Rollance Hilly, a Telekom employee, during a public hearing in Gizo provides an eloquent description of the situation in Honiara at the time. Shortly after the armory raid, Hilly received a visit from a former Telekom employee who had joined the MEF. The militant, who was armed and apparently drunk, had been dismissed from Telekom and claimed the company should pay him a compensation of SBD\$10 million, which after some negotiations he reduced to SBD\$250,000. Finally, following the intervention of a Supreme Council member, Hilly had to sign a cheque for \$35,000:

I tried to convince him but he stood on the \$250,000 demand. As we were talking the Sol Law firm rang me up; they were the company's law representative firm; they asked me about the situation concerning the demand, and they advised me to call the MEF Supreme Council. I called their leader and he was amazed over the nature of the demand; he then told me to put him on the phone. I called him to come to the phone and they talked for some time. At the end of the conversation he told me that his boss wanted to see him. As he was about to leave he told me not to leave the premises since he will return later.

The militant then returned around 5 p.m. in the evening and told me that his boss had agreed for him to demand \$30,000 from the Telekom Company. He argued that his boss has nothing to do with his demand since he was the one terminated by the company not his MEF boss, and pointed out that I should add an additional \$20,000 on top of the \$30,000 to make it a total of \$50,000. I told him to return in the morning and I would raise a cheque of \$30,000 as his boss had agreed upon.

He left and Sol Law rang me up again and asked me of my plan. I told them that I have intended to give him \$30,000. Sol Law told me to advise him to collect his money from them since all the Telekom accounts had been closed as directed by the overall boss in Australia. He came next morning and I explained the situation, and showed him the facsimile send by the boss in Australia to the MEF boss. He was quite confused but I advised him to follow the procedures for his own good and to collect the money from the Sol Law firm. I signed a cheque of \$35,000, handed it over to him and he left.

**Extract of the testimony of Mr. Rollance Hilly, TRC public hearing in Gizo 13/07/2011**

The situation worsened after the Townsville Peace Agreement when the Malaita Eagle Force officially disbanded and the command chain, which kept in check at least partially the self-indulgence of individual militants, disappeared.

**6. After the TPA**

The signing of the Townsville Peace Agreement marked the official disbanding of MEF. However, weapons were still at large with former combatants and civilians. Guns at that time

were easily bought and sold: for US\$125 you could get an SLR, M16, .303 or an SR-88. These guns were now used even more ruthlessly than before the TPA to make fast money. Extorting money from businessmen and public servants increased, as did assaults and car robberies.<sup>343</sup> Many business owners and politicians turned to former MEF militants to provide them security against their former comrades.

A lot of them took advantage of the situation to accumulate wealth. Others with no one to fight when guns were available went around demanding money from people and demanding money from the Treasury. Some formed associations with businessmen and politicians to carry out special tasks. A lot used the guns after the signing of TPA for simply making easy money.

#### **Leslie Kwaiga, Closed Hearing**

Chapter 4.2.5 gives a detailed account of property violations committed by Malaitans who were still in possession of weapons; it is not necessary to repeat them here. This was the time when boatloads of stolen goods were sent over to Auki on almost a daily basis.

At that time the militants or criminals went around looting and stealing the properties left behind by people fleeing from the fight. They took everything and they sold it for money.

#### **Statement N° 1569**

Skirmishes between former MEF factions also increased. As noted above, the Placemaker Building was burned down in November 2000. Another shoot-out based on a compensation claim between Malaitans happened in the Fishing Village in east Honiara; the claim was settled by people from the Lau Lagoon and former militants from the To'obaita region.

The post-TPA violence then reached Malaita. Chapter 3.2.3 describes armed clashes between MEF factions from Kwara'ae and To'obaita, the killing of people over land disputes, and very many of arbitrary compensation claims. There were also clashes over repatriation money:

I was at home one morning when a group of militants came to my house. They came with the village chief and they asked for the repatriation money that had been given to me by the militant leader to keep. The amount of that money given to us was \$1500 which they later took and shared amongst them. After some time some of their friends disagreed with their share and they claimed that I had taken part of the money. They accused me of withholding money. I categorically denied that and an argument broke out and one of them took out a homemade gun and pointed it at my forehead. Those people were from my village and I did not fear them. I stood up and retaliated by chasing them out of my house. Finally they left my house and went away.

#### **Statement N° 0186**

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<sup>343</sup> Many of the businessmen who suffered extortion were Chinese. The Chinese ethnic community was officially invited to give their statements to the TRC, but they finally declined after some internal consultation. Fear of revenge was mentioned as the main reason to the TRC.

After the TPA, when there was no longer a rival militant group to take on, many of the Malaita Eagles turned against their own people. There was nothing “ethnic” anymore about the tension.

## **7. Conclusions**


In the mere ten months of its formal existence, the Malaita Eagle Force turned out to be even less of a *political* organization than the IFM who used the Bona Fide Demands as a formal platform to justify their uprising. No political ideology guided the MEF. Retaliation and revenge were the main motive for involvement of many Malaitan men in the beginning. After the Rove armory raid, however, militants, individually or in small groups, often resorted to criminal activities in their objective to wring the maximum amount of *material* benefit from the tension. After the Townsville Peace Agreement, when hundreds of militants returned to Malaita taking their weapons with them, aggression was directed against people from their own ethnic background.

Many of the offences committed by Malaitan militants, like extortion of civil servants and the Public Treasury, technically do not qualify as human rights violations. They are common crimes and as such they are not registered in the TRC database which was formulated on the basis of six kinds of human rights violations reported by individual victims. So while Guadalcanal militants were responsible for most of the violations of human rights against individuals (see chapter 4.2), the Malaita Eagle Force were to blame mostly for extorting money from the Government.



**Figure 3.3.1**  
**Compensation claim to SIG for a vehicle commandeered by MEF militants,**  
**including approval by MEF Commander**

Deputy Prime Minister  
Hon. Allan Kemakeza  
Ministry of National Unity  
Reconciliation and Peace

  
Green Valley  
Honiara.

Date: 09/01/2001

Dear Sir,

Re: Claim of stolen and badly damaging of Vehicles Registration Number 9483 DATSUN.

I understands under the both cease fire and Peace agreements that the Solomon Islands Government has entered into with IFM and MEF, the Solomon Islands Government has been obligated to cover the total costs of the damages done by the two militants groups.

Sir, the purpose of this letter is to formally notified the Government, and your good office, that during the ethnic tension on Guadalcanal the MEF (tiger) groups has stolen my Vehicle Reg No 9483 Datsun to assist them in mobilization of their soldiers.

Sir, when the vehicle were returned it was badly damaged and were of no value.

Sir, the ownership of there vehicles has come along through investment of my hard earned cash from the Trading activities.

Sir, some papers relating to this claims are enclosed here with this letter.

This amount claimed is as follows:

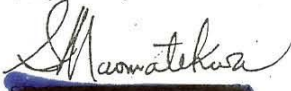

Value of the vehicle Reg. No. 9483 Datsun	\$45,000.00
<b>Total claimed</b>	<b>\$45,000.00</b>

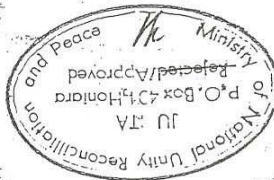
Sir, the costs increased and which have affected my vehicles although small, are the parts of this Peace process restorations, as an individual affected should therefore be considered.

Sir, personally I fully applauded your Government policy to rectified the situation and to bring back Peace to our Country.

Thank you for your understanding.

Yours sincerely



F/C  
please raise a  
payment of  
\$45,000  
UK  
p.s.

CERTIFICATION

1. I hereby certify that the vehicles owned by [REDACTED] has been taken and used by the MEF for purposes of mobilizing our soldiers. The vehicles has since never been returned to [REDACTED]. He is entitled to claim for the use and damaged of his vehicles.

Signature:   
MOSES S M.E.F/COMMANDER/TIGERS

2. The Costs/Services provided falls within the meanings of the Guideline Policies of the Terms of the SIG/M.E.F/I.F.M Peace Agreements.

Signature:   
LESLIE KWAIGA /LEGAL ADVISOR/M.E.F

## 3.4 THE STATE

*There is a hierarchy of political goods. None is as critical as the supply of security, especially human security. . . . The state's prime function is to provide that political good of security.*<sup>344</sup>

### 3.4.1 THE FAILED ATTEMPT TO PURCHASE PEACE: SOLOMON ISLANDS GOVERNMENTS BETWEEN 1998 AND 2003

#### 3.4.1.1 A weak state under siege

Studies have drawn attention to weaknesses in Solomon Islands government even in normal, peaceful times;<sup>345</sup> weaknesses that can be attributed to a number of factors, including disparities between the demands of the Westminster system and society's expectations of political representation; weak political parties; the priority of personal or local interests over national concerns; and corrupt practices. Many authors have pointed to the historical roots of these flaws:

Part of the problem in these countries is the very "statelessness" of traditional societies. In contrast to the homogeneous and hierarchical Polynesian kingdoms, most of which had well-established state-like forms of social organization prior to European contact, most of Melanesia was essentially stateless, and composed of thousands of small a cephalous social groups. As a consequence, countries such as the Solomon Islands inherited colonial institutions of statehood that have not properly taken root. The increasing glorification of gun culture in parts of the Solomons and Papua New Guinea is a good demonstration of the vexed question of how modern statehood relates to the pre-existing society.<sup>346</sup>

All during the tension, this weakness was evident in the Government's inability to meet a basic duty of any state: to provide security for its citizens.

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<sup>344</sup> Robert I. Rotberg: "Failed States, Collapsed States, Weak States: Causes and Indicators", in Robert I. Rotberg (ed.): *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*; Cambridge, Mass.: World Peace Institute and Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003, p. 3.

<sup>345</sup> See, among many others, Tarcicius Tara Kabutaulaka: *A Weak State and the Solomon Islands Peace Process*, University of Hawaii at Manoa, East-West Centre Working Papers N° 14, 2002. Jane Turnbull: "Solomon Islands: blending traditional power and modern structures of the state", in *Public Administration and Development* N° 22, 2002, pp. 191-201. Francis Fukuyama: "State building in Solomon Islands", in *Pacific Economic Bulletin*, Vol. 23, N° 3, 2008, pp.1-17.

<sup>346</sup> Benjamin Reilly and Elsin Wainwright: "The South Pacific", in Simon Chesterman, Michael Ignatieff and Ramesh Thakur (eds.): *Making states work: State failure and the crisis of governance*; Tokyo, New York, Paris: United Nations University Press, 2005, p. 132. See also chapter 2.

Three Prime Ministers governed Solomon Islands during the years of the conflict: from 1997 Bartholomew Ulufa'alu led the coalition Solomon Islands Alliance for Change (SIAC) until he was forced to resign on 14 June 2000; Manasseh Sogavare, who came into power through an irregular election after the *de facto* coup against Ulufa'alu, remained in power until 17 December 2001; and Allan Kemakeza was sworn in as Prime Minister on 19 December 2001, serving a full four-year parliamentary term.

It has become customary, especially among former militants, to identify Solomon Islands Government as the main culprit behind the conflict.<sup>347</sup> While this is an overstatement, there can be no doubt that mistakes were made right from the beginning when dealing with the tensions. Ulufa'alu and his allies greatly misjudged the fundamental issues of the conflict. To them, the tension was masterminded by the Opposition in Parliament, looking for another “platform” from which to oust him after three motions of no confidence (November 1997, April 1998 and September 1998) were all defeated.<sup>348</sup> For Ulufa'alu, the conflict was entirely a *political* issue; he was unable to see the *social* component:

The state was reluctant to acknowledge that there were deeper socio-economic and political issues involved. Instead, officers of the state made inappropriate statements on the crisis. Former Police Commissioner, Frank Short, for example, was reported to have referred to those propagating violence as “young people who want a bit of fun and adventure.” Similar words were used by the Minister for State, Alfred Sasako: “so far as I gather, there are actually two and at the most three very small groups of perhaps a total of 50 people. Some of those arrested on arms charges were disgruntled former police officers. Most other trouble makers appear to be young people who do not take it seriously, but who want a bit of fun and adventure.”<sup>349</sup>

When violence finally threatened to get out of control, the Ulufa'alu Government resorted to customary ways of resolving conflicts. The “kastom feast” on 23 May 1999 was well received by many people, but none of the militant leaders from Guadalcanal participated.<sup>350</sup> Instead, only a few hours after the ceremony, they launched an attack at Tasiboko. After IFM militants raided Solomon Islands Plantation Ltd. in June 1999, the Government opted for a four-month state of

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<sup>347</sup> See the transcriptions of the public hearings with ex-militants in Annex 1.

<sup>348</sup> *Beneath Guadalcanal: The Underlying Causes of the Ethnic Tension*, Serialized by the Office of the Prime Minister, SIAC Government (1997-2000), p. 5; published as “Beneath Guadalcanal – Inside SIAC” in *Solomon Star*, 23/02/2000.

<sup>349</sup> Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka: *Beyond Ethnicity: The Political Economy of the Guadalcanal Crisis in Solomon Islands*. Canberra: The Australian National University. State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Working Paper 01/1, 2001.

<sup>350</sup> The Malaita Eagle Force did not yet exist.

emergency on Guadalcanal, giving the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force special powers to use violence in the course of their duties if they “acted in good faith.” Police action, however, was controversial; on the one hand Commissioner Frank Short shared Ulufa’alu’s view that the tension was a “social unrest” that should be handled with a minimum of repression; on the other hand, there were police overreactions that cost the lives of innocent people (see chapter 4.2.1).

While Ulufa’alu still could rely on a certain level of institutional loyalty even from the police, the “coup” of 5 June 2000 created a totally different situation. The *de facto* power was now in the hands of the Supreme Council that consisted of leading members of the paramilitary police and the Malaita Eagle Force but they were unable to avoid a situation of generalized chaos and anarchy. This became manifest during the government of Sogavare who, notwithstanding the irregular circumstances of his election, tried to do some institutionalizing of peace-building in creating the Department (later Ministry) for National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace which had an important role in fostering the Ceasefire Agreement and the Townsville Peace Agreement. However, no regular “governing” was possible under these circumstances.

*Why did you take over? I mean, in this situation who wants to become Prime Minister of Solomon Islands?*

To be honest I asked the same question to all my senior colleagues. I was actually the leader of Opposition; in my group we had Nathanael Waena, Allan Kemakeza and other senior politicians who had served several terms in Parliament before. I asked the question literally to everyone, is there is anyone who would like to stick out his neck to lead this country? Not one of them raised his hand.

So you are right; who would want to be the Prime Minister of this country and risk his life every day. You should have been in the Red House with me and face the heartache and the pain every day. Recalling these days, possibly for me it was only because I knew some of the key players and besides they were my wife’s relatives, so we managed to survive through that period of turmoil.

One day MEF militants came in and broke the boom gate, they overpowered the securities at the gate; they told me that they will kill me tonight if I do not reinstate Sir Allan Kemakeza by tomorrow.<sup>351</sup> I said that my decision had been made and I will not reinstate Sir Allan Kemakeza, so if you want to remove me tonight, it’s up to you and there is nothing I can do. My response really shook them up, they started pushing and shoving me around. Fortunately a police officer showed up; he grabbed the militants and ordered them to get out of the compound immediately. Five minutes later my wife’s relatives from Fishing Village arrived in truckloads asking where those men were, but I managed to calm them down. Yes, there were some life-threatening situations we went through.

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<sup>351</sup> Sogavare had removed Kemakeza as Minister for National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace when he approved compensation of more than SBD\$800,000 for himself.

At one stage they took me up to the bush escorted with guns; it was part of their observance to promote some police officers and there was beer all around; these were the types of officers who went around the city to whack people up. When they sent the vehicle they strongly instructed me to go and attend their promotion; if I failed to attend they would start burning down the town from White River to KGV. I.

**Extract of Closed Hearing with Manasseh Sogavare, 18/03/2011**

With no operational police force and Australia repeatedly denying the requests for intervention, *money* was expected to provide the solution. In what Fraenkel aptly called the “manipulation of custom”,<sup>352</sup> compensation payments became the driving force of peace-building.

There was not much anyone we could do during the remaining 18 months, because it was all about paying compensation and easing down the tension. We had to secure about \$300 million from the EXIM bank in Taiwan to pay compensation demanded by the people of Solomon Islands; it was all about making peace, peace and peace.

**Manasseh Sogavare, TRC closed hearing**

As the following subchapter will show, however, paying millions of dollars to a wide range of claimants, many of them members of the MEF, did not promote peace but rather fostered corruption, accelerated the breakdown of public institutions and exacerbated a chaotic and uncontrollable state of violence.

### **3.4.1.2. Compensation payments**

#### **1. Background**

Solomon Islands Government first confronted the issue of compensation in the Townsville Peace Agreement (TPA). In this Agreement, the Government defined compensation only in terms of monetary indemnity for loss of property or business during the tension, neglecting other human rights violations such as loss of life and mental wellbeing. The approach the Agreement took in terms of reparations fell short with regards to human rights.

Compensation regarding ethnic tensions was first raised in 1978 in a petition submitted to the newly-independent Government of Prime Minister Peter Kenilorea. A second petition was presented to the Government of Prime Minister Ezekiel Alebua in 1988 as part of “The Bona Fide Demands of the indigenous people of Guadalcanal,” presented to the Government after a

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<sup>352</sup> Jon Fraenkel: *The Manipulation of Custom. From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*. Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2004.

peaceful demonstration through the streets of Honiara. These petitions sought compensation from the Government for the death of 25 Guadalcanal people allegedly murdered by Malaitans, introduction of a state government system, return of alienated Guadalcanal land and fair compensation for the use of Guadalcanal resources in developing the country.<sup>353</sup> There was little positive response.

The demands were renewed in 1998 by the Premier of Guadalcanal, Ezekiel Alebua, shortly before the displacement of thousands of families on the eastern plains of Guadalcanal. Initial support for these people by way of accommodation and food, as well as transport to their home provinces, was provided by the churches and the Red Cross. The Red Cross provided food and tents to displaced families staying in centers in Honiara.

## **2. Initial response of the Government**

The Ulufa'alu Government organized displaced people into zones and assisted with repatriation costs. Subsequently, some of them returned to Honiara to resolve their claims for loss of property with the Government. They took part in demonstrations to pressure the Government for compensation. On 18 August 1999, a Displaced Victims' Pressure Committee was formed to compel the Government to pay compensation for loss of property.<sup>354</sup> The Committee assisted the Government with the compilation of a list to be considered for compensation. The number of displaced people was initially estimated by the Government to be around 18,000. Cabinet approved assistance in the form of cash and material for makeshift shelters. Each individual was entitled to SBD\$1,000 and could claim up to \$8,000. Affected families were required to have their claim certified by the Member of Parliament representing their constituency.

On 13 June 1999, the Government signed a memorandum of understanding with the Guadalcanal Provincial Government to start considering a solution to the Bona Fide Demands. A little over two weeks later, on 28 June 1999, the Ulufa'alu Government signed the Honiara Peace Accord with Commonwealth Special Envoy, Major General Sitiveni Rabuka, Premier Ezekiel Alebua of Guadalcanal Province, and Premier David Oeta of Malaita Province. Under this Accord it was agreed that a mechanism would be established to ensure those who suffered loss of property

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<sup>353</sup> Presented to the SIG on 4 February 1999

<sup>354</sup> *Solomon Star*, 3 July 2001, "Controversy over new displaced committee".

would be compensated. This never happened and this failure was to have consequences in the future.

Following up these Agreements, the Ulufa'alu Government set up three committees: the first to investigate claims for loss of property by displaced people, the second to investigate the alleged killing of 25 Guadalcanal persons, and the third to deal with compensation claims for swearing. On the basis of these committees, SBD\$5 million was allocated for compensation and SBD\$3 million for claims for loss of property. However, no records have been found relating to the work of these committees. Upon his forced resignation on 5 June 2000, Prime Minister Ulufa'alu was unable to continue this program and the Bona Fide demands and plight of the displaced people were temporarily left unattended.

To implement the emerging peace agreements, including compensation and the surrender of weapons, the Sogavare Government created the Ministry of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace (MNURP) with Allan Kemakeza as its first Minister. The Ministry immediately initiated dialogue with different groups of militants for the cessation of hostilities. On 2 August 2000, a Cease Fire Agreement was signed. In order to implement the Agreement, the Cease Fire Monitoring Council was created with Sir Peter Kenilorea as chairman and Paul Tovua as co-chair. The Council spent some time talking with militants around the country, seeking to persuade them to surrender their arms and reconcile. Attention was focused on the surrender of weapons and not on payment of compensation for the Guadalcanal killings and the loss of property. This process opened the way for the Townsville Peace Agreement.

### **3. The Townsville Peace Agreement (TPA)**

The Townsville Peace Agreement that was signed on 15 October 2000 recognized compensation. The parties to the Agreement were the Solomon Islands Government, the Guadalcanal and Malaita Provincial Governments, and representatives of the Malaita Eagle Force and Isatabu Freedom Movement. The Agreement acknowledged that compensation was the responsibility of the Government. Article 5 of Part 2 of the Agreement concerned the rehabilitation of the former militants and Part 3 dealt with missing persons and compensation for loss of property, business and personal property.



The provision in the Agreement relating to rehabilitation of former combatants is in three Parts: Part I provides that “within thirty days from the date of execution of this Agreement all MEF and IFM soldiers shall be repatriated to their home villages at cost to the Government”;<sup>355</sup> Part II provides that the Government would “launch public works programs to engage the services of MEF and IFM soldiers in their respective Provinces” three months after repatriation; and Part III obliged the Government to “provide through accredited Non-Government Organizations, counselling services for returning soldiers as well as for their families and close associates.”

The Townsville Peace Agreement acknowledged the victims by dealing with loss of lives and property. It contained an obligation to identify the remains of missing persons: in 90 days the “IFM and MEF shall locate, identify and allow the remains of any persons known to be killed during the course of the crisis to be retrieved by their relatives.” It also states: “Custom means of reconciliation and compensation may be agreed to between concerned persons and communities in connection with killing of persons during the course of the crisis.

The intention of the Townsville Peace Agreement was sincere. It was a response to the public demand for an end to the hostilities. However, the provisions of the Agreement were broad and unrealistic with regard to timeframes and funding. The Government had neither a compensation policy nor a budget in place to regulate the implementation of the Agreement. To fund compensation for victims, the Government approached donor countries. The Government agreed to employ former combatants in “public works programs” within 90 days. The commitment was unrealistic in light of the crippled state of the economy.

#### **4. The EXIM Bank loan**

To obtain funds for the implementation of the compensation and rehabilitation agreed to in the Townsville Peace Agreement, Prime Minister Sogavare commenced discussions with different donor countries. These talks were unproductive because there was little interest in funding compensation. However, Sogavare believed compensation was critical to the peace process for which the Townsville Peace Agreement was instrumental. This view was clearly expressed in his “One Hundred First Days Plan for Peace program” when he became Prime Minister. The Ulufa’alu Government had begun compensating displaced people on an *ad hoc* basis, but

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<sup>355</sup> TPA, Section 5, Rehabilitation of Militants

compensation became a political commitment for the Government when it initiated the peace process after Townsville. By that time the economy had collapsed as the tension had exacerbated what was a fragile state of affairs. Major businesses had closed or reduced operations, exports had fallen, and there was extensive damage to transport infrastructure, schools, water supplies, sanitation systems, government facilities and health services.

Thousands of people lost their jobs and public servants were paid irregularly, if at all. The economy declined by over 14 percent in 1999 and by the same margin in 2001.<sup>356</sup> Against this economic and social background, Prime Minister Sogavare in June 2001 arranged a loan of US\$25 million from the EXIM Bank of Taiwan to pay for financial obligations incurred in the Townsville Peace Agreement.<sup>357</sup> The resulting budget deficit led to an increase in the Government's formal debt. Loans increased over 70 percent between 2000 and 2002 and (particularly in 2001 and 2002) Taiwanese institutions advanced loans representing 32 percent of Solomon Islands' external debt. Government finances were severely strained as the debt burden was unsustainable, far exceeding the country's earning capacity and legal limits.<sup>358</sup>

Finance Minister Snyder Rini signed the loan agreement with the EXIM Bank before the media and announced that the payment of compensation would begin with displaced people's claims for loss of property. The announcement was made without any policy or guidelines in place. This absence opened the door for anyone to make a claim to receive compensation. On 29 June 2001, Prime Minister Sogavare announced in the media that "the 127 million dollar loan is to compensate those who lost their properties, employment, and commercial operations during the two years of armed conflict on Guadalcanal."<sup>359</sup>

The total loan granted was US\$25 million, and it was agreed that this should be drawn down in four tranches as follows:

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<sup>356</sup> R.N. Hou, Governor, S.I. Central Bank. Address to the Economic Association of Solomon Islands (EASI). "The economic and financial state of the Solomon Islands". 16 November 2001.

[www.cbsi.com.sb/tileadmin/press\\_releases/speeches/EASI](http://www.cbsi.com.sb/tileadmin/press_releases/speeches/EASI)

<sup>357</sup> The TRC was informed verbally by the former Central Bank Director that the Taiwan Government later signed a new agreement agreeing to repay the loan themselves. The TRC formally requested information from the Central Bank but did not receive a reply.

<sup>358</sup> 2001 Solomon Islands Annual Report. Central Bank, 30 April 2002. [www.cbsi.com.sb](http://www.cbsi.com.sb)

<sup>359</sup> *Solomon Star*, 29 June 2001

**Table 3.4-1  
EXIM Bank loan**

<b>Tranche</b>	<b>Date drawable</b>	<b>Amount drawn US Dollars (USD)</b>	<b>Amount drawn Solomon Dollars (SBD)</b>
1	2 July 2001	USD 8 million	SBD 42,283,298.10
2	18 October 2001	USD 7 million	SBD 37,756,202.80
3	7 February 2002	USD 5 million	SBD 29,620,853.08
Drawn through CBSI		USD 20 million	SBD 109,660,353.98
4	4 October 2002	USD 5 million	SBD 36,501,110.26
Drawn through ANZ		USD 5 million	SBD 36,501,110.26
<b>Total drawable and drawn</b>		USD 25 million	SBD 146,161,464.24

**Source: Report of the Auditor General into the Export Import [EXIM] Bank Loan, November 2004**

## **5. Absence of a compensation policy**

There was a flood of claims for compensation after the Townsville Agreement, as displaced people and those who had lost property made submissions to the Government for payment. The total amount of public funds spent was SBD\$371,119,008: EXIM Bank Loan, SBD\$146,161.464 (84%); other SIG funds, SBD\$224,957,544 (16%).<sup>360</sup> The MNURP received the applications and organized the list of claimants. In their report to the government entitled “Book One,” the final list of successful claimants were paid SBD\$140 million. This document formed the first approved list for payments. The Ministry for National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace and the Ministry of Finance has no record of “Book One” and “Book Two” and the payments made.

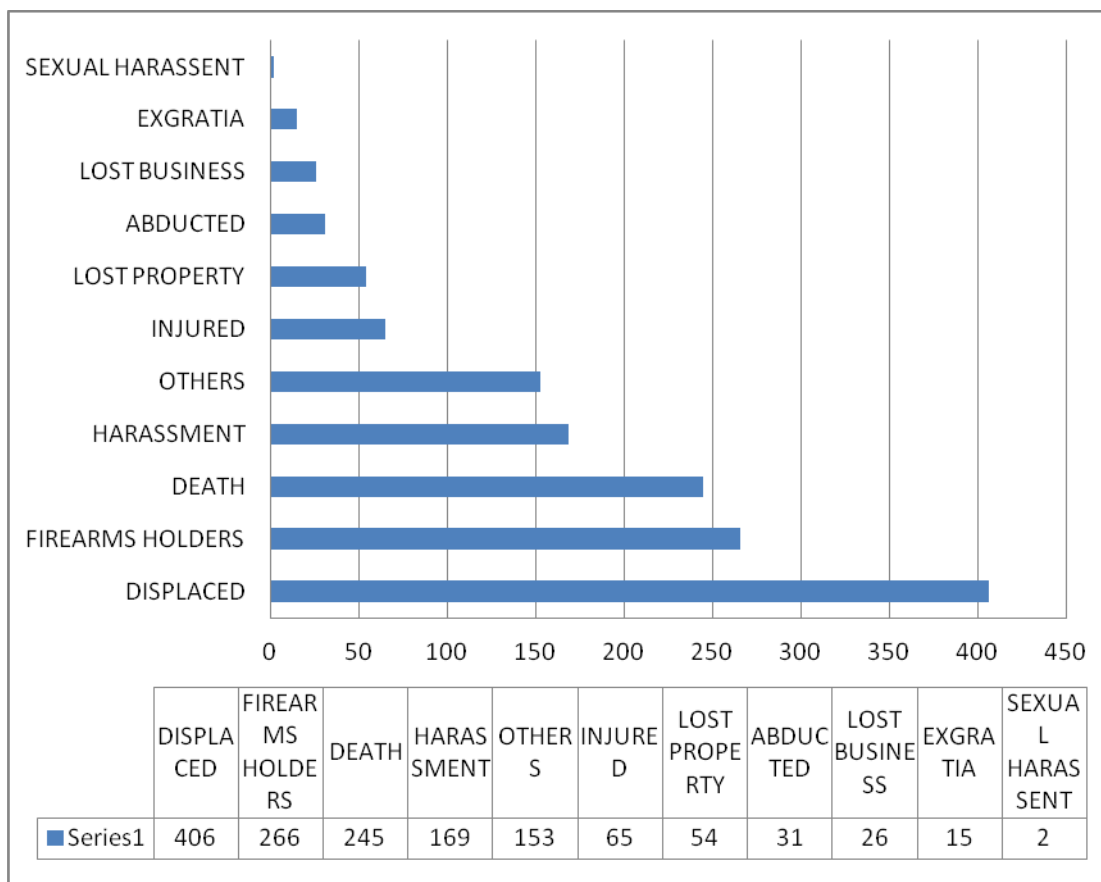
The EXIM Bank loan raised people’s expectations unrealistically in relation to claims for losses suffered during the tension, and the situation was made more complex with no controls or guidelines in place. The TRC analysis of the claims revealed an extensive range of cases. Little attempt was made to classify and quantify claims in order to ensure consistency and comparability. There were cases of loss property, harassment, loss of business, nurses at the

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<sup>360</sup> Report of the Auditor General into the Export Import [EXIM] Bank Loan, November 2004

National Referral Hospital who were harassed by militants, public servants intimidated by armed militants, gratuity for public servants remaining at work during the tension, and licensed gun owners awaiting compensation for the confiscation of their weapons. Payment for the various claims was effected by way of non-negotiable predated bank cheques issued in accordance to the list provided by the Ministry of National Unity Reconciliation and Peace.

**Figure 3.4-1**  
**Types of compensation claims**



**Compiled by TRC, source: MNURP archive<sup>361</sup>**

The Government agreed to establish two phases for payment of compensation. The first was for those who lost property from the beginning of the tension up to 28 May 2000. The second was for those who lost property between 28 May and 15 October 2000. The payments were organized according to a list compiled by three committees and were divided into lots of a

<sup>361</sup> See Annex 4.

hundred. On 24 July 2001, the ANZ Bank paid out the claims of the first hundred cases. This payment was done in three locations: those who claimed lost property in northwest Guadalcanal went to the Police Club; those who had claims in central and north Guadalcanal assembled at Holy Cross Cathedral; and the third group claiming loss of property in northeast and east Central Guadalcanal met at the Multipurpose Hall. Payments were suspended on 26 July 2001 because of irregularities.<sup>362</sup> Numerous complaints were received from displaced people that their claims had been drastically reduced. Complaints were also received from those who had lost property but were not included in the list. At a press conference called to clarify the situation, Prime Minister Sogavare stated that Cabinet was not involved in the compilation of the list.

Sir Allan Kemakeza, Minister for National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace, and his Permanent Secretary, Lucian Ki'i, were responsible for implementing the compensation scheme. A few days later, it was disclosed that they had been paid SBD\$851,000 and SBD\$750,000 respectively for compensation claims contrary to previous agreement. Sogavare dismissed Sir Allan from Cabinet and Permanent Secretary Ki'i was removed by the Public Service Commission. Militants threatened Sogavare, demanding he reinstate Sir Allan, but Sogavare refused to be intimidated.<sup>363</sup>

When the second tranche of SBD\$40 million dollars from the EXIM Bank arrived in the Central Bank, it was announced in the media by MNURP. People not on the list were asked to be patient and await the arrival of the next tranche of SBD\$35 million dollars in October. The public was also told that a new classification system for disbursing money to displaced people had been approved by Cabinet and had been strictly adhered to. However, there was no process in place for certification of the veracity of claims. This situation was made worse by the lack of any governing procedures in place. Every day Cabinet received new lists of claims and there were no controls. The most complicated task was the verification of the claims.

Sogavare's noble intention of reinforcing the peace with the payment of compensation only reinforced the loss of legitimacy and authority of the Government and state institutions. The Government tried to implement a complex and ambitious program of compensation that had no clear policy or methodology at a time of anarchy and defunct government institutions. Receipt

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<sup>362</sup> *Solomon Star*, 26 July, 2000, p. 1.

<sup>363</sup> Manasseh Sogavare, TRC closed hearing, 18/03/2011.

of the compensation in tranches worsened matters as former combatants and those with access to firearms exploited the situation. As payment of compensation claims took priority over all government services, the general public also exploited the situation in whatever way they could.

## **6. Anarchy and corruption**

The permanent secretaries of the MNURP between June 2001 and October 2002 failed to produce proper accounts of the EXIM Bank loan. “Disparity and material discrepancies in the financial data and information have resulted in a net overpayment of property claims of approximately 13.8 million. Consequently millions of dollars were spent on highly suspect and dubious claims.”<sup>364</sup>

When the money from the EXIM Bank arrived, the militants’ commanders commandeered the major portion of these funds. Under duress, Ministry of Finance officials were coerced into preparing cheques for millions of dollars for these militants. The victims regarded the compensation paid as inequitable and unfair because the Government was not consistent in making payments. For example, in death claims a majority of victims received \$100,000, others received \$40,000 and some \$50,000.<sup>365</sup> No explanation or rationale was given for these inconsistencies. Still other payments reflected the irrationality of the program. The following information is taken from a list of payments of SBD\$16,824,023, representing only 296 payments, less than 10 percent of the EXIM Bank loan.<sup>366</sup> There were only two claims for education assistance: one for \$150,000<sup>367</sup> and another for \$30,000.<sup>368</sup> This is strange since the education of thousands of students was disrupted by the tensions. That there were only two payments for education assistance may indicate that the basis on which compensation was paid out was not given as much thought as it deserved.

Another apparent anomaly was payment made to persons claiming they were forced to transport MEF militants or that their vehicles were damaged by MEF militants (see Table 3.4-2). Some of

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<sup>364</sup> Report of the Auditor General into the Export Import [EXIM] Bank Loan, November 2004.

<sup>365</sup> MNURP Archives document.

<sup>366</sup> See Annex 5.

<sup>367</sup> Hon. J.D. Tausinga, voucher 276632, chq. No. 39968, 6 January 2001.

<sup>368</sup> Florence Ki’i, voucher 276606, chq. No. 39944, 25 January 2001.

these payments were higher than compensation for death claims. The total amount paid under this head was \$2,154,548 in 36 payments:

**Table 3.4-2**  
**Compensation for vehicle damages**

<b>Voucher</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Chq. No</b>	<b>SBD</b>	<b>Date</b>
277016	Harold Maomatex	40283	210,000	5 February 2001
276338	Ronald Emmett (cost of fuel & transport by MEF)	42321	153,000	25 April 2001
275985	Maofaita Ship Co. (2 <sup>nd</sup> part pay. for use of ship by MEF)	40249	125,250	31 January 2001
280577	Leslie T Holosivi (used company vehicle)	41799	120,000	12 May 2001
276638	Smith Mauridala (for damage of Hilux A1300)	40255	120,000	31 January 2001
282827	Hon. Lence Tago (for damage to vehicle)	42071	114,000	7 March 2001
276337	Sundry Persons – MNURP (use of vehicle by MEF)	39932	76,000	24 January 2001
277820	Frank Maesala (2 <sup>nd</sup> part payment of use of vehicle)	40262	75,000	31 January 2001
277019	Sutcliff Tisa	40559	75,000	5 February 2001
277731	Freddy Soga (use of vehicle by MEF)	40246	70,000	31 January 2001
2777734	Moses Peter (use of vehicle by MEF)	40250	70,000	31 January 2001
284720	Barrack Wale (use of vehicle by MEF soldiers)	42319	60,400	25 April 2001
2777730	Jack Seda (use of vehicle)	40247	50,000	31 January 2001
276039	Jimmy Store (D/Prime Minister's Hilux Reg No 8338)	39652	50,000	12 January 2001
275967	John Kaonibata (2 ray boats used by MEF)	39653	50,000	12 January 2001
275983	Mr. Joseph Maesala (2 <sup>nd</sup> payment for L/vehicles)	39655	50,000	12 January 2001
2777625	Peter Jimmy (use of vehicle A5128)	40252	50,000	31 January 2001
276341	Redly Gilbert (use of OBM & ray boats by MEF)	39931	50,000	24 January 2001
277856	Aeda John (bus service interrupted)	40279	48,000	5 February 2001
277020	John Sy (acquisition of vehicle by MEF)	40812	48,000	8 February 2001
284721	Edward Angifera (use of vehicle No A7886 by MEF)	42721	46,500	25 May 2001
275991	Ellison Wale (2nd part payment for vehicle use by MEF)	39646	45,000	12 January 2001
277533	Henry Saeni (confiscation of car A5704)	40807	40,530	8 February 2001
281213	Alic Funuga (unlawful use of vehicle)	42591	40,000	18 March 2001
276340	Mark Waleka (use of car & supply vehicle part)	38992	36,200	26 January 2001

276450	Lilly Dio (Mrs.) (compensation car Reg A5919)	40266	36,000	31 January 2001
278207	Sundry Persons – MNURP (vehicle use by MEF - Tigers)	40850	34,200	13 February 2001
281143	Hon. L. Tago (damaged vehicle)	41937	32,000	27 March 2001
276608	Hon. Dickson Wara (damage of private vehicle Reg. 8106)	40020	31,900	26 January 2001
278416	Jack Akao (use of vehicle)	41035	30,000	20 February 2001
275982	Mr. Sosimo Wale (2nd pay compensation of taxi)	39594	30,000	9 January 2001
277984	Paul Bulu Wale (4th payment for 2 bus service)	40766	30,000	7 February 2001
286823	Alick Wane (damaged vehicle)	42712	25,000	24 May 2001
276033	Paul Wale Bulu (bus service stolen & damaged)	39662	25,000	12 January 2001
281135	Janny Bentley (damaged vehicle)	41859	5,000	10 March 2001
286719	Moses K (part used on vehicle)	42604	2,568	21 May 2001
	<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>2,154,548</b>	

**Compiled by TRC. Source: Compensation payments, Peace Monitoring Council archives.**

Twenty-four of these payments, more than half the total amount, were paid to persons who transported the MEF militants; ten for damaged vehicles; and two for loss of business. There were payments of SBD\$210,000, \$153,000 and \$125,000 for the transport of MEF militants; for damage to vehicles: \$120,000 and \$114,000. One person received \$48,000 for interruption of his bus service and another \$30,000 as second payment for compensation for his taxi service. How were these claims calculated and verified? Was it open to everyone to make such claims? On what basis were those who transported militants prioritised over displaced persons who were the earliest victims of the tension and the worst affected? The nature of these questions cast considerable doubt over the integrity and the transparency of the manner in which decisions to pay out claims were made.

Payments for claims for injuries, harassment, and loss of property were not dealt with consistently (see Table 3.4-3). One person received \$71,000 for harassment, another \$20,000, while a third was paid \$2,000 for being threatened. Some of the vouchers mention “sundry persons” with no further detail. The total for these types of payments was SBD\$1,442,580:



**Table 3.4-3  
Compensation for Injury and others**

<b>Voucher</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Chq. No</b>	<b>SBD</b>	<b>Date</b>
276160	Sundry persons MNRURP (T/claims for various persons)	38675	225,000	12 January 2001
276197	F. Gerena Ship Ltd. (compensation claim)	40796	200,000	8 February 2001
276198	Steve Abana (compensation for TRS of Tunau)	40238	160,000	29 January 2001
277854	B.G. Saenemua	41888	150,000	20 March 2001
276333	Mr. R Marahare	38706	150,000	18 January 2001
277859	Laurence Mamugeli (damage & lost property)	41886	150,000	20 March 2001
276161	Raymond Niurara (prop/claim )	39674	125,850	12 January 2001
277939	David Dausabea (lost property)	40281	120,000	9 February 2001
284732	Freda Diau (veh A6111 & house property)	42192	120,000	9 May 2001
279541	Joachim Konai	423333	100,000	26 April 2001
280432	Gordon Darcy (destroyed property)	41887	100,000	20 March 2001
278640	Paul Waleurifo payroll compensation on panel beating)	41460	100,000	8 March 2001
278013	Jimmy Store (2 <sup>nd</sup> payment)	41190	88,000	27 February 2001
277983	M.M. Construction (3rd pay for damages)	42081	83,850	10 April 2001
278362	C. Tagaranana (3rd pay)	41058	75,000	20 February 2001
277961	John Tebolo (2nd pay)	40750	75,000	6 February 2001
277887	J. Maesala (harassment)	41897	71,000	20 March 2001
284732	Freda Diau (V A6111 & house property)	42550	70,000	9 May 2001
281923	Clement Ata	42562	50,000	18 May 2001
275970	Phillip Beukwai	39663	50,000	12 January 2001
278774	Robert Nunua	41179	50,000	26 February 2001
277907	Sundry Persons	41602	50,000	7 March 2001
277724	Barasi Suda (physical & mental)	40244	50,000	31 January 2001
278513	CBSI SIG Revenue A/C (Seth Iromea compensation)	1009	50,000	9 November 2000
276342	Elison Kaoni (comp. physical & mental)	40292	50,000	5 February 2001
275969	Eric Daumusia (gunshot wound)	39647	50,000	12 January 2001
275976	Francis Orodani (lost properties, Kakabona & Savo)	39668	50,000	12 January 2001
282685	Jack Tuita (goodwill payment)	42080	50,000	10 April 2001
277857	Jessie Alegao (comp. payment)	40636	50,000	5 February 2001
281597	Jessies Afu (compensation burned house)	41902	50,000	23 March 2001
277727	Junior Sea (comp. physical & mental)	40248	50,000	31 January 2001
276036	MM Construction (items damaged at height of tension)	39660	50,000	12 January 2001
276642	Morris Joe (physical , health & mental)	40265	50,000	31 January 2001

275977	Sethual Kelly (comp. being attacked by IFM)	39667	50,000	12 January 2001
281927	Sundry (Seni, Velani, Boti, Pas, Peter)	42457	50,000	2 May 2001
286820	Rose Magi	42698	40,000	23 May 2001
278689	David Firisua (damage, arsonist)	42673	30,000	23 May 2001
279543	Max Ofai (hostage by IFM)	41596	35,000	7 March 2001
281204	Harry Padavise	42320	30,000	25 April 2001
281475	Johnson Apeo	41903	30,000	23 March 2001
281985	Wilfred Daoburi	42526	30,000	7 May 2001
281237	Polycarp Kaelafa (PTY/claim)	41898	25,000	21 March 2001
275990	Tuita Balou (2nd part physical & mental injury)	39671	25,000	12 January 2001
278502	Merie Waneasi	41024	25,000	20 February 2001
276008	Francis Waleani (payment claim)	39649	22,000	12 January 2001
277681	Thomas Dake (accommodation charges for MEF)	40815	20,800	8 February 2001
280385	Augustine Taloga (physical & mental injury)	42381	20,000	1 May 2001
282009	Francis Naho & family (harassment)	42525	20,000	7 May 2001
282505	Augustine Taluom	42382	20,000	1 May 2001
280382	Paul Kukiti	41789	20,000	8 March 2001
286619	Jackson Piku (bodily harm)	42596	20,000	18 May 2001
285483	Nicky Maena	42524	16,500	7 May 2001
280384	Harold Timan	42373	15,000	30 April 2001
280379	John Alick Usimanu	42422	15,000	1 May 2001
280274	John Kamusu	41827	15,000	14 March 2001
281668	John Maelangi	41905	15,000	26 March 2001
280576	Walter Limata	41884	15,000	20 March 2001
280380	Augustine Sogholo (unlawful wounding)	41785	15,000	8 March 2001
279152	Clifford A'aisanau (claim attached?)	41248	15,000	2 March 2001
281727	Francis Bakumatae (comp for being taken)	43291	15,000	1 May 2001
280794	John Ross	41892	12,500	20 March 2001
280276	Casper Tinifou	41786	12,000	8 March 2001
281132	David Rosalio	41874	10,000	19 March 2001
281477	Erastus Tele	17130	10,000	28 March 2001
285466	Gad Sanuku	42703	10,000	23 May 2001
281424	Ricky Nupani	42410	10,000	1 May 2001
283441	Joachim Harimanu (claim attached?)	42463	10,000	3 May 2001
278004	John Kaonibata (2nd payment)	41826	10,000	14 March 2001
280770	Michael Toposi	42708	8,480	23 May 2001
280273	Mark Manebona	41595	7,000	7 March 2001
281203	Eddie Tuli	42674	5,000	23 May 2001
282780	Eric Freeman	42060	5,000	4 April 2001
283352	Jack Naitoro	42462	5,000	3 May 2001
281239	Teobasi Tele	42714	5,000	25 May 2001
279085	Alick Fefe (comp for sacrilege)	41176	5,000	26 February 2001
286751	Roger Tapidaka (comp claim?)	42697	5,000	23 May 2001
280872	Kingsley Construction (stolen air	41830	4,300	16 March 2001

	conditioner)			
280671	Collin Vegorau	42672	3,000	23 May 2001
281240	Jack Maefoa	41931	3,000	26 March 2001
280387	Richard Baokosu (threatened)	42696	2,000	23 May 2001
281139	Jeffrey Kukuwan	42011	1,000	3 April 2001
	<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>1,442,580</b>	

Compiled by TRC. Source: Compensation payments, Peace Monitoring Council archives.

During a press conference in April 2001, Prime Minister Sogavare revealed that payments totalling SBD\$40 million were bogus and announced an investigation into the matter. In its 2001 Annual Report, the Central Bank stated that the Government had not sent its financial statements to the Auditor General for auditing.<sup>369</sup>

Compensation for displaced people was paid through the Provincial Governments and Members of Parliament:

**Table 3.4-4**  
**Compensation for displaced families**

Voucher	Name	Chq. No	SBD	Date
276344	N. Guadalcanal Cons.	17093	249,000	28 January 2001
275971	N. Guadalcanal Cons.	39946	188,000	25 March 2001
276628	Hon. Michael Maina (innocent victim)	40026	100,000	26 January 2001
285469	Hon. Stephen Panga	42710	95,500	23 May 2001
282506	Fiona R. Mandetea	42675	90,000	23 May 2001
278015	Renbel Const. – Hon. S. Tahua (4th payment)	41797	87,250	9 March 2001
282759	DAP Holding LTDA	41990	59,000	2 April 2001
276022	Hon. Michael Maina (reimbursement of constituency)	41350	50,000	20 March 2001
275992	Malaita Displaced (2nd part payment, MDVP Comm. Trans.)	39657	50,000	12 January 2001
277883	Guadalcanal Province	40758	49,890	7 February 2001
276831	Malaita Displaced (3rd payment – final)	39957	31,000	25 January 2001
276654	Martin Sopage – Displaced Committees	40295	30,660	5 February 2001
278529	Hon. Lence Tago	41054	26,000	20 February 2001
276022	Hon. Michael Maina (reimbursement of constituency)	41896	20,000	20 March 2001
276654	Martin Sopage	40295	30,660	5 February
278529	Hon. Lence Tago (reimbursement of reparation)	41054	26,000	20 February 2001
276022	Hon. Michael Maina	41896	20,000	20 March 2001
276662	John Ross	39926	10,500	24 January 2001
282506	Fiona R. Manadetea	42372	10,000	23 May 2001
278165	Ray Rongodala	41783	9,000	8 March 2001

<sup>369</sup> 2001 Solomon Islands Annual Report. Central Bank. 30 April, 2002. [www.cbsi.com.sb](http://www.cbsi.com.sb)

276192	Moana Sehutai	39919	2,500	22 January 2001
281921	James Tome	42070	2,000	5 April 2001
	<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>1,236,960</b>	

**Compiled by TRC. Source: Compensation payments, Peace Monitoring Council archives.**

Complete documentation of the payments was unavailable. In the lists to hand, SBD\$967,548 was paid out for legal fees:

**Table 3.4-5**

**Legal fees**

<b>Voucher</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Chq No</b>	<b>SBD</b>	<b>Date</b>
273376	Crystal Lawyers Barrister (professional costs on joint)	37505	125,000	23 November 2000
273481	Bridge Lawyers (2nd payment legal fee)	38194	119,387	27 November 2000
273539	Bridge Lawyers (4th payment legal fee)	38194	119,387	27 November 2000
273290	Bridge Lawyers (1st payment legal fee)	38194	119,387	27 November 2000
273498	Bridge Lawyers (3rd payment legal fee)	38194	119,387	27 November 2000
275422	Primo Afeau (legal fees & allowances)	40720	100,000	5 February 2001
275975	Ranjit Hewagama (legal fees & salaries)	39621	100,000	11 January 2001
276649	Celestine Solosaia (allowances & legal advice)	40754	60,000	7 February 2001
276021	John Tebolo (part PMT legal fees for John & Chris)	39669	50,000	12 January 2001
265745	Bridge Lawyers (expenses for legal matters)	37711	40,000	23 November 2000
274610	Crystal Lawyers Barrister (disbursement cost)	39298	15,000	20 December 2000
	<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>967,548</b>	

**Compiled by TRC. Source: Compensation payments, Peace Monitoring Council archive.**

A third of the total amount, SBD\$5,235,764, was earmarked for the activities of the Ministry for National Unity Reconciliation and Peace:

**Table 3.4-6**

**Cost of MNURP activities**

<b>Voucher</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Chq No</b>	<b>SBD</b>	<b>Date</b>
278512	CBSI SIG Revenue A/C (expenses related to peace talk)	1008	550,000	27 October 2000
280203	Silas Adifaka & H. Kaia (MP claims of allowances as per attached)	41286	232,500	5 March 2001
280399	Sundry persons (James Barley) (Auki MPDS Allowances)	41795	183,600	8 March 2001
281144	Jeanary Center LT/D (re-settle of O/s bills)	42608	174,089	21 May 2001
278695	Nathaniel Supa (allowances G. Province PMC staff)	41161	143,015	23 February 2001

282030	B G Saenemua (replacement of chq 41888 being O/paid)	41038	130,000	27 March 2001
276641	Tropicana Motel (accommodation charge for W/Guadalcanal)	40730	120,550	5 February 2001
278007	Jeanary Centre LTDO (2 <sup>nd</sup> payment)	40822	106,945	12 March 2001
280575	Sundry persons – MNURP (Marau delegation allowances)	41801	105,330	23 May 2001
282684	Peace Monitoring (PMC Malaita Allowance March)	42392	104,280	31 January 2001
277739	Peace Monitoring (2 <sup>nd</sup> part payment)	40251	103,520	13 November 2000
282332	CBSI SIG Revenue A/C (King Solomon Hotel Oct-Dec 2000)	1052	103,354	29 March 2001
277741	Peace Monitoring (3 <sup>rd</sup> part payment)	40251	100,000	31 January 2001
276041	Peace Monitoring (allow. for peace monitoring)	39612	100,000	11 January 2001
278006	Jeanary Centre LTDO (3 <sup>rd</sup> payment)	41880	100,000	20 January 2001
278005	Jeanary Centre LTDO (4th payment)	42602	100,000	21 January 2001
276199	Sundry persons – MNURP (hire of transport for disarmament)	39707	101,000	7 February 2001
278514	CBSI SIG Revenue A/C (sundry persons CMS sitting)	1010	98,589	10 November 2000
279544	Sundry persons – Jason Wale (MPS allowances –zone 3)	41286	100,980	26 January 2001
280271	Nathaniel Supa (Malaita PMC allowances Feb 2001)	41883	98,120	20 March 2001
277878	Sundry persons – MNURP	40828	93,750	9 February 2001
278721	Sundry persons –Pius Filiman	41603	92,800	7 March 2001
278515	CBSI SIG Revenue A/C (S/persons CMC sitting danger)	1010	92,217	10 November 2000
276339	Silas Milikada (Maint & repair bills)	42555	86,000	11 May 2001
278516	CBSI SIG Revenue A/C (around G. Province)	1011	80,000	8 November 2000
283065	Hon. A. Kemakeza (refund of expenses)	42547	79,000	26 April 2001
274830	Honiara Auto Smash (completion of O/Standing bills)	3897	74,500	20 December 2000
276644	Sundry persons J.S. Tiaro (arms storage residence)	40749	74,500	6 February 2001
276645	Sundry persons – J.S. Tiaro (truck hire during disarmament)	40749	72,900	6 February 2001
267201	Dap Holding LTD (MNURP'S set of computers)	35934	70,000	20 October 2000
279183	Fr. Henry Teho (reconciliation expenses)	41776	64,900	7 March 2001
278695	Nathaniel Supa (allowances PMC Malaita Prov.)	41161	61,900	23 February 2001
2776037	Lenisa Co-Operation (Cost & Charge Hilux R/N A6396)	39608	61,200	11 January
276162	Francis Abuofa (vehicle hire )	39673	61,000	12 January 2001
276640	Tropical Motel (accom. charge W/Guadalcanal)	40047	54,560	2 April 2001

276643	Gabriel Idu (claim of vehicle for 130 days)	40264	52,000	31 January 2001
2778298	Fr. Henry Teho (committees allowances)	41169	51,650	23 February 2001
276026	Fred Ganate (addit. fund to MNURP ANZ)	39617	50,000	11 January 2001
281211	Fred Ganate (part pay \$ 200,000)	41889	50,000	20 March 2001
276032	Hon. D. Oeta (danger allowances claim)	39670	50,000	12 January 2001
276040	Jeanary Center LTDA (ration of IFM disarmament comm.)	39651	50,000	12 January 2001
275968	John Wale (valuer IF 9 setter bus & 12 seater bus)	39654	50,000	12 January 2001
276343	Olifasia Ship Co. (charges use of MV Vele Marau)	39929	50,000	24 January 2001
283857	Hon. M. Garo (danger allowances)	42466	43,200	3 May 2001
286225	Hon. D Oeta (money request for MPRC Auki)	42517	42,952	7 May 2001
276888	Sir Peter Kenilorea (reimbursement of PMC Malaita)	40239	39,238	29 January 2001
278047	Sundry persons - MNURP	40791	38,300	7 February 2001
28096	CBSI SIG Revenue A/C (PS/MNURP disarmament at Lau N/Malaita)	1045	35,000	7 December 2000
282933	Sir Peter Kenilorea (reimbursement of PMC Malaita)	42374	34,788	30 April 2001
278226	Sundry persons – MNURP (T/Claims by various persons)	40850	34,200	13 February 2001
276128	Eric Haro (hire vehicle #A1674)	39916	32,000	22 January 2001
278458	Sir Peter Kenilorea (reimbursement of PMC Malaita)	41162	31,930	23 February 2001
283890	Sir Peter Kenilorea (reimbursement of PMC Malaita)	42187	31,930	12 April 2001
276193	Gareth Luramo (vehicle hire )	39923	31,000	24 January 2001
272135	Honiara Hotel (accommodation & meals)	37730	30,556	23 November 2000
287766	Sundry persons V. Puhuto (members allowances & transport)	41901	25,200	23 March 2001
281106	Sir Peter Kenilorea (replenishment of PMC Malaita)	41850	25,090	16 March 2001
276013	Fr. Henry Teho (ex-militant reconciliation, Malu'u)	39650	25,000	12 January 2001
276012	Honiara A/Smash Repairs (outstanding payment)	39672	25,000	12 January 2001
275988	Marine Squad (2nd part logistic support)	39658	25,000	12 January 2001
275989	Renbel Const. Hon. S. Tahua (2nd payment reparation supplies)	39691	25,000	12 January 2001
284735	Agnes Teho (hire landrover #8687)	42447	24,400	2 May 2000
280417	Sir Peter Kenilorea (reimbursement of PMC Malaita)	41791	23,409	8 March 2001

280422	Sir Peter Kenilorea (reimbursement of PMC IMP)	41791	22,730	8 March 2001
276829	Walter Pwai (completion MPS allowances)	39980	22,000	12 January 2001
281133	Paketeligeli Universal (lost cash revenue)	42692	20,000	23 May 2001
276195	Gabriel Wesley (hire vehicle)	40257	18,500	31 January 2001
277959	Hon. D. Oeta (2nd part payment D/Allowances)	40819	18,000	8 February 2001
280367	Agnes Teho (hire landrover #8687)	41832	17,200	16 March 2001
282511	Sundry (Steve Maesiola – January & Feb balance)	42186	17,000	12 April 2001
275986	B G Motel (2nd part pay hire V/N A8316)	39645	15,000	12 June 2001
277849	Chris Baekalia (pocket money as approved by DPM)	41049	15,000	20 February 2001
275987	Olifasia Ship Co. (2nd pay hire veh. A2668, A3257)	39661	15,000	12 January 2001
276200	Sundry persons – MNURP (disarmament hire transport)	40259	14,100	31 January 2001
276035	Sol LS Broadcasting (live broadcasting payment)	39666	13,247	12 January 2001
273708	Fred Ganate (sitting allowances)	41170	12,650	23 February 2001
278264	Sir Peter Kenilorea (reimbursement of PMC Malaita)	40974	12,469	16 February 2001
287278	Alice Hansel (approved container rental)	42595	12,000	18 May 2001
278270	Roy Teho (hire of landrover A8657)	40960	12,000	14 February 2001
276127	Hon. T.K. Chan (allowances & transport)	39693	11,600	15 January 2001
281241	Andrew Fioga (allowances)	42331	10,000	26 April 2001
275966	Michael Walebuata (10 shell money for Fr. H. Teho's)	39659	10,000	12 January 2001
277876	Elsurine Foodshop (outstanding food charge 2000)	42067	8,122	4 April 2001
276183	Jnr Maetia (vehicle hire)	39924	7,500	24 January 2001
281141	David Taro (security & drivers allow.)	420009	7,000	3 March 2001
276647	John Selwyn Tiaro (disarmament committee allow.)	40748	6,750	6 February 2001
274350	Hon. Kemakeza (Peace talk allow. 2000)	38625	6,600	12 December 2000
274352	Hon. William Haomae (Peace talk allow 2000)	38574	6,600	12 December 2000
276650	Caroline Talyna (storage of arms & weapons)	40291	5,400	5 February 2001
282532	Lucian Kii (per diem)	42072	5,400	6 April 2001
269196	Dap Holding LTDO (MNURP new printer)	36433	5,000	26 February 2001
278683	Nucgaek Jwauikia (security monthly contract)	41450	4,300	6 March 2001

284723	Franck Waletofe (shell money taken by DPM)	42181	3,300	12 April 2001
276651	Rose Mary Nana (arms procurement charges)	41307	3,000	5 March 2001
277867	Clement Betea (refund expenses)	42057	1,727	4 April 2001
278308	Melanesian Brothers (outstanding bill hire)	41448	1,400	6 March 2001
278134	Neven Onorio (refund of expenses)	41083	1,280	21 February 2001
2688279	Toner Isles (suppliers 50 only botany lever)	35947	1,200	20 October 2000
279542	David Sirai (refund of own expenses)	41391	893	6 May 2001
268278	Toner Isles (25 A4 reflex photocopy paper)	35947	875	20 October 2000
281236	Devesi Iro (overtime claim for security)	42073	827	6 April 2001
	<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>5,235,764</b>	

Compiled by TRC. Source: Compensation payments, Peace Monitoring Council archives.

The Malaita Provincial Government received \$1,321,017 for similar activities:

**Table 3.4-7**  
**Money received by the Provincial Government Malaita**

Voucher	Name	Chq No	SBD	Date
276344	Sundry Persons - MNURP – (compensation Guadalcanal chief)	38707	300,000	18 January 2001
276344	N. Guadalcanal Cons.	17093	249,000	28 January 2001
276009	Malaita Provincial (danger allowances & fund award)	38991	231,000	26 March 2001
275971	N. Guadalcanal Cons.	39946	188,000	25 March 2001
276641	Tropicana Motel (accom. charge for W/Guad)	40730	120,550	5 February 2001
279540	Guadalcanal Provincial (reimburse of expenses on peace del.)	41775	107,577	8 February 2001
276630	Hon. E Alebua (request by Alebua)	40780	75,000	2 July 2001
277883	Guadalcanal Province (reimbursement Guadalcanal)	40758	49,890	7 February 2001
	<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>1'321,017</b>	

Compiled by TRC. Source: Compensation payments, Peace Monitoring Council archives.

Payments to the militants were made in cash. For example, an ANZ Bank cheque (No 16620) dated 27 October 2000 for a million dollars was cashed through an ANZ Headquarters cashier and paid to the IFM militants as compensation shortly after the Townsville Peace Agreement. There was no explanation or justification for payment of this amount. Another cheque of SBD\$349,000 was paid for the repatriation of Marau militants. On 25 February 2001 Andrew Te'e received a disarmament allowance of SBD\$123,840. Richstone Real Estate received



\$134,250 as second payment for “goods given to MEF.” The total paid to militants on this list \$1,708,890:

**Table 3.4-8  
Payments to militants**

<b>Voucher</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Chq No</b>	<b>SBD</b>	<b>Date</b>
275783	Headquarters Cashier-ANZ (compensation of IFM militants Rep.)	16620	1,000,000	27 October 2000
280574	Sundry Persons MNURP (repatriation of Marau militants)	41801	349,000	12 March 2001
275984	Richstone Real Est. (2nd part pay for goods given to MEF)	40253	134,250	31 January 2001
278809	Andrew Te'e (disbarment allowances)	41160	123,840	25 February 2001
279198	CBSI Revenue A/C (repatriation of MEF members)	1023	74,000	6 February 2001
276646	Francis Kennedy (explosives disarmament)	40747	20,000	6 February 2001
278810	Andrew Te'e (securing the arms containers)	41160	7,800	23 February 2001
	<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>1,708,890</b>	

**Compiled by TRC. Source: Compensation payments, Peace Monitoring Council archives.**

The Government was overwhelmed by claims for compensation from militants. One example was a request for payment from former members of the Marau Eagle Force for a mission they conducted for the Government beginning 20 July 2000, about two-and-a-half months before the Townsville Peace Agreement. Thirty-eight members of the Marau Eagle Force were asked to evacuate 115 Marau residents to safety. The mission took five days to complete and the militants claimed payment of \$30,000 per person for a total of SBD\$1,140,000.<sup>370</sup>

The request was presented to Cabinet in a joint memorandum by the Minister for National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace and the Minister for Police, National Security and Justice. The memorandum set out the context of the claim. It arose on 27 November 2001 after the Marau Eagle Force verbally threatened Felix Korimae, Permanent Secretary of the MNURP for stopping payment of a cheque for SBD\$3,450,000 because of irregularities in procedure. The matter was forwarded to the Commissioner of Police who passed it to the Permanent Secretary for Police Justice and Legal Affairs who finally forwarded it to Cabinet on 15 January 2001.

<sup>370</sup> See Cabinet decision CAB(2002) 28, 5<sup>th</sup> January 2002

Cabinet was advised to approve payment “urgently, there could be undesirable consequences . . . we cannot rule out the possibility of claimants resorting to violent actions in order to push this case . . . with serious concern for peace to hold.” Protection was absent at the time as the police were in no position to offer protection. The memorandum admitted that the amount claimed was high, with police officers being entitled to only \$60 allowance per day, but that the case had “certain peculiarities meriting consideration.”

On 5 January 2002, Cabinet approved payment of \$30,000 for each of the 38 militants for a total of SBD\$1,140,000.<sup>371</sup> It noted that it was for “the role played by the claimants in discharging an important responsibility to protect lives.” By early 2003 Solomon Islands was in a desperate situation with the Government and the police unable to maintain law and order.

A formal request by the TRC to the Ministry of Finance to provide details of the compensation payments, in particular how the SBD\$146,161,464.24 from the EXIM Bank was distributed was declined. They were reluctant to assist the TRC because they feared disclosure of payments would cause trouble. The Ministry of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace itself was not in a position to provide the information because it claimed all the relevant documents were taken for research and audit purposes after RAMSI arrived. The TRC wrote to RAMSI requesting these documents and was told that they did not have them.

The TRC received the Audit Report of the EXIM Bank loan produced by the Auditor General in his November 2004 Annual Report. This report provided case studies of examples of corruption. At the time of the compensation payments, because of the magnitude of the claims compared with what was available from the EXIM Bank loan, the Ministry for National Unity Reconciliation and Peace decided to reduce the SBD\$140 million in “Book One.” This was done by Ministry staff and resulted in the publication of “Book Two.” This was a manipulation of the claims listings: new claimants replacing the “Book One” claimants or claimants forwarded from “Book One” to “Book Two.” Some Book One claims were omitted on the basis that they were false. No documents were provided to substantiate omissions. These changes made some people very angry when payment started and they demanded Sogavare stop the first payment process. The following case studies from the Auditor General’s 2004 Report show the manipulation of compensation claims between “Book One” and “Book Two”:

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<sup>371</sup> See Cabinet decision CAB(2002)2834.

## **Case Study 1**

### **Name: CS 1**

**Narrative:** In book 1, the claimant had a valid code number 1109 in the NWG group. His original claim was \$851,294 and the assessed claim was \$700,200.

In Book 2, the claimant's name was forwarded to code number 47, still in the NWG group, substituting another claimant whose name was omitted in Book 2. The claimant's claim in Book 2 was increased to \$1,851,942 as original and therefore having an assessed value of claims for \$851,000. This was paid on cheque number 889748 during Tranche 1. Site verification of this claim proved that the house was destroyed and its actual value was estimated at \$150,000.

**Conclusion:** The claimant's name was forwarded in order to be amongst those who were to be paid under Tranche 1. His original claim in Book 1 was inflated in Book 2 purposely to increase its assessed value. It is quite obvious that the claim was unreasonably excessive.

## **Case Study 2**

### **Name: CS 2**

**Narrative:** In Book 1, the claimant had a valid code number 407 in the NWG group. His original claim was \$780,900 and his assessed claim was \$550,600. In Book 2, the claimant was forwarded to code number 19 in the same group substituting the former owner of the code number who had been omitted in Book 2.

In Book 2, the claim was increased to \$1,030,900 as original to bring the assessed value to \$680,000. This was paid on cheque number 889720 during the Tranche 1. Site verification proved that the property was an ablution block valued at \$50,000.

**Conclusion:** His name was forwarded to be paid during Tranche 1. The claim was purposely increased in Book 2 to increase its assessed value. It is quite obvious that the claim was unnecessarily excessive.

## **Case Study 3**

### **Name: CS 3**

**Narrative:** In book 1 the claimant had a valid code number 1615 in the NWG group. His original claim was \$1,900,000 and the assessed claim was \$8,000.

In Book 2, the claimant's name was forwarded to code number 62 in the same group and his claim was inflated to \$2,200,000 as original and an assessed value of \$500,000. He was paid \$800,000 on cheque number 639261 during Tranche 2.

Site verification of this claim proved that the only improvement made on the land consisted of a security chain link fence around the land that was valued at \$50,000

**Conclusion:** The Claimant's name was forwarded in order to be amongst the first to be paid during Tranche 2. His original claim in Book 1 was purposely inflated in Book 2 to increase the assessed value from \$8,000 to \$500,000. It is obvious that the claim was unnecessarily quite excessive and fraudulent in nature.

## Case Study 4

### Name: CS 4

**Narrative:** In Book 1, the claimant had a valid code numbers 479 in the Central Guadalcanal group. His original claim was \$1,741,539 and the assessed amount was \$723,959.

In Book 2, the claimant was forwarded to code number 38 in the NEG group, substituting the owner of the code number whose name was omitted in Book 2. The original claim was not inflated in Book 2 while the assessed value was increased to \$960,000. He was paid \$960,000 on cheque number 889639 during Tranche 1. Site verification of the claim proved that there were no improvements on site and the logging operations were ceased well before the tension.

**Conclusion:** The name was forwarded to be amongst the first to be paid.

## 7. Royal Solomon Islands Police Force claims

In addition to compensation, expenditure by the Ministry of Police, National Security and Justice was another significant budget outflow. While the 2000 payroll amounted to under SBD\$155 million, SBD\$96 million was spent for the first six months of 2001. The increase was due largely to a dramatic expansion in police recruitment from October 2000. Public Service staffing rose from 8,000 before the tensions to 10,000, largely from new recruits to the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF). Eleven percent of the RSIPF payroll was to pay the newly-recruited 2,000 special constables absorbed under the Townsville Peace Agreement<sup>372</sup>. Here too there are no clear records of all these payments. There are hundreds of special constables still waiting for their payments.<sup>373</sup> Other cases, particularly allowances for some special constables as well as certain compensation claims having “certain peculiarities meriting consideration”, were impossible to deny without compromising personal security. This situation had serious implications for Government cash flow. These claims were paid at the expense of normal Government services: for more than a year the Government was unable to provide some provincial grants, health and education grants, house rentals and other normal Government services.<sup>374</sup>

Under threat of violence, including gunfire at the Prime Minister’s residence, the Government was forced to authorize the use of the Debt Service Fund Account for large unbudgeted payments to special constables, most of whom were former militants. In the first eight months of

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<sup>372</sup> R.N. Hou, Address to the Economic Association of Solomon Islands (EASI), *op. cit.*

<sup>373</sup> See Annex 6.

<sup>374</sup> R. N. Hou, Address to the Economic Association of Solomon Islands (EASI), *op. cit.*

2003, the Ministry of Police, National Security and Justice grossly exceeded its budget. Payment for the special constables blew out expenditure by SBD\$57,300,000 during this period.<sup>375</sup>

The request for compensation was general and widespread. For example, police officers often sought compensation for harassment. In the case of the Rapid Response Unit at Kukum, a part payment was made for harassment and injuries. In a Cabinet memorandum, the MNURP explained that the majority of claims for harassment and injuries were from police officers and that these situations were in the nature of their work.<sup>376</sup> A total of SBD\$370,000 was claimed but only SBD\$92,500 had been paid, leaving a balance of SBD\$277,500. In order to deal with this matter, Cabinet approved payment of \$5,000 per officer across the board. Notwithstanding that harassment did not apply to police officers, Cabinet agreed to pay a portion in order to appease the claimants.<sup>377</sup> This decision was a reflection of the uncertainty and fear that was prevalent at the time.

Police officers also claimed Special Danger Allowances. For example, a claim dated 14 July 2003, signed on behalf of eight officers by Detective Inspector Fred Saeni, claimed “exceptional danger allowances” during the takeover of the police headquarters armory at Rove on 5 June 2000. They alleged that Cabinet had approved individual payments of \$50,000 but that they received only \$5,000 each.

At the end of 2002, the Prime Minister’s Office requested the Police Commissioner, David Morton Siriheti, to draw up a strategic plan to capture Harold Keke. The operation was code-named “Liberation Strike.” It was agreed that civilians who participated in the operation would be paid the same allowances as regular police, prison officers and special constables, \$60 per day. The civilians’ claim to the MNURP is dated July 2007; MNURP referred the claim to the Ministry of Police, National Security and Justice and the Ministry of Finance.<sup>378</sup> The claimants have yet to receive payment.

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<sup>375</sup> Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Economic Analytical Unit. Solomon Islands Economy. [www.dfat.gov.au/eau/2004](http://www.dfat.gov.au/eau/2004)

<sup>376</sup> See Cabinet memorandum CAB(2002)21538

<sup>377</sup> Ref: MNURP 10/3/4

<sup>378</sup> 1,611 civilians participated in the Joint Operation Field Force and claimed Danger Allowance (see Annex 3).

The Government also cooperated in a project with UNDP on “Demobilization of Special Constables” and in 2002 a UN expert arrived in the country to offer advice on how this task was to be carried out.

The Auditor General’s report into the Export Import (EXIM) Bank Loan, November 2004, in relation to the Ministry of Police, National Security and Justice (NPNSJ), stated:

4.4.2.1 At the RSIPF Headquarters level, there was a total breakdown in the administrative and financial procedures and controls. Submissions for payments forwarded to the Department’s Administration HQ were done with no proper basis from which claims could be verified and substantiated. I conclude from this that payment submissions were normally devised and structured to suit the claimant’s own ends. Most notable was the duty allowances paid to the Special Constables. After submission, they pursued their claims through the authorities and secured prompt payments often by applying threat. Their network strength was quite powerful during the period and they even infiltrated the key Departments of the Government. They always knew the actual daily liquidity status of the government, and even knew in advance what revenue and amount (and from where) the government was going to receive the next day, days or week. Therefore the government’s effort to conceal its daily liquidity status was futile, and was always forced to make payments under duress.

4.4.2.2 At the MPNS&J Administration HQ Level, submissions received were never questioned or verified. Submissions were merely processed and forwarded to Ministry of Finance, and in the submissions forwarded these were satisfactorily documented (official documents) and authorized. Therefore it was assumed that the Ministry hastily issued and submitted payment requests, merely to get rid of persistent claimants, and although the submissions were properly documented and authorized, claims were never properly examined and verified. This gave rise to \$86,098,686 in excess expenditure from the two votes “Special Constabulary” and “Special Police Operations” alone.

## **8. Cabinet attempts to resolve the compensation issue**

The issue of compensation spiralled out of control with the MNURP flooded with claims for compensation for harassment, injury and death. In order to cope with the situation, the Ministry presented an alternative argument to Cabinet that in

. . . the Melanesian Culture or Traditional Values and Perspective, such compensation payment for being harassed, injured or even killed is normally done by the two parties in dispute or brawl to compensate each other. In this contest, Government is seen not necessarily as being a direct party to these claimants.

While being “morally obligated” under the Townsville Peace Agreement, “legally the SIG cannot and should not be held responsible for criminal activities occasioned by individuals or groups of citizens.”<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>379</sup> Cabinet decision: Ref: 10/3/4.2

On 20 September 2002, Cabinet approved a general policy in relation to all claims for compensation for harassment, injury and death.<sup>380</sup> Such claims were to be settled under the appropriate system of cultural values and the MNURP. The Ministry of Finance was ordered to stop all direct compensation payments. Only death claims certified by the police, medical practitioners or church ministers would be accepted, provided the death occurred before 15 October 2000 and the event was covered by the Amnesty Act.

This decision affected the right of true victims to receive reparation. The rationale for this proposal to Cabinet was that there were no funds to pay compensation. Later the decision to cease compensation payments was justified on the basis of cultural values. This argument was not reasonable because compensation had already been paid out to victims, and it was only raised when funds were exhausted. Cabinet stipulated 15 October 2000 as the cut-off date, with no explanation as to what was to happen to claims after that date. The Amnesty Act covers the full period of the tensions and not just up to 15 October 2000. There was no indication as to who was to decide whether or not a matter fell within the ambit of the Amnesty Act.

In an injury claim by Moses Garu, the Cabinet decided that the Government would not pay compensation for crimes committed by militants and the matter should be pursued in court<sup>381</sup>. The police report had established that the MEF were the perpetrators in Moses Garu's case. The MNURP was also directed by Cabinet to publicize the decision that all claims for compensation for injuries and harassment were to be pursued in court. This decision applied to all outstanding claims. In making this decision, Cabinet changed its compensation policy yet again without taking into account the rights of victims. It also overlooked the inability of the judicial system to respond in a timely and cost-effective manner to the volume of cases involved.

When some of the claimants pursued their cases in litigation, they were denied compensation by the High Court. For example, in the cases brought by Michael Tohina,<sup>382</sup> Billy Gizo Saenumua,<sup>383</sup> John Sela Chan<sup>384</sup> and Celestine Milton Lanetelia,<sup>385</sup> the High Court held that the

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<sup>380</sup> See Cabinet decision CAB(2002)174740.

<sup>381</sup> See CAB(2002)216 dated 29 October 2002

<sup>382</sup> Case No 236/2003 High Court of Solomon Islands

<sup>383</sup> Case No 275/2003 High Court of Solomon Islands

<sup>384</sup> Case No 237/2003 High Court of Solomon Islands

<sup>385</sup> Case No 237/2003 High Court of Solomon Islands

Townsville Peace Agreement was not a treaty or convention and there was no accompanying domestic legislation to enforce its provisions. The Agreement could by itself not make provision for people to litigate their cases in the courts. While the Court cannot be criticized for taking a legal approach to the issue, the position of the Government is less defensible.

Despite the obstacles and challenges, victims continued to press their claims. Many have been motivated by a deep sense of grievance and injustice at the lack of fairness, transparency and consistency of the Government in dealing with the issue of compensation. On 28 November 2002 the Ministries of National Unity Reconciliation and Peace and Finance presented to Cabinet a request for clarification of the priority in the 2002 Supplementary Appropriation Bill to pay the 29 death claims admitted by the MNURP, because the 2003 budget excluded compensation payments.<sup>386</sup> In authorizing payment of the death claims and ranking it as priority eight, Cabinet acknowledged the considerable frustration being expressed by claimants with the Office of the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Finance, saying they had no trust in Cabinet.

However, the 29 death claims were still not resolved by this decision. A MNURP memorandum dated 15 December 2003 to Cabinet sought clarification as to whether the decision of the High Level Government Committee to stop all compensation payments affected 20 of the 29 death claims outstanding. On 12 January 2004, Cabinet directed the Ministry of Finance to pay 40 percent across the board in each of the 20 cases.<sup>387</sup> There is no information on whether these payments were ever made.

## **9. Government ceases payment of compensation claims**

As by now there were no funds, on 19 March 2003, Cabinet decided to stop all categories of tension-related payments and set up the High Level Government Committee to verify claims submitted for payment at the Treasury.<sup>388</sup> It also revoked the authority of the MNURP to raise and issue payment vouchers and instructed the Attorney General's Chambers to draft and circulate a notice publicizing this decision.

The terms of reference of the Committee were to examine and assess the claims pending at the Department of Finance and Treasury and make recommendations to Cabinet on their veracity;

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<sup>386</sup> See CAB(2002)252

<sup>387</sup> See Cabinet decision CAB(2004)2.

<sup>388</sup> See Cabinet decisions CAB(2003)46 and 47.



assess the legal obligations of the Government in Part 3 Clause 2 of the Townsville Peace Agreement and section 11 of the Marau Peace Agreement; and determine whether the Government had any legal obligation to pay compensation for harassment, injury or death. The Committee concluded that the Government's responsibility was limited only "to securing funds from its development partners to assist persons who suffered loss or damage to property on Guadalcanal including [those] who lost employment as a direct consequence of the crisis on Guadalcanal, [or] business or investment and personal property." This conclusion totally overlooked the primary obligation of the state to protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of individuals as set out in the Constitution and disregarded the Government's having already having borrowed hundreds of millions of dollars and paid it out as compensation. While no legal obligation was created, these payments had raised expectations among tens of thousands of Solomon Islanders who suffered loss during the tension, that some relief would be forthcoming from the Government.

A second conclusion was "in the absence of compensation policy guidelines," "many of the claims were approved merely for the purpose of sustaining peace regardless of the existing Financial Regulations." The Committee reviewed 295 claims and determined that 94 percent of the claims did not have any credible supporting documentation. They concluded that claims did not have to be proven authentic to be approved. Another six percent of the claims, representing 18 claims, were considered to have passed the authenticity test while only one claim fell within the scope of assistance under the Townsville Peace Agreement.

The Committee also pointed out that the allowances paid to police officers and special constables were excessive. From 2000 to April/May 2003, the Government spent SBD\$80,083,000 from the Consolidated Fund which contained only \$600,000. The Committee also commented on the lack of definition in relation to what constituted injury, harassment, and *ex gratia* claims, further complicating the verification of the claims. There was "insufficient and non-credible evidence to support the payment."

The Committee recommended that the Government was

not liable to pay any just compensation under existing laws. There are already adequate procedures where each individual citizen may exercise his or her right to claim such cost and damages through the court. . . . [It is also] not necessary to have a National Policy or a Standard Policy and to make new legislation as already there are sufficient and adequate laws available to attend to such cases. Also it is difficult with such diverse cultures as well as its ethnicity makes it

more difficult to codify and regulate reasonable and acceptable compensation and reconciliation according to accepted cultural norms and values.

The Government adopted this recommendation of the High Level Committee and halted processing of all compensation claims. There are presently 1,489 outstanding claims.

The High Level Committee's recommendations were flawed in that the Committee saw the issue of compensation in a narrow legal context in terms of claimants' initiating court proceedings to prove their claims according to a legal burden of proof. The tension was a national crisis in which thousands of people suffered losses in a variety of forms. The courts could not have coped with the volume if all those affected had taken their claims to them. Moreover, it was unrealistic to put forward the legal option when most people did not have the means to resort to it. What was required in these circumstances was development of a policy to provide practical and timely assistance to those most in need and a strategy to implement it. The Government was unable to do this for a variety of reasons, chief of which was the anarchic and chaotic situation which prevailed at the time.

## **10. Conclusions**

**a.** The Government recognized its obligation to compensate victims of the tension in the Townsville Peace Agreement. Although not legally binding, the Government's commitment to victims arose under the "Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law", adopted as Resolution 60/147 by the General Assembly of the United Nations. As a member of the United Nations, Solomon Islands is obliged to provide adequate, effective and prompt reparation for victims of internal conflict. Such reparation should be proportional to the gravity of the violation and the harm suffered. This state obligation is in relation to acts or omissions concerning victims. National programs should be established for reparations and other assistance to victims including restitution, compensation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition. And the domestic law should provide the same level of protection for victims as that required by international obligations.

**b.** In order to fund compensation for losses suffered during the tension, the Government negotiated a loan for US\$25 million from the EXIM Bank of Taiwan. This solution only created more problems because Government institutions were barely functioning and anarchy and

criminality prevailed. The presence of these funds generated a frenzy of covetousness as victims, militants, politicians and others staked their claims. The country's external debt directly affected health and education services which were barely functioning. In securing the loan, the Government overlooked its lack of capacity to implement the complexities of the compensation program. Its ability to exercise its authority was severely limited, thereby compromising the sincere intentions of the loan.

**c.** The MNURP, responsible for compensations, failed to establish the necessary control measures required and did not follow the Government's obligatory Financial Instructions. The Permanent Secretary and the Chief Accountant had special responsibility to comply with the Financial Instructions but were unable to ensure proper controls. The difficult and dangerous circumstances at the time resulted in corrupt use of this money.

**d.** The Ministry of Finance, as the authority responsible for public funds, was also responsible for failing to implement the necessary monitoring controls when the MNURP handled the disbursements. As chief custodian of public funds for the implementation of the Financial Instructions, it failed in its obligation to question the timeliness and authenticity of each payment. There should be a criminal investigation into how this fund was spent.

**e.** The overwhelming majority of displaced persons did not receive any compensation for their losses, yet they were the first victims of the tension. The records available reflect payments made to politicians, militants, business people and those with connections to the Government. Those without influence or means were overlooked.

**f.** The Government had no compensation policies or guidelines in place to regulate implementation of compensation payments. Neither were categories of human rights violations drawn up or adequately defined to ensure consistency and equity. The process was *ad hoc* and subject to the whims of the moment. The result was corruption, misappropriation and abuse of a significant portion of the funds earmarked for compensation. While some victims were compensated, a greater number were not, their plight made more poignant by the amount that was misspent. However, it must also be said that even had there been appropriate controls and safeguards in place, the anarchy and criminality which then prevailed casts doubt on whether it would have made any difference.

**g.** There were no orderly records of compensation paid to claimants by the Government. It is not possible to establish outstanding compensation payments for that reason. Because the right to compensation for gross violations of human rights and humanitarian law are fundamental, the matters outstanding may not be completed without first having a thorough investigation of those already compensated.

**h.** The Government did not follow the Auditor General's recommendation to investigate immediately and recover payments from the individuals concerned of all overpayments emanating from invalid, false and unsubstantiated claims. Where necessary, prosecutions should be commenced.

**i.** Victims in the rural area with little access to power were excluded from the payment of compensation, a situation that deepened feelings of abandonment by the Government and created a chasm in the restoration of dignity.

**j.** The payment of compensation by the Government did not consider victims who lost loved ones or whose lives had been profoundly affected by violations of their human rights. All cases involve loss of dignity, something that money cannot restore. It is necessary to incorporate a holistic reparation program for victims that respect culture, justice and a recognition by the state of its responsibilities. Payment of compensation and corrupt acts by the Government have become a barrier to initiating a process of real reconciliation in the country.

## **3.4.2 THE LAW AND JUSTICE SECTOR DURING AND AFTER THE TENSION**

### **1. Introduction**

This chapter is based on a series of interviews with those who were part of the law and justice sector of Solomon Islands during the ethnic tension period. This sector comprises the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, the Solomon Islands Prison Services (now known as the Department of Correctional Services) and the courts. The period of the tension is defined in the TRC mandate as the “human rights violations or abuses which occurred between 1<sup>st</sup> January 1998 and 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2003.

A wide cross-section of people in the law and justice sector were interviewed, including top-level policy makers, mid-level officials, foreign advisors and local leaders, both those who began their careers during the tension and those old enough to serve under British colonial rule. The interviewees are acknowledged for their vivid, insightful and candid responses that make plain the uncertainties and injustices of the tension and the shortcomings and success of the recovery process. Their testimonies make clear the commitment of many in the law and justice sector to protect the remnants of law and order against the ruination of war and to reconstruct a stronger structure with the peace and assistance secured by the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI). That many remained faithful to those commitments in conditions of terror, sometimes with gun barrels thrust in their faces, is a testament to the bravery and resilience of the people of Solomon Islands.

However, the interview-based methodology created certain potential biases, magnified by limitations of time and barriers of language. The views gathered are hardly comprehensive. They provide a glimpse of the law and justice sector through a series of narrow windows rather than a full comprehensive picture. Information gleaned from interviews must always be viewed sceptically, considering the likely impact of memory loss, communication difficulties, personal agenda, and blinkered viewpoints. Each interview was short, generally only an hour and conducted in English, usually not the subject’s native language. Interviewees tended to be in positions of leadership and there are few views from low level officers and support staff, not to mention detainees, prisoners and defendants. Finally, interview subjects tended to be current leaders in the law and justice sector, who were not necessarily those who held most power or

knowledge of how the law and justice sector operated during the tension. Most of them spent the tension years frustrated, stifled, and constantly under threat. Individuals reacted to this stress in varying ways.

## **2. The experience of the tension and its aftermath**

### **2.1 The Police**

The Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) was one of the state institutions most directly impacted by the tension. In the city of Honiara, which contains the headquarters of the RSIPF as well as the bulk of its forces, the RSIPF became entangled with militant groups, most prominently the Malaita Eagle Force, leading to a breakdown of order, corrosion of the chain of command, and ultimately a permanent rift in community trust. While many officers took advantage of the situation to ally themselves with the MEF and gain greater power, other officers within the Force felt targeted because of their ethnic background, including Malaitan officers who attempted to remain neutral rather than join the MEF.

This situation is brought into stark relief when officers expressed their pride in the integrity and professionalism of the RSIPF before the tension. Interviewees expressed nostalgia for the community constable under the colonial regime who, on foot and unarmed, patrolled villages and helped resolve local disputes. This model of community policing, however romanticized, declined during the country's increasing centralization in the first two decades of independence, a trend interviewees unanimously regretted. However, officers still took pride in many aspects of the more centralized post-independence RSIPF, including its cohesiveness, community trust and professionalism. In contrast, interviewees characterized the present RSIPF as plagued by misconduct, low morale and public distrust.

The changes the tension would bring were foreshadowed by the paramilitary role played by RSIPF officers during the 1990's Bougainville Crisis. After a steady influx of rebels and refugees from nearby Bougainville led to fears of destabilization and cross-border criminal activity, the Government constituted a Police Field Force (PFF) of over 200 officers in 1993 to respond to security threats and major riots. The PFF was amalgamated with the Police Maritime Unit and given intensive training with heavy arms imported from Singapore. Originally stationed in the Shortland islands near Bougainville, all but a dozen PFF officers were recalled to

Guadalcanal at the start of the tension and charged with guarding checkpoints at Alligator Creek and Kakabona. This was an uncomfortable role for the PFF, serving in increasingly war-like conditions outside the scope of police work. “It was difficult”, says a former PFF leader. “I told my boss, we should be concentrating on the issue on the border. The issue in Guadalcanal is a different issue, a land dispute between the Malaitans and the Guales . . . We can’t be fighting our own people.”

The PFF was thrust into this paramilitary role because the RSIPF leadership, along with much of the Government, was caught unprepared by the tension and reacted slowly to the crisis. The failure to act aggressively to resolve ethnic disputes on Guadalcanal, to confront the rise in militant activity, and to protect citizens of Honiara and outskirts prompted citizens to take the law into their own hands, with fatal consequences. “Leading up to July 2000 . . . we missed the opportunity to stand up and bring law and order,” said a former police leader. “Because the police were not in a position to rebuild themselves and show they’re there for the people of Malaita especially; that gave room for the formation of MEF . . . we gave space for people to fill the gap that we should have filled for them.”

Once the RSIPF did begin aggressive action, they overreacted and used heavy-handed tactics that inflamed the situation and reinforced community concerns that officers were biased and ineffective. “We went in heavy-handed rather than taking a community approach, a dialogue approach. Because of that approach, the community retaliated,” a PFF leader said. He continued:

Militants drove us from their territory. They knew us and where we are. They used communication systems to counter our operations, make them less effective. If anybody talked to us, the militants attacked them. So these made people not cooperate with police as the law-enforcing authority.

This view was confirmed by another senior police officer.

Early in the tension the ethnic diversity of the RSIPF became a source of suspicion and antagonism rather than a strength. “A decision was made at one stage not to involve Malaitans and this was not a good decision for any police force. Are we one force or not?” asked the PFF leader. Malaitan officers, who comprised the majority of RSIPF officers, and Guadalcanal officers, who comprised a significant minority, began to mistrust each other. Some became

involved with the militias themselves, widening those divisions and weakening the Force's authority and operations. A former commanding officer explained the process:

The first to be compromised were some police officers [from Guadalcanal] in 1998 . . . [who] were working with members of provincial cabinet . . . In 2000 some officers from Malaita [were] compromised in the raid in Auki . . . Most of these defections to militias on both sides happened . . . by May 2000.

Over the course of late 1999 and early 2000, police entanglement with militant groups, especially the MEF, increased in visibility as the police leadership lost the confidence of the officers and the public. One of the prosecutors at the time complained:

The Police Headquarters had never been a place for people who had nothing to do with the Police to frequent. [There was a] breakdown of law and order because there was no respect for [these] institutions.

The coup of 5 June 2000 cemented ties between MEF and the RSIPF. One officer recalled the day's events:

Early morning when I woke up in my house [and] came through Chinatown, [I] saw people milling around . . . then I could see some of the prisoners holding guns! . . . I came through in plain clothes [and] started to fear because I identified a prisoner whom I had charged with murder and he was armed. I was lucky he did not recognize me but I recognized him. So I met other police officers . . . the Director of Police Field Force, the Director in charge of homicide. We tried to walk into Central Police Station. We couldn't. Prisoners, criminals standing outside police station, armed with weapons, wouldn't allow us in. . . . One of my bosses rang to me and said, "Oh, just leave if you want to go home, you go home. Don't carry your police notebook with you. Hide away your notebook. You can make entries, but don't carry your notebook with you." I went to the Acting Commissioner and said, "Sir, we can do a lot of things. We are well-trained . . . we can just regroup ourselves and handle the situation . . . [or] we can go to Western Province and set ourselves up there." I also said to the Commissioner "You should get a Special Decree, because the situation is getting worse." I said to the police "Go! Stand around and you could be killed." Two days later I came back because there were police officers up at Gold Ridge and we needed to bring them back. I asked for a helicopter, but no arrangement was made. The GLF caught up with them. I said, we should have saved these guys a long time ago. We better get the others down now, they were about to be killed. Then the situation became worse.

Between the coup of 5 June 2000 and the arrival of RAMSI on 23 July 2003, the RSIPF often operated in tandem with MEF through paramilitary "Joint Operations" and the deputizing of "Special Constables. Special Constables, appointed in 2001 and 2002 after the Townsville Peace Agreement, were primarily individuals associated with the MEF or IFM. They were upgraded to full constables in order to integrate them into the police payroll and structure. Later a "Star Division" was formed, "full of police officers who took part in the tension," according to a high-level police official.



After the TPA, the Joint Operations were significantly curtailed by the new Police Commander who wished to dialogue with different groups, according to the high-level police officer. “He made clear to both police and militants that we needed to tidy up criminal activities around the place.” This change led to “some cooperation between police and militants in Honiara despite the guns around the place.” He continued,

However, militants still ruled the streets with impunity: [It was] difficult for everyone, especially the business houses. The Chinese shops did not operate anymore. Major businesses closed down. The Treasury was being raided every day. Even if we put people in cells . . . police or militants would come take them out. We were just going around in circles.

Most neutral officers unaffiliated with a militant group just tried to keep their heads down under conditions of uncertainty and pressure to take sides. “Nearly half the police went away during [the tension]. Only those who felt like they had nothing to do with the issue stayed”, said another officer. Officers feared that if they didn’t join a group they would be tarred as “spies” (spies) and suffer retribution.

Pressure was not exerted by the militants as a group, but individual militants sometimes did exert such pressure, according to a senior police officer. This practice was confirmed by another colleague who noted, “some of the police were angry with those involved and if they heard a police officer was trying to investigate incidents they will come back and maybe harass you.” Militants harassed the Criminal Investigation Division (CID) twice. In a raid on the CID office, they “came and broke down the door, went to all the rooms, took up all the guns that were labelled as exhibits including high-powered weapons.” The same CID officer described another incident in which militants went to his house and tried to take his police vehicle at gunpoint.

One reason many officers were wary of involvement of militants with law enforcement was their lack of professionalism, especially in the handling of firearms. “I don’t think you can get close to somebody holding a gun who doesn’t know how to hold a gun,” explained one police officer. This problem was especially acute regarding special constables. As another colleague observed: “It’s rubbish! You can’t send untrained men to the frontline. Guns made the problem more serious.”

Because the justice system was effectively suspended, police investigations yielded few results. One of the senior officers observed: “Soon after the coup, the justice system became silent. . . . I

don't think we ever took anybody to court. . . . That's why we had a huge backlog of tension-related cases.”

Outside of Guadalcanal, RSIPF stations functioned regularly, despite the lack of financial support from Honiara. A senior police officer who fled from Guadalcanal said that the situation was normal in Makira, Isabel and Temotu provinces. “For the Western Province,” he said, “the only issue was with the Bougainvilleans, which affected some Malaitan people.” The police in the provinces could probably survive six months without Honiara “because they secured funds necessary for operations six months ahead, allowing them to provide basic services” and “still staff the office and deal with anything that comes in.” The continued operations of the RSIPF in the outer islands during the tension showed the value of decentralization in policing which increases the resilience and cost-effectiveness of law enforcement during times of crisis.

In the months before RAMSI came, “the police started to look for [the escaped inmates],” said one senior PPF officer. After the arrival of foreign police assistance under the Participating Police Force (PPF), nearly all escaped prisoners were recaptured without incident, according to another senior police officer. Only a few former inmates remained at large, believed to be in Malaita. According to a prosecutor, the investigative work and record-keeping of RSIPF provided important information, but the “people arrested later after RAMSI came, would not have been arrested without RAMSI.”

The Participating Police Force immediately dispatched teams to key military redoubts, such as the Weather Coast, and rounded up suspects for interrogation and detention in Honiara. The RAMSI PPF officers were unquestionably effective, promptly establishing order and restoring public confidence with few casualties. Their presence was supported by most Solomon Islanders and they were seen as helpful in raising the professionalism of the RSIPF whom they assisted. However, many PPF officers, especially the majority Australians, provoked criticism for aggressive and culturally insensitive behavior in the early days of the intervention. Their confrontational tactics undermined the initial reception of communities harboring militants and led to some of the evidence collected during their interrogations ultimately being ruled inadmissible in court, resulting in overturned convictions. An Australian female defence lawyer explained:

The PPF when they first came in here were atrocious. Most of their records did not comply with the law, the laws of the Solomon Islands. Many did not comply with the Judges' Rules. Inexperienced police officers were sent here to do major investigations which were just beyond their experience. I don't think they had any proper instruction or training. The minute they got off the plane they thought the rules did not apply anymore. International principles, fairness, the rule of law – all those things just went out the window. It's not just the Australian police but most of the lead investigators were from either Australia or New Zealand.

Once RAMSI officers saw that Solomon Islands was not the hostile war zone they had anticipated, they made commendable strides to train PPF staff to act more sensitively and to cooperate with the community. But the legacy of their initial heavy-handedness had lingering ramifications for both the tension trials and police-community relations.

During the early raids, RSIPF officers who worked with the PPF often took on secondary roles as guides, translators and back-up. Many of the suspects in places like the Weather Coast were uneducated young boys from rural communities who spoke only local languages, so the PPF relied upon local police officers to translate and mediate while conducting investigations and arrests. As the Australian defence lawyer explained, "The role of the Solomon police was finding people, acting as interpreters, which is hardly independent and the police should have known better." This conflict of interest cast doubt on statements made by suspects under arrest, some of whom have said they were intimidated and misled by police.

According to the Australian defence lawyer, accusations of brutality against RSIPF officers in the round-up of suspects after RAMSI's arrival were "routine." In addition, suspects have "routinely complained . . . about lack of sleep and food while in police custody waiting to be interviewed." However, one of her colleagues disagreed over the prevalence of police brutality among the RSIPF, saying, "I don't know of any gross examples of police brutality."

Another issue detainees have raised is that the police disregarded the Amnesty Act in their arrests. The police staunchly defend their actions. "We investigate every case," said a high-ranking commander:

There is no such thing as an amnesty. The law states that very well. Unfortunately, this commitment to investigate every tension-related case has stressed the capacity of the RSIPF to handle other crimes, including new investigations. There are tension cases to be investigated. But we can't investigate them because serious cases come every day. We don't have enough police officers to do all these investigations.

The focus on investigation and arrests immediately after RAMSI's arrival has since shifted to rebuilding community trust. Perceptions created during the tension that the RSIPF is corrupt or biased towards Malaitans is difficult to uproot, hampering investigations. "Today we still have problems collecting evidence," reported one of the senior commanders. "There were people killed during the crossfire and their relatives know very well they were killed by police weapons. So it is very difficult for us to gain the trust of communities."

To repair relations, the RSIPF has focused on community policing and tried to reform their operations to emphasize accountability and transparency. They have also taken part in customary and religious ceremonies of reconciliation. "We started already on Gold Ridge and we'd like to do some more there this year and then move to the Weather Coast for some big ones," said another high ranking local police official. He continued,

We went to a very emotional reconciliation between the groups that allied themselves with the Joint Operations and those that allied themselves with the GLF. And that sets the scene for the Police Force to do our reconciliation with them, working with the Ministry of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace.

Efforts to purge ex-militants from the RSIPF have been handled by a combination of voluntary leave and vigorous new recruitment. The special Constables were also given financial incentives to leave and "they all left," according to a senior commander with PPF. The RSIPF still has many officers who benefitted from aligning themselves with militant groups during the tension. For example, some of the promotions granted during that time have been called into question, according to a senior police officer. However, another high-ranking officer stressed that the police have found success in diluting any "bad blood" by recruiting officers "from remote provinces . . . who were still in school" during the tension.

Ultimately, the RSIPF leadership stresses, community cooperation will come when the police have earned it by demonstrating professionalism, establishing order and enforcing justice. Now that the justice system is fully operational, the police hope to meet the high standard of justice set by the courts. "After the tension, I think justice at a high level is now coming back. Justice at a lower level is there yet," said a high ranking police officer.

## **2.2 The Department of Correctional Services (Prisons)**

When the tensions began, many prison guards, like police officers, were suddenly and inappropriately thrust into paramilitary roles. The RAMSI advisor pointed out that prison

officers “were asked to do security tasks, almost in a military environment. They got into fire fights.” A Special Task Unit was constituted among prison staff, which trained with the PFF, “designated to help police during disasters,” but it broke down as ethnic divisions manifested within the prison staff. “Some of us were working with the police trying to get the rebels,” described one of the correctional officers. “When we caught them, put them in jail, some of the Guadalcanal officers released them. So the Malaitans thought this was not fair.”

During the coup of 5 June 2000, Guadalcanal prisoners were assisted by Guadalcanal officers to leave because they were afraid that the MEF would harm them, according to a high-ranking prison official. Some at-risk prisoners were transferred to facilities at Kirakira, one of the two satellite prisons outside greater Honiara unaffected by the tension.

When MEF militants took over the prison facilities on Guadalcanal, including the offices and main prison at Rove, they released all the prisoners, justifying the action based on the escape of the Guadalcanal prisoners, according to a high ranking prison official.<sup>389</sup> Many Malaitan prisoners were not recaptured until the arrival of RAMSI, according to both police and prison sources. A Malaitan prison official confirmed that “staff from Malaita was involved in the crisis.” He said it was “hard for Malaitan officers who wished to remain neutral because they didn’t have weapons to resist.” MEF raided the prison armory, confiscating an arsenal of high-powered rifles and shotguns, according to the Malaitan prison official.

Like their police counterparts, correctional officers interviewed expressed pride in the state of the correctional system before the tension, describing it as “disciplined, in a very good state,” with “respect throughout the ranks” and “enough budgeted.” The staff were composed solely of nationals, with one foreign advisor. A current RAMSI advisor observed, “The staff here talk about how before the tension there was a different organizational culture; staff were committed, showed up to work, wanted to be here, enjoyed their job, felt they provided a good public service, had a great relationship with police.” Prison staff usually worked unarmed, trusted by the prisoners.

After the takeover, most non-Malaitan prison officers fled back to their homes. The Malaitan staff were more divided, with some assisting MEF and others trying to remain neutral. The

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<sup>389</sup> Another high-ranking official disputed that all prisoners were released, saying the militants “were very selective to get only Malaitans out of jail,” and that the total prisoner release happened at another time.

remaining staff took care of the prisoners, including detainees who had returned after the prison break and others who were brought in by the Joint Operation, according to the Malaitan prison official. “Most people detained were detained unlawfully” by MEF, observed a high ranking prison official.

The neutral prison officers were still paid although irregularly and belatedly, said the Malaitan prison officer:

At that time we . . . had control over the jail, but the [militants] controlled the guardhouse. . . . Militants dominated the place, walking around with guns. . . . We would just stay home in our houses. Militants ran the prison. Sometimes when I saw no militants around, I went to my office. When I saw militants coming back drunk, firing weapons and such, I went back home. . . . [The staff] tried to compromise [with the militants] but they wouldn't.

Like their police counterparts, the prison officials described the militants who controlled the prison as dangerously unprofessional. They were often drunk and careless with weapons. A lawyer who visited the prisons during the tension found there were “hardly any prison officers in their uniforms.”

Yet more troubling are allegations of prisoner abuse by militants. A prisoner accused of arson in the burning of the Placemakers building in central Honiara was shot to death in front of two staff who were then forced to carry him out, according to the high ranking prison official. “My staff was very psychologically affected,” he commented. “We arranged counselling from the Melanesian Brothers and later posted them to outer provinces. The shooter was found guilty of murder, based on the officers’ testimony.”

Other prison staff members felt directly threatened. “I was very much threatened, very insecure.” said the high-ranking prison official. “A number of staff were involved in incidents and were fairly traumatized,” said the RAMSI advisor, “particularly the Malaitan officers who put their profession and their job first and felt a great conflict between other people’s expectations versus their job role.”

“One staff who was very traumatized, physically feels ill if he comes to Guadalcanal; he still has post-traumatic stress.” Another “was shot and lost a kidney, now back home in provinces, doing okay.” One of the prison officers described how he “was nearly shot by one of the MEF members [a prison officer] I know well. . . . He said he was drunk, under the influence of some Malaitans around him.” The man who intimidated him is now one of his superiors, but they have

since reconciled. “He my best friend now,” he said, in a stark demonstration of how the officers on opposing sides of the guns during the tension now have the need and capacity to work alongside one another and find a way to settle their differences.

One of RAMSI’s first priorities was to return control of the prisons to civilian hands. Assured of their security, most of the correctional officers came back to work. RAMSI funded a large contingent of foreign advisors, as well as construction of modern offices and facilities. Interviewees agreed that RAMSI provided sufficient resources to handle the challenges of the post-tension era.

Initially, foreign staff served in place of local staff, including in many leadership roles, but RAMSI staff have gradually moved to a solely advisory role. There is currently only one foreign national left in an in-line staff position, who is expected to step down as soon as the Government approves a successor. The contingent of foreign advisors, which had swelled to 50 at its height, is now only 17; they are primarily focused on organizational development rather than operations, according to one of the Australian advisors. One such advisor noted,

[Solomon Islanders] know how to run a prison now, they’re good at it. They don’t need all those advisors anymore, they can do everything themselves. . . . Corrections is seen as a leading organization in how far they’ve come.

The primary challenge facing the correctional system since the end of the tension was dealing with the influx of new prisoners to Rove following the wave of arrests by the RSIPF and PPF. This large increase of prisoners included militants as well as former inmates. A high-ranking correctional officer commented,

We arrested [the former prisoners], but not all of them. Probably two or three still are at large. Some came back voluntarily. Most of the lifers came back voluntarily. . . . There was a certain fear among my staff looking after the inmates. Luckily, we have the RAMSI people working with us.

Like their counterparts in the PPF, the RAMSI advisors to the justice system quickly found that they had to adjust their expectations to an environment a world away from Australia. A senior expatriate Commandant described this different context:

Prisoners here are very compliant, easy to work with, very open. . . . They don’t have a lot of the issues that prisoners in Australia have. Very few drug issues. Significantly fewer psychological issues than in Australia. They’re still very respectful of authority, which is missing in most Westernized countries.

When RAMSI officers first arrived they tried to run the prisons in a more Western way. For example, they banned guards from talking to the prisoners. This change sparked a non-violent protest by inmates upset by these changes in policy and the disrespect they perceived from new prison staff. The incident, the only such mass protest amongst prisoners in recent memory, chastened foreign advisors, who learned to appreciate Solomon Islands' more congenial and collaborative prison environment.

In the chaotic aftermath of RAMSI's arrival, prisoners were not segregated carefully, leading to conditions of detention that may have violated inmate rights. An expatriate defence attorney reported that, in disregard of the presumption of innocence,

. . . people accused of higher profile crimes were separated out in A-block. Most of them had twenty-three hour lockdowns to start with, not in solitary but [they had] . . . restricted visiting rights, . . . no access to prison programs, [and] limited ability to exercise.

According to a senior expatriate office, "Currently, inmates sorted into one of five different security blocks, as well as segregated facilities for women and for juveniles, each of which rarely has more than a few inmates." Assisted by the foreign advisors, the prison system changed several policies to adopt a modern rehabilitative model. One official described it as a "fast change." While prisoners were not treated badly under the old system, reforms led to greater transparency and more respect for international standards of human rights. "Before the tension, the treatment of prisoners was far worse," admitted the senior prison officer. "Now prisoners are treated very fairly. So far, I'm satisfied from the feedback we get from the independent groups who come in, like the International Red Cross." "We try to run an open, transparent system," a high ranking prison officer explained, saying that visiting delegations have come from Bougainville, the UK, New Zealand, and Australia,

This change in policy has been accompanied by legal change as well. The high-ranking prison official said:

The new Act in 2007 set a clear direction in terms of prisoner rehabilitation, a genuine commitment on behalf of the Solomon Islands Government to go down the path of rehabilitation . . . This represents a change in philosophy, not just about locking up prisoners but about rehabilitating them, so that they can go out better people than they came in and help their community. The staff is committed to rehabilitation. They see it works and they see the value of it.



Key reforms include the introduction of individual case management and new prisoner programs such as vocational training and religious services. One outstanding program is the Sycamore Tree Project, a program encouraging forgiveness and reconciliation between prisoners and the victims of their past crimes.

The staff has consciously tried to encourage reconciliation among prisoners as well. After the tension, prisoners who had been members of Guadalcanal and Malaita militant groups had access to religious and other non-governmental programs to encourage reconciliation through customary and/or religious methods. Explained one prison official,

When we brought [the ex-militants] in, we put them in different blocks. Then we have programs through churches, NGOs, and other stakeholders. We let them reconcile. And then they become good friends, they live in the same cell.

Officers also encourage reconciliation when conflicts emerge between prisoners, the high ranking officer added:

After the punishment period (of segregation) we try to get them together with the chaplain. Ninety-five percent of prisoners are happy to do the reconciliation – once a situation blows up, it's blown up. Because of the small size of even Rove prison, reconciliation is a necessity; there simply isn't enough space for factionalism among prisoners.

Disciplinary problems among prisoners, however, are rare in the Solomon Islands, especially compared to Western countries, according to the expatriate senior officer.

Some officers are resentful that staff who actively participated in the tension often remain unpunished, and sometimes are in positions of authority based on promotions during the tension. Unlike the police, the prison system has not pressured or given incentives to staff members who were formerly associated with militant groups to leave. A female RAMSI advisor expressed the strong fear that such “problem staff members” inspire in others:

Some are quite difficult to work with, they are resistant to change. Not just with advisors, they do it to each other. No one's done a performance review on these inspectors in years. Their files are almost always empty, because others are too scared to review them. For some staff you pussyfoot around them, almost like we're waiting them out for the next 20 years until they leave. This is the group that is either going to kill it or make it work.

The “problem staff” officers have contributed to morale problems, making the current work environment of the prison system different from its pre-tension past. Delinquency is common among staff, especially after payday, and a less congenial culture exists among staff members.

Officials say that the long-term solution to this morale problem is to recruit a more professional staff. The recruitment system, once casual and irregular, has been modernized and made more meritocratic. According to the expatriate female advisor, the new standards emphasize diversity and high educational standards. In the meantime, officers report little ethnic tension amongst the staff, although the prison farm at Tetere still does not allow Malaitan officers. Nevertheless, a high ranking officer admitted, “there are some ill-feelings in the hearts of individuals, deep inside.”

### **2.3 The courts**

Unlike the police and the prison systems, the courts remained independent of militant influence during the tension. However, the court system operated only at a superficial level during the crisis, due to the larger breakdown of law and order in Honiara. The courts and legal offices remained open but few new cases were tried. Some police officers and militants imprisoned detainees without trial, prosecutors had few new cases to bring, according to one of them. The courts tried some cases backlogged from before the tension, but the caseload before the tension had been relatively light, observed another prosecutor.

At the onset of the tension in mid-1998, police investigated a few tension-related cases and prosecutors charged defendants (primarily from Guadalcanal) with unlawful assembly, threats of violence, and possessing unlicensed firearms, noted one of the prosecutors. By 2000, prosecutors found it difficult to prosecute cases and trials had to be shifted to police headquarters for security reasons, according to the same prosecutor. In one major case in 2000, the courts convicted a man of murdering the foreign manager of a construction firm and sentenced him to life imprisonment. This case provoked a backlash amongst the defendant’s relatives but police “assisted in quelling the rage,” according to the prosecutor.

Lawyers and judges were shocked and terrified as law and order disintegrated in Honiara:

The seriousness of offences rose. . . . The beheading of a person in public, the shooting of a person in broad daylight . . . We had never seen things like that before. Criminal activities became prevalent, we felt insecure.

One of the public defenders summarized the situation aptly: “In those days, the people with the guns had control over everything.” The problem reached Guadalcanal. After securing the

conviction of a suspect accused of armed bank robbery in Gizo, a prosecutor later saw the defendant “walked out of the prison by Bougainvilleans.”

Judges and public lawyers reported being directly threatened and harassed by armed militants. One of the prosecutors explained:

... before the tension, maybe people were not happy with what I did in my work but never would I receive any threats, never would I be assaulted or even insulted. But through the tension and even afterwards, it was commonplace.

As an example, he told a story of being insulted, robbed and physically assaulted in the street near Point Cruz by a prisoner whom he had prosecuted, who had been freed when the jails were opened after the coup. Saved by a passing relative, he described it as a “commonplace experience.” Another time, a man threatened in public to “pull out this knife and cut you into pieces,” but he was saved again by relatives and bystanders.

A female solicitor reported being “personally threatened by gunmen on the streets, but I was rescued by observers.” She described another occasion in which she had to physically hide in her office a client who was being pursued by MEF-affiliated police against whom she sought a restraint order

In the Western Province, a Malaitan magistrate reported being chased out of Gizo by the Black Sharks in 2000, along with other Malaitans including a public defender. After he left, the court remained closed without a magistrate for one to two years. A part-Malaita public defender in Gizo at the time reported that she felt threatened by the Black Sharks but did not leave the town. One magistrate in Gizo was reportedly held for ransom by MEF militants and freed through negotiations by the Melanesian Brotherhood, according to the female solicitor. Due to the security situation, the lack of funding and the disruption of the central courts in Honiara, the courts of the Western Province were “hardly functioning until RAMSI came,” the female solicitor observed.

Unlike the police and correctional officers, lawyers and judicial officers reported that the 5 June coup “did not change anything for us,” in the words of one of the prosecutors. Trials began to taper off in early 2000 and resumed only in 2003 with the arrival of RAMSI, said another prosecutor. Court offices remained open and were staffed by personnel who had not fled to their home villages. These officers continued to be paid, though often late. Judges, magistrates,

prosecutors and defenders busied themselves with low profile cases and with assisting provincial courts in the outer islands. One of the judges reported:

Most of the staff were gone because of threats. At least some of us were there, dealing with a few civil matters, mostly traffic matters. Criminal matters, no. There were no tools of justice, no court circuits, nothing. Most of the days, we were doing nothing. We would just sit in the office. But we were still open. That was the situation right until RAMSI arrived; the Townsville Peace Accord changed nothing.

Public lawyers also reported their offices remained open but idle during the tension. “We would only receive inquiries from other provinces; we just remained locked in our office,” said one of the prosecutors. A defence attorney reported that there were “not many criminal cases at that time; civil matters went on as usual.” Another female colleague said, “both [the higher and lower] courts were still functioning, but under extremely difficult circumstances. We would go to court, but there were hardly any trials.”

Even if lawyers wanted to go to court, they found witnesses reluctant to come forward and little admissible evidence was collected by the police, observed a female solicitor. In at least one case, High Court judges admitted in their decision that defendants could not be released for fear of their safety. The first tension-related High Court case, in which former Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa’alu challenged his overthrow, proceeded “under difficult circumstances, with armed people in the court room.” according to the female solicitor.

While the wave of arrests that accompanied RAMSI’s intervention strained the capacity of the police and the prisons, it overwhelmed the court system entirely. The legal system, which had been effectively mothballed for four years, was suddenly flooded with hundreds of new cases. The challenge was qualitative as well as quantitative. The atrocities of the militias, the legally ambiguous actions of the Joint Operation and the aggressive tactics of the PPF under RAMSI were all legal issues unprecedented in the nation’s still young justice system.

Even if they felt competent and experienced enough to try tension-related cases, most of the country’s judges and lawyers felt too emotionally involved to participate fairly. Nearly all of them had lived in Honiara and suffered through the conflict. A justice official explained: “It was thought at the time, because of the effects of the tension on our people here, we would bring in outside people to deal with these cases, because our judges and magistrates are from ethnic groups involved in the tension.”

Unlike the police and prisons, the courts could not rely on “new blood,” since the tension had broken off all legal education. Thus, most of the “tension trials” have been tried by foreign lawyers, with Solomon Islanders generally playing secondary roles. This practice has been true even in the High Court which has one judge from Malaita, one from Guadalcanal and one from the outer islands. “That’s why we have foreign judges here to deal with those cases,” said one of the judges. Despite this extensive foreign role, all trials are conducted under the jurisdiction of Solomon Islands and its laws.

Some Solomon Islanders have felt comfortable participating in the tension trials, including one judge, four or five defence lawyers, and several prosecutors. In the last few years, locals have become more involved in tension matters and within two to three years more cases will be turned over to local staff, according to an expatriate prosecutor. Local lawyers have felt especially relieved not to be involved in cases where they have a conflict of interest, a situation sometimes necessitated by capacity shortages before RAMSI arrived. “I remember one murder case in South Malaita,” said a local defence attorney. “I raised the issue that the victim is related to me, but with only three lawyers, I had to take it, I had to go and defend him.”

The RAMSI-funded foreign advisors have tried to build up the capacity of the local system. The local defence attorney admitted that before RAMSI,

although we still had the set of legal institutions set up, it was like we were working in a vacuum. When RAMSI came, despite the increase in caseload and case management, at least we were on the right foot doing the work that was required.

Unlike RAMSI police and prison advisors, RAMSI advisors in the court system have tried to work within the existing order, making few policy changes. The court system had always functioned at a fairly high level, at least in Honiara, and after the tension it resumed more-or-less intact.

While their presence is appreciated, the foreign judges and lawyers have attracted some criticism. Like their counterparts in the police and prisons, some have been accused of cultural insensitivity. A defence attorney observed, “The expatriate judges were on the money most of the time but I thought they were culturally insensitive. For local lawyers English isn’t their first language and the judges just have to deal with that.”

More troubling are accusations of bias by many defendants. A justice official admitted; “there are perceptions by some quarters of the community that RAMSI has been dominated by

Australia. Some people started to express issues with this, especially from those connected to those charged with offences, but this is more about perceptions than actual bias.” In response, RAMSI and the Government of Solomon Islands have tried to recruit more advisors from other Pacific Islands, especially since 2005. Ultimately, as a local defence counsel put it: “RAMSI came in really well to assist the country and is really appreciated. The longer it goes on, maybe people start having different views, but the good it has done to the country has more value than any negative criticism.”

RAMSI-funded lawyers vehemently deny any political agenda or interference with their work. “I’ve never been told anything other than ‘you must put in a robust defence’”, said a RAMSI-appointed defence counsel. “Neither have I heard from another colleague of any influence being attempted to be applied by any Australian official or government employee ever, and I don’t think they would.” However, one of his colleagues noted that although RAMSI officers have not actually interfered with the trials, they haven’t always been careful not to give the impression of political involvement. Early on when the tension trials were starting, a former defence attorney observed:

RAMSI would have someone sitting in the back of the courts taking notes if something happened. My boss, the Public Solicitor at the time who was an expatriate would get phone calls, “Well, how did this happen? How did they get bail? How did they get an acquittal?” You shouldn’t be getting those phone calls at all.

She added that those who provided funding sometimes influenced the order in which cases were tried. For example, a case involving the beheading of an Australian missionary in Malaita was “moved around at the request of the Australian High Commissioner even though it was an appeal against conviction, so nobody was languishing in jail. That sort of thing leaves a tarnished taste in people’s mouth about the justice system.”

In contrast, RAMSI’s role in boosting the capacity of the justice system, especially under the “Enhanced Assistance Program” from 2003 to 2008, has been wholly uncontroversial. “Without this assistance, we couldn’t have done much,” a senior justice official admitted. Prosecutors and defence counsel alike reported satisfaction with the level of assistance provided by RAMSI. “RAMSI improved resources immensely,” said an expatriate defence counsel, “in terms of defence work, it is much easier to concentrate on the evidence, and case preparation when you have a computer there, books and people to consult with and get assistance. It gives us a huge

breathing space.” Resources given to the prosecution and to the defence are roughly equal, in contrast to the imbalances common across developing and developed countries alike. “We were given as much as they could give us,” said another defence counsel. She specifically cited the existence of RAMSI’s Case Support Unit, which provided logistical support to both sides to locate and transport witnesses, as an example of extraordinary support. Still, a RAMSI defence counsel has asserted that much of the evidence collected during the early years after the tension relied upon confessions that may be suspect. She commented,

Particularly with the GLF cases . . . a number of people have been convicted on the word of one person. Miraculously enough, for two convicted people I know of, it was the same one person. There was a total disregard for people invoking right to silence. Some people were interviewed five to six times by the PPF and the Solomon Islands Police Force as well.

Prosecutors and judges countered that such issues have been successfully raised by the defence in court, resulting in the exclusion of improperly gained evidence.

Although they have been content with RAMSI support so far, interviewees did express the view that additional lawyers and judges would allow a faster disposal of the backlog of tension cases. Officials also felt that the tension trials diverted resources from the prosecution of ordinary crimes. “The tension trials have occupied our resources until recently; now, other cases are being listed more,” admitted a senior justice official. A judge agreed with those sentiments: “The tension trials have taken a lot of our resources and time; 60 to 70 percent of our cases are tension-related.”

The most serious charges levelled at the tension trials have been over issues of due process. Questions have emerged over violations of suspects’ rights on the collection of evidence in the first wave of arrests after RAMSI’s arrival. “The standard of evidence collection is a major problem for the Prosecution,” one of the prosecutors observed; “it took awhile for the PPF and police to be able to investigate in a way that maintained the rights of individuals.” He added that there “needs to be improvement in the gathering of evidence, crime scene evaluation and recording and reconstruction.” However, he described the tension trials as, on the whole, handled very competently and noted that evidentiary issues have been resolved fairly during the trial process. A justice official agreed that the High Court has been able to resolve fairly these issues through appeals. Evidence has been excluded from trials when problems with testimony

have come to light, such as a failure to inform suspects of the right to remain silent, according to a RAMSI defence counsel.

Another major due process issue has been the concern over the unfair treatment of former members of the Guadalcanal militant groups. While few argue that RAMSI or the RSIPF have purposely targeted former militants from Guadalcanal, these militants tended to be younger, poorer, less educated and less connected in Honiara compared to their Malaitan counterparts. Thus, they may have unwittingly incriminated themselves when they were arrested. A defence counsel who has represented militants on both sides explained:

There are more GLF convictions than MEF convictions. The MEF were more organized, more educated, because a lot of them were police officers and businessmen and ex-politicians so they understood their rights and most of them shut up. They had better access to lawyers because most of them were arrested in Honiara. The GLF, when RAMSI came in, were hauled together on the beach, on the Weather Coast, and there were no lawyers there. They were given lawyers in Honiara but by that time most of them had already given confessions. Some of those confessions have been excluded by the courts but it has been very dependent on which judge is sitting. Most of the GLF people didn't even speak pijin. A lot had never been out of the Weather Coast and were lucky to have had primary school education. Immediately alienated from their family, community, villages, a lot of them thought they were coming to Honiara to give their side of the story and then go home. But now they can't go home.

She went on to blame the police for reinforcing, or at least not contradicting, the misconception of GLF members that they were covered by the Amnesty Act and wouldn't be held liable for the actions they confessed. Malaitan defendants also suffered from the mistaken belief they had been granted amnesty for their crimes, a belief the courts have generally not upheld.

All of the interviewees in the judicial system agreed that more Guadalcanal than Malaitan defendants had been convicted but explanations for this divergence varied widely. One defence counsel looked to differences in culture:

In my experience, Malaitans defend their rights. It's different with those from Guadalcanal; they spoke freely and were willing to answer anything. They will say, this is what we did and this is how we did it." It's not fair to take this as being voluntary because a fourteen-year-old from Guadalcanal will obey an elder person.

She argued that many of these child militants were under duress due to their cultural value of absolute obedience to elders, including both militant leaders who ordered them to commit crimes and, later, police officers who pressured them to confess to those crimes. She explained that courts in Papua New Guinea had accepted a defence of duress from children in similar cultural contexts. In Solomon Islands, juvenile defendants have been given certain protections under the



Juvenile Justice Act and have been exempted from the mandatory life sentence that accompanies a murder conviction. However, many argue for further leniency, according to a RAMSI defence counsel.

Others looked to the differences between the militant groups. “Maybe the problem is that the Malaitan people are around town and the witnesses fear them,” said a prosecutor. The high visibility of many former MEF leaders in Honiara may intimidate some witnesses into silence. Another hypothesis was offered by a colleague, that while MEF members had not shied away from thefts and assaults during the tension, they committed fewer murders than militants from the IFM and GLF, who had viciously turned against their own people after the signing of the TPA. The police and prosecution vehemently disclaim any bias: “The fair way of doing our job is that we make arrests when there is evidence,” said a high ranking officer. A prosecutor asserted that prosecutions were solely evidence-based. “Not a single time have I been told not to prosecute a person,” he said, “we just proceeded with cases brought by police.”

### **3. Overview over the tension trials**

Although the tension trials fall outside the period of the tension as defined in the Act (that is, 1 January 1998 to 23 July 2003), they were a direct consequence of the tension as militants were charged with offences committed during that time and prosecuted accordingly.

It was critical for the rule of law to demonstrate that there would be no impunity for the commission of heinous crimes and violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. However, it was not possible to ensure all violations of international humanitarian and human rights laws would be recognized, as Solomon Islands has not ratified some of the relevant international instruments, nor has it incorporated their provisions into domestic law. For example, on 3 December 2000 the Solomon Islands Government signed the Rome Treaty, recognizing the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court but has yet to ratify it or incorporate its provisions in domestic legislation.

The tension trials discussed below are considered in terms of due process and the rule of law. Eighteen cases are discussed in terms of judicial consideration of relevant issues of due process and rule of law through admissions, duress, strength of evidence, lack of legal representation, treatment of juvenile defendants and amnesty applications. The courts were not unaware of

these issues. However, in the interests of transparency and of justice, it is recommended that there be a thorough review of the process when the tension trials are completed.

### *Tension period*

The Tension period occurred between 1 January 1998 and 23 July 2003 as defined by the Truth and Reconciliation Act. “Tension trial” is not expressly defined. However police advisors and staff from the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) agree that a general definition is, “crimes committed during the tension period by militants against others.”

### *Militant activity*

Militant activity occurred throughout the period of the tension from 1 January 1998 to 23 July 2003. While there were periods of relative quiet, the armed conflict persisted even after the signing of the Townsville and Marau Peace Agreements (in October 2000 and February 2001). By then Harold Keke and the GLF were being targeted by the Government and its allies from the beginning of 2001 until the arrival of RAMSI in July 2003. The fighting on the Weather Coast was fierce and protracted with the people caught in the middle of the conflict. Although Keke was confined to his own environment, he cast a long shadow over Guadalcanal and Solomon Islands. The Government clearly saw him as a major security threat and expended significant personnel and resources to try to capture or kill him.

### *The tension trials*

The tension trials take place within Solomon Islands’ formal legal system and are subject to charges pursuant to Solomon Islands laws, mainly the Penal Code Cap. 26. Tension-related matters may be heard in the Magistrate or High Court, depending on whether or not the offence is indictable. Prosecutions were initially only conducted by foreign lawyers but now are also conducted by local lawyers from the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP). Defendants were initially represented by foreign lawyers, but are now also represented by local lawyers from the Public Solicitor’s Office (PSO). For tension trial purposes, both DPP and PSO are recipients of funding from RAMSI. Since the end of 2010, local lawyers have been involved in tension trials. However, this remains work in progress, because there continues to be a reticence and reluctance on the part of local lawyers to be more engaged. This reluctance is attributable to poor salary and allowances, resentment at the disparity between local and

expatriate salaries, a “no care” attitude towards work, and defiance. Initially, the average length of trial was three to six months. Now it is approximately two weeks.

### *The Judiciary*

Designated tension trial judges were initially appointed from Fiji, the United Kingdom and New Zealand. These judges have since left Solomon Islands. As of mid-2011 four of the five judges sitting are Solomon Islanders, namely, two civil judges, two criminal law judges and one Chief Justice. Solomon Island judges and a foreign judge preside over the tension trials. The Justice Sector Consultative Committee and the Case Support Unit of RAMSI co-ordinate the cases and logistics for tension trials.

### *The number of tension trials*

Tension trials are a small number of the overall caseload in the Solomon Islands court system. According to the High Court Registry at mid-2011, there were only 12 outstanding tension trials compared with 100 outstanding everyday criminal cases. Rough statistics held by the High Court Registry and information from the DPP indicate that during 2004- 2010, between 10 to 20 defendants were sentenced from tension trials. This is only a rough estimate. RAMSI possesses accurate records of the tension trials but were not prepared to release information to the TRC.

From a small selection of 14 tension trial sentences recorded on the High Court Registry files, there were two pleas of guilty. From those who were not sentenced, three were acquitted, two were subject to *nolle prosequi* (voluntary discontinuation of criminal charges), and there was one stay of proceedings. Two children were charged with murder; those cases are discussed below. As of 1 August 2011 there were 12 outstanding tension trials. From these 12 trials there were 15 charges and 29 defendants (who are often the same person). In three of these the accused was still at large; in three, files were missing; in six, matters were still to be listed; and two cases had been recommended to be discontinued. As of August 2011, there were approximately 80 tension-related crimes yet to be investigated, including five exhumations by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It is estimated that the tension trials are to continue for at least another year.

The majority of cases prosecuted were against defendants from Guadalcanal. The main crimes prosecuted arising from the tension trials were murder and abduction. Some sexual assaults were

reported but there were no resulting charges or prosecutions. The ODPP continues to prosecute those who are already serving life sentences to give effect to justice and for the public to see the guilty punished.

#### *Due process and rule of law*

Twenty-five tension trial judgments on the PACLII website were considered; if related cases were not considered, it because they were not available on this website. From these it was clear that breaches of due process and the rule of law received consideration from the courts. Cases discussed below show judicial consideration of relevant issues of due process and rule of law in admissions, duress, strength of evidence, lack of legal representation, treatment of juvenile defendants and amnesty applications. The judiciary, pardons by the Governor General, Parole Board orders, prison facilities, mental health facilities, and statutes of limitation are also considered.

#### *Admissions of guilt*

##### *Keke, Cawa and Lela*

In the matter of R. v. Keke, Cawa and Lela, the accused were charged with the murder of Father Augustine Geve on the Weather Coast in August, 2002. Father Geve was Member of Parliament for South Guadalcanal. Keke was the leader of the GLF, Cawa second in command of the GLF, and Lela a GLF gunman. Keke had sent a letter to Father Geve asking him to come to the Weather Coast to discuss some matters. Father Geve attended the meeting, the result of which he wrote a letter of resignation to the National Parliament and was later killed. All defendants pleaded not guilty. At the trial they were convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment.

In 2005 Cawa and Lela applied to the High Court for an order that their admissions of guilt were inadmissible and should be excluded on the grounds that they had been made unwillingly.

The judge considered the arguments, including that the police induced Cawa to make the statements through promise of safety and humane treatment, including the assurance of a gun amnesty; that he was held in detention on a boat in the presence of RAMSI personnel at the time of interview and was not aware of the true nature behind police questioning; that he did not have an independent interpreter (the interpreter was the policeman interviewing); he was prevented

from consulting with a lawyer of his choice; and that the caution given to him was inadequate in the circumstances of the case. The court considered the argument that Cawa's statements were constitutionally unlawful, as he had not been told the reasons for his arrest. In Lela's case, the judge considered whether his statements were induced because police made representations that his other friends would be retrained, educated and looked after while in Honiara; that they were told they would be staying with Keke at the Guadalcanal Beach Resort; and the representation was also made that no criminal charges or investigation would be carried out on the guns as part of the peace process.

These arguments were duly considered in relation to the Judge's rules, rules of evidence and the Constitution. The Judge ultimately found that the interviews had been voluntarily agreed to; breach of section 5(2) of the Constitution was no bar to admitting the interviews because of their voluntariness; that a caution had been given at the beginning of Cawa's questioning and that, in any case, omission of a caution in this case was not fatal as the statements made in the interview were voluntary. Both applications were refused.

In 2006 Keke, Cawa and Lela again appealed to the Court of Appeal on the basis that the trial judge did not properly take into account inconsistencies between the evidence of the prosecution witness and previous inconsistent statements; and that the permission to record the interview of Cawa and Lela was not voluntarily given. The appeal of each was dismissed.

#### *Tatau, Ome, Ross, and Kwaimani*

The matter of *R. v. Tatau, Ome, Ross, and Kwaimani* involved one charge of murder and three charges of attempted murder of officers on duty from the Participating Police Force (PPF) of RAMSI in October 2004. Tatau and Ome were charged with murder of one officer and attempted murder of another for an event that occurred in December, 2004. The court found all confessions were unreliable and inadmissible and all four defendants were acquitted.

In Kwaimani's case, the judge found that his admission to attempted murder was unreliable as no notes were taken at the time of the confession and there was no verbatim record of the interview; the judge could not decide whether the admission was a recital of what was alleged against the defendant or whether it was what he actually did; that language interpretation possibly created misunderstanding; and that other supporting evidence from prison informants was unreliable.

Ross' confession was considered unreliable and inadmissible because it was made to ordinary citizens as opposed to persons in authority; there were possible language misinterpretation between what was meant and what was said; and because of the unrealistic recollection of events in the confession.

There was no direct evidence from eye witnesses that Tatau and Ome were at the scene at the time of the shooting. Ome's confession was considered unreliable and inadmissible because it was not from persons in authority but from the same prison informant involved in Kwaimanu's case. Tatau was acquitted, amongst other reasons, because the judge was not convinced he had produced a false alibi that placed him in another place at the time of the offence.

### *Duress*

In Solomon Islands duress or compulsion is a defence in all crimes, including crimes under international law (although a factor to be taken into account in mitigation). Domestically, duress is a defence for committing criminal acts but not justification, and applies to any crime in the Penal Code. The Court of Appeal in *Kejoa v. R.* held that the defence of duress is not necessarily precluded if the accused has voluntarily joined a criminal organization based on violence but it is a significant factor.

The defence of duress was unsuccessful in the 2005 matter of *R. v. Hese* where the accused was charged with the murder by shooting at close range his cousin on the Weather Coast. The court ultimately ruled against the defence's argument of duress because the accused was a member of the GLF – an illegal organization – which was known to encourage and commit brutal acts such as executing anyone who was a threat, including family members. The judge found the accused person's intention was clear in that he chose to execute the deceased who was a cousin-brother and totally disregarded family connections because he was determined to follow the orders of the GLF.

### *Strength of evidence*

In the 2007 High Court case of *R. v. Keke and Cawa*, Keke was charged with seven counts of murder in 2002, and Keke and Cawa were jointly charged with another murder occurring in 2002. Keke was charged with ordering the killing of seven Kwaio men who were lined up at the beach in Ravu and shot. The judge acquitted Keke of the murders on the basis that the evidence

was not sufficient to prove the crime beyond reasonable doubt because of inconsistencies in the evidence, difficulty in the identification of Keke, and because the admission was incomplete, unsound and not a true account. For example, Keke's admission of cutting off the head of a victim and cutting out his heart while it was still pumping was contrary to the *post mortem* report which indicated that the cause of death of this victim was multiple high-velocity gunshots. Cawa was found guilty of murder.

#### *Lack of legal representation*

\*The 2004 appeal against sentence of Kunua v. R., in which the accused was not represented by legal counsel at trial, was successful. The appellant had pleaded guilty to a charge of going armed in public and was convicted and sentenced to nine months' imprisonment. His appeal was ultimately based on the fact that the informer had stated he had a pistol when he had a knife; he had admitted to this fact and the police had assisted the court; and that he was a first offender with previous good character. The sentence was reduced to one month, three weeks and six days.

#### *Recusal by the Judiciary*

In the 2005, in the case of R v. Toghovotu, the leader of the Isatabu Freedom Movement was tried for murder. Part way through the trial an application was made for the judge presiding over the murder trial to defend his appointment; while denying any conflict of interest, he nevertheless felt personally affronted by the demand and rescued himself. A new judge was appointed to hear the case.

#### *Amnesty applications*

The 2000 Amnesty Act barred criminal prosecution for some criminal acts involving politically motivated violence in exchange for surrender of weapons and ammunition. The amnesty covered acts by the Solomon Islands Police Force and Prisons Service; the Isatabu Freedom Movement in relation to forceful evictions from the Province of Guadalcanal between 1 January 1998 and 15 October 2000; the Malaita Eagle Force in retaliation for those evictions; and members of the Joint Operation/Malaita Eagle Force between 1 January 1998 and 15 October 2000. It implemented the General Amnesty clause of the Townsville Peace Agreement which covered offences relating to arms and ammunitions; killing in combat conditions or in

connection with the armed conflict on Guadalcanal; damage done to properties during or in connection with military operations; and traffic offences committed during or in connection with security operations. A provision was added that excluded amnesty for violations of international humanitarian law and human rights violations or abuses.

Similarly, the 2001 Amnesty Act barred criminal prosecutions for some criminal acts involving politically motivated violence. It contained an identical exclusion of human rights violations. The Emergency Powers (Islands of Guadalcanal) Regulations 1999 were adopted when the Government of Solomon Islands declared a state of public emergency in 1999. These Regulations granted a blanket amnesty for all acts committed by police officers and other individuals in “good faith.” They also sharply restricted public reporting about alleged human rights violations.

In the 2008 case of *Lusibaea, Fefele, Ila, Kiki and Kwaimani v. R.*, amnesty applications were made by the accused who were all members of the Malaita Eagle Force and charged with the 2000 attempted murder of a Guadalcanal bank manager who had no known connection to the GRA. They were also charged with grievous harm and conspiracy to murder. The attack was said to be in retribution for the killing of a MEF member. The judge was not satisfied that the application fulfilled the criteria of the Amnesty Act which required that the alleged acts of those accused constituted killing or wounding in combat conditions or in connection with the armed conflict on Guadalcanal. For these reasons the judge declined their amnesty applications.

Other Amnesty applications include *Tahiuru and Periporo v. R.*, a 2003 appeal from the Magistrate Court involving two former police sergeants who were believed to be members of the MEF and had been found guilty of demanding with menace in 2001. The court found the Amnesty Act did not apply. The 2007 amnesty application of *R. v. Maga* involved two Malaitan men charged with the abduction of a Guadalcanal man suspected to be involved with GRA militants. The court granted amnesty. In *R v. Su’u and Others*, the application involved six Malaitans who were alleged members of the MEF participating in an MEF patrol that killed a Guadalcanal man in 2000. The court refused amnesty because the actions of the accused violated basic human rights. In the 2008 case of *R. v. Aili*, the application was made by two Malaitan men thought to be members of the MEF, accused of abduction and robbery during an attack on commercial premises in which vehicles were stolen. The court refused amnesty.



### *Pardons by the Governor General*

The former Commander of the Isatabu Freedom Movement, Andrew Te'e, was sentenced to seven life sentences in *R. v. Toghovotu* in 2008 for several murders and one attempted murder on the Weather Coast in 2001. An appeal against the conviction in 2009 was unsuccessful. In July 2011, he received a conditional pardon from the Governor General of Solomon Islands on the recommendation of the Committee on the Prerogative of Mercy and was released from prison. There was some adverse reaction to the decision, particularly as the Committee declined to give any reasons for its decision, asserting that its proceedings were "confidential." However, as Andrew Te'e had received seven life sentences for murder, surely the public was entitled to know what factors influenced the Commission to recommend an early pardon to the Governor-General. The justice system is undermined and public confidence in it shaken when persons convicted of heinous crimes are perceived to be treated leniently. The pardon also raises the spectre of discriminatory treatment against those who remain incarcerated at Rove who are not as well-connected as Andrew Te'e.

### *Parole Board*

In November 2010, the High Court in *R. v. Lusibaea* convicted Member of Parliament Jimmy Lusibaea, formerly of the Malaita Eagle Force, of unlawful wounding for shooting an unconscious man in hospital and for assaulting a police officer with a pistol butt in 2000 following a shootout at a nightclub. An application for bail was rejected. The court sentenced him to two years and nine months' imprisonment. He was released on parole by the Parole Board in January 2011.

There was a mixed reaction to the decision, with Lusibaea's supporters insisting that he had paid his dues to society. However, the blatant manner in which the powers of the Parole Board were brought into play coupled with Lusibaea's position as a Minister of the Crown, did neither the Government nor Lusibaea much credit. To outside observers, it appeared to be a serious case of "influence peddling." Subsequent court proceedings have held Lusibaea to have lost his parliamentary seat as a result of receiving a custodial sentence of more than twelve months. The Solomon Islands Constitution states that any Member of Parliament sentenced to more than six months' imprisonment is no longer a Member of Parliament. In Lusibaea's case, the early parole

had reduced his time in prison to less than six months, which, he argued, allowed him to remain in Parliament. The High Court ruled otherwise.

#### *Prison facilities*

A juvenile wing at Rove Prison has been operating for four years; however there are no juvenile rehabilitation programs. There is generally minimal rehabilitation available to juvenile inmates.

#### *Mental health*

The defence of insanity is available pursuant to section 12 of the Penal Code. However, it appears to be rarely used. There are no forensic psychologists or psychiatrists to support a plea of insanity and no real ability to make the defence. There are very limited mental health facilities to address rehabilitation and only very limited, if any, forensic hospital facilities.

#### *Statutes of limitation*

Solomon Island has a statute of limitations for genocide and for some crimes of sexual violence; however the Penal Code does not refer to its application to any other crimes within the Penal Code.

### **4. Recommendations**

These recommendations are formulated on the basis of the interviews conducted with those interviewed for the first three parts of this chapter. The intention is not to propose any radical measures but to put in place initiatives that will contribute to the better delivery of services outside Honiara for the great majority of the people of the Solomon Islands.

#### *Access to justice*

Given that nearly 80 percent of the population of the Solomon Islands live outside Honiara, the Local and Magistrate Courts need to be re-established throughout Solomon Islands to enable them to provide services to the great majority of the people of the country. Careful attention must be paid to those people who will preside over the courts as respected community leaders.

### *Community policing*

In order to re-establish trust and confidence in the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, re-introduction of community policing is an appropriate place to begin. Such policing would enable the police to work in close cooperation with the community as a whole and facilitate the building of trust between the police and the community.

### *Developing capacity*

The professional capacities of local professionals in the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Office of the Public Solicitor require concerted attention. It is not clear that they will be able to perform the required tasks when RAMSI begins to withdraw in 2013. There is also a combination of poor working conditions where housing and related costs are unaffordable, resulting in an attitude that is basically marking time until a better offer enables them to leave.

### *Juvenile rehabilitation programs*

It is essential to improve rehabilitation facilities for juveniles in prison to enable them to find an outlet for their energies.

### *Mental health facilities for accused persons and prisoners*

These need to be made available to accused persons and prisoners.

### *Quotas*

To ensure ethnic balance in the police force and prisons service, there should be a provincial quota for police and prison staff recruitment.

### *Review of tension trials*

A full review of the tension trials needs to be undertaken when they have finished to address any doubts about their propriety.

*Correctional Services redundancies*

Consideration should be given to allowing officers who compromised themselves during the tension to take early retirement to facilitate reform.