

# Report of the Commonwealth Observer Group

## SOLOMON ISLANDS GENERAL ELECTIONS

19 November 2014



The Commonwealth

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## Acknowledgements

We convey our sincere appreciation and gratitude to the Government and people of the Solomon Islands, for the generous hospitality extended to us since our arrival on 9 November 2014.

The support and advice provided to the Group by the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission and all the stakeholders involved with the 2014 general election informed the Group's work and was greatly appreciated.

We acknowledge the assistance extended to the Group by the Heads of the Commonwealth diplomatic missions and other international partners in Honiara.

The Group welcomed the support provided by local members of the team recruited to support the Group. They include: Mr Brian Lenga; our two drivers, Steven and Anthony; and the five assistants who accompanied our teams during deployment to Malaita, Western Province, Isabel, and Central Province.

Our sincerest appreciation to the support and advice provided by the Commonwealth Secretariat Staff Team: Mr Albert Mariner, Ms Clara Cole, Mr Julius Mucunguzi and Ms Madonna Lynch. Without their commitment and professionalism, we would have struggled to complete our task.

We convey our sincere gratitude to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Mr Kamallesh Sharma, for giving us the opportunity and the privilege to serve the Commonwealth through this mission, in support of democracy and Commonwealth values in Solomon Islands.

# Letter of Transmittal



## Commonwealth Observer Group

Solomon Islands General Election, 19 November 2014

8 December 2014

Dear Secretary-General,

I have the pleasure to submit our Group's report following our assignment to the Solomon Islands general election of 19 November 2014.

The 2014 election was inclusive and competitive. Voters were generally free to express their will. It was noteworthy that women and young people appeared unhindered in their participation in the process. The Group was of the overall view that the election was credible and the results reflected the wishes of the people.

The Group welcomed the adoption of biometric voter registration, which raised the confidence of stakeholders in the integrity of the new register of electors. However we noted that not all eligible voters were able to register during the registration period.

The Group congratulated the only successful female candidate for the 2014 election. We recommend however that additional temporary special measures be considered to encourage the greater representation of women in Parliament.

The Group congratulated the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission (SIEC) for the successful management and administration of the elections. We commended the role of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, supported by the RAMSI Participating Police Force, which gave confidence to the people to fully exercise their democratic rights.

Our conclusion and recommendations are submitted with the expectation that, if implemented fully, Solomon Islands' electoral processes will be strengthened. I hope the Government, the SIEC and Solomon Islands' development partners will give this report due consideration and provide the necessary support to implement the recommendations.


**Sir Mekere Morauta**  
Chair



Senator Linda Reynolds  
**Australia**



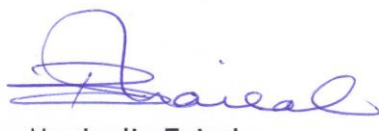
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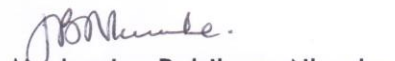
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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

At the invitation of the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission, and following a staff assessment visit from 22-26 September 2014, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Mr Kamallesh Sharma, constituted an Observer Group for the general election of 19 November 2014. The Group was led by Sir Mekere Morauta, former Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, and comprised 11 experienced persons from around the Commonwealth, supported by a four-member staff team from the Commonwealth Secretariat. A full list of members is at Annex 1.

### Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference for the Group are as follows:

*“The Group is established by the Commonwealth Secretary-General at the invitation of the Government and Electoral Commission of Solomon Islands. The Group is to consider the various factors impinging on the credibility of the electoral process as a whole.*

*It will determine in its own judgement whether the elections have been conducted according to the standards for democratic elections to which the country has committed itself, with reference to national election-related legislation and relevant regional, Commonwealth and other international commitments.*

*The Group is to act impartially and independently. It has no executive role; its function is not to supervise but to observe the process as a whole and to form a judgement accordingly. It would also be free to propose to the authorities concerned such action on institutional, procedural and other matters as would assist the holding of such elections.*

*The Group is to submit its report to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, who will forward it to the Government of Solomon Islands, the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission, political parties taking part in the elections and thereafter to all Commonwealth Governments.”*

### Activities

Members of the Commonwealth Observer Group (‘the Group’) were present in Solomon Islands from 9 November to 2 December 2014. The Chair issued an Arrival Statement on 13 November (Annex 3). The Group had a comprehensive programme of briefings with stakeholders in the country prior to deployment. This included meetings with the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission (SIEC), political party representatives, civil society groups, media, Police Commissioner, the Special Coordinator of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), Commonwealth High Commissioners, members of the diplomatic corps, and other international observer missions.

The Group was deployed in seven two-person teams from 17-21 November, to Western Province, Isabel, Central Province, Malaita, and Honiara/Guadalcanal. During deployment, each team met with electoral officials, local community leaders and voters, and engaged with other international and domestic observers. The Group's Deployment Plan is at Annex 2.

Following the Group members' return from deployment, and based on their preliminary findings and observations, the Chair issued an Interim Statement on 22 November 2014 (Annex 4).



## Chapter 2

### Political Background

#### 2014 General Election Context

The general election held on 19 November 2014 is the ninth since the country's independence in 1978. It is the third election since the end of the conflict (known as 'the tensions'), which affected the nation from 1998-2003. The 2014 election was significant, as it was the first general election held after the withdrawal of the RAMSI military component. In this election, the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) assumed responsibility and took the lead with the security arrangements, with support from RAMSI's Participating Police Force (PPF).

There were several key issues that dominated the political dynamic in the lead up to the 2014 election, including the passage of the *Political Parties Integrity Act* (PPIA) in May 2014. The PPIA for the first time provided a legal framework for the formation, registration and administration of political parties. The Group views the strengthening of the party system as critical to enhancing political stability in Solomon Islands.

To encourage the formation of political parties, the PPIA provides financial incentives for Members of Parliament belonging to a political party. The Group considers that the Act's objectives are commendable, however the PPIA, in its present, form may prove inadequate to effectively deliver on its goal.

Twelve political parties registered under the PPIA prior to the election. Of the 447 candidates who contested the election, only 204 were declared members of a registered political party. A number of party representatives who met with the Group expressed concerns that introduction of the PPIA had been rushed, with some confusion among candidates as to the Act's requirements.

Observers received many comments expressing voter concerns about widespread corruption amongst the political establishment and the involvement of businesses in providing financial support to particular candidates. A core issue raised was the use of public money - particularly the Rural Constituency Development Fund (RCDF) and the Members' terminal grant - by parliamentarians for their personal use, and to support their political campaigns.

The Group was told that the root causes of the tensions included: disputes over land ownership, settlements and development projects on customary land; unequal distribution of development benefits stemming from natural resource and extractive industries; increasing unemployment with limited opportunities, especially for the indigenous community; and concentration of development projects in Guadalcanal and Western Provinces.

#### Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI)

In April 2003, then Solomon Islands Prime Minister Sir Allan Kemakeza requested Australian assistance to address the breakdown of law and order in the country as a result of the tensions. Following consultations between the governments of Solomon

Islands, Australia and New Zealand, a package of strengthened assistance to support the Solomon Islands Government - RAMSI - was proposed and unanimously endorsed by a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Pacific Islands Forum. RAMSI was debated and unanimously endorsed by the Solomon Islands Parliament, welcomed by the President of the United Nations Security Council, and supported by the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group.

RAMSI has been a long-term commitment to Solomon Islands, aimed at creating the conditions necessary for a return to stability, peace and a growing economy. In 2009, RAMSI and the Government of Solomon Islands signed a joint Partnership Framework, which sets out shared objectives and timelines for RAMSI's work, so that RAMSI activities can gradually draw down as Solomon Islands' capacity grows.

On 1 July 2013 RAMSI's military component was withdrawn, with development assistance activities transferred to Australia's bilateral aid programmes. RAMSI's current priority is providing support and building the capacity of the RSIPF through the PPF engagement.

## **Brief Historical Overview**

Solomon Islands politics has been characterised by fluid coalitions of political parties and independent Members of Parliament. In December 2001, despite the tensions, a general election was held. Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare and the ruling People's Progressive Party (PPP) were heavily defeated, retaining only three seats, with only 19 Members of the previous Parliament retaining their seats. The People's Alliance Party (PAP), led by former Deputy Prime Minister Sir Allan Kemakeza, won 20 seats, with the Solomon Islands Alliance for Change (SIAC) securing 12 seats. Sir Allan was subsequently elected as Prime Minister, with the support of the Association of Independent Members (AIM) led by Mr Snyder Rini.

At the April 2006 election, 16 members of the previous government lost their seats. Sir Allan Kemakeza retained his seat but his party was considerably reduced in size. Snyder Rini's AIM did well, with 13 newly-elected members. Rini was subsequently elected Prime Minister by the new Parliament. Rioting then broke out and a large area of Chinatown in Honiara was looted and destroyed by fire by protesters who opposed Rini's election. In the same month, Rini stood down after losing the support of the majority of Members of Parliament and, in May 2006, Parliament elected Mr Manasseh Sogavare (leader of the Social Credit Party) as Prime Minister.

The Sogavare Government had a challenging relationship with RAMSI, and was ousted following a vote of no confidence in December 2007, precipitated by the defection of nine government Ministers. Derek Sikua, the leader of the recently established Coalition for National Unity and Rural Advancement, and Education Minister in the Sogavare administration, subsequently became Prime Minister.

Following the general election of 4 August 2010, the Solomon Islands Democratic Party, led by Steven Abana, secured 13 of the 50 seats. Eighteen seats were won collectively by members of other parties, with independents taking the remaining seats. Mr Danny Philip, leader of the Solomon Islands Reform and Democratic Party (a coalition of parties and several independent Members) was chosen as Prime Minister, polling 26 votes. His rival, Steven Abana, had the support of 23 Members.

In November 2011, following defections from the ruling coalition, Prime Minister Philip resigned. In the parliamentary vote that followed, former Finance Minister Mr Gordon Darcy Lilo was elected as Prime Minister.

## **Key Issues**

### **Issues facing Government**

The devastating floods of April 2014 and the subsequent closure of the Gold Ridge mine, a high unemployment rate, and demands from ex-combatants for financial compensation placed considerable pressure on the Lilo Government.

### **Rural Constituency Development Funds and Terminal Grants**

Commonwealth Observer Groups for both the 2006 and 2010 elections highlighted the practice of sitting Members of Parliament being provided with millions of dollars under the RCDF. RCDF funds are intended to support grassroots development initiatives. Widespread allegations persist that these funds are used by Members to influence voters through direct cash payments or gifts, thereby providing incumbent parliamentarians with an unfair advantage. Auditing of the RCDF remains a challenge. At present, the annual RCDF allocation is approximately \$6 million for each Member of Parliament.

On dissolution of the Parliament, Members received a terminal grant of \$400,000. For the 2001-2006 Parliament, the grant had been \$100,000. The increase in the amount of the terminal grant was a highly contentious issue in the lead-up to this election.

### **Foreign Business Interests**

The influence of foreign business interests in the political process, in particular during negotiations to form Government, has been a key concern expressed by several stakeholders.

### **Women in Parliament**

Before this election, only two women had been elected to Parliament. Ms Hilda Kari became the first female Member in 1997. No female candidate was successful at the 2001, 2006 and 2010 general elections. In August 2012, Ms Vika Lusibaea was elected at a by-election.

Section 48(1) of the PPIA encourages a political party to have at least 10% female candidates, of the total number of candidates it endorses to contest a general election. The Act also has in place financial incentives, through a temporary special measures grant, for any party with a female Member of Parliament.

## Chapter 3

### Electoral Framework and Election Administration

#### Electoral System

The Solomon Islands Parliament consists of 50 members, directly elected from single-member constituencies on the basis of the first-past-the-post system. The Parliamentary term is four years.

The Constitution requires that a review of constituency boundaries be conducted by the Constituency Boundaries Commission at least every 10 years. The most recent redrawing of constituency boundaries occurred in 1997 (increasing the number of constituencies from 47 to 50). In 2009 the Parliament rejected a recommendation from the Commission to increase the number of constituencies to 67. Following the biometric voter registration exercise, the smallest constituency (Shortlands) had 2512 registered electors, while the largest (Central Honiara) had 13,528 registered electors.

The Prime Minister is the leader of government. The Prime Minister is not directly elected by the people. An individual Member, a party or a coalition of parties may negotiate for the position. The Member with majority support of the Parliament (demonstrated through a secret ballot of Members) is appointed Prime Minister.

The negotiations for the position of Prime Minister are not transparent. Lobbying for support proceeds behind closed doors over the course of several days in Honiara following declaration of the results by the Governor-General.

Solomon Islands' administrative structure consists of nine provinces, with the capital city of Honiara administered as a separate district.

#### National Legal Framework and Regional and International Commitments

Solomon Islands' Constitution guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression, assembly and association, and participation in elections.

The key documents providing the legal and regulatory framework for the conduct of elections are:

- Constitution;
- *National Parliament Electoral Provisions Act (Cap.87)*;
- *National Parliament (Electoral Provisions) Regulations 2005*;
- *Political Parties Integrity Act 2014*; and
- *Election Petition Rules 1976*.

In addition, Solomon Islands has signed or agreed to some significant regional and international commitments and instruments relevant to the conduct of elections. These include:

- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination;
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women;
- Convention on Rights of People with Disabilities; and
- Charter of the Commonwealth.

## **Solomon Islands Electoral Commission**

Section 57 of the Constitution provides for the establishment of the SIEC. The *National Parliament Electoral Provisions Act* and regulations (NPEPA) provide the regulatory framework for the administration and conduct of elections. The functions and mandate of the SIEC are to “supervise the registration of electors for the election of members of Parliament and the conduct of elections of such members”.

The SIEC comprises the Speaker of Parliament, as *ex officio* Chair, and two Commissioners appointed by the Governor-General, acting in accordance with the advice of the Judicial and Legal Service Commission. A Commissioner holds office for four years, coinciding with the life of Parliament. Commissioners work on a part-time basis, receiving only sitting fees.

Under the oversight of the Commission there is a Secretariat, headed by the Chief Electoral Officer, which manages the operational aspect of elections. There are eight permanent staff members. The current Chief Electoral Officer is Polycarp Haununu.

For the conduct of these elections, the SIEC recruited and trained approximately 3500 polling officials. Most of these individuals were public servants. The following structure was adopted for the conduct of these elections:

- 10 Electoral Managers, one for each of the nine provinces, and one for Honiara City, responsible for coordinating the process at the provincial level;
- 50 Returning Officers, one for each constituency, responsible for managing the elections at constituency level and declaring the outcome;
- 867 Presiding Officers, one for each polling station, responsible for managing the polling stations on election day;
- Returning Officers and each Presiding Officers had two assistants each, for additional support.

## **Eligibility and Registration of Electors**

In order to be eligible to vote, one must be a citizen of the Solomon Islands, at least 18 years of age, and registered to vote. Persons are disqualified from voting if they are declared to be of unsound mind or under a sentence of imprisonment exceeding six months.

For the purpose of this election a new national biometric voter registration system was established. According to the SIEC, the national census conducted in November

2009 identified Solomon Islands' total population as 515,870. Applying growth rates for subsequent years, the Commission estimated the present population as approximately 634,000. It was estimated that roughly 53% of the total population is aged 18 and above. This meant that there were around 340,000 eligible to register to vote.

Biometric voter registration began on 10 March 2014 and ran for 40 days. The process captured a series of details for each individual elector, including fingerprints and photograph. Each registered elector received a voter identification card with a unique identification number.

At the completion of the registration exercise, and following a period of claims and objections to the register, the final register of electors contained 287,565 names, representing roughly 85% of persons estimated as being eligible to vote. It is of interest that this figure is significantly lower than the 448,189 electors registered for the 2010 election and the 342,119 registered for the 2006 general election. The SIEC attributes this drop to the large number of duplicate and 'ghost' entries in the previous register.

The SIEC advised that there were approximately 5000 instances of multiple registration during the 2014 registration exercise, with one individual allegedly registering on nine separate occasions. The SIEC has referred all instances of multiple registration to the police for investigation. The police expressed concern that a lack of resources will make it difficult to prioritise all but the most serious of these cases.

## **Political Parties Integrity Act and Political Parties Commission**

In an effort to strengthen the political party system and culture in Solomon Islands, the PPIA was passed by the Parliament on 27 May 2014. It commenced on 30 June, following publication of the required Gazette notice. Regulations under the Act were made by the Prime Minister on 6 August, and published in the Gazette on 12 September. The Act is administered by the new Political Parties Commission, assisted by the Registrar of Political Parties.

The mandate of the Commission under the Act is to: register political parties; formulate, monitor and review policies relating to the regulation of political parties; and issue integrity standards. The Commission is comprised of a Chair and four other members, appointed by the Governor-General on the joint recommendation of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. Members of the Commission can serve a maximum of three terms of three years.

In addition, the Act makes provision for:

- the selection by a political party of its candidates for election, including a requirement that at least 10% of the party's candidates should be women;
- coalition agreements between two or more political parties, including the minimum requirements for these agreements;
- public funding of registered political parties, with an annual administration grant to the party of \$20,000 for each elected member, and a further annual temporary special measures grant of \$10,000 for each female elected member;

- reporting by political parties of donations received;
- licensing of campaign activities by political parties not contesting a particular election; and
- a prohibition on participation in elections by unregistered political parties.

The PPIA does not address other challenges to political stability in Solomon Islands, such as the tendency of coalitions to form and dissolve spontaneously, or for Members of Parliament to cross the floor (known as ‘grasshopping’).

A challenge to the PPIA was brought before the High Court by a candidate in the election, on the ground that the ban on participation in the election by an unregistered political party was an unacceptable restriction of the applicant’s constitutionally-protected freedom of association. The challenge was dismissed on 14 November.

The PPIA also provides a potential pathway through which the formation of a new government might occur. The Act obliges any parties forming a coalition to formalise an agreement regarding the coalition, which must meet the minimum requirements outlined in Schedule 2 to the Act. An important component of this agreement is that it must include provisions prescribing who the coalition may nominate as its candidate at the election of a new Prime Minister.

## **Candidate Eligibility and Nomination**

Under the Constitution, in order to be eligible to contest as a candidate for election, a person must be a citizen of the Solomon Islands and be at least 21 years of age. A person is disqualified as a candidate if the person: is of unsound mind; is serving a sentence of imprisonment exceeding six months; is an undischarged bankrupt; or has allegiance to a foreign power.

For the nomination process, the NPEPA stipulates that the prospective candidate’s nomination must be supported by three electors ordinarily resident in the constituency for which the candidate wishes to stand. A candidate may not stand for election in more than one constituency. Additionally, on submission of the nomination papers, a prospective candidate must pay a deposit of \$2000. A prospective candidate can be nominated by a registered political party or stand as an independent.

For this election there were 447 candidates, 202 of whom were nominated by a political party, with 245 independent candidates. Twenty-six of the candidates were women.

## **Election Offences and Petitions**

The NPEPA outlines a series of election offences. These include: bribery; treating; undue influence; personation; illegal voting; false statements; and intimidation. Each offence is punishable by a fine and/or imprisonment. Under the PPIA, it is an offence for a non-contesting party at an election to campaign unless it holds an election activity licence issued by the Registrar of Political Parties. It is also an offence for a registered political party to fail to report the source of its campaign funding within two weeks after the election.

An elector or candidate may file an election petition with the High Court, to complain of an undue return or undue election. An election petition is heard in open court. The Court may summarily dismiss a petition if the Judge considers that there are insufficient grounds for the petition. A petition must be submitted within one month after the publication of the official results of the election. A decision of the High Court on an election petition is final, and cannot be challenged on appeal.

## **Key Issues**

### **Solomon Islands Electoral Commission**

One of the key recommendations from the 2010 Commonwealth Observer Group was that “the Electoral Commission enjoy full independence and be adequately resourced”.

The SIEC is still not a fully autonomous body. Current functional arrangements locate responsibility for the Commission’s financial and administrative management within the Ministry of Home Affairs. The SIEC must submit its annual operating budget to the Ministry, which can review and amend before submitting the budget to the Ministry of Finance. Funds appropriated for the SIEC are vulnerable to reallocation to other activities of the Ministry. The functional arrangements for the Commission are not ideal.

Despite a commendable effort in registering an estimated 85% of persons eligible to vote, and the creation of a biometric register, leading to increased public confidence in the integrity of the register of electors, significant human and financial resource challenges to the SIEC’s ability to fully execute its mandate remain.

The composition of the SIEC has had direct consequences for this election. Shortly after the dissolution of Parliament, the then Speaker (and Chair of the SIEC) resigned his office and was nominated as a candidate in the election. This left the SIEC with a bare quorum. Had either of the other members become incapacitated during the lead-up to the election, the SIEC would have been unable to function.

The Group commends the timely disbursement of funds to the SIEC for this election but reiterates the concerns of the 2010 Commonwealth Observer Group, and urges the Government of Solomon Islands to review the existing arrangements for the Commission.

### **Register of Electors**

Concerns about the integrity of the register of electors were at the forefront of preparations for this election. In past elections the accuracy and integrity of the register was heavily criticised by stakeholders and observers. The 2010 Commonwealth Observer Group made a strong recommendation for the creation of a new register.

The new register of electors for this election represents a significant improvement. The registration of approximately 85% of the eligible electorate is a substantive achievement for the Commission.

However, concerns remain regarding the need for a mechanism to allow subsequent registration of those unable to register during the registration window (such as persons temporarily absent from Solomon Islands). Also, those aged under 18 years



during the registration window, but who would turn 18 before the election, were not captured. Given that six months elapsed between the registration period and the election date, a significant cohort of people eligible to register as at the date of the election were effectively disenfranchised.

The Group received several reports that voter identification cards were being ‘sold’ to candidates as an indication of the elector’s support, in exchange for money or some other benefit. Given that the Group observed relatively few electors attending polling stations without their card (although presentation of the card was not mandatory), if the reports were correct, electors must have been able to retrieve their cards in advance of the election. While the cards are an important component of the enhanced voter registration process, the commoditisation of the cards can only be described as an unintended consequence.

### **Women’s Participation and Representation**

The Charter of the Commonwealth recognises that gender equality and women’s empowerment are essential components of human development and basic human rights. The Group noted with concern that women’s representation in Solomon Islands’ Parliament remains one of the lowest in the Pacific.

According to the register of electors, 139,059 women were registered to vote at this election, representing 48% of eligible electors. While there are no legal obstacles to women standing as candidates, they remain significantly under-represented in Parliament.

Despite the provisions of the PPIA, at this election only 26 of the 447 candidates were women. Of these, the Group welcomes the election of Ms Freda Tuki Soria Comua in the constituency of Temotu Vatud. However, the Group observes that measures adopted so far to increase representation of women in Parliament have not yielded, and are not likely to yield, the desired result. Much stronger efforts and the adoption of innovative measures will be required to bring about lasting change.

### **Recommendations**

The Group commends the actions of the Government of Solomon Islands to address some of the recommendations from 2010, such as improving the integrity of the register of electors. However several concerns remain. The Group recommends that:

- the SIEC’s statutory and regulatory framework be reviewed, with a view to enhancing its capacity to fully exercise its oversight functions in accordance with international standards;
- the register of electors be kept under continuous review, to maintain its integrity and accuracy;
- the impact of the PPIA on the electoral process be reviewed at an early opportunity and amendments made where necessary;
- cases of alleged corrupt electoral practices be referred to the police for investigation in a timely manner, and that sufficient resources be provided to facilitate this process;

- consideration should be given to strengthening the Leadership Code, and the establishment of an anti-corruption body powers to investigate allegations of corrupt election practices;
- penalties provided for under the NPEPA for election offences be reviewed and increased to more effectively deter corrupt practices;
- temporary special measures be adopted to guarantee seats for women in parliament, with one option being the creation of 10 provincial seats reserved for women.

## Chapter 4

### Election Campaign and Media

#### Campaign

The Group observed only the late stages of the campaign period, which had commenced on 7 October, but stakeholders advised that campaigning had generally been peaceful and calm.

The Group observed that candidates had the opportunity to reach out to voters using a variety of media to promote their policies and election platforms, including radio, newspapers, text messages, social media, posters, outdoor rallies and leaflets. Market and community social gatherings were also important campaign opportunities.

Campaigning continued right up to election eve and, over the course of the last few days, became increasingly animated. Candidates and their supporters converged upon towns and villages with huge convoys of vehicles, blasting trumpets and whistles, and waving party symbols.

Corruption and financial mismanagement were dominant issues, particularly the use of the RCDF. Other issues included: health, education and transport services; the newly-introduced PPIA; independent candidates; the environment; and mining.

Although some political parties had manifestos, policy development seemed to still be at a nascent stage. The Group was not aware of any candidate debates occurring.

The NPEPA places a \$50,000 cap on campaign spending for each candidate, however the PPIA places no limit on campaign spending by registered political parties. It appeared to the Group that the cost of campaigning for many candidates far exceeded the prescribed limit. The Group was informed that candidates' supporters were provided with free transport to enable them to return to their constituencies to vote, the cost of which would have been considerable. There is a general lack of transparency and accountability regarding campaign financing.

As with previous elections, it was claimed that incumbent Members of Parliament had a considerable advantage over other candidates, largely due to their access to significant financial resources, such as the RCDF and the terminal grant.

#### Media Coverage

Section 12 of the Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, freedom of the press and freedom of opinion. From the Group's observations, it appeared that these freedoms were respected, and journalists were able to cover the electoral processes freely.

The SIEC, with input from the Media Association of Solomon Islands, developed a Code of Conduct for media coverage, a new development for these elections. The Group was informed that the Media Association conducted training for its members in election reporting. However, formal training for journalists remains an issue.

The Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC) is the national public broadcaster. It broadcasts on AM and FM. No Solomon Islands television station was broadcasting during the 2014 election.

The SIBC provided extensive election coverage, including broadcasting a live talk show. It deployed correspondents to provinces around the country to provide on-going coverage of developments.

The Group was informed that the SIBC was not required to allocate free airtime to candidates. This meant that those with more resources could buy advantage.

Solomon Islands has two daily newspapers, the *Solomon Star* and the *Island Sun*; and a weekly, the *Sunday Isles*. Election coverage by print media appeared balanced. There was significant additional content from the SIEC, the Police, civil society groups and political parties.

Online media is dominated by the Fiji-based [solomontimes.com](http://solomontimes.com). This election also saw increased use of social media, facilitated by improved access to the internet over the mobile network. Facebook was a popular medium, used by political parties, civil society and youth groups to communicate with voters.

Overall, media provided comprehensive coverage of the election, including analyses and commentaries.

## **Recommendations**

The Group recommends that:

- the regulatory framework for campaign financing be strengthened, to provide for greater transparency and accountability;
- the current available training for journalists be further enhanced, to increase public confidence in the accuracy and integrity of the media's coverage of future elections; and
- provision be made for free and equal campaign-related access to public broadcasters for all candidates.

## Chapter 5

### Voting, Counting and Results

#### Background

The general election proceeded as planned in all of the 50 constituencies. Voting was scheduled from 7:00am to 5:00pm in 867 polling stations across the country.

Most of those with whom the Group met indicated their confidence in the neutrality and commitment of the SIEC, although several expressed concerns about the capacity and preparedness of the Commission to conduct the election.

Election officials are required to perform their duties in accordance with the NPEPA and the *Presiding Officers' and Polling Assistants' Manual* ("the Manual"). Each polling station is managed by a Presiding Officer, with two polling assistants. Candidates are allowed to have two polling agents at each polling station.

At each polling station, there was one clear ballot box secured with seven seals (the seventh being used to seal the flap at close of voting), although the Manual referred only to four seals.

The NPEPA prohibits the display of campaign materials within 50 yards of a polling station, and no campaign speeches are permitted within 200 yards of the station.

#### Voting and Counting Procedures

Under the NPEPA and the Manual, the procedure for the conduct of voting is as follows:

- shortly before 7:00am, the Presiding Officer invites any polling agents, observers, candidates and electors present into the polling station to inspect the empty ballot box;
- the ballot box is sealed on four sides, with seal numbers recorded on the *Record of Ballot Box Security Seals* form (witnessed by two polling agents);
- all unauthorised persons are asked to step away from the ballot box;
- at 7:00am the Presiding Officer announces that voting has begun;
- electors approach the polling assistant one-by-one. The polling assistant must be satisfied:
  - as to the identity of the elector, by inspecting the elector's Voter Identification Card or, if the elector does not present a card, by asking for the elector's name and place of residence and comparing the information provided against the information contained in the Register of Electors (the assistant may also ask certain security questions); and
  - that the elector is eligible to vote at that polling station, by checking the Register of Electors; and
  - that the elector has not already voted, by inspecting the smallest finger on the elector's left hand for indelible ink;

- the polling assistant calls out the elector's name and address or village and, if requested by any polling agent or candidate, the polling assistant must ask the elector to verbally confirm their identity and/or that they have not voted;
- the polling assistant marks the elector's entry on the Register of Electors by placing a tick in red ink in the box marked "has voted";
- the smallest finger on the elector's left hand (or right hand, if the elector does not have a left hand) is placed into a bottle of indelible ink, up to the first joint;
- the Presiding Officer records the elector's Voter Identification Number on the counterfoil of a ballot paper, makes the official mark in the space provided, and issues that ballot paper to the elector;
- the elector proceeds to a voting screen, marks and folds their ballot paper, and places it in the ballot box;
- if an elector requires assistance with voting, the Presiding Officer (or a polling assistant authorised by the Presiding Officer), escorts the elector to a voting screen, in the presence of a police officer or another polling assistant. The elector indicates their preferred candidate, and the Presiding Officer marks the ballot paper accordingly;
- at 4:55pm, the Presiding Officer warns those present that voting will end at 5:00pm. At precisely 5:00pm, the Presiding Officer seals the flap of the ballot box with a security seal, and records the seal number;
- even if an elector has arrived at the polling station before 5:00pm, no vote may be cast after that time;
- the Presiding Officer completes the *Ballot Papers Account* form, and packages all materials ready for collection. The *Record of Ballot Box Security Seals* form is signed by the Presiding Officer, to confirm that the ballot box seals are intact, and also signed by two polling agents as witnesses;
- the ballot box and other materials are transported to the counting centre in accordance with instructions from the Returning Officer.

Counting of votes for each constituency is conducted under the supervision of the Returning Officer for that constituency. The counting procedure is as follows:

- once the ballot boxes have been received at the counting centre from all polling stations in the constituency, counting can commence;
- each ballot box is counted individually, in polling station number order;
- the seals on the ballot box are verified and cut;
- all ballot papers from the ballot box are removed and the empty box is presented for inspection by counting agents and observers;
- ballot papers are counted, but not inspected, and the total number of ballot papers removed from the ballot box is recorded on the *Ballot Paper Count* form;

- ballot papers are then sorted according to candidate, with rejected ballot papers sorted according to the reason for which they were rejected. A Returning Officer must reject a ballot paper if it:
  - is missing the official mark; or
  - contains writing or a mark by which an elector might be identified; or
  - is informal;
- the number of votes for each candidate, and the number of rejected ballot papers, is recorded on the *Ballot Paper Count* form;
- a fresh count of all ballot papers removed from the ballot box is undertaken, and any error in the count is corrected, after which the Returning Officer completes and signs the *Ballot Paper Count* form. The form may be countersigned by an Assistant Returning Officer or public officer present, and the details of the count copied by any candidate or counting agent present;
- all counted ballot papers are then sealed and returned to the ballot box from which they came;
- the Returning Officer verifies the ballot paper count from that ballot box with the Presiding Officer's *Ballot Paper Account*.

Once the Returning Officer has completed the counting and verification process, the Returning Officer must declare to be elected the candidate for whom the most number of votes has been cast.

## **Assessment of the Vote and the Count**

The Group was of the overall view that the election was credible and the results reflect the wishes of the people. The election was generally conducted in a peaceful atmosphere, with voters waiting patiently to vote. Conditions existed for people to vote freely. The alcohol ban appeared to contribute significantly to the peaceful conduct of the election.

The Group made the following key observations:

- on election day, as required by NPEPA and the Manual, election materials provided by the SIEC were available and on display. These included posters showing how to vote, lists of election offences, and the register of electors for that polling station (showing electors' photographs);
- the register of electors was credible, insofar as it accurately reflected the electors who had registered;
- voting commenced on time and the polling stations were generally well-administered. However, in some of the larger polling stations, the number of election officials assigned was insufficient to effectively manage the process;
- the preparation and distribution of materials to polling stations was, in some cases, *ad hoc*;
- election officials generally worked hard, at times in difficult and trying circumstances, and displayed professionalism and integrity;

- in some provinces, there was a noticeable number of female polling officials, including at Returning Officer and Presiding Officer level;
- assistance was provided to elderly, frail and disabled voters, although it was noted that the physical structure and location of many of the polling stations made access difficult;
- secrecy of the ballot was generally respected;
- polling agents were present in many of the polling stations, as were accredited observers, however the overwhelming number of these were international observers;
- Police officers were present in most of the larger polling stations, and patrolled other stations. The Police presence was visible but discrete;
- the 50-yard perimeter, within which campaign materials are prohibited, and the 200-yard perimeter, within which campaign speeches are prohibited, were generally respected;
- some Presiding Officers appeared to find their duties at the close of voting challenging, with some officials taking a long time to complete the process;
- at some polling stations, there was poor coordination and communication between the election officials and Police officers, resulting in some confusion regarding the transfer of ballot boxes at the close of voting;
- voters appeared to generally understand the voting process, however there remain apparent misconceptions surrounding the secrecy of the ballot;
- there were strong concerns expressed regarding the unavailability of measures for out-of-constituency and pre-poll voting;
- while there did not appear to be any attempt to deliberately subvert the voting and counting procedures, election officials applied inconsistent approaches in the performance of their functions.

## **Provincial-specific Observations**

Commonwealth Observer teams were deployed to seven locations across Solomon Islands. The provinces visited account for 39 of the nation's 50 constituencies. Teams observed the voting, counting and results tabulation.

### **Honiara and West Guadalcanal**

- High Police visibility at all polling stations ensured calm and order. Two roving Police teams were observed in both Honiara and West Guadalcanal.
- One polling station observed posed access challenges for the elderly, however polling assistants were prepared to assist if required.
- The poll closed on time. Ballot boxes were sealed, and the seal numbers verified with polling agents. Ballot boxes were placed into sacks, labelled and secured by Police.
- The count was methodical and transparent. The counting agents for all candidates were present, and noted the results accordingly.



## **Honiara and North Guadalcanal**

- Some polling assistants seemed to have difficulty in locating some electors' photographs in the register of electors, which appeared to be attributable to the register not being sorted in a readily ascertainable order.
- There appeared to be confusion among some Presiding Officers as to the requirement for validating a ballot paper. It seemed unclear whether the requirement was for both a stamp and the Presiding Officer's signature, or if one of these would be sufficient. The Presiding Officers concerned advised that the stamp had been a recent addition to the election kit.
- The list of polling stations provided by the SIEC included two polling stations at King George VI market, in Honiara East. However, the polling stations were actually at the King George VI school, 400 metres away. No signs had been posted at the market to re-direct voters to the school.
- Officials at the counting centre observed seemed ill-prepared, with counting taking several hours to get underway.
- Counting agents were present for the count and able to challenge decisions of the Returning Officer.

## **Central Province**

- Generally, electors turned out early and, by midday, it appeared that, at most polling stations, more than half of the registered electors had voted.
- Very few polling stations had a police officer assigned.
- At two polling stations, campaign materials were observed inside the 50-yard perimeter.
- Some voters said that they had not registered to vote as they preferred not to have their photograph on public display.
- In one of the rural constituencies visited, there was a sense that the expectation of communal conformity prevailed over an individual's freedom to choose.
- The closing process was conducted in a timely and efficient manner.
- Standard procedures were not consistently applied at one counting centre.
- There was good coordination and communication between polling officials and Police officers.

## **Western Province - North, South and West New Georgia**

- Voting in the constituencies observed was well conducted.
- A training session for polling officials for one of the constituencies was observed, with the Returning Officer performing impressively.
- Varying numbers of polling agents were observed at most polling stations.
- Inconsistencies were observed in the application of indelible ink to electors' fingers.
- At one polling station observed, several hundred people who had presented before 5:00pm (and, in many cases, several hours beforehand) could not be

processed before the scheduled close of voting. It was announced that authorisation had been given to delay final sealing of the ballot box, to allow all of those already in the queue at 5:00pm to vote.

- Counting proceeded well and transparently, in the presence of several counting agents.

#### **Western Province - Gizo/Kolombangara**

- Police officers were observed at only one of the polling stations visited.
- At one polling station observed, the placement of the voting screens was not conducive to secrecy of the ballot.
- Standard procedures were not consistently applied at some polling stations and counting centres.
- At the close of voting, it appeared that some Presiding Officers found the procedures challenging.
- There appeared to be issues concerning the transfer of ballot boxes from the polling stations to Police custody, with record-keeping inadequate to ensure confidence in the chain of custody.

#### **Isabel**

- Voting was slow but orderly. No situations were observed where secrecy of the ballot was compromised.
- There were accessibility issues at some polling stations, but polling officials assisted the elderly, frail and incapacitated.
- Polling officials were professional and gender diversity was observed.
- The ban on the sale of alcohol was conducive to a peaceful atmosphere.
- At the close of voting, it appeared that some Presiding Officers found the procedures challenging.

#### **Malaita**

- Standard procedures were not consistently applied at some polling stations and counting centres. Some electors presenting without a Voter Registration Card were turned away, while others were permitted to vote.
- The secrecy of the ballot was compromised at one polling station. Early in the day, the Presiding Officer advised that, while he had initialled the three ballot papers issued so far, he had not stamped them. He was concerned that this would result in the subsequent rejection of the votes. On advice from his Returning Officer, the Presiding Officer ordered that the ballot papers be removed from the ballot box, through the slot. This was done, the ballot papers were stamped and returned to the ballot box.
- A Presiding Officer allegedly stole a ballot box and election kit from another polling station as it was being transported to the provincial capital. In the course of the incident the ballot box was recovered, but badly damaged. The election kit was not recovered. The Returning Officer for that constituency counted the votes from the damaged ballot box, despite being unable to verify the number of ballots cast with any certainty.

- It appeared that a disproportionate number of assisted voters were women.
- On three occasions, at different polling stations, electors were observed depositing their ballots through the opening in the side of the voting screen. In two instances the polling assistant was able to retrieve the ballot papers and place them in the ballot box. In the other case, the ballot paper was not discovered until two hours after the ballot box had been sealed. After consulting with her Returning Officer, the Presiding Officer for that station declared the ballot paper as spoilt.
- During the counting of votes from one constituency, several ballot papers were rejected by the Returning Officer as having more than one mark. On inspection, it appeared that, for many of these, the second mark was a transfer of the indelible ink from each elector’s little finger.

## The Results

	No of Seats
Independents	32
Democratic Alliance Party	7
United Democratic Party	5
Peoples Alliance Party	3
Kadere Party of Solomon Islands	1
Solomon Islands Party for Rural Advancement	1
Solomon Islands People First	1
Turnout	89.3%

## Recommendations

The Group recommends that:

- a review of the constituency boundaries be undertaken with a view to standardising the numbers of electors across the constituencies;
- there be established procedures for pre-poll and out-of-constituency voting;
- the number of electors registered to vote at a single polling station be capped at 400-500, to maximise the ability of polling officials to process electors in a timely manner;
- the SIEC be empowered to respond appropriately in the event that a *force majeure* situation arises;
- the law be amended, so that all electors who present at a polling station before 5:00pm will be able to cast their vote;

- greater attention be paid to the selection of polling station facilities, to ensure ease of access for disabled, elderly, frail and pregnant electors;
- the procedures for assisted voting be reviewed, to allow an elector requiring assistance to be accompanied by a person of their choice.
- sufficient polling officials be available at each polling station to enable rotation and relief;
- improved training of polling officials be undertaken to ensure greater consistency in the application of electoral procedures utilising, amongst other measures, audio-visual training material;
- polling procedures be reviewed, in particular the practice of recording the voter identification number on the ballot counterfoil;
- procedures be reviewed to ensure that effective and accountable chain of custody records are kept for all transfers of ballot boxes and other election material;
- support be provided to civil society organisations to increase their capacity to observe future elections;
- efforts continue to ensure that a broad program of civic awareness and voter education is implemented, in order to strengthen voter confidence in the electoral process.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The successful conduct of the 2014 general election demonstrated Solomon Islands' commitment to democratic values and principles. We commend the professionalism and diligence demonstrated by the SIEC, despite some operational challenges. The Group would also like to commend the people of Solomon Islands for the way in which they engaged in the electoral process. The positive spirit that prevailed among the electorate revealed a determination for more effective parliamentary representation.

The election was inclusive and competitive. Voters were generally free to express their will. It is noteworthy that women and young people appeared unhindered in their participation in the voting process.

However, the Group notes that political representation of women remains disappointingly low. Before this election, only two women had been elected to Parliament. Measures adopted thus far to increase representation of women in Parliament have not yielded the desired result. Much stronger efforts and the adoption of innovative measures will be required to bring about lasting change.

The SIEC's efforts to facilitate accuracy of information and transparency in its management and conduct of the polls were commendable. The competent management of election day activities represents further progress for the country in strengthening its democratic practices. However, enhanced training of election officials will ensure greater consistency in the application of procedures. We encourage the SIEC to undertake an early review of its management of this election, to better enable it to build upon lessons learned, with an aim to addressing weaknesses and reinforcing strengths.

It is essential that the SIEC put in place strategies that facilitate a focus on the full four-year electoral cycle.

The Group commends the adoption of a biometric voter registration process. The new system significantly enhanced the accuracy and credibility of the electoral process. However, it was noted that some electors were disenfranchised, particularly those that were unavailable during the registration window and those working to the support the electoral process (for example, polling officials and police officers). Continuing efforts will be required to ensure that citizens better understand the value of maintaining a credible register and exercising their right to vote.

The Group received complaints concerning some electors who were registered in constituencies with which they had no family or traditional connection. It was alleged that some candidates had sponsored the registration of these electors in return for support on election day. The SIEC will need to put in place measures to avoid registration practices that undermine the integrity of the voter register. Consideration might be given to extending the period for public display of the register, to better allow for claims and objections to be lodged.

Civic awareness and voter education are critical to ensuring an informed electorate, which is able to engage constructively in the nation's political and electoral processes. Therefore, efforts should be made to strengthen outreach programs to better inform electors.

The legal framework governing this election guarantees the freedom of assembly, association and participation. However, the Group notes that there are areas that could be strengthened to further enhance the credibility of the electoral process.

The impact and consequences of corruption on the political and electoral processes was an issue that was frequently emphasised by many of the stakeholders with whom the Group met. Endemic corruption has significant potential to undermine the foundation of a truly democratic society. The Group heard numerous concerns regarding the use of the RCDF by sitting MPs during the campaign period, which may have created an uneven playing field for the 2014 election.

The period leading up to the election of the Prime Minister, following the official declaration of results, generally referred to as the 'second election', was described by many stakeholders as being tainted by corrupt practices. There were numerous allegations of financial incentives being provided by both foreign and local business interests to the various political groupings. Consideration should be given to strengthening existing anti-corruption measures to deter such practices.

The Group commends the role of the RSIPF in supporting the SIEC. Police officers contributed in great measure to the security and logistical arrangements for the election.

The Group was pleased to note that some of the recommendations of the 2010 Commonwealth Observer Group were accepted and implemented. In this Report, the Group has set out various recommendations. Here we bring them together for ease of reference.

### **Electoral Framework and Election Administration**

The Group recommends that:

- the SIEC's statutory and regulatory framework be reviewed, with a view to enhancing its capacity to fully exercise its oversight functions in accordance with international standards;
- the register of electors be kept under continuous review, to maintain its integrity and accuracy;
- the impact of the PPIA on the electoral process be reviewed at an early opportunity and amendments made where necessary;
- cases of alleged corrupt electoral practices be referred to the police for investigation in a timely manner, and that sufficient resources be provided to facilitate this process;
- consideration should be given to strengthening the Leadership Code, and the establishment of an anti-corruption body powers to investigate allegations of corrupt election practices;

- penalties provided for under the NPEPA for election offences be reviewed and increased to more effectively deter corrupt practices;
- temporary special measures be adopted to guarantee seats for women in parliament, with one option being the creation of 10 provincial seats reserved for women.

### **Campaign and Media**

The Group recommends that:

- the regulatory framework for campaign financing be strengthened, to provide for greater transparency and accountability;
- the current available training for journalists be further enhanced, to increase public confidence in the accuracy and integrity of the media's coverage of future elections; and
- provision be made for free and equal campaign-related access to public broadcasters for all candidates.

### **Voting, Counting and Results**

The Group recommends that:

- a review of the constituency boundaries be undertaken with a view to standardising the numbers of electors across the constituencies;
- there be established procedures for pre-poll and out-of-constituency voting;
- the number of electors registered to vote at a single polling station be capped at 400-500, to maximise the ability of polling officials to process electors in a timely manner;
- the SIEC be empowered to respond appropriately in the event that a *force majeure* situation arises;
- the law be amended, so that all electors who present at a polling station before 5:00pm will be able to cast their vote;
- greater attention be paid to the selection of polling station facilities, to ensure ease of access for disabled, elderly, frail and pregnant electors;
- the procedures for assisted voting be reviewed, to allow an elector requiring assistance to be accompanied by a person of their choice.
- sufficient polling officials be available at each polling station to enable rotation and relief;
- improved training of polling officials be undertaken to ensure greater consistency in the application of electoral procedures utilising, amongst other measures, audio-visual training material;
- polling procedures be reviewed, in particular the practice of recording the voter identification number on the ballot counterfoil;
- procedures be reviewed to ensure that effective and accountable chain of custody records are kept for all transfers of ballot boxes and other election material;

- support be provided to civil society organisations to increase their capacity to observe future elections;
- efforts continue to ensure that a broad program of civic awareness and voter education is implemented, in order to strengthen voter confidence in the electoral process.



## Annex 1

### Biographies of Chair and Observers

#### **Rt Hon Mekere Morauta, KCMG (Papua New Guinea) - Chair**

Sir Mekere hails from Papua New Guinea's Gulf Province, and served as the sixth Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea from 1999 until 2002. He was later Leader of the Opposition. He continued to serve in leadership roles in Government until May 2012, when he announced his retirement from politics.

Sir Mekere has been an influential figure in Papua New Guinea from early in his career. In 1975, he was the first Papua New Guinean to be appointed Secretary of the Department of Finance. He later served as the Managing Director of the Papua New Guinea Banking Corporation, and Governor of the Reserve Bank of Papua New Guinea. He was knighted in 1990, in recognition of his services to the community, to the public service, and to politics.

While Prime Minister, Sir Mekere was instrumental in the passage of the *Organic Law on the Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates*, an Act designed to promote political stability in Papua New Guinea. Under the Organic Law, the party system was strengthened and governments were given further protection from votes of no confidence. The two electoral terms that followed adoption of the law saw both governments serving their full term, a previously unheard-of situation.

#### **Senator Linda Reynolds CSC (Australia)**

Senator Reynolds is a Liberal Senator representing the State of Western Australia. Prior to entering the Australian Senate in July 2014, she had a distinguished career across politics, the Australian Army and the private sector. Senator Reynolds is also one of Australia's most experienced trainers and mentors for candidates and party officials in new and post-conflict democracies. Her career highlights include three years as a Chief of Staff to the Minister for Justice and Customs and two years as the Deputy Federal Director of the Liberal Party. Over a 29-year Australian Army Reserves career, she served in a diverse range of part and full time roles, including as a Commanding Officer. In 2012, she was the first woman in the Army Reserve to be promoted to the rank of Brigadier and appointed as the Army Adjutant General, the Australian Army's key governance and compliance advisor.

#### **Mr David Lambourne (Kiribati)**

David has extensive experience as a Government lawyer in a number of Pacific countries. Kiribati is home, but he is presently working as an adviser to the Government of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea. David is married to Tessie and has five wonderful and inspiring children (who, fortunately for them, seem to take mostly after their mother).

#### **Mr Aiman Rasheed (Maldives)**

Aiman Rasheed is the Advocacy and Communications Manager at Transparency International Maldives and a leading advocate of electoral reform. Mr Rasheed has observed elections in several countries, including the United States, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh and the Solomon Islands. He represented the civil society at the National Advisory Committee for Elections, the highest statutory advisory body

for elections, comprising members of the Elections Commission and several independent institutions, and representatives of political parties, during the past four national elections.

**Mr John Hayes ONZM (New Zealand)**

John Hayes is a former diplomat, businessman and Member of Parliament who has extensive experience of Asia, the Middle East, Africa and the Pacific. He was made an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit in recognition his work on the Bougainville conflict. The Government of Chile extended a Bernard O’Higgins award in recognition of developing relations between New Zealand and Chile.

**Ms Lydia Faisal (Saint Lucia)**

Lydia B. Faisal is currently a practicing Attorney-at-Law in Saint Lucia. She worked firstly in Agricultural Extension after which she worked as a teacher at both the Primary and Secondary school levels. Thereafter she became employed with the St Lucia Development Bank where she was involved in the appraisal and supervision of bank funded agricultural and fishing projects. By virtue of her work with the Development Bank, Mrs Faisal actively participated in the improvement of the socio-economic positions of several families in the rural areas where her work with the Bank was concentrated. She has and continues to provide legal advice and assistance to several of the less privileged who suffer constitutional and other legal rights violations in her country. She works closely with local human rights activists in pursuit of the awareness of all rights conferred by the local Constitution and the various Human Rights Treaties. Mrs Faisal participates in disseminating free legal advice via local television.

**Leitaualesa Daryl Clarke (Samoa)**

Leitaualesa Daryl Clarke is a partner in Clarke Ey Lawyers and is a former Assistant Attorney General (Civil) of Samoa. He has practiced law in Australia and Samoa. Daryl has appeared as counsel in elections petitions following the Samoa general election in 2006 on behalf of the Electoral Commissioner and in 2011 on behalf of candidates.

Daryl is an accredited mediator and is the Papua New Guinea’s Honorary Consul to Samoa. Daryl holds the matai (chiefly) title of Leitaualesa from the village of Faleu, Manono.

**Mr Hendrick Gappy (Seychelles)**

Hendrick Gappy has been the Electoral Commissioner of Seychelles since 1998. Prior to this, he served as the Director-General of the Management and Information Systems Division, responsible for National Statistics Office and the National IT Office. He has been the Census Commissioner on several counts. Internationally, he has been involved with various organisations including the Commonwealth, SADC, COI, the United Nations and others in the context of electoral observation and statistical reform. In 2007, he was part of the Commonwealth Expert Team to the Maldives Referendum. In 2008 and 2013, he was part of the Commonwealth Observer Group for the Maldives Presidential Elections. In 2011, Mr Gappy was appointed as Chairman of the Electoral Commission, the Boundaries Commission and Registrar of Political Parties.

### **Ms 'Ofa Guttenbeil-Likiliki (Tonga)**

Ms Guttenbeil-Likiliki is the current Director of the Women and Children Crisis Centre in Tonga, the first One-Stop-Shop crisis service for women and children victims of violence in the Pacific. With a BA and MA (Hons) in Film, TV and Media (University of Auckland), a Diploma in International Broadcast Journalism (Thomson Foundation, Cardiff University, Wales) and an LLB (University of the South Pacific), 'Ofa's area of work and interest is in women's human rights and gender equality, in particular ending violence against women and girls, women's rights to land, increasing women's participation in parliament and decision making processes and maintaining media freedom and expression. 'Ofa is an executive member of the Pacific Network Against Violence Against Women and is the current CSO Pacific Representative on the Commonwealth Gender Plan of Action Monitoring Group and is the Pacific Representative on the Asia Pacific Women in Law and Development Regional Council for 2014-2017.

### **Ms Jessica Nkuuhe (Uganda)**

Jessica's background is in education. She currently works with Civil Society Organisations on women's human rights, peace-building and human security issues, and has participated in Civil Society election observation in Liberia, Senegal and Sierra Leone. She holds a Masters degree in Commonwealth Literature, a BA and concurrent diploma in Education, a post-graduate diploma in Journalism and Media Management, and a Graduate Certificate in Conflict Transformation Across Cultures. She also holds graduate certificates in Election Management and Observation.

### **Ms Vera Baird QC (United Kingdom)**

Vera Baird QC was elected Police and Crime Commissioner for Northumbria in 2012. She is the public's voice in policing, responsible for police governance and for ensuring that the Northumbria force delivers the services the public want. She has responsibility for crime prevention, for the local criminal justice system and for victim support.

She was Member of Parliament for Redcar from 2001; a Justice Minister in the former Labour Government from 2006 and, from 2007-2010, Solicitor General for England and Wales. She is a human rights and criminal lawyer and a lifelong campaigner for equalities and against violence against women and girls

### **Commonwealth Secretariat Staff Team**

Mr Albert Mariner, Head, Caribbean and Pacific Section, Political Division

Ms Clara Cole, Political Officer, Electoral Support Section, Political Division

Mr Julius Mucunguzi, Media Officer, Communication Division

Mrs Madonna Lynch, Program Assistant, Political Division

## Annex 2

### Deployment plan

LOCATION	TEAM MEMBERS
Honiara and West Guadalcanal	Sir Mekere Morauta Mr Albert Mariner Mr Julius Mucunguzi
Honiara and North Guadalcanal	Ms Vera Baird Ms Madonna Lynch
Central Province	Mr Aiman Rasheed Ms Lydia Faisal
Western Province - North, South and West New Georgia	Mr John Hayes Ms Clara Cole
Western Province - Gizo/Kolombangara	Senator Linda Reynolds Mr Daryl Clarke
Isabel Province	Ms 'Ofa Guttenbiel-Likiliki Mr Hendrick Gappy
Malaita Province	Ms Jessica Nkuuhe Mr David Lambourne

## Annex 3

### Arrival Statement



## Commonwealth Observer Group

### Solomon Islands General Election, 19 November 2014

#### Arrival Statement by Sir Mekere Morauta, Chair

Honiara, 13 November 2014 – The Commonwealth Observer Group is delighted to be here in Solomon Islands to observe the forthcoming elections scheduled for 19 November 2014. I feel honoured to have been requested by Commonwealth Secretary-General, Kamallesh Sharma, to lead a team of distinguished Commonwealth citizens on this mission.

Our presence here follows an invitation from the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission and the findings of an Assessment Team which was here last month. The Assessment Team established that there was broad support for, and that conditions existed for, the presence of a Commonwealth Observer Group in the country.

The Commonwealth attaches great importance to the conduct of credible and peaceful elections as a means of giving citizens an opportunity to choose their leaders and to hold them accountable. Indeed, the Commonwealth Charter, agreed by Commonwealth leaders, and signed by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Head of the Commonwealth in 2013, buttresses this commitment.

In the Commonwealth Charter, we recognise the inalienable right of individuals to participate in democratic processes, in particular through free and fair elections, in shaping the society in which they live. Our presence here is meant to promote and uphold that fundamental belief.

Our Group comes from across the breadth of the membership of the Commonwealth. We are supported by a professional staff team from the Commonwealth Secretariat. I would like to stress that each one of us is here in our individual capacity. We do not represent our governments, or the organisations or associations which we are affiliated to.

In doing our work, we will be independent, objective and impartial. Our task is to observe and report on relevant aspects of the organisation and conduct of these elections, and also on the environment in which they are held.

The Group will consider the key factors impinging on the credibility of the electoral process as a whole, and assess whether these elections have been conducted according to the standards for democratic elections to which Solomon Islands has committed itself. These standards are in reference to Solomon Islands' own election related legislation, as well as relevant regional, Commonwealth and other international commitments.

In the coming days, we will meet a wide range of stakeholder, including the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission, representatives of political parties, civil society, the media and the Commonwealth diplomatic corps.

Prior to Election Day, we will deploy to a variety of locations around the different islands to observe the voting, counting and results process.

We appeal to all stakeholders to play their due roles to ensure a credible and peaceful process, before, during and most importantly after the elections. This is particularly important given the recent political history of the country.

Finally, we look to the citizens of Solomon Islands to show the way by participating in large number in this democratic process. All eyes in the region and the Commonwealth are on you. You have an opportunity to make yourselves, the region and the Commonwealth proud by doing it – and doing it well – and peacefully. And you can do it.

For media enquiries, please contact:

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## Annex 4

### Interim Statement



## Commonwealth Observer Group

### Solomon Islands General Election, 19 November 2014

#### Interim Statement by Sir Mekere Morauta, Chair

Honiara, 22 November 2014 – Conditions existed for the people to vote freely and decide their representatives in the next Parliament. We congratulate the citizens of Solomon Islands for participating peacefully in their 2014 national election.

I am privileged to have been asked by the Commonwealth Secretary-General to lead this group of experienced citizens of the Commonwealth to observe your national election at the request of Solomon Islands Electoral Commission. We were invited by the Secretary-General in our individual capacities to undertake this mission as representatives of the wider Commonwealth family.

Members of the Group have been in the country since 9 November. We have been warmly welcomed by the people of Solomon Islands and have met with the Electoral Commission, Political Parties Commission, representatives of the political parties and independent candidates, civil society groups, women and youth groups, media, the Commissioner of Police, the leadership of the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands, and diplomats.

Group members were deployed to Western Province, Isabel, Central Province, Malaita, Guadalcanal and Honiara City.

The Group has interacted with other regional and international observers during the polling and the ongoing count. Our final report will be submitted to the Commonwealth Secretary-General for transmission to the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission, the Government, and key stakeholders.

This is the Group's Interim Statement, providing an outline of our key observations up to this point, and in recognition that the count is still ongoing, and the results for all 50 constituencies are to be declared.

#### Initial Observations:

- The people of the Solomon Islands are to be congratulated for turning out to vote on 19 November. The election process observed by the Group was

conducted in a peaceful environment and voters appeared generally able to cast their votes freely on Election Day.

- The Biometric Voter Registration process has raised confidence in the integrity of the electoral roll. A credible voters' register is a key foundation for conducting elections with integrity. However, there were reports that not all eligible citizens were able to register during the registration period.
- The Group warmly welcomes the call by some community leaders encouraging voters to engage in the process peacefully, and accept the results of the vote. These messages, together with the Government's alcohol ban, went a long way to ensuring that both the vote and the count proceeded in a peaceful and calm environment.
- The Group was disappointed that, despite passage of the *Political Parties Integrity Act* and Solomon Islands' ratification of international agreements encouraging greater participation of women in the electoral process, there remain significant impediments to women successfully standing for election.
- The Group was impressed by media freedom and the positive role the media played in raising awareness about the election.
- The Group observed that while voters generally understood the voting process, there were apparent misconceptions surrounding the secrecy of the ballot.
- The Group heard expressions of strong concern regarding the absence of out-of-constituency and pre-poll voting arrangements.
- The legal requirement to complete voting by 5pm caused issues at some polling stations. The Group observed that some polling stations had too many voters and/or too few staff to enable voting to be completed in the time allowed.
- The Group was of the view that polling officials generally displayed professionalism and integrity, and ensured the voting process was well organised and that voters were able to cast their votes in an orderly manner.
- The Group commends the dedication demonstrated by the counting officials and notes that the counting process is ongoing in a number of constituencies.
- However the Group did observe some variations in practices adopted by polling and counting officials.
- The Group recognised the significant logistical challenges faced by the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission in organising and delivering election materials to all the polling stations. The SIEC is to be congratulated for preparing the country's 2014 elections.
- Finally, we commend the role played by the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, supported by the Participating Police Force, and the security arrangements that were put in place for the election. The high visibility of



RSIPF during polling day and the ongoing count gave confidence to the people to exercise fully their democratic rights in the country's political process.

We will finalise our report over the coming days and this will include the Group's conclusion and set of recommendations to further improve the country's electoral processes.

The Commonwealth's long-standing commitment to democracy and development in Solomon Islands will continue. The full declaration of results will be known shortly. The Group encourages all the citizens and the elected leaders from this election to continue working together in ensuring your country's democracy and development continues with the full active participation of the citizens.

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### **Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation**

The Commonwealth Secretariat is a signatory to both the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and the associated Code of Conduct for International Election Observation Missions, which were commemorated on 27 October 2005 at the United Nations in New York.

Commonwealth Observer Groups are organised and conducted in accordance with the Declaration and Commonwealth Observers undertake their duties with the Code of Conduct.