



Speech by the Honourable Prime Minister,

Hon. Rick Houenipwela, MP

Friday, 6th July, 2018

40th INDEPENDENCE CELEBRATIONS

"RE-DIRECTING OUR JOURNEY AT FORTY"

Salutation

Governor General of Solomon Islands His Excellency, Sir Frank Ofagioro Kabui and Lady Kabui;

Hon. Speaker of Parliament – Hon. Ajilon Nasiu;

Hon. Chief Justice – Sir Albert Rocky Palmer;

Deputy Prime Minister – Hon. Manasseh Sogavare, MP;

Ministers of the Crown;

Leader of the Official Opposition – Hon. Manasseh Maelanga, MP;

Leader of the Independents – Hon. Derrick Sikua, MP;

Members of Parliament;

Constitutional Post Holders;

Commissioner of Police;

Provincial Premiers and Members of Provincial Assemblies;

Mayor of Honiara City – Councillor Andrew Mua;
Heads and Members of the Diplomatic Corps;
Our Development Partners;
Representative of Solomon Islands Christian Association;
Chairman, Executive, and Members of the Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce;
Heads of Statutory Organizations;
Church Leaders and Clergies;
Senior Government Officials;
Traditional Chiefs and Community Leaders;
Fellow Solomon Islanders and Friends of Solomon Islands;
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Greetings

Greetings and a Very Good Morning to each and every one of you present here today, at home and those listening in our villages throughout the provinces.

Let me first take this opportunity to wish our people and our beloved country Solomon Islands a **Happy 40th Independence Anniversary**. I acknowledge that some of our people are not able to join us in our celebrations today for various reasons including those in our Hospitals, those incarcerated and our citizens abroad, our prayers and thoughts are with you.

As we celebrate this important milestone in our history, let us not forget those who started the process that brought us independence 40 years ago - the forefathers and mothers of our nation. These men and women negotiated our independence from Britain who ruled us for 85 years since declaring us as a protectorate from 1893. On 7 July 1978, our pioneers declared to the world our choice and determination to champion our own destiny. On that day, we started the process of governing ourselves.

Today, 40 years on, we ask - what has become of this young democracy? How have we done in that time?

There is a saying that goes, "***Life begins at 40***". Well, for this year, the theme chosen for the 2018 Independence Anniversary is "***Redirecting our Journey at Forty***." In a way, it is a proclamation of a new beginning.

To redirect our journey into the next forty years, we need to reflect on how we have fared in the last forty years. And in that spirit it is fitting to reflect on a ***biblical analogy***, that it must have felt like ***we have spent the last 40 years in the wilderness***. So what can we do over the next 40 years, which will help our emergence from this wilderness into the green pastures of "***the promise land?***"

Continuing that Biblical analogy, we will need a new leadership mind set: ***the Joshua and Caleb mind-set***. As Joshua instructed the people on the west bank of River Jordan, we will need real deep soul-searching; a purging of attitudes, and renewing of the mind. We will need to do things differently if we are to emerge from the "wilderness".

This is what this year's anniversary theme "***Redirecting our Journey at Forty***" really means. Only then can we be certain to reach the "*Promised Land*" of "...***joy, peace, progress and prosperity*** ..." for which we yearn through our national anthem.

Going forward into the next 40 years, our direction must be informed by the assessments and responses to our current challenges; the realities of today and the lessons of the past 40 years.

Since Independence - Reflection

In that regard, let me make a few reflections on Solomon Islands progress since independence.

Our population in the year of Independence was estimated at 211,648 people. Today, our population is estimated at 666,557 people.

In the forty years since independence, we have more than tripled our population. We have increased by 454,905 people.

Our average Life expectancy at birth increased to 69.6 years from around 54 years in the 1970s.

Over the past 40 years, we have expanded our economic base through improved trading arrangements with other countries. Our exports base, increased to include round logs; sawn timber; fish – fresh and canned; palm oil; coconuts and other niche products including cocoa and other marine products. Tourism and our cultural industry grew. These among others have generated much of our revenue.

Within 20 years of our independence, we adopted a system of government that formally established and empowered our provinces to establish legislative Councils through the Provincial Government Act (1996). Prior to 1996, our provinces were called districts and managed through a system of District Commissioners (or DCs as they were referred to in those days) deployed from Central Government.

Along with the implementation of the Provincial Government Act, many of the services previously provided directly to the then districts by central government, were devolved to the respective Provincial Governments.

Over the forty years, Christianity and other Civil Society Organizations grew. In that period we established diplomatic ties with at least 80 countries and became member of various multilateral Organizations. And some of them have established their presence in Solomon Islands, as we reciprocated in the same manner – a recognition of our Statehood.

These statistics and developments generally show improvement. We have come a long way in 40 years. But there were also challenges.

Political Events

The history of Solomon Islands shows that within each decade, we met with various national challenges. Our response to those challenges, for example:-

Reflecting back, it is useful to remind ourselves of some of these challenges which among others included:

In 1988, the people of Guadalcanal marched and presented their demands to the then Prime Minister Rt. Hon. Ezekiel Alebua.

In 1999, civil unrest began on Guadalcanal – what had become known outside our country as the ‘ethnic conflict’. The ensuing period immediately after that remind us of some of the darkest and most trying times our people and our country had faced.

In July 2003, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands commenced. This was the beginning of our journey of recovery. Australia, New Zealand and our Pacific Islands brothers and sisters came to support us, a programme that lasted 14 years.

In 2006, we experienced the April Riots and burning of Chinatown. This event once again tried our resolve and again our unifying spirit helped us find long-term peaceful solutions.

In 2017 RAMSI departed from Solomon Islands after 14 years of helping us to restore services and a return to normalcy. We can manage our affairs by ourselves as a sovereign nation once again in peace and harmony.

Many of you will agree with me, these challenges tested our resolve as a people and as a nation. We suffered as a people and as a country. But we remained united in our search for peace and reconciliation.

The challenge today is, what will we make of tomorrow or more importantly, the next 40 years? The theme for this year’s 40th Anniversary celebrations “***Redirecting our Journey at 40***” forces us to reflect on

what we have done in the past 40 years, and articulate a vision; a roadmap to guide our journey in the next forty years.

The Realities of today

The most important role of government is to serve its people to ensure they prosper socially, culturally, spiritually, economically, and politically. Our ability to do this well is affected by many factors including our rapidly growing population.

We know that our country produces 50 births every day. This is equivalent to 2 classrooms every day or 1 primary school every week. Based on projected population growth, by 2050, we will produce almost 80 births every day, an equivalent to 3 classrooms a day, or a combined primary and high school every week. This begs the obvious question - How will we be able to provide for such an alarming rate of population growth?

Our current curriculum does not produce work-ready students when they leave our education system at any level – be it senior primary, junior secondary or senior secondary. It needs urgent reform to ensure our students are work-ready and are competitive when they leave the education system and enter the labour market.

We need to lift the status of the technical and vocational skills training in Solomon Islands to the same status as the formal education system. The majority of the ‘skills set’ needed by most of our students to contribute effectively to our country’s social and economic development are provided through our TVET institutions.

Yet they are still regarded as second-rate programs or institutions and bulk of government financing to education is directed at the formal education system, and overseas scholarships. This needs to change. Skills education through TVET institutions will be key to the country's economic engine. We will work to ensure Skills training and TVET institutions are accorded equal status as formal education in a new 2-tier education system that provides choices to our children after year 6 primary schools.

Our health system needs to step up to serve our rural and urban populations better. We must ensure our health support systems work, such as ensuring essential drugs are always in stock. We must aim to eradicate malaria by 2030 so it can no longer be a course of ill-health in our country. We must reverse the NCD crises that is responsible for about 8 of every 10 deaths in the country today.

The Economy

Let me comment briefly on the economy.

As some of you may know, the Solomon Islands economy has been enjoying positive growth for the past several years. That would have enhanced opportunities for business in areas such as infrastructure services, tourism development, sustainable forestry, agri-industry and fisheries.

In recent years, except for a contraction in 2014 caused by devastating floods and the closure of Gold Ridge mine, it grew by 2.9% in 2015, 3.2% in 2016 and in 2017 of growth of 3.0% has been recorded. However, the

strong momentum in 2017 is not expected to carry into 2018 and 2019, with GDP growth projected to be 3.5 percent in 2018 and 3.4 per cent in 2019. This is primarily due to the expected fall in the value of log exports and fishing activities. The Government is addressing this simmering risk to revenues and foreign exchange earnings.

Given the impact from the closure of Gold Ridge Mine, it is one of the main policy drivers of the Government to reopen Gold Ridge. After much discussion, I am more than hopeful that this will eventuate with the first gold pour in 2019.

Inflation

Rise in domestic prices has been moderate in recent years. The inflation rate for 2017 was slightly increased to 1 per cent, up 0.4 percentage points high than the previous year. Inflation rate for 2018 is projected be around 2-3 per cent. This is mainly driven by expected minimal increases in the imported fuel prices in 2018.

Economic Risk

As alluded earlier, there are some key risks to the economic outlook – mainly due to the recent uncertain developments of logging activities and fish prices, but also the outbreaks of Coconut rhinoceros beetle and giant African snails, political instability and risks associated with Solomon Islands graduation from LDC status.

Other Actions

There are other issues of concern that we must be constantly aware of. For example, our youth, which comprise more than 50% of the country's do not have adequate employment and / or entrepreneurship opportunities. Therefore they are not able to contribute effectively to our country's economic development. A reform in our education curricular will ensure our youths are more competitive in the labour market.

The Government is now taking steps to create innovative employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for our young people through-out the country. This year we will introduce a new Youth Empowerment Policy to drive youth employment and entrepreneurship in the country. This framework will also include programs for leadership training, in sports, arts and drama and many other areas of interest to our youth population.

In addition to enhancing employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for youths in the country, I am personally seeking to put in place formal labour mobility agreements with several countries including Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Japan and Taiwan that I hope will help provide huge opportunities for our youths and alleviate the youth unemployment challenges in our country.

We must step up efforts to support our women in businesses initiatives and programs. We must strive for gender equality in leadership positions. We must seek and put in place mechanisms to increase women representation in our Parliament that are equitable.

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry have been the mainstay of our economy. We will continue to drive production in these sectors while also focusing on how our farmers, fishermen and many other producers get the best returns for their produce.

We will accord greater focus on Forestry. Currently much of our export earnings derive from round log export. Various estimates indicate our forest reserves are declining fast and that we are in danger of overharvesting our forests within 10 years. We need to invest down-stream processing for which we can derive higher export process.

We need to look at alternative industry to replace round log exports. Tourism and our cultural industry hold tremendous potential as larger revenue earners for the country. Already steps are being taken to make this happen. **We have just launched a new Solomon Islands Tourism Brand last night which will forge Solomon Islands into this competitive market. That sector is a perfect example of 'redirecting our journey at 40'.**

We must undertake regulatory reforms to make our business environment more conducive to our small and medium business enterprises. The backbone of Solomon Islands Businesses are our SMEs, owned mostly by Solomon Islanders, but our current laws do not provide incentives they can enjoy and grow. We must ensure our laws provide a level playing field that will benefit our small businesses as well as large multinational companies.

We are embarking on an exciting new path with our telecommunication sector with the anticipated commissioning of a new submarine cable toward

the end of next year. **In-fact I will be signing a tri-partite agreement next week with my Australian and Papua New Guinea counterparts for the Undersea Cable that will link Honiara and Port Moresby to Sydney.** On this note I wish to register my deep appreciation and thanks on behalf of the government and people of Solomon Islands to the government and people of Australia for supporting this project which will not only modernize a large part of our communication system but also help reduce telecommunication costs in the country.

We have also embarked on an exciting new journey on renewable energy with the Tina Hydro project commencing soon. **On completion and commissioning, the Tina Hydro project is anticipated to meet up to 80% of all energy requirements of Honiara.** Tina Hydro Project is the beginning of our journey on renewable energy.

We will develop a roadmap to roll out renewable energy throughout the country, be it hydro power, solar power, wind energy, geothermal energy and / or wave energy. We are in the process of reviewing the current legislation on energy to minimize the potential for monopoly and ensure small Solomon Island firms that wish to engage in renewable energy in the country are encouraged to do so. This review will also look at ensuring regulatory function / authority on energy is separate from providers of energy.

Governance and oversight

We must prevent the culture of corruption from taking hold in our country. If we do not, it will lead us down a path that will deprive our people of the benefits they should rightly expect from our country's resources. In this regard I am happy to inform the nation that the ***Anti – Corruption Bill (2018) and the Associated Whistle-Blower Protection Bill (2018)*** will be tabled in Parliament this year.

I am pleased that in a relatively short period the SIDCC Government has driven a number of key legislative and policy reforms and economic opportunities. Some of these reforms were also championed by the previous DCC government with bipartisan support. These reforms represent important milestones in our journey since Independence and going forward into the next 40 years.

In addition to the two legislations I have referred, the other reforms include the:

- Land Reform Program and Traditional Governance Program;
- National Reparation Policy in addressing the TRC Report;
- Preparatory work for the hosting of the 2023 Pacific Games;
- Reopening of the Gold Ridge Mine;
- Upgrading of the Honiara Main Road;
- Upgrading of the Honiara International Airport;
- Reopening of a number of closed airports and the tar-sealing of others;
- Expansion of our International Sea Port Facilities in Honiara and Noro;

- Opening of the second international airport in Munda, Western Province;
- Aggressively pursue important projects in the productive sector including the Bina Harbour Project; and Isabel Nickel Mining;
- And revival of DBSI, CEMA, and RIPEL;

In terms of our national security it is Government core responsibility to always ensure that Law and order is maintained. This is being carried out through the RSIPF crime prevention and community strategy. In terms of our Border security issues, the Government is currently working on a new strategy for enhancement of the Border Security and Management System. On the international scene, RSIPF is now linked with Interpol, regional and international police, security and intelligence agencies.

Tribute

We are grateful that the peaceful co-existence we now enjoy again resulted from the efforts of many, including Solomon Islanders from the highest institutions and offices in our land including our Parliamentary institutions, to the operational arms of government, to our private sector, our churches, our civil society, our communities and our people. We all contributed to the future we now enjoy and with God's Blessing to the future yet to come.

I also pay tribute to those who helped us along the way; our development partners. They were, they are, and they will still be, our friends and our partners as we move forward into the next 40 years of our journey.

We should also pay a special tribute to the men and women who served in the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) and to those who made RAMSI possible. Led by Australia and New Zealand. Through RAMSI our Pacific brothers and sisters were part of our journey.

To the brave men and women of RAMSI, your families, your nations, we owe a deep sense of gratitude. To the families of those who made the ultimate sacrifice so that our people can now enjoy peace and stability again, your sacrifices will never be forgotten, and we offer our most sincere and heart felt gratitude for sacrifices you have made.

A call to the people

As we all can recall, we have faced serious challenges including the ethnic conflict. But the challenges we faced, strengthened our resilience as a people, and our resolve as a nation.

The challenges we faced showed us the value of unity, for there is more that unites us, than divide us. We must ensure the security of our nation remain strong and firm. That we remain united, as one people, living in peaceful co-existence.

This is the legacy we must guard with honour to pass on to our future generations – **the legacy of peace, reconciliation and unity; the legacy of one people, one vision, one destiny and one nation.**

Fellow Solomon Islanders, we all have a collective responsibility to our beloved nation. It is my hope that we can work together for the common good of current and future generations.

As we commence our journey into the next 40 years, I ask each one of us to reflect on these very simple questions;

- What kind of Solomon Islands do I want to leave behind for my children, grand-children and great grand-children?
- How can I contribute to the type of Solomon Islands I want to leave behind?
- How can I make a difference in my community?
- How can I become a good citizen of Solomon Islands?
- What can I do to help my beloved country?

The answers to these questions, will enable us to redirect our journey to achieve the type of nation we dream of; a nation that is dynamic and thriving; a nation founded on strong Christian principles and values; a nation where our traditions, cultures, and values are accepted and respected; a nation where governance is paramount; a nation where our young girls and boys, women and men are empowered culturally, socially, economically, spiritually and politically; a nation where our youths are gainfully employed and engaged in leadership, decision-making and economic entrepreneurship activities; a nation where the role and place of our women and children is recognised and supported; a nation where its people stand to be counted and do their individual and collective contributions to make Solomon Islands great.

My Fellow Solomon Islanders, regardless of where we are, and what we each do – we all have a moral responsibility to our nation. Together we can all contribute to the kind of Solomon Islands we wish to leave behind for our children and grandchildren.

I am very optimistic about Solomon Islands future and the potenitals that lie ahead, apart from the Independence Anniversary itself, we have and are celebrating a number of milestone projects including:-

- The MACFEST
- Launch by CBSI of SI new \$40 note and new\$ coin.
- Launch of the KGVI F6 Class of 78 Book
- The Solomon Voices Choir
- The Grand opening of the new Ela Moors Dealership, Ranadi
- The Launch of the SI Tourism Re-brand

All the people involved in these various projects have expressed a fervent belief in the optism in Solomon Islands future. But the events themselves are a reflection of the level of optimism I this country. I share that optimism.

Never before has there been a better platform for us to launch our journey for the next 40 years than we have now. We have learnt from our lessons. We know what it is like to grieve; but we also know what it is like to be rise above the hurts and be reconciled, to be liberated and to be free. So let us join hands as we march with confidence toward our future.

In closing, let me call on all Solomon Islanders, wherever you may be, never to forget our country.

The future of Solomon Islands is in our hands. Actions and decisions by our Leaders today, in all walks of life, will determine what kind of Solomon Islands we will see in 40 years. Our decisions and action today can either empower or condemn our future generations – We **must** choose wisely.

As we embark on our journey for the next 40 years, I close with another simple question; "**what legacy do we wish to leave behind for our future generations? Our children and their children?**"

The answer to this question must inform the choices we make, the investments we must decide; the sacrifices we must make; to redirect our journey into the next 40 years.

To guide us, we must be united with a vision that portrays "a strong, secure, peaceful and prosperous Solomon Islands whose people are educated, healthy and manage their resources in an economically, environmentally and socially sustainable way".

As a country, we must position ourselves to respond effectively to the challenges we all face, and make informed decisions about our future and the future we wish to leave behind for our children, our grandchildren and generations that follow with the aim to 'decrease poverty, promote equal opportunity, promote prosperity and enhance peace and stability' to help Solomon Islands achieve its long-term development vision.

Conclusion – A Pledge

To my People of Solomon Islands, as we venture into the next 40 years of our journey, we must always stop to give thanks for the many blessings that God has bestowed on us. We must show gratitude for what we have. Despite our challenges, we are abundantly blessed.

Never take anything for granted: give thanks for each breath of life, each sunrise and each sunset.

For each day we wake to sounds of birds singing and not to the sound of artillery and bombs.

For we are able to smile, sing and laugh and not be persecuted for our religious beliefs.

For the continued partnerships between Solomon Islands, our development partners and their people we must be thankful.

So, for our journey into the next 40 years, it is my wish that today, we make a pledge. A pledge to our Lord, to each other and to ourselves. A pledge that because we are abundantly blessed, we will rise, we will take our nation to new heights, we will be united, and we will be a nation that will stand forever more. Solomon Islands belongs to you and to me and only we can change the course of our beloved Solomon Islands.

And finally, once again on behalf of myself and the SI Democratic Coalition for Change Government, I wish you all a Happy 40th Anniversary celebrations.

It is customary to recognise the contribution of individuals who unselfishly contributed to the good of society during Independence Day Celebrations.

I now have the honour of announcing the recipients of the 2018 40th Independence Honours and Awards

1. For SOLOMON ISLANDS MEDAL (SILVER)

No	NOMINEE	AWARD	CITATION
1	Denton Hehenoro RARAWA	SIM (Silver)	For services to economic, commerce and community development
2	Gane Alva SIMBE	SIM (Silver)	For services to economic, commerce and community development
3	Verzilyn ISOM	SIM (Silver)	For services to education, and community development
4	Derick TENAI	SIM (Silver)	For services to the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force
5	Jackson VAIKOTA	SIM (Silver)	For services in the field of survey and community development
6	Gideon BOURO	SIM (Silver)	For services in the field of forestry and community development
7	Tommy SIPOLO	SIM (Silver)	For services to community development.

8	John Tokaibure BAKEUA	SIM (Silver)	For services in sports and community development
9	Holmes Matao SAEVE	SIM (Silver)	For services to the Church, politics and community development.
10	Solomon Andrew WALA	SIM (Silver)	For services to policing and community development.

2. For SOLOMON ISLANDS MEDAL (BRONZE)

No	NOMINEE	AWARD	CITATION
11	Revd. Alick HAGI	SIM (Bronze)	For services to the Church, government and community development.
12	Nathaniel Bolikoo IKA	SIM (Bronze)	For services to community development.
13	David Sau OLOBENI	SIM (Bronze)	For services in sports and community development
14	Severino AEFI	SIM (Bronze)	For services in sports and community development
15	Nohichu Fa'amoana TOPUE	SIM (Bronze)	For services in sports and community development

3. For SOLOMON ISLANDS MERITORIOUS SERVICE MEDAL (SIMSM)

16	Justina RADCLYFFE	SIMSM	For services in the field of health and physiotherapy.
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17	Professor Rajesh CHANDRA	SIMSM	For services in the field of education and community development.
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May God Bless you all. May God bless our Beloved Solomon Islands, from shore to shore.