



**NATIONAL HEALING AND APOLOGY PROGRAMME
OPENING SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
HONOURABLE MANASSEH DAMUKANA SOGAVARE MP**

- His Excellency Frank Ofogioro Kabui, Governor General of Solomon Islands
- Deputy Prime Minister, Honourable Manasseh Maelanga
- Minister of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace, Honourable Samson Maneka
- Honourable Ministers of the Crown
- Leader of the Official Opposition, Honourable Jeremiah Manele
- Leader of the Independent Group in Parliament Honourable Derek Sikua
- Members of Parliament
- Premiers and Members of the Executive of all our Provinces in the Country
- Mayor of Honiara City Council Honourable Alfrence Fatai
- Heads and Members of the Diplomatic Corps
- Special Coordinator of RAMSI
- Commissioner of the RSIPF
- Commissioner of Correctional Services of Solomon Islands
- Other Constitutional Post Holders
- Permanent Secretaries
- Leaders and Members of SIPCRAA
- Chiefs and Village Elders throughout the 5000+ villages
- Fellow Solomon Islanders.

I would like to thank all of you for coming in numbers today to celebrate and pave the way for lasting peace in Solomon Islands. We need that to enable the country to pursue nation-building in an environment that is free from all forms of barriers and hindrances. This program is about getting the heart right before we can even begin to realistically talk about issues and nation- building.

In this regard I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the former combatants and the victims for coming forward. You are the people who really matter in this whole thing. You suffer because of the carelessness of the Government both, national and provincial.

I know people have come as far the Shortland Islands and Bougainville and Choiseul and Temotu to participate in this week of national healing and forgiveness.

Your presence here this morning is sending a strong message to other Solomon Islanders who are still living in the shadow of the past and would rather continue to see this country sliding down the path of ethnic hatred, and anarchy by making lousy excuses.

Thank you very much for taking the bold step of declaring to the people of this country that you desire peace, tolerance, and happy coexistence of all Solomon Islanders. You earn my respect and admiration.

We are blessed with this chain of isles and we have a solemn duty not to allow it to slide down the path of anarchy again. We owe our

regional friends the gratitude of helping us to restore peace in this country and we would be irresponsible and unthankful to allow it to slide down the path of anarchy again.

This requires collective responsibility by everybody who calls Solomon Islands Home and the Solomon Islands Government at both the national and provincial level is the key stakeholder in this regard, because our country collapsed in year 2000 because our carelessness. Your presence here this morning is sending a positive signal to our people that we can, if we so desire, live in peace and harmony.

The event of 5th June year 2000 will go down in the annals of our history as a striking reminder to all of us and more specifically people in positions of responsibility and leadership in Government to accept the truth that no man is an Island in our quest for nation-building and that our development policies must take into account our diversity and unique situation.

We are literally a nation of island states that is so diverse in terms of ethnicity, customary practices and development aspirations. We failed miserably as a nation to appreciate that fact.

As a matter of fact, we paid dearly for our carelessness. We did not give enough thinking into understanding the interplay between the three pillars of our systems of Governance, namely Government, Religion and Custom; and how they affect each other, so that we design our system in a way that is sensitive to the intricacies of our

diversity, taking into account the role played by the three pillars. Again we failed miserably to do that.

Our country collapsed amidst our claim that we are 95% a Christian nation that runs the affairs of the country under the principles of democracy. Something must still be missing in the equation. And I would like to believe that it has to do with our relationship with God. Our hearts are not in tune with our profession of religiousness. This program is about getting that formula right. We must be willing to emulate the character of God to forgive one another.

Considering the failure of the entity called the Government to address the people's concern, having more government and structures of government may not be the way forward to address our concerns. This is what I want all of us to take serious note of in light of our effort to relook at the structure of our system of government.

As a matter of fact custom and customary values are totally sidelined in our governance system for years. For the first time the DCCG is taking this matter up as a strategic policy to consolidate our peace process. It takes a crisis for us to realize our mistake.

To add salt to the wound, the national government over the years has been caught up in the agenda of polarizing power centrally since we become a nation, so much so that we even failed miserably to make the Provincial Government system work since its introduction and adoption in the early 1980s.

Consequently development has been highly centralized and over time we systematically forget the development needs of our people in the rural area. Again it takes a crisis for us to come to our senses, but more needs to be done to realize the high expectations of our people in this matter.

Provincial Governments which are supposed to be agents of the National Government to frontline development in the rural area have been deprived of the capacity to do that by the national government.

In doing that the leadership of successive national governments failed miserably to appreciate the truth that, it is the wealth created by the utilization of resources extracted from the jurisdiction of Provincial Governments that keep the country going and yet we have been returning peanuts to the Provinces from the revenue generated from these resources. It takes a crisis to see this gross injustice.

Our land administration legal framework handed down to us by the administrators of the Protectorate is the single most insensitive legal framework that existed in this country, that is only biased towards the needs of the Government in terms of land for development, without the slightest appreciation of the need to respect the original landowners.

As a matter of fact the present constitution rightfully places the ownership of the country's land in Solomon Islanders, but failed in practice to recognize the customary land tenure system in any meaningful way. It is also observed that our dispute settlement

process under the country's court system further compounds the problem to an already complicated situation.

It is observed that the centralized development strategy and the resulting increased internal migration to the most developed areas add to the complication by intensifying the pressure that is already mounting on indigenous land owners to compromise their valued customs. The argument of the indigenous people is that the government has a duty to help them protect the integrity of their valued customs as they relate to dealings in land

I must admit that the Solomon Islands Government over the years failed to appreciate this or simply disregard the fundamental principles of our traditional land tenure system, which among others recognized that:

- Land is communally owned and is inalienable under any circumstances whatsoever. The so called other ways of inheriting land in custom are in reality concerned with the right of usage. Land in custom remains permanently the property of the tribe;
- The concept of ownership differs from the capitalist sense of ownership. The relationship is one of custodianship under the broad principle of stewardship. Individualization of title to land in custom is unheard of in most part of the country;
- In their dealings in tribal land, Solomon Islanders are cognizant of their obligations to their departed ancestors and the

generations yet unborn, thus placing them in a position of stewards. This fact alone establishes the principle of “inalienability of customary land” for very good reasons in custom;

I must admit that successive Solomon Islands Governments have failed to appreciate and take these fundamental principles into account in our land reform program over the years, which again only concentrated on making land available for development through the process of alienation - something that is repugnant in custom. Without realizing it, the Government over the years is only fuelling animosity and making people stateless in custom.

Our people’s responses to the unbearable effect of this draconian policy which brought the country on its knees in year 2000 is perfectly understood and the national government would be irresponsible to respond to this concern in any other way than to design a policy response that tackles the concern head-on.

The country is still counting the cost of the havocs left behind by an open revolt by our people against the Solomon Islands Government in direct disagreement with the working of this legal framework. We would only be irresponsible to continue to allow this injustice not to be addressed in our land reform program.

It is not my intention to outline all the issues except to make the point that, what happened in year 2000 is a direct response by our people to the carelessness of the national government.

This carelessness created a situation where innocent Solomon Islanders were forced to take up arms against each other and inflicted atrocities at the level unimaginable against our own people. Our people were placed in this situation by an environment created for them by the carelessness of the national and the provincial government; because no rational human being would do what these people did.

I admired those who served their time in jail for the crime they committed during the tension period. You have my highest respect. I am pleased to know that most of these people are now actively involved in peace building work and church activities. God is doing a marvellous work in their lives.

I also know that many victims of the Bougainville crisis especially those in the Batava Ward in Choiseul Province and others in the Western Borders are still waiting to have their issues addressed by the national government. It is now more than 20 years. I acknowledge your patients and am truly sorry for the injustice and inconvenience caused.

As the current Prime Minister of our beloved country, I take this opportunity on behalf of the leadership of the national governments since July 1978 to say sorry to our people throughout the length and breadth of our country for allowing our beautiful Solomon Islands to go down the path of ethnic crisis in year 2000. We are still recovering from the effects of this event.

I also acknowledge the untold mental, psychological and physical suffering that the innocent victims of the crisis had to go through. Many of these people are still struggling to come to terms with normal life. Your stories are taken up in the TRC report and have been brought to the attention of the Government. I also take this opportunity to say sorry to these people.

As a strategy to address the outstanding issues, the Government will adopt a holistic approach. The Government is finalizing the recommendations of the TRC Report which suggests ways of attending to the issues and concerns of both the perpetrators and the victims of the tension and will be taken up in the proposed Reparation Bill to be table in Parliament when it is ready.

I believe our God is taking a keen interest in what we are doing because we are advancing his cause here on earth. He came down to this earth more than 2000 years ago to reconcile us to Himself and encourages us to forgive one another. We are therefore on the right track and we are assured of his very presence to help us forgive one another.

Once again thank you very much for coming out in numbers to support this program and may God Bless Solomon Islands from Shore top Shore.