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# THE REYNOLDS REPORT

*"Supporting democracy in our  
Neighbourhood"*

**Solomon Islands: Special Edition**

**December 3, 2014**



Welcome to a special edition of my e-newsletter.

I recently returned from Honiara in the Solomon Islands where I was privileged to

support democracy as a member of the Commonwealth Observers Group. Members of the Commonwealth, along with the Pacific Islands Forum, observed the nation's elections at the invitation of the Solomon Islands Government. This was the Solomon Islands' seventh election since independence and third since the end of 'the troubles' and the commencement of the Regional Assistance Mission Solomon Islands (RAMSI).

Teams from the Commonwealth Observers Group were deployed across five provinces and covered the majority of 50 seats as part of a seven-day mission. International observers received a warm and friendly reception right throughout the mission and it was a privilege to engage freely and frankly with Solomon Islanders from all walks of life.

Having worked in Melanesia throughout the past few years on several democracy strengthening programs, I was thrilled with what I saw, heard and experienced throughout the mission. There was a general consensus amongst international observers that the election was conducted in a peaceful fashion and voters appeared able to cast their votes freely on election-day. It was great to see the people of Solomon Islands turn out in force to exercise their right to vote and for taking up the opportunity play their part in determining the future of their nation with such enthusiasm.



I was present at the commencement of RAMSI in the Solomon Islands back in 2003 and I witnessed first-hand a country divided and severely degraded by 'the troubles' but I was delighted to see that the Solomon Islands is a very different place to the country I visited over a decade ago. It was wonderful to witness people participating peacefully, enthusiastically and freely in these elections. Australia has lead the RAMSI mission since 2003 and has invested more than \$2 billion to restore peace and stability, and to lay the foundations for economic growth following the period of civil conflict. In 2013, the Australian government committed nearly \$500 million to extend RAMSI and its successor programs. Australia's aid program to the Solomon Islands this financial year totals approximately \$168 million to support broad based economic growth, improved justice services, improved service delivery in health and education, and improved governance.

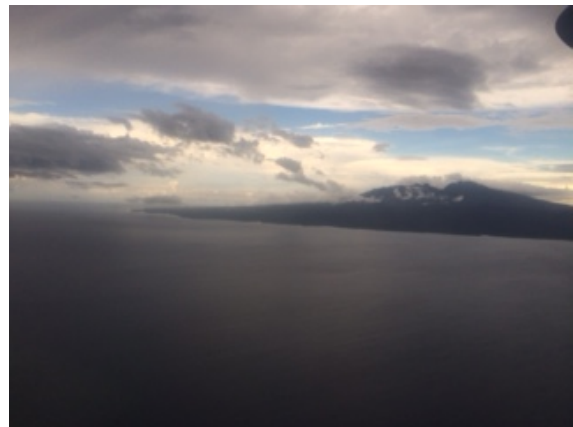
The Australian Defence Force support to RAMSI concluded in July 2013. Between 2003 and 2013 approximately 7,270 Australian military personnel from all three Services were deployed to Operation ANODE and over 2,100 were Australian Army Reserve members. All West Australians should all be particularly proud of the 411

West Australian reservists from our own 13 Brigade who served with distinction on operation Anode.



Based in Gizo, I travelled between booths on banana boats and witnessed first-hand the logistical challenges faced by the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission in organising and delivering election materials to polling stations. The Electoral Commission is to be commended for preparing the country's 2014 elections so effectively, especially in light of significant resource restraints. Polling officials that I observed displayed professionalism and integrity, and ensured the voting process was well organised. They worked hard to make sure voters could cast their votes in a transparent, orderly and peaceful manner.

I also witnessed the important role played by the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, which was very ably but quietly supported by the international participating police force. I was impressed with security arrangements that were put in place for the election, including a week long alcohol ban.



The outcome for all 50 seats was finalised last week and I am pleased to report there will be 32 independents and 18 members of five separate parties. Only one woman was elected to the 50 seat parliament, and my congratulations to Freda Comua on her election. Over the past few years I have worked with female candidates, including those in the Solomon Islands back in 2010, to help them campaign, fundraise and engage voters in the Solomon Islands, and I have seen first hand the challenges women face. Newly elected members will now negotiate to form a new government and appoint a new Prime Minister. I am optimistic that, while robust, the discussions and negotiations will be conducted by the newly elected representatives as peacefully and

purposefully as the ballot.

Despite significant progress, the country still faces challenges on many fronts and has a long journey ahead of them – one that I believe will require ongoing but challenging and evolving support from their regional partners, particular Australia. All 15 members of RAMSI, and particularly the thousands of Australian men and women who have supported RAMSI and other bilateral support programs over the last 11 years, should be extremely proud of their efforts and commitment to this successful result.

Until next time,

Linda



You can view my adjournment on the Solomon Islands mission by clicking [here.](#)



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