

THURSDAY 12 NOVEMBER 2009

The Speaker, Rt Hon. Peter Kenilorea took the chair at 9.49 am.

Prayers.

ATTENDANCE

At prayers, all were present with the exception of the Ministers for Commerce, Industry & Employment, National Unity, Reconciliation & Peace, Environment, Conservation & Meteorology, Lands, Housing and Survey, Mines, Energy & Rural Electrification, Provincial Government & Institution, Home Affairs, and the members for East Are Are, Baegu/Asifola, Temotu Pele, West Are Are, South Vella La Vella, and North Guadalcanal.

Mr Speaker: Honorable Members, we have with us today a new Member who was elected through a bye-election in October this year. According to section 63 of the Constitution, no Member is permitted to participate in the proceedings of this house until he or she has taken the oath set out in Schedule 1 of the Constitution. We will now proceed with the administration of the oath.

ADMINISTRATION OF OATHS

(Sir Allan Kemakeza took the oath of allegiance)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, on behalf of the National Parliament of Solomon Islands I welcome you all as a newly elected Member for Savo/Russell Constituency. Having taken your oath you are now permitted to participate in the proceedings of the Hon. House. I wish you well as you resume your duties to this House and to your constituency.

Hon. Members, welcome to the continuation of the Tenth Meeting of the Eight Parliament. The seven weeks recess, I am sure, have been put into good use by some Members who are able to either visit their constituencies or attend to other important responsibilities. I note too that others have been very busy with committee hearings and have had no rest since we adjourned on Tuesday 24th September 2009.

I wish to advise members that I have given permission to the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee to make a statement on his Committees' report. I will call on him when the House is ready to deal with his business as stated in today's Order Paper. I wish to also inform the House that there will be a signing of a financial agreement for the building of Members' new office complex. This will take place in the main conference room at 11am between the Republic of China (Taiwan) and the government. All Members are invited to come and witness this important occasion. Hon. Members let us now proceed to our next item of business.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS

By the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, "Report on the Inquiry into the Facilitation of International Assistance Notice 2003 and RAMSI Intervention".

By the Chairman of Parliamentary House Committee "Report of the Parliamentary House Committee into Parliamentary Entitlement Commission's Regulation (Amendment) Legal Notice No. 45, the \$50,000 Terminal Grant to the spouse of a Member of Parliament.

By the Minister for Justice and Legal Affairs “Solomon Islands Courts (Civil Procedure) Amendment Rules 2009”

STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE ON THE INQUIRY INTO THE FACILITATION OF INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE NOTICE 2003 AND RAMSI INTERVENTION

Hon. BOYERS: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to make a statement to mark the tabling of the report of the Foreign Relations Committee on its RAMSI inquiry. For the sake of those listening in, especially those in the provinces, I am referring to our Committee’s report on its inquiry into the Facilitation of International Assistance Notice 2003 and RAMSI Intervention. Today, I present that report to Parliament with an overwhelming sense of gratitude and satisfaction. This is indeed a historic day for our Committee and for this Hon. House. The report is culmination of an immense undertaking that Parliament referred to our Committee in July last year. As Members are aware, last year Parliament asked our Committee to review the Notice that was made under the Facilitation of International Assistance Act on RAMSI’s arrival in 2003. Under the leadership of Hon. Laurie Chan and later myself, our Committee set out in what grew into a review, not just of the Notice but of RAMSI and its entirety. I trust that Members appreciate the full extent of our inquiry and the true value of that inquiry and the report in terms of the relationship between our country and RAMSI as an intervening force.

While there have been previous reviews on RAMSI and its operations, Mr. Speaker, our review, as the report demonstrates, is perhaps the most extensive in terms of coverage. It was also the first full inquiry into RAMSI by Parliament through its Standing Committee. Our inquiry commenced in July 2008 and public hearings concluded in June this year. We heard from all relevant officers in Honiara including the Prime Minister, Ministries and constitutional offices as well as from RAMSI and all stakeholders of RAMSI and government such as donors and civil society. We also conducted public hearings in all the nine provinces, and I am very proud that our Committee is perhaps the first body or tribunal to have heard directly from the representatives of all provincial wards and all constituencies in Solomon Islands. The successful completion of such an extensive round of public hearings and the compilation of the report are indeed unprecedented and significant achievements for our National Parliament.

On behalf of the Foreign Relations Committee I wish to thank everyone who assisted or participated in our inquiry in one way or another. As much as I would like to, I cannot name every participant, instead however today I stand on the floor of Parliament to honor and acknowledge all the people throughout Solomon Islands who gave up their time to assist our Committee. We, the Committee members enjoyed our time in your communities and are indeed very thankful for your hospitality and your generosity. In particular we are grateful for the eye opening and rare opportunity for us as parliamentarians to engage directly with you and we have certainly learned much from you. I can only pray that our report will encourage and guide the government and its partners to look into your many concerns and issues.

I also wish to extend my gratitude to the honorable Prime Minister and his government for your financial support to our inquiry, even during a very

difficult financial period, which allowed our Committee to visit every province and bring together many witnesses from all corners of Solomon Islands.

To RAMSI, thank you very much for your support throughout our inquiry. Other committee members would agree with me that the former and current Special Coordinator and the executive personnel of RAMSI have been very helpful and very cooperative and PPF officers we encountered in every province were also very supportive as with our RSIP.

I also acknowledge and thank the Clerk of Parliament, the Parliamentary Secretariat, Hansard, and all officers of the National Parliament Office for their tireless efforts in organizing our public hearings, particularly those out in the provinces in ensuring that committee members and witnesses made it to each hearing venue. We, the committee members witnessed firsthand the logistical nightmare of organizing a hearing in rural areas and we cannot thank you enough for making all those hearings possible. On that note, I also extend our gratitude to the dedicated team of staff who assisted our committee to put together the report and all relevant documents. I am pleased that through the UNDP Parliamentary Strengthening Project, our local staff have been provided technical assistance and further training on report writing and audit to take on this report and project. I further extend my sincere gratitude to all the media offices in Solomon Islands, the broadcasting commission, One News television who followed our Committee everywhere and ensured all our hearings were broadcast and televised for people in our country. Your role in our inquiry has

been very instrumental in achieving the true value of our inquiry in the provinces. Although we went out and seek the views of our people on RAMSI's work and presence in the provinces, it was equally important to our Committee that rural communities have the opportunity to voice their concerns directly to the government and to RAMSI. Media coverage provided that opportunity and I thank those media officers on behalf of the people.

I also wish to thank the Chief Executive Officer, Chairman of the Board and operation staff of Solomon Airlines for the great assistance our committee received from you to get to our hearing venues and back again. As I recall, there were many occasions on which we were almost stranded and do not have the budget to charter a flight and on every such occasion Solomon Airlines gave us special deals, perhaps bending a few rules in the process, but all in good faith and for a good course. Thank you very much Solomon Airlines for your support.

At this juncture, I would like to take the time to thank my fellow committee members who, for almost a year, gave up much of their time and commitments to their families and constituents in order to participate in the inquiry. I am very grateful that despite your commitments you often braved rough plane and boat trips to ensure that our Committee fulfill its mandate. On the same token, I wish to also thank four of our members who during the course of our inquiry left the committee to become Ministers of the Crown. They are the

former Chairman, honorable Laurie Chan, honorable Matthew Wale, honorable Manasseh Maelanga, and honorable Clay Forau. I thank you for your commitment and contributions to the inquiry and I certainly hope the report does justice to your contributions. On a personal note, might I add that the honorable Laurie Chan provided outstanding leadership for most part of the inquiry and when he left after we returned from Makira the other members and myself made every effort to mirror his trademark visionary guidance and enthusiasm.

Finally, on behalf of the Committee I wish to thank all Members of the House for supporting the inquiry. Since Parliament referred the inquiry to our Committee, we came back to the House asking for extensions of our reporting deadline three times and on each occasion received unanimous support from the Members. Thank you for your indulgence and I am very pleased and relieved that I stand here today not to ask for another extension but to present the report. I hope that the report is worth the long wait and I ask Members to extend the same support to our recommendations.

Before I resume my seat, I would like to make some general comments about the report. Today I do not propose to make full observations about the contents of the report, but I have to wait until Parliament considers the report in detail sometimes next week. For now, suffice it is to say, the report is designed

and intended to be representative, fair and balanced. In putting together the report, we tried as best as we can to put across many perspectives, arguments, sentiments about RAMSI and the government, some of which were often conflicting and contradictory and based on where the bulk of the evidence lies with due conclusions, which we hope are reasonable and fair. Given the extent of our inquiry we could not possibly address every single view on our report. No doubt some might feel that the report missed some points or places less emphasis on their view. That unfortunately is inevitable but I strongly feel that the report addresses all the key issues that were raised during the inquiry, even if it does not identify every single person who raised a particular issue.

In terms of the provinces, the Committee also made every effort to do justice to the various concerns of the rural communities, but again we could not address all the concerns of each ward and province. I believe, however, that without naming wards and witnesses, our report draws out the main concerns that were relevant and understanding.

In the report our Committee considered in detail concerns about RAMSI such as issues of sovereignty, the powers and privileges of RAMSI personnel and the legal framework and mandate of RAMSI, to name a few. We place more emphasis on negative perceptions but found that most of these perceptions have

a perfectly legal or acceptable explanation but which most Solomon Islanders are unaware of, hence the negativity.

In our report we also sought to provide further information on aspects of RAMSI and its operations that were either unknown or misunderstood in the hope of educating our people about the full extent, limitations and actual impacts of RAMSI. Throughout the report we also considered the responsibilities of the Solomon Islands Government that it is expected to discharge as an equal and responsible partner in SIG/RAMSI partnership. Contributions and impacts of donors and the Pacific Islands Forum to both RAMSI and the government are also featured in the report. The report explores the issue of the recourses of the ethnic tension, not so much on identifying these, but more on the responsibility of the Solomon Islands Government to address these with the support of its partners including RAMSI. The report concludes with commentary on what our Committee considers to be the outstanding issues that could potentially determine the direction of our partnership with RAMSI and how it takes it on in future. It is my sincere hope that my approaching of the issue of root causes and other outstanding issues on behalf of the majority of Solomon Islanders, the report will assist the government to map out in further progress whatever plans it has to address these issues. I hope that no one expects our report to be the

ultimate solution to all the issues regarding RAMSI in our country. That was certainly never our intention when we started our inquiry.

As I mentioned earlier, we believe that the real value of our inquiry lies in the opportunity that provided our people to voice their concerns and needs, and I am positive that in the course of the inquiry both the government and RAMSI took note of such concerns and needs and even acted on many of these. I am quite sure of this because I noticed that time we started working on our report many of the areas that we planned to make recommendations on have already been addressed or in the process of being addressed.

In closing, Mr Speaker, on behalf of the Committee I sincerely hope that our report would be of assistance to the Solomon Islands Government, both current and future, RAMSI and the Forum in guiding the future roles and responsibilities of RAMSI and in strengthening the relationship and understanding between RAMSI and Solomon Islanders at the grassroots level. With great honour and pleasure, I commend the report to Parliament. Thank you.

BILLS

Bills – First Reading

The Facilitation of International Assistance (Amendment) Bill 2009

The Political Parties Registration and Administration Bill 2009

ADJOURNMENT

Hon Sikua: Mr Speaker, I move that Parliament do now adjourn.

he House adjourned at 10.10 am