

**TUESDAY 26<sup>th</sup> AUGUST 2008**

The Deputy Speaker, Hon Clement Kengava took the Chair at 9:50am.

Prayers.

**ATTENDANCE**

At prayers, all were present with the exception of the Prime Minister, the Ministers for Environment Conservation and Meteorology, Agriculture and Livestock Development, Foreign Affairs, and the Members for Shortlands, Central Makira, Temotu Vatud, West Guadalcanal, North Guadalcanal, Central Honiara, Malaita Outer Islands and South Vella La Vella.

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

**Financial Position – Soltai & Solomon Airlines**

22. Mr **SOGAVARE** to the Minister for Finance & Treasury: Will the Minister inform Parliament on the current financial position of Soltai Fishing Company Limited and Solomon Airlines Limited?

**Hon. RINI:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Leader of Opposition and MP for East Choiseul for the question. The answers are as follows: The current financial position of Soltai Fishing & Processing Limited and the Solomon Airlines Limited could be described as sound and challenging.

Mr. Speaker, with Soltai, despite its current financial position, the company still continues to produce products for its local markets and also overseas markets. It also continues to produce the loin for our export market to Europe.

Mr. Speaker, in regards to the Solomon Airlines, despite its current state of finances, Solomon Airlines is continuing to effectively and efficiently provide its services to the public both internationally and domestic.

**Mr Sogavare:** Just a follow up on the two words “sound” and “challenging”, can the Minister brief Parliament the challenges facing these two companies?

**Hon. Rini:** Mr. Speaker, the challenges currently facing the Solomon Taiyo is financing of the capital expenditure. The tsunami and earthquake in the Western Province caused a big crack on the international wharf, and that facility needs a big capital injection to repair. During the earthquake the floor of the cold storage also cracked and when this happened it reduces the temperature of storing the fish inside. That is another challenge.

Another challenge as well is the inconsistent supply of electricity by SIEA, which is affecting production so because of this the company is thinking of buying a new stand-by generator or another generator to provide power to the factories to increase production.

On the arabushi side, when the tsunami hit, the sea covered the place of making fire needing further capital expenditure to uplift the fire place so that the production of arabushi resumes. Those are the financial challenges that Soltai is facing at the moment, which is financing of capital projects.

With the Solomon Airlines, the current challenges Solomon Airlines is facing at the moment is to enable the company get its own plane to fly the international route and also to get new planes to fly the domestic routes. The challenges of these two companies are mainly to do with financing of their capital projects and not their operations project. Thank you Mr. Speaker

**Mr AGOVAKA:** Mr. Speaker, I have two supplementary questions; one on the Soltai and the other one on the Solomon Airlines.

Can the Minister confirm the number of fishing fleets the Soltai has and the amount of grant the government has given to Soltai to support its work? That is the question on Soltai.

On Solomon Airlines, I noted that Solomon Airlines has an Islander plane that uses a different fuel from the other twin otters. I heard that there is shortage of this fuel. What is the government doing to get fuel for this plane so that service can be provided?

**Hon Rini:** Mr. Speaker, the Soltai has a fleet of about eight pole-and-line boats. Due to the high cost of fuel and repair and maintenance, it is only running two pole-and-line boats and they are doing very well in their catch.

On the Solomon Airlines, I am not aware of any shortage of fuel supply of a particular plane, because the plane is still flying. I think there is no shortage of fuel by the fuel company to Solomon Airlines. Thank you Mr. Speaker

**Mr OTI:** Mr. Speaker, supplementary question. Can the Minister clarify and confirm to Parliament that because of the magnitude of the financial challenges facing Soltai, is the government intending to inject further financial support to Soltai. Secondly, whether the shareholders are able to bear the cost of repairing and bringing back to full operation the infrastructures; whether it is incumbent on the current shareholders? Thirdly, whether it is an option for the government to look at selling certain shares or a number of shares in Soltai to enable potential shareholders recapitalize Soltai in order to meet the challenges mentioned by the Minister.

Those are the three questions. The first one is whether the government envisages further financial support directly in a way of grant or guaranteeing a loan to Soltai.

The second question is whether the shareholders are able to recapitalize and inject more capital into Soltai so that the government does not intervene directly?

The third question is whether it is an option for the government and the shareholders to look at the option of selling Soltai either in its entirety or part of the shares to raise the capital to finance the challenges?

**Hon. Rini:** Mr Speaker, the newly appointed Board of Soltai is looking into these options. It has not yet come back with a report, but as soon as the report reaches us, the ICSI and the Solomon Islands Government are going to discuss the options.

Those options are in place. The government cannot inject anymore funds until the new board comes up with the report on the needs of Soltai and so forth. The government has to wait for the report before it can look at injecting more funds into Soltai. At the moment the government does not have any official report that comes from the board through ICSI seeking further financial assistance.

On the capability of the two shareholders to be able to finance the expansion, both shareholders do not have the capability of doing that, and are still relying on government for assistance.

In looking at new shareholders coming in, this is a matter the Board is currently looking into. Until the report is completed and submitted to us through ICSI, the government will certainly look into the options of selling a few shares to a third party. Thank you, Mr Speaker,.

**Mr ZAMA:** Mr Speaker, these two companies or SOEs are very profitable ones but the problem is they have debts everywhere. Can the Minister inform Parliament how much is Solomon Taiyo's debts and Solomon Airlines debts separately? I am asking the debt levels of these two SOEs?

**Hon. Rini:** Mr Speaker, at the moment I do not have the figures but if the Member really wants the figures then I shall certainly ask the two companies to send me their total debts and I shall distribute that in the pigeonholes of MPs.

**Mr Waipora:** My question is about Soltai. I remember when we were in government I was the only Minister who opposed the \$3million assistance to Soltai because I want to know the real story of Soltai before capital is injected into it.

I want to ask the Minister of Finance whether the board is going to inform you of every problem that Soltai has or a special taskforce independently appointed will look into the problems. Are you going to entirely depend on the board to give you information on the problems besetting Soltai today?

During that time I was thinking of a special independent group to look into the problems of Soltai before \$3million can be given. Do you depend entirely on the Board or may be a special task force? Thank you, Mr Speaker.

**Hon Rini:** Mr Chairman, an independent consultant has already made his report on Soltai, and it is this report that the Board will discuss. An independent report was already done by a private consultant last year.

**Mr Sogavare:** Mr Speaker, I thank the Minister for answering the questions.

### **Six Domestic Airports**

27. **Mr SOGAVARE** to the Minister for Infrastructure Development: What criteria will the Ministry use to determine where to build the six new domestic airports in 2008 and 2009 as outlined in the CNURA Government's policy statement?

**Hon. SOFU:** Mr Speaker, I would like to thank the Leader of Opposition and Member for East Choiseul for this very important question he is asking the Minister of Infrastructure Development.

Mr Speaker, the Ministry of Infrastructure Development is not directly responsible in determining where to build the new six domestic air terminals in 2008 and 2009. The Ministry of Communications and Aviation is fully responsible for aviation policies and decisions relating to aviation.

Mr Speaker, I would like to inform Parliament that the Ministry for Infrastructure Development only assists when there is request for technical specification, design work, scopes of work and when to do the work.

Mr Speaker, the Ministry of Infrastructure Development is also responsible for outsourcing of civil works by putting works on contractual arrangement to contractors to carry out the work.

Mr Speaker, I would also like to inform Parliament that the Ministry of Infrastructure Development has also outsourced work to engineering firms to do survey work.

Mr Speaker, aviation policies, legislation and decisions affecting aviation comes under the responsibility of the Ministry of Communications and Aviation.

**Mr Sogavare:** Thank you very much, Mr Speaker for clarifying that. Since the Minister is here, I seek your indulgence, Mr Speaker, to redirect the question to the Minister of Communications and Aviation to clarify that point.

**Mr Speaker:** Permission granted.

**Hon. LONAMEI:** Mr Speaker, I would like to thank the honorable Leader of Opposition and MP for East Choiseul for redirecting that question to my Ministry.

Mr Speaker, like the Minister of Infrastructure had already mentioned, the Ministry of Infrastructure and my Ministry are working together to try and identify technical areas.

Mr Speaker, my Ministry is looking at the economic value, benefits as criteria for an airfield to be built that and airstrip on that place. But the ultimate directive will be from the government who will determine the priority sites of maximum economic benefit to the country. The criteria and economic benefits will be put to the Cabinet and

Cabinet will decide on which sites are giving maximum benefits to the country as the criteria of building an airstrip.

**Hon. Fono:** Mr Speaker, additional information to that question that the two Ministers were trying to answer. The government will only decide in consultation with the provincial governments. Provinces also need to identify where their priorities are in terms of their provincial plans in order for Cabinet to make a final decision on where to build the airstrips.

**Mr OTI:** Mr Speaker, I thank the three Ministers including the Acting Prime Minister for that clarification. In furtherance of that particular policy there is an allocation this year of \$3million for provincial airfields.

Can the Ministers concerned confirm whether that provision is for the six new airports that are envisaged in the policy plan or are they for existing aviation infrastructure? In furtherance should it be an allocation towards that policy intention by the government, can the Ministers confirm where are they now after eight months in terms of working towards, as I did not find, at least some of the considerations referred to by the Minister of Aviation, notwithstanding that it still needs to come to Cabinet. I just want a progress report on the implementation of that policy to date before coming to Cabinet to make a final consideration of where to locate those six aviation infrastructures.

**Hon. Lonamei:** Mr Speaker, of the airstrips my Ministry is working on, as well as waiting for the budget to be passed, the Ministry at this stage will still do Seghe, Munda, Fera and Renbel. The airstrip for Temotu will either be built at the end of the year or the beginning of next year.

**Mr Waipora:** Mr Speaker, all the criteria under the sun mentioned by the Minister of Communication and Aviation are all met by West Makira Constituency and Makira/Ulawa Province. All the technical people such as civil engineer of the government, the Aviation have completed their work. Even the economic benefits of an airstrip have also been taken into consideration. This is the second time I hear the same answer from the Minister.

Mr Speaker, Deputy Prime Minister, keep quiet. I want you to once again consider our airport. You should not have the thinking that I must come over to you before you build it. Everything has been completed.

Are you going to build our airport because our provincial government and the government have already given their approval? I want to know because the Prime Minister told me outside here that it is still on. I am not sure why different ones were counted when his boss, the Prime Minister told me that my airport is going to be built this year. Thank you.

**Hon Sofu:** The Minister of Aviation as well as the Acting Prime Minister made it very clear today that there are certain things needs considering when it comes to constructing of airfields. Let us say the provincial governments and other stakeholders need to contribute towards important infrastructures such as airstrips. This particular airstrip the Honorable Member, my good friend for West Makira is talking about was also taken onboard. I would like to inform Parliament that the Ministry of Communications and Aviation and the Ministry of Infrastructure Development are working together on the proposed airstrip. Thank you.

**Mr Zama:** Mr Speaker, I would like to know the rationale and the politics of the government on why it wants to build six new airstrips. The price of fuel is very expensive now and many airfields throughout Solomon Islands, the domestic ones are uneconomical. The only economical routes are Auki, Munda and Gizo. The Solomon Airlines has problem with money and planes.

I think the Government should not be thinking of building any new airstrips at all because even the existing ones are closing down because the government and Solomon Airlines cannot maintain them.

What is the rationale or reason why the government is intending to build six new airstrips?

**Mr Lonamei:** Mr Speaker, I think the rationale behind it is that the government wants to improve infrastructures throughout the country. Although fuel is getting expensive now, I think operators will continue operating and people will still travel. I therefore think it is good to put infrastructures and hopefully when costs come down in the future everything will flow as back to normal again.

**Hon Sofu:** Mr Speaker, I would like to add on to what the Minister for Communication and Aviation said that upgrading work on existing airstrips will be done first before constructing of new ones.

**Mr Taneko:** Mr Speaker, supplementary question. Mbalalae is one of the very historical airstrips. It is historical because 517 soldiers built that airstrip, and I have contacts of their families. That airstrip can make a good tourism promotion in our nation.

The question is, does the Minister have any plans to rehabilitate or upgrade that airstrip as it is historical in its sense and therefore can be a tourism destination bringing economy to our country?

**Hon Lonamei:** Mr Speaker, that is the type of airstrips we would to promote. As I have said already said because of the very late passage of our budget in April and that is why we are restricting it to a few. But by the time the 2009 budget is passed in November this year, airstrips such as the one the MP for West Makira and the MP for Shortlands are talking about will be catered for in next year's budget. We only need time to do the work. Thank you.

**Mr Oti:** Last supplementary question, Mr Speaker. Besides the site in South Makira as confirmed by the Ministers and as put forward by the MP for West Makira, apart from that site in terms of technical, engineering and its economic assessment, where are the other five. Can the Minister confirm where are they and what stages have they reached like the one in West Makira?

**Hon Lonamei:** Mr Speaker, the other five for 2009 and 2010 are not listed here but the Ministry is now working on the sites so that they can advise the government on which areas we should move to next.

**Mr Soalaoui:** Mr Speaker, further supplementary question to the Minister. Whilst I appreciate what the Minister has explained, I think when we consider the economics of building airstrips and the government providing access to inaccessible areas, I believe some of the economic opportunities that can help our economy are there but those areas are not seen because they are not accessible.

In terms of the criteria used in determining where to build airstrips, the way we see it at the moment is that if stand alone criteria such as the economics of building an airport is used then we are forgetting our responsibility of providing access to the whole parts of this country.

I would like my good Minister to inform Parliament because listening to what you have said, they are not really airports and as a strong supporter of the government, I could hear Temotu not included in the list mentioned by the Minister.

Some of the airports I heard as being considered, Mr Speaker, at least if they need to be maintained but ships too usually go to those places.

Some parts of this country are too difficult to reach because of no airports and no ships too. Since the two responsible Ministers are here, I would like my two good ministers to inform Parliament that in your consideration of the airports, you must think of what is going to happen to the people where even a ship and a plane cannot reach them.

Mr Speaker, I ask this supplementary question as somebody coming from areas affected. I think it is the responsibility of the government, not only to think about money but think about providing access to some of our places in the country. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

**Hon Lonamei:** Mr Speaker, I think I have already stated today that after the four (4) airports of Seghe, Munda, Fera and Renbel I mentioned today are built, the next and first one will be Temotu.

I want to assure the Honorable Member that the next airport we will take into consideration because Temotu is faraway, priority will go to them. That is why I said that it could be at the end of this year or early next year.

**Mr Speaker:** Thank you Minister. I think the question has been well covered of the rationale behind it.

**Mr Sogavare:** Mr Speaker, I would like to thank the government for trying to answer our questions. Mr Speaker, it shows very clearly that we are not properly organized for the projects, but I thank the government for answering the questions.

### **Prospecting License for Nickel Mining**

85. **Mr WAIPORA** to the Minister for Mines, Energy & Rural Electrification: What is the Government's current position on the issuance of the prospecting license for nickel mining on San Jorge, Jejevo and Takata in Isabel?

**Hon HUNIEHU:** Mr Speaker, I thank the questioner for the question. The issuance of prospecting licenses for the two legal prospects on Isabel and San Jorge Islands namely Takata and San Jorge have not been made as of date due to the pending legal cases that we all know until they are cleared by the High Court of Solomon Islands. The only issuance of a prospecting license PL 03/2007 has been made for Jejevo in the early 2007 for a period of three years by the previous government.

I wish to inform Parliament that this made the whole package totally uneconomical when one of the tenement areas issued a license to a company in Australia. It is the current government's policy objective to place the Isabel Nickel project on international tender. This however cannot be done unless the legal issues still pending are cleared, and the outcome of which must be on the government's favor.

The main reason to go on the international tender process is to provide opportunity for the Solomon Islands Government to ensure that a proper, competent and genuine developer is identified and formally engaged to develop this long known Nickel prospect in Isabel Province.

The three deposits to compose the international tender are San George, Takata and Jejevo. Unfortunately, a prospecting license PL 03/2007 was issued in March 2007 to Pacific Rim which changed its name in the late 2007 to Arc Nickel SI Limited. This PL is currently being reviewed by the Attorney General's Chambers with the hope of cancellation.

The granting was suspiciously done under the last government's tenure. Arc Nickel is a locally incorporated company and is 100% fully owned by the Nickel Mines Limited Brisbane based in Australia. Tender preparations including international tender documents etc. are now completed and ready to be proceeded with when all legal issues are cleared.

The budget for the program is under the development budget amounting SBD\$2million, unfortunately these funds are not yet accessible as of to date. Once prospecting licenses are granted it is the formal position of the Ministry that a mine be developed between 2 to 3 years after PL's are issued.

The complications that hinder the international tender process are as follows:-



- The High Court case by Sumitomo Mining SI Limited against the Mineral Board's decision for not extending its letter of intent in the late 2007 over the San Jorge and Takata nickel prospecting areas.
- The Jejevo Nickel prospecting area was already under a prospecting license questionably issued by the Minister.
- The matter has been referred to the Attorney General's Chambers for review with the object of revoking the issuance.
- The INCO data collected in the 1960's by the previous company that had extensively explored and studied the deposits are yet to be retrieved from an unauthorized custodian. This referred data is absolutely essential to compose the international tender package, without which the international tender cannot be proceeded with. Attempt to pursue the matter amicably is continuing.

I also wish to inform this House that the Ministry has been in contact with the suppliers of those information, INCO itself in Canada and Brazil to provide the Solomon Islands Government with a copy of that report. We believe that this report should be in the hands of the government as soon as practically possible. Thank you.

**Mr AGOVAKA:** Mr Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister, what is the procedure of obtaining a prospecting license?

**Hon Huniehu:** Mr Speaker, under the Mines and Mineral Act the Ministry can review a prospecting license if it is not performing or in other words if it is not carrying out any active exploration in the tenement areas in which licenses have been issued. Thank you.

**Mr Agovaka:** Mr Speaker, in relation to prospecting gold, for you to be able to renew your prospecting license you have to first of all obtain an access agreement with landowners. Is that the same procedure you are using on the nickel?

**Hon Huniehu:** Yes, definitely. You have to have some access rights, arrangement and agreement with local landowners.

**Mr WAIPORA:** Mr Speaker, therefore does that mean that the company with the three MPs and the Premier who went to Australia are the ones prospecting at this time?

My question, Mr Speaker, is that I know that there was a visit by leaders of Isabel to Australia. I just want to know because I am confused whether the group that did the prospecting now was the one the three MPs of Isabel as well as the Premier went to identify in Australia. They went to Australia and identified a company there.

**Hon Huniehu:** I did not quite clearly hear what the MP said but only those with prospecting licenses can do prospecting in the tenement areas. If the government or the Ministry does not give you a prospecting license then you cannot do prospecting.

This is exactly the case with the two remaining highly prospecting areas in Isabel. It means that the one that license was issued for, only those with a license can do prospecting. At the moment there are no activities done on the osland of Isabel as yet.

**Mr Sogavare:** Mr Speaker, just a supplementary question. The Minister made reference to legal issues. I would like to find out one particular issue and how the government handled it. It came to the late notice of the previous government that a particular local company working with an Australian interest had been issued some form of license to do prospecting on those deposits and have actually landed some heavy machines on those places and have done some work already. For some reasons, they have cancelled their license and this has become a legal issue which came to the late notice of the last government.

I just want to find out how the government has handled that particular issue or whether the government is aware of that particular legal issue.

**Hon. Huniehu:** Mr. Speaker, I think the the Leader of the Opposition was referring to happened a few years back where a local company was issued a prospecting license and has been conducting some excavation works already.

Since that happened a few years ago, we have been talking with the local company to see whether we can negotiate an out of arrangement with them if they have any legal issues to raise with the government. We have been in active discussions and I believe that some amicable resolutions can be found.

**Mr. BOYERS:** Just for clarification purposes. It would be appreciated if the Minister could supply to the House a copy of all the companies that have been issued with prospecting licenses in the past.

It is very confusing to note that there are companies here and there and no company names were really mentioned. For clarification purposes, could that be presented to the House?

**Hon. Huniehu:** I think the best I can do here is to provide the prospecting licenses in the pigeonholes. I think the list can be provided. I think the intention of the questioner, his question has been answered as far as this Minister is concerned.

**Mr. WALE:** Supplementary question Mr. Speaker. I am not sure whether it is true but can the Minister confirm whether the same data that is in the custody of INCO in Canada, a copy of which was used to be in the Ministry is in the custody of someone locally. Can the Minister confirm and if that is the case the legality of such custody in private hands of a national asset. What steps are being taken by the Ministry to retrieve this data?

**Hon. Huniehu:** I can confirm that those documents are in the custody of a local entrepreneur. I think that also relates to the question previously raised by the Leader of

Opposition, in which we are actively negotiating with this person to have these documents retrieved from him amicably. If we do not then our best option is the one I have just mentioned. We have been contacting INCO directly in Canada and Brazil to have a new set of document provided to the government.

**Mr Waipora:** Mr Speaker, I must thank the Minister for answering my question.

86. **Mr. WAIPORA** to the Minister for Fisheries and Marine Resources:

- (a) What is the work progress in establishing two tuna loin factories in 2009?
- (b) Related to tuna loin factories development are pump boats. When will the government acquire these pump boats, how many and where will they be allocated to?

**Hon. LENI:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the MP for West Makira. Since May this year, the Ministry has been working with the Malaita Provincial Government to look into the Suava land in which the government and the province think as the appropriate place to set up the tuna loin factory. So far, survey work has been done with the Malaita Province, the Central Government, the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources and the interested investor. The survey is done on land including water sources and also hydrographic survey done on the seabed in Suava Bay.

What we achieved so far is that Malaita Province and the Ministry have already identified seven landowning tribes and groups in the area and negotiations between the Malaita Provincial Government and the Ministry is continuing with the landowners.

The NFD and Tri-Marine, the two interested investors are also involved in the discussions that have taken place already. On Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> August this year the Ministry has already held a one day workshop with landowners, interested investors and Malaita Province on how this project will progress.

My Ministry has also set up the Suava Bay Taskforce to work with the government through the Ministry of Fisheries on things yet to be done so as to come to the final recommendations to the government for Cabinet approval.

So far, we have already done about more than 50% of groundwork that is needed in giving assurance to the investor, the Malaita Province and the Central Government. Work is progressing and we are well in track with the Ministry's work program to this effect.

Mr Speaker, in regards to pump boats, in May this year the NFD purchased three pump boats and these pump boats are in Noro this time. There is need to recruit co-crew components from the Philippines; six of them, three for each pump boats so that they train our local crews. Of these three crews, one will be a fishing master and another one a chief engineer in each of the boat.

As of yesterday, the government through the Department of Immigration has approved the permits and related documents of these people allowing them to come into the country. Three of them are already in the country and are now in the boats at

Noro. Three are yet to arrive and the information the Ministry received that as of yesterday approval was made by the Immigration department, and so they should arrive in the country at the end of this month or early next month.

On the last part of question on how many will and where will they be allocated to. This question is too early for the Ministry to give an answer to the Honorable Member of Parliament for West Makira.

**Mr Sogavare:** Mr Speaker, supplementary question. I think I might not have heard it properly but there is also intention to build one loin factory somewhere at the Lungga/Tenaru land. What is the progress on that one?

**Hon Leni:** Mr Speaker, tomorrow there will be a meeting with the Guadalcanal Province and the landowning groups of Tenaru for this intended loin factory to be established just beyond the Alligator Creek at the Tenaru land.

The same groundwork we did with Suava Bay with Malaita Province and the landowning groups will start tomorrow with the Guadalcanal Province and the landowning groups in here. This will be a repeat of the same process done at Suava. Things are going on well now with the Province and the landowning groups. The outcome of the meeting tomorrow will give us more details to inform the Government as to how we are progressing with this proposal in Guadalcanal.

**Mr Waipora:** Mr Speaker, that is the information I want to know. Only Malaita Province and Guadalcanal Province I understand and so we are now seeing the priority of government on where the loin factories will be located. I would like to thank the Honorable Minister for your answers.

**Mr Speaker:** Honorable Members that concludes our question session for today. This Parliament is now suspended until 1:30pm this afternoon. Thank you.

*Sitting suspended for lunch break until 1.30 pm*

## **BILLS**

### Bills – Second Reading

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Bill 2008

**Hon IDURI:** Mr. Speaker, I move that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Bill 2008 be now read the second time.

Sir, national reconciliation and healing is our priority in our efforts to foster sustainable peace and promote national unity in our beloved country. The establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission by legislation is in pursuant of this important policy.

The purpose of this Bill is to set up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission that would be a forum in which both victims and perpetrators of our recent ethnic violence could share their experiences and that would help us get a clearer understanding of the past in order to facilitate healing and true reconciliation with our communities.

Mr. Speaker, the TRC is set against the background of the conflict that erupted on our shores between our very own people. While direct violence was between those of Guadalcanal and Malaita origin, the whole nation, our people of all provinces were directly or indirectly victimized, suffered losses and injustices in various ways. Until today, many of our people are still trying to rebuild their lives after the events of our recent past.

Sir, what makes this Bill so important is our commitment to prevent those terrible events from happening again because the violence resulted in loved ones being killed, persons mistreated, harassed, abducted and women raped. Atrocities were committed in certain instances of violation of human rights and the commission of heinous crimes and abuses against human rights or international humanitarian laws and standards. Sir, hatred, fear injustice, ethnic divisions are negative impacts our country is still struggling to address 10 years on. Unresolved, these problems remain as threats to all our peace efforts.

Mr. Speaker, Solomon Islands has made great progress with the help of our donor partners in rebuilding and re-strengthening state and democratic institutions and also ensures the rule of law and order prevails.

Sir, the improvement in law and order is commendable although we are mindful that the security and peace we now enjoy remains fragile. Restoring and rebuilding relationships and trust amongst and between our people is most important.

This Bill also acknowledges the numerous traditional and church reconciliation processes that are taking place within our affected communities. This ongoing community reconciliations centre around personal, group and community levels within both Malaita and Guadalcanal Islands and also extend between the island groups. This Bill will not replace the restorative justice mechanisms but is an important component to these mechanisms and processes in bringing about lasting peace and healing to our people.

Sir, our challenge today is that true a meaningful reconciliation that would enable our nation to move forward, however, cannot be achieved without true forgiveness and healing, one that is premised on acknowledging the truth of what happened during those dark years of our history.

Mr. Speaker, it was for the purpose of establishing the Commission that a TRC steering committee was appointed in March 2007, tasked to review the subject matter of truth commissions, the purpose, work, success and failures of TRCs in other countries and to consult widely within Solomon Islands for a TRC most suitable to our context and circumstances.

Sir, this Bill is the result of that work, which embraces the views of our people to ensure that the TRC addresses our own contextual issues and meet our goals. The

committee has completed its work and also received very positive comments from the International Centre for Transitional Justice and donor partners on the various drafts before the final blessing of Cabinet.

Mr. Speaker, a TRC for Solomon Islands was first promoted by our civil society group through the Solomon Islands Christian Association in 2003. Sir, the Solomon Islands Christian Association continues to support the establishment of the commission. Our people agreed for the TRC to be a Forum where victims, particularly vulnerable groups such as women and children, some of whom remain traumatized to this day, could tell their stories to ensure that future gross human rights violation and armed conflicts should never again happen on our shores.

Sir, many young people spoke passionately of a TRC Bill that is commended to future generations. Through its recommendations it would safeguard the country from similar violent events of 1998 to 2003 that had deprived many of their rights of a decent future.

Sir, reformed perpetrators too, who have been through our justice system and still searching for personal healing and closure, see a TRC as a formal, but non-judicial, independent body that could listen and record their experiences.

This Bill seeks to establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission by legislation that would provide the opportunity in reaching out to the many victims and perpetrators too in an attempt to understand the extent and impact of our past violence as well as the causes and consequences.

Sir, ultimately, a TRC through its report may hopefully prevent further abuses and violence through specific recommendations and policy reforms that the government is required to address to bring about national reconciliation and healing.

Sir, overall the Bill is simple and quite straight forward although the Honorable House would appreciate the sensitivity of the Bill.

Mr Speaker, for public information, I will briefly summarize the specifics of the Bill. The Bill is preceded with a preamble, which in brief explains the circumstances that necessitated the enactment of the Bill as an Act of Parliament.

Part I on preliminary matters sets out the definitions of key words and terms in the Bill. Part II provides for the establishment of the commission and its duration as a body corporate making this a legal entity with certain statutory rights, obligations, duties and functions.

Sir, importantly, the nomination of commissioners is by public nomination. A national selection committee is chaired by the Chief Justice.

Sir, the duration of the Commission is initially for one year excluding a preparatory period of three months, with a possible extension for a further period not exceeding one year. The commission's work will focus on the period from January 1998 to July 2003. The TRC is a new concept here in Solomon Islands and wide public awareness programs will be conducted.

Sir, Part III is the most important because it specifies the objects, functions, mode of operation and powers of the Commission. The principle object of the Commission is to promote national unity, reconciliation and peace. This objective will be achieved

inter-alia by carrying out investigations, gathering information and conducting research into events, causes and effects of the social crisis, hearing from victims their stories in public etc...

The power in carrying out its work include the issuing of summons and subpoenas; engaging all stakeholders in the reconciliation process, examining the antecedents and causes of the conflict, and to examine and investigate the extent of human rights violations that occurred during the period from 1<sup>st</sup> January 1998 to 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2003.

Sir, the Commission's function also include gathering of information by calling for reports, records etc., from any source, including governmental authorities, visit any establishment, enter land or premises for purpose of obtaining information. In performing its functions, the Commission may seek assistance from traditional, religious leaders including community and political leaders to facilitate its public sessions.

Mr Speaker, making statement by the public to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is done voluntarily to safeguard witnesses or other persons who appear before the Commission. No statement made orally or in writing before the Commission will be admissible against such person in any proceedings. Witness could be cautioned and advised to refrain from making any statement that would incriminate them and other persons.

The Commission in exercising its functions is vested with powers of the High Court. The Bill also requires all persons, including Members and officers of the government and provincial governments to cooperate with the Commission in order to fulfill its mandate.

Mr Speaker, Part IV provides for administrative matters such as staff of the Commission, provision for the appointment of committees, and most significantly guarantees the independence of the commission. The Commission will also appoint committees to assist in performing its functions.

Sir, like any commissions, financial resources are important for its smooth operation. Part V is common financial provisions, which deals with funds, accounts and audits. The Bill provides for funds of the Commission to include money appropriated by Parliament and any other source. It also provides for annual audits by the Auditor General or his nominee.

Mr Speaker, the recommendations of the Commission as an important outcome of the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Part VI of the Bill requires the Commission to submit a report, together with its recommendations at the completion of its mandate to the Prime Minister. The report must set out the findings and the recommendations of the Commission, which must contain reform and other measures needed to achieve the object of the Commission. The Prime Minister on receipt is required to lay the report before Parliament and the report is made available to the public.

Sir, the implementation of the recommendation is crucial. The Government is required to establish a designated body/unit to monitor the implementation of the recommendations. It requires the government as far as practicable to implement the

recommendations of the report and make resources available in order to achieve this object. The Commission is to be dissolved after three months of the submission of the report and the administrative activities that need to be taken prior to such dissolution.

Sir, Part VI also explains and put beyond doubt that certain aspects of the work of the Commission is not to be taken as being the basis for certain rights and benefits to be claimed by individuals.

Finally, Mr Speaker, Schedule 1 is about the appointment and work of the National Selection Committee and the nominating procedures for Commissioners, both nationals and non-nationals. Schedule 2 specifies the membership and terms and conditions of appointment and the internal procedure and other aspects of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a working body.

In conclusion, Mr Speaker, I have covered the general main features of this Bill in underpinning the work of the TRC for Solomon Islands. The TRC Bill is an important part of government strategy to achieve national reconciliation and healing.

The honorable House is advised to deliberate constructively on the contents of the Bill as it is simple and straightforward, yet an important Bill for an important commission, whose outcome and work will contribute greatly in advancing our national reconciliation and healing process.

Sir, I commend this TRC Bill to the House and I beg to move.

**Mr Speaker:** Honorable Members the motion that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Bill 2008 be now read the second time has been moved by the Honorable Minister. I understand he wants to say something further.

**Hon. Iduri:** Mr Speaker, to allow Members more time to prepare for debate and to consider the Bill and Legislation Committee's Report on this Bill, which I believe will be tabled shortly, I move that debate on this bill be now adjourned until the next sitting day. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

*Debate on the Bill adjourned to the next sitting day.*

**Hon. Fono:** Mr Speaker, I beg to move that Parliament do now adjourn.

*The House adjourned at 2.30 pm.*