

**Remarks of the MSG Director General at the Opening of the MSG Prime Minister's Cup
Korman Stadium, Port Vila, Vanuatu
16 September 2022**

[Acknowledgements]

Prime Minister, Hon. Bob Loughman Weibur, MP
Members of the Council of Ministers
Chiefs of Vanuatu
Australian High Commissioner
Chinese Ambassador
Departmental Heads
Members of the Diplomatic Corps
Visiting Heads of our Sporting Ministries and Bodies from the MSG
MSG Soccer Teams
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

I stand proud before you today, as the Director General of the MSG Secretariat, having just assumed office recently (two weeks in fact), to see the culmination of a dream by our MSG Leaders, to revive the Melanesian Cup under the banner of the Melanesia Spearhead Group Prime Ministers Cup.

It is fitting that we are launching this revived tournament in Port Vila.

I am told that the former Melanesia Cup was found, collecting dust, in the cupboards at the MSG Secretariat, and its discovery precipitated efforts for the revival of this football tournament.

On the basis of briefs that I have received, it has been an arduous and protracted exercise, just trying to get this Prime Minister's Cup Tournament up and running. The challenges were compounded by the Covid 19 pandemic and its heavy toll on our economies.

But, we are here now – and ready to kick off.

Just this week, meeting at our MSG Secretariat Office, the MSG Sports Officials, with the prior sanction of our technical officials of the National Football Federations, approved the Tournament Regulations, thus giving the final official greenlight for the Tournament to start.

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I am advised that the last tournament, under the previous configuration, was held in Fiji. I am reliably informed too that, out of the previous seven tournaments held since 1988, Fiji has won five (5) with Solomon Islands and Vanuatu winning the other two.

I understand, a similar competition, the Wantok Cup, was conceived in 2008. This Cup was played on three occasions, but was abandoned in 2011.

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I make these observations to emphasise that all of us, in MSG, owe a debt of gratitude to the Vanuatu Prime Minister and the Vanuatu Government and its people for braving the challenges of hosting the inaugural, the first, Prime Minister's Cup Tournament - and taking up the responsibility to organize this event. The first is always the most difficult to organize.

It is with regret I note the absence of the other MSG Leaders at today's occasion due to competing schedules and prior commitments. I can only urge that the next one will see all of them in attendance.

I join Vanuatu, and on behalf of the MSG family, welcome our soccer dignitaries, officials, football teams and supporters to Port Vila for this tournament.

I want to thank all who started this revival project from 2013 up to today and those who will manage this tournament in the next two weeks.

It is pleasing to see this iconic football tournament revived after some 22 years of it dormant.

This tournament comes at a crucial time when the world football body, FIFA, has approved one direct entry of a team from Oceania to the prestigious FIFA World Cup beginning in 2026.

The MSG PMs cup has one noble objective. We want to get one of our member countries' into this world football tournament. What better way to begin this effort than through this Tournament.

It is fitting that the theme of this inaugural MSG Prime Ministers Cup is "ignite the spirit of Melanesian through sports" and the trophy would constitute a solid "volcanic rock" formed by "volcano explosion". So, let us use this Prime Minister's Cup as a platform to further consolidate a solid Melanesian bond (like the volcanic rock) and explode into the international soccer scene as credible Melanesian World Cup contenders.

The MSG Sports Committee meeting this week reaffirmed the original desire of our MSG Leaders to also have a women's version in the next Tournament. Our technical teams will work on details and shall make the necessary announcements in due course.

The Committee is also discussing other sporting codes, to be organized, under similar arrangements. As well, similar discussions are being had on arrangements under the ambit of the bigger Melanesia Games, with a heavy focus on youth.

As the Prime Minister of Vanuatu so eloquently stated yesterday, sports is a critical enabler of positive human development. When we have an active, healthy, productive and stable youth population, it is a prerequisite to other developments.

On behalf of our MSG Leaders, I welcome you all to this MSG Prime Ministers Cup.

I wish the teams all the very best. I ask for good sportsmanship to be displayed during the Tournament. The Melanesian spirit of brotherhood and togetherness must pervade our conduct throughout the Tournament.

To conclude, I also thank all sponsors.

A special thank you is owed to the Vanuatu government and people and the Vanuatu Football Federation and the LOC.

I thank also the Australian Government that has partnered with the Vanuatu government to make sure that this Tournament does actually take place and the financial viability of the tournament is assured.

All the very best. Thank you. Merci Beaucoup, Tank yu tru, Teng yu tumas.