



MSG Secretariat **Secretariat du GFLM**

Melanesian Spearhead Group | Le Groupe Fer de Lance Mélanésien

Remarks of the MSG Director General at the Finals of the MSG Prime Minister's Cup **Korman Stadium, Port Vila, Vanuatu** **30 September 2022**

Prime Minister, Hon. Bob Loughman Weibur, MP
Members of the Council of Ministers
Members of Parliament of Vanuatu
Chiefs of Vanuatu
Heads of the Diplomatic Missions accredited to Vanuatu
Departmental Heads
Members of the Diplomatic Corps
Church Leaders
Visiting Heads of our Sporting Ministries and Bodies from the MSG
MSG Soccer Teams
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is only fitting and proper that we acknowledge and thank the traditional landowners on whose land we are holding this MSG Prime Minister's Cup Tournament.

Fifteen days ago, on 16 September, I stood here with the Prime Minister and the Australian High Commissioner, to officially launch the Tournament.

I looked across the field and saw the flame of the tournament lit. And it has been burning whole throughout the tournament. What an important reminder for all of us to keep the spirit of Melanesia alive throughout our lives.

As I stated at the official launch of the tournament, all of us, in MSG, owe a debt of gratitude to the Vanuatu Prime Minister, the Vanuatu Government and its people for hosting this inaugural, the very first, MSG Prime Minister's Cup Tournament.

Prime Minister, looking around the Korman Stadium today, a packed stadium, no one will deny, that you have definitely ignited the spirit of Melanesia through sports – in this case soccer.

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.

What better way to begin this crusade, to have one of our own teams, a Melanesian Team, have a direct passage through to the FIFA World Cup then through this MSG PMs Cup Tournament.

I have watched all the games played and I am convinced that a direct entry is not beyond the reach of our MSG Soccer Teams. We can and we will, with more competition at this level.

The exemplary technical level of the first game between New Caledonia and Solomons was second to none at the international level. The mental fortitude and “never say die attitude” displayed by Fiji to come from two goals behind to draw the game against the Solomon Islands is what wins games in the international scene. The tenacity of the Vanuatu Development Team to hold their nerves and force a draw with the Solomons Team, and triumph eventually during the penalty shoot-out serves notice that we are there with the best.

We must keep this tournament alive.

Last night at Warwick Hotel, the Deputy Prime Minister, standing in for the Prime Minister, unveiled the trophy, an impressive and unique trophy, for the MSG Prime Minister’s Cup. It constitutes a solid “volcanic rock” - formed, as we all know, as a byproduct from a cauldron of competitive and friction between forces of nature within the earth’s crust.

I can only say, Prime Minister, you and your Government have outdone yourselves.

The symbolism is so profound. And so apt!

You began with a flame to ignite the spirit of Melanesia through this tournament. You then follow-up with a solid “volcanic rock” formed by volcanic activity. It is the best manifestation of the strategic objectives of this tournament.

Through this tournament you have already started the process of consolidating the Melanesian bonds of solidarity, and unity of purpose, to be as rock solid as the Volcanic Rock that makes up our trophy.

Through this tournament, and the intense competition between our Teams, Melanesia will explode unto the World Football Cup scene as a solid and credible force. We will be credible Oceania Confederation World Cup direct entry contenders. Melanesian Soccer Teams will no longer be pushovers in the Oceania Confederation.

A decision has already been made for our women-folk to be included in the next MSG PM’s Cup Tournament.

Officials are also discussing other sporting codes, to be organized, under similar arrangements as the MSG PM’s Cup. 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 has so eloquently stated on many occasions, sports is a critical enabler of positive human development. Let us leverage the powerful pull of sports to address health, youth, gender equity and other development challenges confronting our countries.

At this stage, I would like to thank all sponsors, in the different categories, without whose benevolence this MSG Prime Minister’s Cup Tournament would not be possible. Bear with me as I mention their names: **Platinum Sponsor** – Warwick Hotel, **Gold Sponsors** – Chinese Embassy, Vodafone, iCount, NBK Financial Company, Classic Sign and Colorite Design & Printing, and **Supporting Sponsors** – CCECC, Airports Vanuatu, Pacific Suppliers, Namba 1 Wota, Origin Gas, and MK Restaurant. For the **Government Ministries**, you all know who you are.

A special thank you, as I mentioned earlier, is owed to the Vanuatu government and people, the Vanuatu Football Federation and the LOC for all the logistical and administrative arrangements and, more so, for the exemplary hospitality.

I thank also the Australian Government, that has readily partnered with the Vanuatu government, to make sure that this Tournament does actually take place. Amidst some anxious moments of uncertainty in the initial stages of preparations, the Australian Government's firm commitment of support ensured the financial viability of the tournament. But let me say this, by this generous gesture, Australia has reinforced its membership of the Melanesian group within the Pacific Islands Forum set-up. We at the MSG Secretariat look forward to welcoming our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island brothers in our MSG sanctioned sporting fixtures and cultural activities.

We are about to witness the culmination of two weeks of intense competition. The players afforded us an opportunity to enjoy the display of incredible sports talent and intricate soccer skills. I wish the two remaining teams all the very best.

On a lighter note, has anyone noticed that the two Teams that opened the Tournament will be the same ones that will close the Tournament. Is it coincidence or is it fate! I will leave that to you to decide.

May the best team win. Thank you!