



MSG Secretariat
Secretariat du GFLM

Melanesian Spearhead Group | Le Groupe Fer de Lance Mélanésien

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**BRIEF REMARKS OF THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF MSG AT OPENING
CEREMONY OF THE 7th MACFEST**

Saralana, Port Vila, Vanuatu

Wednesday 19th July 2023

(Pleasantries)

President of the Republic of Vanuatu

Speaker of the National Parliament of Vanuatu

Chief Justice of Vanuatu

Chair of the MSG and Prime Minister of Vanuatu

Deputy Prime Minister

Opposition Leader of Vanuatu

President of the Malvatumauri Council of Chiefs

Chief Teriki Paunimanu Mantoï Kalsakau III

Members of the Council of Chiefs

Members of the Council of Ministers

Members of Parliament of Vanuatu

Former Heads of State and Government of Vanuatu

Mayor of Port Vila

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Church Elders

Heads and Members of the visiting MSG MACFEST Delegations

Senior Officials from Vanuatu and MSG Governments

People of Vanuatu

Good afternoon to all of you.

The Melanesian Arts and Culture Festival (MACFEST) is a cultural event, extensively infused with custom and tradition, and it is only proper that we acknowledge with thanks the customary Landowners on whose land we are celebrating this big Melanesian cultural event.

Earlier today, we paid a visit to Chief Teriki Paunimanu Mantoï Kalsakau III of Ifira to request his permission, as well as that of his people, to allow all visiting delegations from MSG countries, and the other Melanesian communities invited to participate in the 7th MACFEST, the liberty to display and celebrate our Melanesian customs, traditions and culture in the next 13 days.

I feel proud and good that we did this customary gesture. This is the Melanesian way. This is the Melanesian sign of respect. And this is the right and correct way.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank the Vanuatu Government and the Local Organising Committee for all the arrangements they have made so far to enable the hosting of this grand cultural event. This has come about despite the fact that COVID 19 and the two devastating tropical cyclones had dealt Vanuatu a big blow to its economy and the financial resources available to it. I wish to acknowledge also the contribution and active participation of the Chiefs in organizing the MACFEST.

At this juncture, I wish to also thank all MSG participating contingents for travelling to Vanuatu for the 7th MACFEST. I note one contingent will join us later in the week.

I thank too the Vanuatu Provincial contingents that have gathered here in Port Vila to join in the festivities. My appreciation goes to the Torres Strait Islanders that have graciously accepted the invitation to participate in the 7th MACFEST.

The MACFEST is the MSGs flagship event in our four-year cultural calendar. Vanuatu last hosted MACFEST in 2002 and will wait for another twenty years to host another MACFEST.

MACFEST provides us the medium to promote, preserve, and demonstrate respect for Melanesian cultures, identity and simply showcase to the world who we are.

Our shared culture and customs binds us as Melanesians. Care must be taken not allow this opportunity of the MACFEST to be used for other purposes.

For every new MACFEST, we should always build on the successes of the previous ones. Expectations are that this 7th MACFEST should be bigger and better than the last one. And I think Vanuatu has done it. At the end of this festival, I have no doubt that everyone will return home convinced it is bigger and better.

In my statement at the launch of the 7th MACFEST preparations, I challenged the Organisers NOT to dial down on the coverage of the Melanesian representation at this MACFEST. You certainly have not disappointed me there and I commend you for it.

I note and commend the Vanuatu Government for organizing dancing, bands, theatre, writers, poets and carvers.

The Melanesian unique and rich customs and traditions must be allowed to be shown in their full splendor and spectrum of colours.

MACFEST and events like this allow people from the world over to witness and enjoy the full range, and splendor of the Melanesian spectrum of customs, cultural and traditional colours.

The bigger challenge is to make sure that our future generation can still enjoy the richness of the Melanesian customs, traditions and cultures.

We must all make concerted efforts to mainstream the teaching of our Melanesian ways in our education systems.

Culture and custom can be leveraged to address many of the political, economic and social challenges we are facing. Solutions may be found in culture and customs. Custom and culture can help inform Government on policy options. This conviction was reaffirmed during my visit to Tanna recently.

I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for inviting me to Tanna and giving me the opportunity to experience the cultures and traditions of Tanna. There is much to learn from our cultures and traditions.

More resources must be channeled into our customary institutions. Deliberate affirmative actions must be taken to embody and embrace customary governance and administrative structures and practices to support and complement our adopted modern Government systems.

Let me emphasize that the size and geographical spread of the Melanesian communities existent today must be allowed to be manifested in the 7th MACFEST. From the West to the East, Melanesians must be embraced. We must dispel the notion that Melanesia communities only live in Fiji, New Caledonia, PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

Let us continue to acknowledge and include our other Melanesians that live elsewhere.

I am reminded that there are pockets of descendants of Melanesians in the Micronesian Group and the Polynesian Group. We should include them, like the black Samoans of Samoa - often referred to as Tama Uli - in future MACFESTs.

In the past, Timor Leste, Indonesia, Australia and Taiwan were invited to attend. Let us continue to build on these blocks to make this flagship cultural event of ours even bigger and better in the years to come. I am pleased to note that our brothers and sisters from Torres Strait and the Papuan Provinces of Indonesia will be participating at the 7th MACFEST.

Our shared cultural practices are so extensive with our other brothers and sisters of the austronesian extracts. Maybe we should consider inviting these communities from countries like Philippines, China, etc, to join in future MACFESTs.

Vanuatu has shown, it has no peer, when it comes to advocacy for, and promotion of Melanesian rights, Melanesian customs, Melanesian values, etc. It is refreshing and encouraging. Vanuatu can rightfully feel proud that it is a torch bearer on these matters.

Happy celebrations.

Tenk yu tru, Tangio tumas, Vinaka vakalevu, Oleti, Merci beaucoup.

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