

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY



DG's REMARKS AT HIGH COMMISSIONER HEIDI BOOTLE'S FAREWELL BREAKFAST
PORT VILA, 19th APRIL 2024

(Pleasantries)

High Commissioner Heidi and your Staff
Head of the Melanesia Office of the SPC
Directors and staff from Foreign Affairs Ministry
Commander of the VMF
Deputy Vice Chancellor of the Vanuatu National University
Director Vanuatu Culture Centre
All Protocols observed

I must confess, it is with some degree of difficulty, that I stand before you this morning to deliver my brief remarks.

I am happy that the Secretariat has been given the opportunity, (indeed the honour,) to show its token of appreciation to a colleague, friend, sister, and working partner.

But, the occasion, for me, is also sad, because it signals the imminent departure of a person I have come to respect as a reliable and compassionate working partner in my quest to deliver practical and tangible results for MSG.

(And, as the old saying goes, the proof is in the pudding.)

I would like to believe that in a way, however miniscule that role may be, we at the MSG Secretariat contributed towards having Australia involved (and might I say in a big way) in the successful hosting of the MSG Prime Minister's Cup and the MACFEST here in Vanuatu.

As it concerns the MSG Secretariat specifically, the signing in December 2022 of the MOU on Development Cooperation between MSG Secretariat and Australia with Foreign Minister Penny Wong provides us a valuable platform on which we can develop concrete projects for the benefit of our MSG peoples.

The conclusion of the arrangements to roll out the Australian funded Gender Project through SPC, which would have a Gender officer at the MSG Secretariat, the agreement by Australia to fund the PCMU and Yut4Melanesia Projects, and the practical launch of the Father Walter Lini Scholarship during the MSG Day are again testament of this person's resolve to work with the MSG Secretariat for the benefit of MSG peoples.

As Head of the MSG Secretariat, it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge with profound thanks the extensive development Programme that Australia has in Vanuatu in Education, Infrastructure, Human

Resource Development, Security (VMF, Police Force), Health, to name a few. These are products of the work of this individual that is leaving us shortly.

These are manifestations of the capacity of this individual's empathy towards Melanesia's prosperity and wellbeing, and readiness to make strong well-articulated representations to Canberra, for (the big wigs in) Canberra to hear our MSG concerns, aspirations and pleas.

Of considerable admiration to me is the propensity of this individual to hear me out on cooperative ideas or simply projects that I have conjured up, however crazy they may sound. For instance, the Project Coordination Management Unit (PCMU) when I arrived in September 2022. Only two partners showed interest and I opted for my preferred partner.

I have often wondered how this individual could be so patient, tolerant, understanding and generous in her disposition. I found an explanation in her name – Heidi. Meaning, being noble – unselfish and morally good.

Heidi, we at the MSG Secretariat will miss you.

More importantly though, and I know I echo the feelings and sentiments of the people of Melanesia when I say, Melanesia is the poorer without you working by our side.

Heidi, so that you know, we in Melanesia, represented through the MSG Secretariat, value and appreciate your efforts in assisting us in our development endeavours, we would ask that you accept this small gift – which I will present to you in a short while.

Hopefully, you will find many occasions in future to adorn it as a reminder of how eternally grateful Melanesia is to you.

With the kind assistance of Estelle Milfirer from the Vanuatu Bijouterie we were able to have a brooch made with the MSG logo on it.

The making of this gift has an interesting story to it.

We started with trying to melt silver coins from all MSG Members (Fiji, New Caledonia, PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu) to make the brooch. (But alas!) They contained too much nickel and could not hold up well, so we abandoned the idea.

A special feature of the logo on your brooch is the **waves** below – or so I thought (Melle Florence Toka in 2009, the designer of the MSG logo, had the idea that these represented **a barbed spear** to symbolize the strength of Melanesian cultures and traditions). The official logo has only four (4) waves/barbs, but on your brooch, you have five (5) – to represent the five MSG Members.

Heidi, can I ask that you come forward and accept this gift from a grateful MSG family.

Thank you, Merci Beaucoup, Tangio Tumas, Tenk yu tru, Vinaka Vakalevu, Oleti!

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