



MELANESIAN *Tak*

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A quarterly newsletter to inform our readers about key work activities undertaken at the MSG Secretariat

Political Stability, Economic Prosperity, Social Equality and Inclusivity and Sustainable Development are the MSG's core objectives as endorsed by Leaders in the "MSG 2038 - Prosperity for All Plan"

MSG & SPC SUPPORT WOMEN'S RIGHTS & GENDER EQUALITY



Front from L-R: Greg Nimbtki, Deputy DG of the MSG Secretariat; Sarah Mecartney, SPC Director for Melanesia; Leonard Louma, Director General of the MSG Secretariat; Australia's Acting High Commissioner to Vanuatu, Jon Philp; and Sovaia Marawa, Program Manager, Trade & Economic Development.

A project to support Melanesian women entrepreneurs, increase capacities of successful women Members of Parliament (MPs) in their roles as legislators, and end violence against women and girls is expected to get off the ground soon.

Promoting Melanesian Women to Enable Social and Economic Empowerment, known as the Promoting Melanesian Women project, will soon come to fruition with the co-signing of a Grant Agreement by the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat and the Pacific Women Lead @ Pacific-Community-SPC on Monday 5, August 2024.

Central to the project is enhancing youth and women's participation and leadership in the MSG development process.

SPC's contribution of AUD400,000 to the joint project is through the Pacific Women Lead at SPC programme, funded by the Australian Government to the tune of AUD577,000. The MSG Secretariat's in-kind contributions towards the project is valued at over AUD170,000. The Promoting Melanesian Women project focusses on Gender Equality and three related components: namely Trade and Women's Empowerment; Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG); and Women in Leadership (WIL). Director General of the MSG Secretariat Leonard Louma said the project "demonstrates in a manifestly practical way our shared commitment to do what is right by our women folk in the gender space.

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**FROM THE
DIRECTOR
GENERAL'S DESK**

Leonard Louma, OBE



This would be the penultimate Melanesian Tok issue for 2024. Much has been done in the last three months and I am pleased to report these activities. An achievement of significant milestone was the signing of a Grant Agreement with SPC for the project on "Promoting Melanesian Women". This gender-centric focus in our work programmes is something we intend to vigorously crusade.

We are grateful to the SPC for this timely support and the Australian government whose generous contributions to the MSG Gender Project, the Project Coordination Management Unit (PCMU) Project and the Yut4 Melanesia Project, signals a broadening in the scope and depth of our joint partnership - the apparent result of our MoU with Australia which was signed in 2022.

Another highlight was the Tokyo Statement issued by the MSG Leaders on New Caledonia. It reaffirmed the MSG's strong position on the right to self-determination and eventual independence of New Caledonia and commits MSG to undertake practical actions to achieve these ends.

After a lapse of 10 years, the MSG Trade Facilitation Committee Meeting was convened to address the developments and progress in the implementation of the MSG Trade Agreement, the outcomes of which will be tabled at the upcoming Trade and Economic Officials Meeting.

Earlier last month, MSG Leaders caucused within the margins of the 53rd Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting in Tonga, to develop joint positions on issues of relevance and of particular concern to the Group, such as the MSG Leaders Dialogue with the President of Indonesia and the Ocean of Peace concept by Fiji.

At the caucus, the MSG Chair and Prime Minister

of Vanuatu, Hon. Charlot Salwai Tabimasmamas, emphasised the significance of such side meetings which he said, provided valuable opportunities to discuss issues of specific interest to the MSG Group, enabling the development of common approaches and positions to take to the PIF.

We renewed our collaboration on shared regional development goals with Oceania Customs Organisation Secretariat in continuing to pursue our Strategic Partnership objective of providing an environment for MSG trade to prosper under our Work Programme. Furthermore, we are exploring potential partnership with the Asia Foundation, one of which is through possible scholarships for staff to undertake studies in the United States.

Additionally, we've signed an MoU with the Oceania Football Confederation, which will continue to provide the general framework for collaboration between the MSG Secretariat and the OFC in a sport that is so popular in our countries and that elicits so much passion in our people.

In late July, a meeting of MSG Speakers was successfully convened within the 2nd Meeting of the Indonesia Pacific Parliamentary Partnership (IPPP) in Jakarta, where MSG Speakers and the Indonesia House of Representatives agreed for MSG/Indonesia Parliamentary meetings to be held biennially.

As well, we received a number of courtesy visits including from the Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations of the European Parliament, Hon. David McAllister, and delegations from Solomon Islands on missions to Vanuatu for air services cooperation and shipping transport administration, Republic of China and Papua New Guinea.

More recently we convened the MSG Workshop on Security Strategy, Atrocity Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect where I reiterated for MSG Governments not to be complacent with the issue of atrocities and take serious preventive actions now. I also reaffirmed MSG's support for collective security initiatives to address the region's security concerns. We hope you will enjoy these updates and more.

Merci Beaucoup, Vinaka Vakalevu, Tenk Yu Tru, Tangio Tumas, Oleti.

MSG LEADERS UNITE FOR NEW CALEDONIA'S INDEPENDENCE



MSG Leaders at the 10th Pacific Island Leader's Meeting (PALM10) in Japan.

Credit: Fiji Government Facebook page.

Leaders of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) reaffirmed their strong position on the right to self-determination and eventual independence of New Caledonia, committing the MSG to undertake practical actions to achieve these ends, within the margins of the 10th Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM10) held in Tokyo, Japan from 16-18 July 2024.

In the wake of the political upheavals in Kanaky, New Caledonia on 13 May, the MSG Leaders issued a joint statement on the decolonisation process and political situation, expressing concern at the ongoing tenuous security situation.

"We regret the recent events in New Caledonia after the passing by the French National Assembly of the Constitutional Bill on 13 May 2024, seeking to "unfreeze" the electoral roll for the provincial elections in New Caledonia, which precipitated the carnage that followed," they stated.

Leaders condemned the destruction of property and the unnecessary loss of lives that effectively caused untold damage to the economy and

extreme suffering for the people of New Caledonia.

On the Constitutional Bill on Electoral Reforms, Leaders welcomed the decision of the President of the French Republic, Emmanuel Macron, to shelve its presentation to the Congress de Versailles and urged him to officially withdraw the Bill and issue a public statement to that effect to create a propitious environment for dialogue to resume amongst the Noumea Accord Signatories.

"We reaffirm our strong opposition, as echoed in our 22nd MSG Leaders' Summit Communique of August 2023, to the way the third self-determination Referendum was conducted, where less than 50% (only 43%) of the voting population participated and where traditional obligations and Kanak customs relating to COVID 19 deaths were completely ignored," they stated.

The MSG Secretariat has been tasked to develop the roadmap containing the short-term and long-term strategies for MSG assistance to FLNKS, taking into account Leaders' past decisions and current political developments.

LEADERS CONVERGED FOR CAUCUS AHEAD OF 53RD PIFLM



MSG Leaders sharing a light moment over kava during the 53rd Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting.

The Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Leaders' Caucus was successfully convened in Nukua'Alofa, Tonga, within the margins of the 53rd Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting to develop joint positions on issues of specific relevance and of particular concern to the Group.

In his opening remarks, the MSG Chair and Prime Minister of Vanuatu, Hon. Charlot Salwai Tabimasmal, thanked his colleague MSG Leaders for availing themselves to participate in the Caucus.

He emphasised that such side meetings, on the margins of the PIF meetings, provide valuable opportunities to discuss issues of specific interest to the MSG Group, enabling the development of common approaches and positions to take to the PIF.

"Collectively we can prosecute and advance our interests and issues more effectively when we strategise first before we are seated at the PIF table. As we are all aware, PIF membership is made up of diverse groups whose views on issues, that we want to push, are often not the same as ours. Together we are stronger," he stated.

Referring to the caucus agenda, the Chair said that while many issues were brought up or discussions at the PIF, some of them are of specific interest to the

MSG, like New Caledonia for instance, a foundational issue for the MSG.

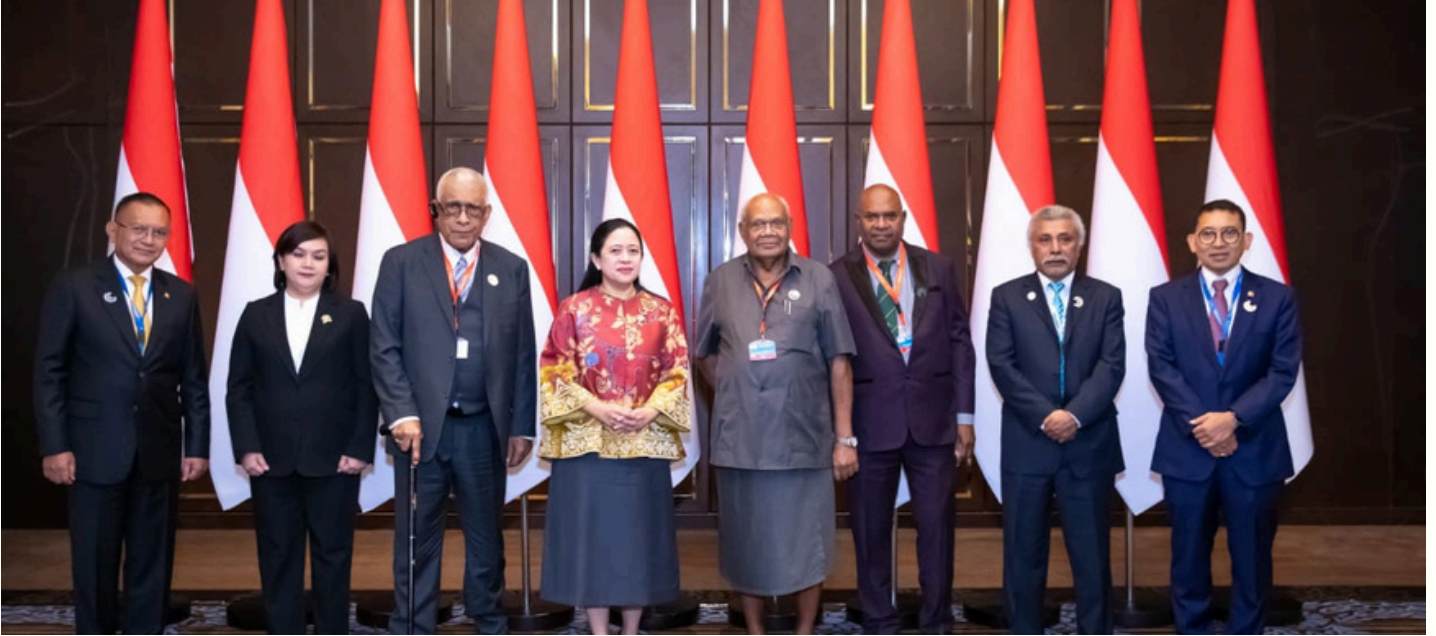
"No other grouping in the PIF has invested so much time, effort and resources on this issue than the MSG. MSG must continue to be in the driver's seat on this issue as the affected indigenous people, the non-self-governing peoples of that non-self-governing territory are the KANAKS, and they are members of the MSG," he stated.

"The Ocean of Peace is an initiative of one of our members, Fiji, and we need to ensure that we all collectively support it at the PIF. It builds on the Efate Declaration on Mutual Respect, Responsibility, Cooperation, and Amity (The Efate Declaration on Security) that we signed on 24 August 2023.

In many respects, the Udaune Declaration on Climate Change that we adopted last year also complements the broad concept of security captured in the Ocean of Peace initiative," the Chair commented.

On the Pacific Policing Initiative (PPI), the Chair said that while it is another important initiative set for discussion at the PIF meetings, this collective approach to policing is ironically not a new concept to the MSG.

MSG SPEAKERS AGREE ON MOU'S WITH INDONESIA



Speaker of the Indonesian House of Representatives, Puan Maharani (centre) with the Speakers of the Parliaments of the MSG Members.

A meeting of Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Speakers successfully concluded within the 2nd Meeting of the Indonesia Pacific Parliamentary Partnership (IPPP) in Jakarta.

Both MSG Speakers and the Indonesia House of Representatives Speaker agreed for MSG/Indonesia Parliamentary meetings to be held biennially and supported the need to have MOUs on Cooperation between respective MSG Parliaments and the Indonesia House of Representatives concluded.

The Director General of the MSG Secretariat, Leonard Louma, expressed gratitude to the Indonesian House of Representatives for finding time within the tight Indonesia Pacific Parliamentary Partnership (IPPP) program for the MSG Speakers to caucus.

This was helpful in the efforts to usher in a more enhanced cooperation between the MSG National Parliaments, and the Indonesian House of Representatives, DG Louma stated. He further reiterated the words of the Honourable Fiji Speaker, Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu to underscore the important role of Parliaments in international relations. "The role of Parliamentary diplomacy is crucial for building bridges towards peace and understanding between nations".

"As part of the enhanced sub-regionalism advocated in the 2038 MSG Prosperity for All Plan, approved by our MSG Leaders, our MSG countries, institutions of State and Government, and the private sector entities were called on to cooperate and collaborate in their specific areas to deliver shared services for the benefit of our people."

The MSG Leaders, he informed them, have taken deliberate decisions on the importance of developing and promoting relations between MSG countries and Indonesia.

"Consistent with the Leaders desire to elevate the relations with Indonesia, we continue to nurture a very healthy and rapidly growing relationship in the trade, fisheries, human resource development and climate change areas, to name a few.

"Thanks to our MSG Associate Member we have the opportunity today to discuss how we can further elevate and enhance cooperation in the legislative space." The meeting was attended by H.E Dr Puan Maharani, Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia; Hon. Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu, MP, Speaker of the Fiji Parliament; Hon. Johnson Wabunai, MP, Head of the PNG Parliamentary Delegation; and Hon. Patterson Oti, MP, Speaker of the Solomon Islands Parliament.

MSG & OCEANIA CUSTOMS ORGANISATION RENEW MOU



Head of the OCO Secretariat, Ms Nancy T Oraka and Director General of the MSG Secretariat, Leonard Louma, after the signing of the MoU at the MSG Secretariat.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been signed between the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat and the Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO) Secretariat for partnership and collaboration on shared regional development goals.

In his opening remarks, Director General of the MSG Secretariat, Leonard Louma, said that with the MSG constituting the largest population (86%), largest land mass (98%), biggest GDP (91%), almost 50% of the EEZ, and by some accounts, 90% of the natural resources in the Pacific Islands Forum area, the MSG collectively has a corresponding responsibility to be at the forefront of regional cooperative and collective actions that seek to better serve and better respond to the needs of our people.

"The MOU will help us leverage whatever knowledge, experience, resources, network, and human capital that OCO Secretariat has, to play a constructive role in the customs and trade space," he said. DG Louma pointed out a directive by MSG Leaders that in developing and implementing MSG collective and cooperative initiatives, it must be

remembered that the MSG is part of a bigger regional community – the Blue Pacific Continent.

MSG Leaders he said, have unambiguously determined that MSG must remain inclusive in its approach to its collective initiatives and must be positively disposed to others joining in whenever they feel appropriate.

DG Louma highlighted this to illustrate that with the help of OCO, trade and commercial activities will only increase within the MSG countries, between the MSG countries, and between the MSG countries and the region and the globe.

Head of the OCO Secretariat, Ms Nancy T Oraka, said the occasion not only marked a continuation of the strong partnership between the two organisations but also a re-affirmation of the shared commitment to the security, prosperity and resilience of the Pacific region.

"Over the years our collaboration has brought about significant progress – together we have strengthened border security, facilitated safe and secure trade and advanced capacity building initiatives both directly and indirectly," she said.

TRADE OFFICIALS MEET ON THE MSG TRADE AGREEMENT



Director General of the MSG Secretariat, Leonard Louma (front, middle) and Australian High Commissioner to Vanuatu, H.E Max Willis (2nd from left) with participants of the Security Strategy, Atrocity Prevention & the Responsibility to Protect workshop.

After a 10-year hiatus, the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Trade Facilitation Committee Meeting (TFCM) was convened last week to address the developments and progress in the implementation of the MSG Trade Agreement (MSGTA).

During the meeting, Members provided updates on Customs automation and reforms, MSGTA Implementation, MSGTA Tariff Implementation, Review of the MSGTA Rules of Origin Handbook, and Biosecurity Reforms.

"Since 2014, the Group, as we all know, has experienced enormous growth in its trade volumes and range of goods traded. The nature, character and ways in which trade is carried out has also changed. IT advances has necessitated greater use of "E" commerce. All these have brought about new challenges affecting trade facilitation in the Pacific," the Director General of MSG, Leonard Louma, said.

"As well, both the conclusion of the Melanesian Free Trade Agreement (MFTA) and the Pacific Regional Trade Facilitation Strategy have inevitably affected Members' and the Secretariat's responsibilities pertaining to trade facilitation measures," he added.

This he said, requires a well-coordinated plan and the revised Terms of Reference seeks to accommodate these changes.

DG Louma said that after the MSG Customs and Quarantine Sub-Committee was setup in 2011 it was changed in 2014 to the MSG Trade Facilitation Committee Meeting (TFCM).

The MSG Customs and Quarantine Sub-Committee was restructured to become the MSG Trade Facilitation Committee Meeting (TFCM) and the scope of issues it handled widened to not only involve customs and quarantine matters, but now include shipping and immigration matters.

Discussions at this meeting of the TFCM would inform the Group on progress with respect to national reforms undertaken on customs and biosecurity/quarantine matters.

"In addition, updates from Members on the developments to the tariff reductions to goods originating from the MSG, in accordance with commitments made within the MSGTA, would be useful to help show how we have fared in our endeavours to achieve the overall goal of an MSG free trade area," DG Louma stated.

The outcomes of the meeting will be tabled at the upcoming Trade and Economic Officials Meeting.

SECURITY STRATEGY, ATROCITY PREVENTION & R2P



Director General of the MSG Secretariat, Leonard Louma (front, middle) and Australian High Commissioner to Vanuatu, H.E Max Willis (2nd from left) with participants of the Security Strategy, Atrocity Prevention & the Responsibility to Protect workshop.

The Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) is happy to support efforts by the Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (APR2P) to ensure that MSG countries, and others in the region, implement the commitments made to address mass atrocities such as genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

In his opening remarks at the MSG R2P Workshop, DG Louma warned of the danger of thinking that these enumerated mass atrocities do not occur in our part of the world. He acknowledged that this perception is due largely to our notions being framed by what transpired in Kampuchea under Pol Pot, Kosovo and Rwanda. This is a fallacy and provides a false sense of innocence to our governments and encourages in them a nefarious attitude of complacency.

The Director General urged participants to give serious consideration to this subject matter and the need to look at MSG countries' national policies, regulations, and laws to accommodate state commitments on atrocity prevention and Responsibility to Protect (R2P). He noted that Governments have an inherent obligation to protect the people they govern in their nation states and must ensure their welfare is taken care

of and their dignity as human beings protected. "At the risk of oversimplifying the notion of atrocity, we would do well to think of it as a cruel act or mistreatment that injures the dignity of a human being. Suffering from hunger, affliction with NCDs, lack of basic drugs in our medical and health facilities, abuse in the treatment of our inmates in our prisons, etc. Atrocity prevention and taking heed of, and acting on, early warning signals is critical." The Director General while delivering his opening remarks at the three-day MSG Workshop on Security Strategy, Atrocity Prevention & the Responsibility to Protect also clarified that the MSG is not averse to collective security approaches aimed at addressing the region's security concerns, despite the fact that it is sometimes portrayed as being in opposition. "In our efforts to properly frame collaboration in the security space, explore synergies between new initiatives and existing initiatives, and ensure necessary guard rails are considered in any security arrangement, we are often portrayed as being against a collective security initiative." DG Louma expressed appreciation for the Australian Government's collaboration with the MSG Secretariat on many matters of mutual interest.

VICE CHANCELLORS OF MSG UNIVERSITIES' MEET



Director General of the MSG Secretariat, Leonard Louma, with the Vice Chancellors of MSG Universities.

The Vice Chancellors of the MSG Melanesian Universities have agreed for the need to collaborate and strengthen partnership during their inaugural meeting, which concluded successfully in Port Vila, Vanuatu in July.

The meeting was attended by the Vice Chancellor of the National University of Vanuatu (NUV), Jean Pierre Nirua as Chair; Professor Unaisi Baba, Vice Chancellor of the Fiji National University (FNU); Dr Cecilia Nembou, Acting Vice Chancellor of the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) and Dr Transform Aqorau, Vice Chancellor of the Solomon Islands National University (SINU).

Deputy Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), Esala Nayasi, and Regional Director, Melanesia for the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), Ms Sarah McCartney, were invited by the MSG Director General as Special Guests. In his opening remarks, Director General of the MSG Secretariat, Leonard Louma, said the meeting was intended to kick-start, "a process of identifying gaps in cooperation currently undertaken under the ambit of Pacific Islands Universities Regional Network, or cooperative arrangements that you yourselves have already entered into, and determining areas where MSG National Universities, as a collective, might add

value to those partnership arrangements in the pursuit of specific MSG interests in the higher education space".

He said the initiative is part of MSG's efforts and contributions towards achieving the objectives of Pacific Regionalism as envisaged under the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific, and proudly proclaimed that MSG will be the foundation and the building block for Pacific Regionalism.

The Director General revealed that some of the issues that provided motivation to convene the first meeting of the Vice Chancellors of the MSG National Universities include:

- To enable labor mobility of MSG people between the MSG countries;
- Agree to impose preferential fee levels for MSG citizens in the MSG National Universities;
- Introduce robust Student Exchange Programs to engender Melanesian fraternity and feeling of togetherness;
- Introduce vibrant visiting lectureship program and sharing of curricula amongst MSG Universities to cultivate the spirit of Unity of Purpose for Melanesia; and
- The promotion and protection of Melanesian culture and languages.

MSG EXPLORES POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIP WITH ASIA FOUNDATION



Director General of the MSG Secretariat, Leonard Louma, with the Asia Foundation and MSG staff.

Potential areas of development cooperation were recently discussed between the Asia Foundation and the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat during a courtesy visit to the Director General of the MSG Secretariat, Leonard Louma, last week by Ms. Sandra Kraushaar, Regional Representative and Ms. Lavenia Rokovucago, Senior Program Officer from the Asia Foundation. DG Louma revealed a personal association with the Asia Foundation and expressed gratitude for the scholarship they granted him to undertake studies on the "Role of Small States in a Multi-Polar World" at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy.

The Asia Foundation Team briefed the MSG Director General and his staff on their activities and ongoing role in providing trainings and technical assistance to professionals and entrepreneurs in the Pacific.

The scope of the activities covers children's literacy promotion, counter-trafficking in persons theatrical/play productions, empowerment of women in the workspace, gender equality and inclusive economic growth through the concept of care economy.

Both the MSG Secretariat and the Asian Foundation agreed to continue the dialogue with a view to identifying specific partnership arrangements.

MEMBER OF EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT VISITS MSG SECRETARIAT



The Director General of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat, Leonard Louma, received a courtesy visit from the Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations of the European Parliament, Hon. David McAllister on Thursday 8 August 2024.

The Chairman was keen to know more about the MSG, its specific role and focus activities in pursuit of its Members' interests, and how it fits in the regional landscape with the different regional organisations, especially in relation to the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF).

PAPUA NEW GUINEA NGOS & CSOS DISCUSS MSG SECURITY STRATEGY



Representatives from Papua New Guinea's NGOs and CSOs during the MSG Security Strategy consultations.

A second round of consultations on the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Security Strategy with Papua New Guinea's civil society organisations and NGOs was successfully completed in Port Moresby on August 30, 2024.

As directed by the MSG Leaders at their meeting in 2023 in Vanuatu, the consultation served as an opportunity to provide an overview of the MSG Security Strategy to NGOs and CSOs to solicit their views on the MSGSS. This is to ensure that the broader community are on the same understanding of what it is about.

On behalf of the Director General of the MSG Secretariat, Leonard Louma, the Programme Manager for Political, Security Affairs & Legal Affairs, Ilan Kiloie, expressed appreciation to the Office of the Prime Minister and the Department of Foreign Affairs for hosting the consultations and the excellent arrangements for the one-day consultation. Some of the views expressed were that the strategy is a living document that can

continue to be monitored to maintain its relevance and that it is crucial that the role of NGOs and CSOs including educational institutions and faith-based organisations be recognised in addressing security challenges. Security is everybody's business and requires a holistic and integrated approach to addressing them. The proposal to have sub-regional and national mechanisms for engagement of NGOs and CSOs needs to be explored.

In discussing the MSG Formed Police Unit (FPU), Mr. Kiloie stated that it is important for new police initiatives developed at the wider Pacific level to consider existing police initiatives at the sub-regional level and help to operationalise them in a way that will maximise and prioritise benefits and needs of the people. Following the conclusion of the consultations, the Security Strategy will be finalised by the MSGSS Working Group before it is submitted to the Police Commissioners Conference and the Police Ministers Meeting for their consideration and final endorsement by Leaders.

PNG DELEGATION IN VANUATU FOR TOK SORI CEREMONY RECEIVED



Grand Chief Brigadier Ted Ramu Diro, Former Commander of the PNGDF who led the Kumul Force to stop the Santo rebellion in 1980 (3rd from right) with the PNG delegation.

The Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat received a Papua New Guinea delegation on Thursday, 1 August led by Hon. Powes Parkop, Governor of the National Capital District (NCD) who attended Vanuatu's 44th Independence Anniversary celebrations in Port Vila.

The delegation comprised Hon. Lohia Boe Samuel, Member for Port Moresby North West; Hon. Keith Iduhu, Member for Central Hiri; and Grand Chief Brigadier Ted Ramu Diro, Former Commander of the PNG Defence Force.

In welcoming them to the Secretariat, Director General, Leonard Louma, assured them of the deep pride and honour attached to their visit to the Secretariat.

"At the very outset, let me admit that it is not lost on us here at the Secretariat that our creation as an organisation is very much the product of what transpired 44 years ago in Santo when Papua New Guinea answered the plea for assistance from a fledgling young Melanesian country aspiring to take its place as an independent nation in the Pacific and indeed the world.

"In more ways than one, MSG as an organisation was born from that crucible of conflict in Santo.

That readiness and willingness of a fellow MSG country, that was at that stage no more than 5 years old itself, as an independent nation, took the bold step to intervene, when others older than itself, were not able to respond in the affirmative, to the request for help from Vanuatu," DG Louma stated. He said the events in Santo set off a paradigm shift in the way our Leaders thought of cooperation amongst and between themselves.

The experience he said, convinced them that cooperation amongst and between themselves was possible despite their myriads of challenges and very limited resources.

The Secretariat also gifted the delegation with a pig, kava and mats to assist them to perform the Tok Sori ceremony at the Saralana Park later that afternoon, for the unfortunate loss of life during the Santo operation caused by the Kumul Force.

Grand Chief Brigadier Ted Ramu Diro, Former Commander of the PNGDF, that oversaw the deployment of the Kumul Force to stop the Santo rebellion in 1980, was honored with a Distinction Medal by the President of Vanuatu, His Excellence Nikenike Vurobaravu at the State House on Independence Day.

DG LOUMA CALLS FOR PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AT UNICEF SEMINAR



Participants of the seminar on Protecting Children in the context of Labour Mobility, co-hosted by the MSG Secretariat, Government of Vanuatu and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).

The Director General of the MSG Secretariat, Leonard Louma, has called on countries participating in Pacific Labour schemes to do more to ensure that the need to promote and protect the welfare of children is taken into account.

There is a real need for a concerted effort on this as this cannot be done alone, he said, while speaking at the seminar on Protecting Children in the context of Labour Mobility in Port Vila, co-hosted by the MSG Secretariat, Government of Vanuatu and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).

During his opening remarks, DG Louma said, "the context in which we live and work continues to evolve in ways that are detrimental to the welfare and safety of our children and in many ways they grow up in an environment that is unhelpful to nurturing them to become useful members of the community".

He said while people migrate to urban centers or other countries, seeking job opportunities and better futures for themselves and their families, regrettably, the brunt of the cost for the absence of parents from children – is borne by the children themselves.

"The experience throughout the Pacific is similar. Most children experience violence in their homes,

while often also being indirect victims of, or witnesses to, domestic violence. When family structures and support networks break down, we know that children are at an even greater risk of victims of violence.

"Much 'ado' is often made of the current economic gains and development as a result of this labour mobility, but, interestingly, less evident or less researched is the impact of this practice on our children. The anecdotal evidence is very clear, our children suffer," he added.

This he said, applies to both the labour mobility within our respective national boundaries, and labour mobility under the PALM and other Pacific labour schemes offered to islanders in Australia and New Zealand. The Melanesia Free Trade Agreement is yet to be ratified but the MSG is keeping a close watch to ensure our children are protected.

DG Louma said labour mobility can lead to detrimental effects on our children's wellbeing as they may be at risk of losing contact with their cultural heritage, they often have worse educational outcomes or even drop out of school, and they are more vulnerable to the risk of violence, abuse and neglect – harms to children are already pressingly prevalent in our communities.

MSG, OFC SECURE PARTNERSHIP TO STRENGTHEN FOOTBALL



Director General of the MSG Secretariat, Leonard Louma signs the MoU with the Oceania Football Confederation to strengthen football in the region.

The Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat has renewed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Oceania Football Confederation to strengthen football in the region.

In making the announcement, Director General, Leonard Louma, said the MSG football teams dominated the Pacific Games football finals, adding that the Fiji and Vanuatu performances at the just concluded OFC Men's Nations Cup football tournament validates this positive approach to football development, and vindicates this MSG/OFC partnership. "We gather to sign a 3-year MoU that sets out the broad parameters and general framework for collaboration between the MSG and the OFC in a sport that is so popular in our countries and that elicits so much passion in our people," he stated. DG Louma hoped that through this MoU, OFC may find it possible to partner with the MSG in its quest to make football a useful development tool that goes beyond sport.

"We, at the MSG Secretariat, want to leverage the popularity and power of football, and the rapidly growing enthusiasm for futsal, for development purposes," he said.

He added that, "We want to use personalities involved in the sport, to be purveyors of positive messaging for health, social justice, gender equity and balancing programs, economic inclusion and political awareness".

In addition, DG Louma said football and futsal must be used to engender unity of purpose among MSG states and the greater Melanesia communities.

AUSTRALIA PROVIDES MSG & VANUATU FOREIGN AFFAIRS WITH DIPLOMATIC TRAINING



Participants from the MSG Secretariat and the Vanuatu Foreign Affairs after receiving their certificates.

A group of early to mid-career Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation & External Trade (MFAICET) officers received valuable diplomatic and protocol training through an Australian-led professional development course in Port Vila. The training was hosted at the headquarters of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat which also included four of its staff.

The week-long training was led by retired Australian diplomat Julienne Hince, who has served overseas as Australia's High Commissioner to Malta, Ambassador to Tunisia and Deputy Ambassador to Athens, as well as earlier postings to Bangladesh and Germany.

"I really enjoyed sharing my experiences with all of the trainees who have such long and positive futures ahead of them," Ms Hince said.

Speakers included Australia's Acting High Commissioner to Vanuatu Jon Philp and MSG Secretariat, Director General, Leonard Louma,

while Queensland Trade and Investment Commissioner for the Pacific, Leata Alaimoana, addressed the participants via Zoom.

DG Louma said he was excited to impart his experience as a diplomat and acknowledged Australia's initiative in an exercise that would benefit this cohort for Vanuatu with regards to multilateral diplomacy, international protocol and foreign policy, among others.

"Training and education have proven to be powerful drivers of economic growth and hence building prosperous communities for our people, therefore I commend Australia for continuing to contribute to this important area of capacity-building in Vanuatu and the region," DG Louma said. One of the practical elements of the course was a mock diplomatic reception in the MSG Secretariat courtyard, giving participants an opportunity to practice their representation and protocol skills by engaging with diplomats from the Australian, New Zealand and British High Commissions.

QUARTERLY BRIEFS



Political Manager, Ilan Kiloe & Legal Officer, Brittein Yosef at the ICJ.



Chargé d'Affaires ad Interim Gu Zihua during a courtesy call to the Secretariat.



The Secretariat was part of an SPC People Centred Approach workshop.



The people of Papua New Guinea in Port Vila celebrated their 49th Independence this month.



The Secretariat received a courtesy call from the new Australian High Commissioner to Vanuatu.



The MSG is facilitating Vanuatu & PNG Foreign Investment Agency cooperation.



The Secretariat took to cleaning up parts of Port Vila to mark World Clean Up Day.



The Secretariat received a delegation from the Solomon Islands.



The people of Vanuatu celebrated their 44th Independence Anniversary in July.

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