

MSG ACTING DIRECTOR GENERAL's Remarks

**At the SIGNING OF GENDER COOPERATION MOU WITH AUSTRALIAN
GOVERNMENT**

MSG Secretariat, Port Vila, Vanuatu

Monday 12th December 2022

Salutation

- Senator the Hon Penny Wong, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia
- The Hon Pat Conroy MP, Minister for International Development, and the Pacific
- HE Heidi Bootle, Australian High Commissioner to Vanuatu
- Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham, Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs
- The Hon Michael McCormack MP, Shadow Minister for International Development and the Pacific

Senior advisors and delegates from Foreign Affairs, respective Senator's offices and the media.

Ms Mia Rimon, Regional Director Melanesia, Pacific Community

PNG Honorary Consul, President of Solomon Islander Association, Representative from Fijian, Community

A good Afternoon.

I intend to be brief.

On behalf of the MSG DG, Leonard Louma, who conveys his apologies as he is currently on overseas duties, and the staff of the MSG Secretariat, I would like to warmly welcome you all to our Melanesian Nakamal.

It is a Nakamal not for its physical space but for the questions, which Melanesian Leaders asked themselves many years back, and tasked us to find more questions to, while managing answers to those that we can. But as a Tambaran House of PNG, our Nakamal continues to house the spirit and vision of Melanesian Leaders since 1986 (When they had the first talanoa in PNG). As a Fijian Bure, it continues to allow Talanoa (Storian – Vanuatu; Tok Stori - Solomon) in both good and challenging times.

Since the establishment of the MSG Secretariat 14 years ago, Hon Foreign Minister and Delegates, you're coming here in our Nakamal marks the first for an Australian Foreign Minister, and a highly esteemed delegation from Australia. Let alone a Bipartisan one. So, thank you for Gracing us with this Australia Bipartisan presence.

In the next 14 Mins, we will sign an MoU to break this curse of absence.

Hon. Foreign Minister and esteemed Delegates, we are hopeful that it offers the beginning of meaningful conversations around opportunities for more Australia and MSG partnerships. It will add to partnerships, which the MSG already has with the EU (Trade capacity) and JICA (Japan in implementing the MSG Inshore Fisheries Road Map), to name but a few. And the MSG has partnerships with the Pacific Islands Forum, Oceania Custom Organization and SPC, also.

Talking about partnerships, I would like to thank the Australian government for the funding support, which it offered towards assisting Vanuatu in hosting the successful MSG Prime Ministers Cup in Oct 2022 (Port Vila). At this junction, we would like to congratulate the Socceroos for an admirable representation of our region in the current World cup. To be in the final 16 best countries in the world in football is no easy feat. And to congratulate the Kangaroos for been Rugby Leagues Champions again (and to also congratulate our Pacific Neighbour's Manu Samoa).

Finally, the pinnacle of today's event is the signing of an MoU with Australia towards DFAT assisting the MSG in its Gender Policy. The MSG as a Secretariat has a responsibility to inspire young Melanesian girls to be more than what they thought they can be. Here, I would to thank everyone who have been involve in the conversations surrounding this goal, to thank High Commissioner Heidi Bottle and her Predecessor, Ms. Serah De Zoeten for been very kind towards this proposal.

This MoU is a small but a very important step for our relationship with Australia. And we deeply appreciate this. I am hopeful that the opportunities for us working together are very bright.

Hon. Minister, I know diplomats and regional organizations and their policy strategies do not often take guidance for their future planning from Musicians.

However, for this Australia – Melanesian Spearhead Group relationship, which we have started, we must draw a leaf from strictly the title of a song by these great Australian singer-songwriters Paul Kelly and Kev Carmody, that:

“From little things, big things grow”

From this small MoU, big things will grow.

Thank you.