



MSG Secretariat
Secretariat du GFLM
Melanesian Spearhead Group | Le Groupe Fer de Lance Mélanésien

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**DG's REMARKS AT THE UNVEILING OF THE TOTEM POLES AT THE MSG SECRETARIAT,
Port Vila, Vanuatu
23rd August 2023**

Prime Minister of Vanuatu, and Chair of the MSG, Hon. Alatoi Ishmael Kalsakau Maau'Koro, MP

Prime Minister of Fiji, Hon. Sitiveni RABUKA, MP;

Official Spokesperson of the Front de Liberation Nationale Kanak Socialiste (FLNKS), Mr Victor TUTUGORO;

Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, Hon. James MARAPE, MP;

Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands, Hon. Manasseh SOGAVARE, MP;

Deputy Prime Minister of Vanuatu and Head of Delegation of Vanuatu to the FMM, Hon. Matai SEREMAIAH, MP;

Minister of Foreign Affairs and Ministers from our MSG Members Countries;

President of the Malvatumauri Council of Chiefs, Chief Willie Plasua;

Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, Pahala Nugraha Mansury;

Invited Special Guests;

Senior Officials of MSG Members

Ladies and Gentlemen

Welcome to the House of Melanesia.

It is only fitting that we begin this custom ceremony with an acknowledgement of the Ifira Chiefs and their people, the Landowners, on whose land the Secretariat stands. The Landowners have been generous and the spirits of their ancestors continue to cast their benevolent protection over the Secretariat and those that work in it, and those that pass through it.

MSG Leaders, I know not all of you have had the occasion to visit us at the Secretariat. Apart from Prime Minister Sogavare that visited the Secretariat in 2016, the Chairman, Prime Minister Kalsakau that last visited this the Secretariat during the MSG Day, and the FLNKS Spokesperson that has visited us several times, two amongst you have not visited the Secretariat prior to today.

The last time that the Secretariat had the honour to play host to the presence of all MSG Leaders was 15 years ago in 2008 when this building was officially opened for occupation.

Again, I welcome you all to your Nasara and Nakamal.

Since then, the Secretariat building has been subjected to the cruel vagaries of the weather and nature - caused by climate change. It has gone through many tropical cyclones and earthquakes, and while there are fractures to its structure, the Ifira spirits have ensured that the structural integrity of the building remains sound and uncompromised.

The 1988 Agreed Principles of Cooperation entreats MSG to commit itself to the principles of respect for and promotion of Melanesian customs, traditions and values.

In pursuit of these principles, it was decided in 2013, during the Silver Jubilee Celebrations, to have skilled carvers from our respective member countries to carve totem poles and have them mounted in the façade of the Secretariat building. The carvings were mounted not simply as decorative pieces but were mounted on the frontage of the Secretariat to protect the structure as well as those that work in it, including those that visit the Secretariat.

Like the Secretariat Building itself, the initial carvings were not spared the ravages of the weather and time. Most got rotten and had to be taken down in the interest of the safety of those that come to the Secretariat. Because of the hazards that the rotting artifacts posed to the public, and scared at the potential for compensation claims, if an accident were to occur involving the falling of one of the artifacts on a visitor, the decision was taken to remove them.

Very much conscious of the cultural significance of the old artifacts, they were therefore taken off their mountings in a solemn cultural ceremony in June. In that ceremony, with the blessings of the Malvatumauri Council of Chiefs, we respectfully asked the spirits that were embodied in the artifacts to excuse themselves while we undertook the process of replacing their homes with new artifacts from our respective members.

With the help of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, we took advantage of the 7th MACFEST to request our visiting delegations and the host country to identify skilled carvers to carve replacement totem poles. Thanks to the understanding of the respective MSG Members and the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, we now have the new Totem Poles to reveal.

I thank you, once again, for agreeing to come and unveil these Totem Poles - each representing our MSG membership. In unveiling them, you will be inviting back the spirits of Melanesia to re-enter their abode and not only protect the Secretariat and those that work in it, but also those that pass through its premises.

On that note, I invite you all to prepare yourselves to unveil, in a moment, your respective country Totem Poles.

Thank you, Merci beaucoup, Tank you tru, Tangiu tumas, Oleti.

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