

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY



**REMARKS BY THE DIRECTOR GENERAL TO RECEIVE GOVERNOR OF NCD,
HON. POWES PARKOP, AND THE GOVERNOR'S DELEGATION TO THE MSG
SECRETARIAT**

1 August 2024, Port Vila, Vanuatu

Hon. Powes Parkop, Governor of NCD
Hon. Lohia Boe Samuel, Member for Port Moresby North West
Hon. Keith Iduhu, Member for Central Hiri
Grand Chief Brigadier Ted Ramu Diro, Former Commander of the PNGDF
Members of the PNG Delegation attending the Vanuatu 44th Independence
Anniversary Celebrations

Welcome to the MSG Secretariat!

On behalf of the MSG Secretariat Staff, let me assure you of the deep pride and honour we attach to your 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 organization is very much the product of what transpired 44 years ago in Santo when Papua New Guinea answered the plea for assistance from a fledging 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 organization 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.

The events in Santo set off a paradigm shift in the way our Leaders thought of cooperation amongst and between themselves. The experience convinced them that cooperation amongst and between themselves was possible despite their myriads of challenges and very limited resources.

Soon after the successful intervention in Santo, then Prime Minister Sir Julius Chan invited the first Prime Minister of Vanuatu, Fr Walter Lini, to join him on the aircraft to the Solomon Islands to talk with then Prime Minister of Solomon Islands, Sir Peter Kenilorea, about how they might cooperate and collaborate with each other in their quest to address the different development challenges that their countries were facing.
(NB: draw attention to the screen which shows the photo)

The seeds of MSG cooperation were sewn there and then. Convinced of the need to have joint approaches and positions on shared challenges and interests, Leaders of Vanuatu, PNG, Solomon Islands and the FLNKS external affairs representative, Yanne Celene Uregei, met informally in Goroka in 1986 and agreed to formalize the organization and coined the name “Melanesian Spearhead Group” as the name of our Organisation. Two years later in 1988, the Agreed Principles of Cooperation between the Independent States of Melanesia was signed here in Port Vila to formally establish the MSG Group.

The Ceremony of Tok Sori

Governor, Honourable Members, and Grand Chief Brigadier Diro

MSG Secretariat is your Haus, your Nasara. It is your place of refuge, your place to rest and seek nourishment after your journeys.

We hear that you have also come to “Tok Sori” for the unfortunate loss of life during the Santo operation caused by the Kumul Force.

We at the Secretariat wholeheartedly support your intention in this regard. It is the right thing to do. It is the noble thing to do.

This magnanimous act that you intend to undertake this afternoon has very deep and profound significance. It will heal wounds suffered from the conflict, it will build bridges destroyed as a consequence of that conflict, it will restore family ties shattered by the conflict, and it will reaffirm PNG’s noble intentions in agreeing to assist Vanuatu with its request – to help Vanuatu and its people find their feet as an independent nation and not to deliberately bring harm to its citizens.

(Note as an anecdote) Since taking up Office here in Vanuatu, I have heard stories from families of those Ni-Vanuatuan’s that assisted, in one way or another, with the Kumul Force intervention in Santo, that since that time, many of them have not visited their families and relatives in the theatre of operation out of a genuine feeling of unease. Your “Tok Sori” ceremony today will pave the way for these Ni-Van helpers to feel a bit more comfortable in returning to their homes and visit their families.

To assist you perform your “Tok Sori” ceremony this afternoon, and as your family away from home, on behalf of the Staff of the Secretariat, allow us the pleasure and honour of presenting to you these traditional gifts which you can put together, with the others that you have prepared, to present to the Government and people of Vanuatu. They comprise of all the traditional and customary items that are significant both in PNG and Vanuatu. **(NB: Mention significance of pig, kava, mats, etc.)**

May God continue to guide and bless you in your endeavours.

Thank you!

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