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MSG Secretariat
Secretariat du GFLM

Melanesian Spearhead Group | Le Groupe Fer de Lance Mélanésien

MSG DIRECTOR GENERAL'S REMARKS AT MSG SECURITY STRATEGY WORKING GROUP MEETING

Honiara, Thursday 24 October 2024

Chairman of the MSG Security Strategy
Senior Officials of the Solomon Islands Government
High Commissioner of PNG to the Solomon Islands
Distinguished Delegates

Good morning.

Let me start by extending gratitude to the Solomon Islands Government for agreeing to help host this meeting of the MSG Security Strategy (MSGSS) Working Group.

Our appreciation is extended to the Associate Member, Indonesia, for the funding support provided towards the development of the Security Strategy and the work of the MSG SS Working Group. Without this support, we would not have had the series of Working Group Meetings and the extensive consultations undertaken in all the MSG countries with the CSO's and NGO's.

To Fiji, that has provided the Chair of our MSG SS Working Group since its inception in 2016, on behalf of the whole MSG membership, including our MSG Associate Member, we are indebted to you, PS Mason Smith and your Government, for guiding us in the development of our homegrown MSG Security Strategy. In this regard, let me thank the MC (Master of Ceremony) for asking us to pay tribute to those that have contributed to the development of this MSG SS but have since left us. I pay special tribute to two Fijians namely Epineri Sebouma and Erami Raibe for their work on the MSG SS.

Let me emphasise again, this is a homegrown strategy. Not an imposed one and nor is it a borrowed one.

The Working Group can rightfully feel proud of the exhaustive work it has done and the resulting document that you will be reviewing today.

The importance of the work of the MSG SS Working Group in crafting this homegrown MSG Security Strategy is made more pronounced given the intense geo-strategic interest by great powers in our region.

The animated jockeying for geo-political influence in our region, the increasing militarization of our region, the cutting-edge technological advances in the IT area and their complex attendant security ramifications (particularly in the cyber-space), and the clear and present danger posed by climate change on our very existence as countries, does impose on us (those of us developing the Security Strategy) an imperative to ensure that we identify our real security challenges, and we define our responses to these challenges.

We, and nobody else, should be allowed to exercise these responsibilities.

Having said this, let me make this confession.

In trying to decide what to say and how to frame my remarks this morning, I had difficulty determining what might be new that I could say that I have not said in the previous five Working Group Meetings or the many consultation meetings that have been conducted with the CSO's and NGO's.

Not wanting to bore you with repetitions of comments made in my previous interventions, and knowing that this Working Group meeting marks the final stages of our work on the text of the MSG Security Strategy, I have deliberately chosen to provoke you, even (for some perhaps) anger you, this time round with the hope that this would motivate you to critically look at the MSG Security Strategy and ensure that a comprehensive and practical strategy is provided to the Police Commissioners Conference (PCC) and the Police Ministers Meeting (PMM) to consider next year – before the Strategy is presented to the MSG Leaders for approval.

So, with your indulgence, let me just quickly go through a number of issues that I think needs to be addressed head on. Some of which, I have posed as questions.

Understanding of the MSG SS at the national level

It is imperative that all stakeholders at the national level are aware of what is contained in the MSG Security Strategy.

Have we sufficiently socialized the text of the MSG SS and the ideas it contains amongst all the necessary stakeholders in our national jurisdictions?

For instance, are the officials in quarantine, customs, immigration, police, defence, health, etc, sufficiently aware of what is contained in the MSGSS?

We, as your Secretariat, cannot tell you how to coordinate your effort in socializing the MSG SS amongst your national stakeholders.

But we would be failing our duties if we did not urge you to ensure that all those that would be involved, in one way or another, with the implementation of the Strategy be fully briefed.

MSG SS and its relationship with National Security Policies

There is need to ensure that the MSG Security Strategy complements our National Security Policies.

The MSG Security Strategy has been in the making since 2016, and during this period many of you have had reason to review your National Security Policies.

My question to you all, is, have we honestly and adequately developed the MSG SS to complement your National Security Policies?

I can only hope we have. Otherwise, implementation would be rendered almost impossible.

MSG SS and Bilateral Security Arrangements

Over the last few years, the Secretariat has noted that many bilateral security arrangements have been entered into by respective MSG Governments with other partners.

Again, I ask myself, are these bilateral security arrangements compatible and consistent with what we are recommending in the MSG SS?

If they are not, then we would need to tweak the MSG SS to accommodate these bilateral arrangements so that the MSG collective security arrangement is not at odds with the bilateral arrangements.

MSG SS and other Regional Security Arrangements

All the MSG countries are involved in other Regional Security Arrangements that are being developed to address identified security challenges confronting our part of the world.

It is useful to remind ourselves that the MSG Security Strategy is an initiative of our Police Commissioners and Police Ministers and endorsed by our MSG Leaders. It is, let me repeat, our homegrown approach to collective self help in the security space.

I feel compelled to point out that because the MSG SS is our security strategy, contextualized to our needs and interests, we must do everything in our powers to ensure that other regional security arrangements feed into our security strategy.

In other words, let us ensure that other regional security arrangements do not undermine and render our MSG Security Strategy unimplementable. Synergies must be identified and it would be in our interest to ensure that other regional security initiatives, such as the Pacific Policing Initiative, utilize our MSG security platforms for implementation.

Involvement of CSO's and NGO's

While national security remains the general purview of Governments and their instrumentalities, security is equally recognized as everyone's business. And this nexus in responsibilities has been recognized by all of you.

It is considered everyone's business for a very good reason. National Governments and their instrumentalities are not omni-present throughout the length and breadth of the territories under their jurisdictions.

For surveillance purposes, our people at the community level are our eyes and our ears. For purposes of governance and law and order, utilization of traditional structures and local solutions at the community level are invariably more appropriate and effective.

We must mainstream the involvement of CSO's and NGO's in the implementation phase of the MSG SS.

Need for genuine cooperation between MSG Countries

I have left this issue to address before I conclude. The reason simply being that it involves the sensitive issue of sovereignty which our Governments guard jealously.

The challenge of many of the collective and cooperative ventures we are proposing in the MSG SS would involve very intricate, delicate and intimate management and governance arrangements on our borders and across our borders.

This will require navigating actions through sensitive questions of sovereignty. Our Governments must be prepared to cede a bit of their sovereignty to effectively undertake collective security actions on our borders and across our borders.

For instance, there were suggestions made to me in relation to establishment and management of joint border posts which I have initially discarded as being too radical. On further reflection, I do think that there is merit in establishing joint border posts, both land and maritime, to be manned and managed jointly by MSG countries and this may need to be seriously considered.

Conclusion

I know many of you will think some of my remarks today as being too harsh or outrageously inappropriate.

I ask that you do not forget the importance of getting it right on such an important area – that is **SECURITY**.

It is because of this that we owe it to our people and Governments' that we must sometimes have these honest and difficult conversations.

I have confidence that you will go through the text of the MSG SS and the proposals contained therein with a fine-tooth comb and arrive at a product that is worthy of submitting to the PCM and the PMM for vetting next year before it is presented to the MSG Leaders for approval.

Thank you, Merci beaucoup, Tenk yu tru, Tangio tumas, Vinaka vaka levu, Oleti, Terima kasih.

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