



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 MARKS 35TH YEAR OF EXISTENCE



Chair of the MSG & Vanuatu Prime Minister, Hon. Ishmael Kalsakau, delivers his remarks during MSG Day.



PNG dancers perform an item during MSG Day celebrations.

The Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat marked 35 years of the Group's existence at a ceremony which was officiated by the MSG Chair & Vanuatu Prime Minister, Hon. Ishmael Kalsakau on March 14. In his keynote address, Director General, Leonard Louma, welcomed the PM and his entourage saying his presence was significant as he is also Chairman of the MSG, and Chief of the land on which the Secretariat sits. DG Louma said the Secretariat is confident that under Hon. Kalsakau's Chairmanship, "we can take our cooperative relationship in MSG to a higher level".

"Under your leadership and Chairmanship, I know that the "spearhead" in the MSG spear will be sharpened again to defend and protect our interests. But more importantly, if needed, can be used to pierce through blockages in search of solutions to challenges that confront our membership," he stated.

The Hon. PM said at the time of MSG's inception, many cynics were skeptical about the vision, relevance and cohesion as a group. He stated that MSG is still viable and "we are still forging ahead with the pursuit of our social, political, economic and security interests underscoring our resoluteness, tenacity and resilience as Melanesian people.

"Sub-regionalism is now regarded as a building block for stronger regional cooperation as exemplified in the PIF regional architecture changes incorporated in the Blue Ocean Continent. MSG sub-regionalism has been vindicated," he said.

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Leonard Louma, OBE



FROM THE DIRECTOR GENERAL'S DESK

Greetings from your Secretariat!

It has been an eventful quarter ending with two tropical cyclones, back-to-back, disrupting the status quo as they wreaked havoc across the islands.

However, first let me offer my felicitations to our host country, Vanuatu, for the successful adoption by the UN General Assembly of the historical resolution, calling for an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the responsibility of States with respect to climate change and its inextricable nexus to human rights. What a win for the nation, for climate justice and indeed the planet! Climate justice is a critical human rights cause for action to ensure a safe, secure and sustainable world.

We began 2023 with a courtesy visit to the Chair of the MSG and Prime Minister of Vanuatu, Hon. Ishmael Kalsakau, who emphasised the need for the MSG to engage and be more vocal on issues affecting our region. I am encouraged and confident that MSG is headed for a more prominent role in regional affairs under the chairmanship of Hon. Kalsakau.

A courtesy call was also made to the Hon. Jotham Napat, Chair of the MSG Foreign Minister's Meeting (FMM) and Vanuatu's Minister for Foreign Affairs. Later, we engaged in a workshop for the development of a Regional Community-Based Fisheries Management (CBFM)

Implementation Guideline, as part of efforts to implement the MSG Inshore Fisheries Roadmap.

Attending the Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS) Congress in Noumea, a feature of my visit was to demonstrate solidarity and reaffirm the support of the MSG Membership and its Secretariat, towards their legitimate cause.

Another notable activity was the courtesy call to Vanuatu's Head of State, His Excellency Nikenike Vurobaravu. Earlier this month, we welcomed the Chinese Special Envoy to the Pacific, His Excellency, Qian Bo, where there were constructive talks on a broad range of issues pertaining to the specific interests of the MSG Membership and the needs of the Secretariat. I am pleased with the positive sentiments conveyed by the Special Envoy on the proposed areas of cooperation including Security, Trade & Economic Development, Health, and Culture.

This quarter was also special in that we marked 35 years of MSG's existence on March 14, 2023. We held a small ceremony at the Secretariat to celebrate this milestone and was honoured to have it officiated by the MSG Chair, PM Hon. Kalsakau, who emphasised the need to remain committed to stand in solidarity and in unity, to forge meaningful pathways forward for the benefit of all our people. I recently returned from the 15th SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting in Noumea, on the kind invitation of my counterpart, Dr Minchin, the DG of the Pacific Community. I am excited to note that we will soon renew our partnership with SPC to strengthen cooperation in the areas of health, fisheries and agriculture.

Finally, I wish to especially commend Fiji for sending their Emergency Rapid Response Team to assist Vanuatu rebuild, following the aftermath of Tropical Cyclones Judy and Kevin. This gesture is yet another indication of the strength of our Melanesian brotherhood, even in the face of adversity.

Thank you, Merci beacoup, Oleti, Tenkiu tru, Tankiu Tumas, Vinaka Vakalevu.

MSG SECRETARIAT DELEGATION PAYS COURTESY CALL ON VANUATU PM & MSG CHAIR



DG Louma and his team during the courtesy call to the Vanuatu Prime Minister and MSG Chair, Hon. Ishmael Kalsakau

The Director General of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat, Leonard Louma, led a senior management team on a courtesy call to the Vanuatu Prime Minister and current MSG Chair, Hon. Ishmael Kalsakau on 26 January 2023.

Hon. Kalsakau welcomed the DG and his delegation stating he was glad to have this first meeting since he took up office last year.

He urged the Head of the Secretariat to provide regular briefings to him to enable him to properly discharge his functions as Chair of the MSG.

DG Louma briefed Hon. Kalsakau on matters pertaining to his role as the Chair of the MSG and the operations of the Secretariat.

He was also updated on staff establishment, budget, refurbishment plans for the Secretariat building and the upcoming Governing Body meetings.

"I feel confident that MSG is headed for a more prominent role in regional affairs under the Chairmanship of Hon. Kalsakau," asserted Mr Louma. The Director General in acknowledging the PM as MSG Chair, underscored the fact that as regional civil servants, the Secretariat was subject to decisions by Leaders, led by the Chair, on any cause of action

that needed to be pursued in the interest of the region.

Hon. Kalsakau emphasised the need for the MSG region to engage more "since we are familiar with each other".

He also stressed the need for Members to be more vocal about issues affecting our region and at the same time ensure that none of the Members should be made to feel isolated.

The Chair noted that while the MSG is part of the "bigger" Pacific Islands Forum group "we need to consolidate first at this level, work towards the aspirations of our leaders and in the interest of Melanesia". MSG has in the past successfully used itself as a building block to pursue regional initiatives. "We need to be speaking more to each other as Melanesians, the more we engage the more open-minded we become for the betterment of our region," he stressed.

The MSG Governing Bodies are expected to meet soon.

"We look forward to working closely with you to strengthen and advance the interests and aspirations of the MSG Group," he added.

MSG SECRETARIAT SENIOR STAFF UNDERTAKE COURTESY CALL ON VANUATU'S HEAD OF STATE



The President of Vanuatu, His Excellency Nikenike Vurobaravu with DG Louma and senior staff of the MSG Secretariat.

A delegation from the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat comprising senior staff led by the Director General, Leonard Louma, paid a courtesy call to the President of Vanuatu, His Excellency Nikenike Vurobaravu, on Friday 24 February 2023.

H.E Vurobaravu received the team warmly and acknowledged the contribution of the MSG sub-region in advancing many regional initiatives across the broad spectrum of political, social and economic areas within the wider Pacific.

DG Louma said it was an honour for his team to meet H.E Vurobaravu, an influential figure in the establishment of the MSG group.

He stated that with an approved staff establishment of 30, MSG has grown considerably from its humble beginnings. "It has gone from basically being a pressure group, pushing issues of particular concern to Melanesian countries in the region at the Forum, to a recognised subregional organisation with its own Secretariat and a distinct legal identity of its own," DG Louma said.

The Director General underscored the importance of subregional organisations, serving as building

blocks, in creating an even stronger region, adding that MSG is a big player and has played a pivotal role in enhancing regionalism.

Furthermore, he stated that contrary to early reservations held by some that sub-regionalism would fragment the region, the MSG Leaders insisted that they would instead provide strong foundations for a stronger region.

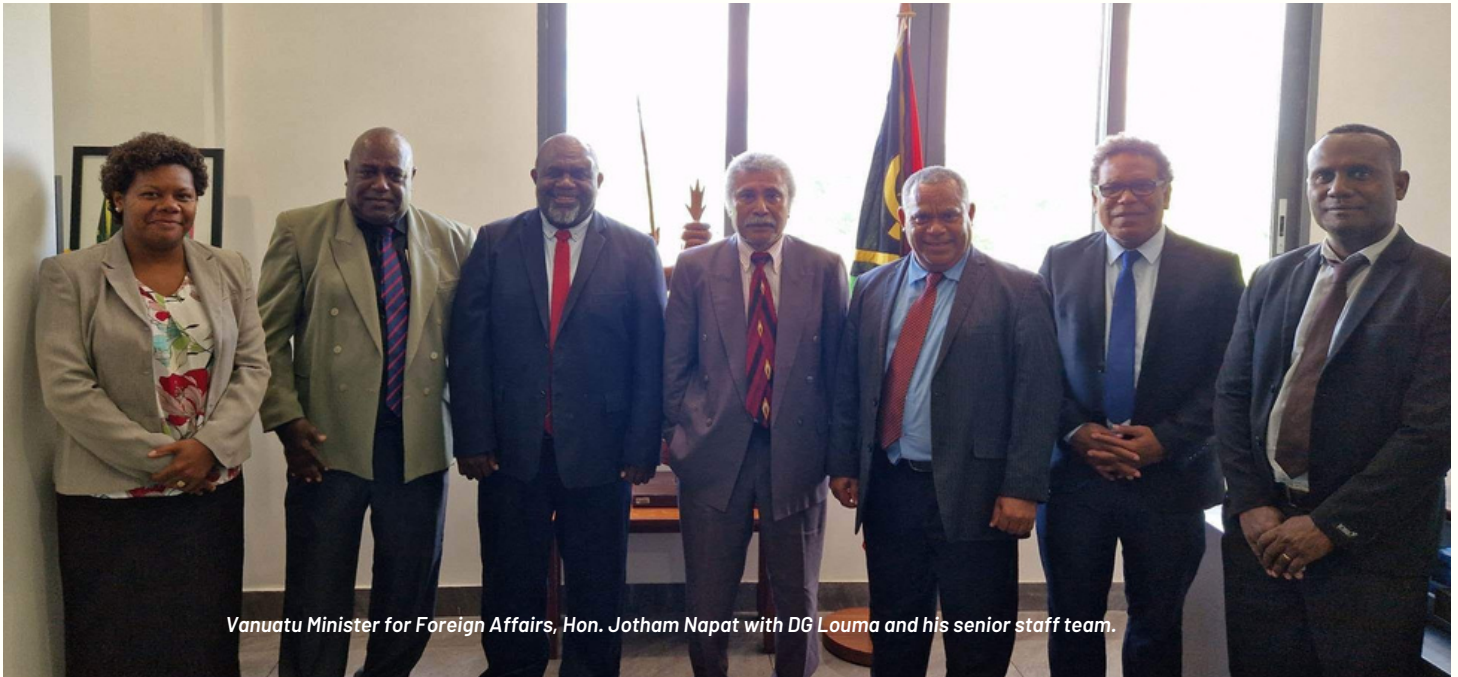
DG Louma said the MSG is a subregion known to be bold enough to embark on initiatives where others might not likely entertain and noted that Vanuatu's push for a fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty and Vanuatu's International Court of Justice (ICJ) initiative are in that vein.

H.E Nikenike expressed confidence in the work of the team and acknowledged, with hope, the leadership of the organisation under DG Louma.

He noted that the MSG is well placed in the region to contribute towards framing and influencing policy in terms of trade and security, among other issues.

While paying tribute to former Leaders, the President said the MSG has certainly evolved from its humble beginnings.

MSG SECRETARIAT DELEGATION PAYS COURTESY CALL ON VANUATU FOREIGN AFFAIRS MINISTER



Vanuatu Minister for Foreign Affairs, Hon. Jotham Napat with DG Louma and his senior staff team.

A delegation from the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat led by the Director General, Leonard Louma, paid a courtesy call to the Vanuatu Minister for Foreign Affairs, Hon. Jotham Napat earlier this year.

Hon. Napat welcomed the delegation saying he was delighted to receive them and that he looked forward to working closely with the Secretariat in his capacity as Chair of the Foreign Ministers Meeting (FMM).

DG Louma acknowledged the mutual desire of Hon. Napat to lead the MSG in pursuing the interests of its membership and took the opportunity to brief him on the current operations of the Secretariat, including its forecasted activities for the year.

Hon. Napat was also briefed on the significance of the role of the MSG Chair, which Vanuatu currently holds.

In this regard, Foreign Minister Napat emphasised that he would want the MSG to assert a leadership role in the region and actively contribute towards resolving issues and framing regional initiatives.



DG Louma presenting a gift to the Vanuatu Minister for Foreign Affairs, Hon. Jotham Napat.

FIJI RAPID RESPONSE TEAM PAYS COUTRESY CALL TO MSG SECRETARIAT



DG Louma with the team leaders of the Fiji Rapid Response Team and the Fijian staff of the MSG Secretariat.

The Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat received a courtesy call from the Fiji Rapid Response Team, led by Team Leader and Commissioner Eastern, Vitale Varo.

MSG Secretariat Director General, Leonard Louma, welcomed them saying that Fiji's presence in Vanuatu made the Secretariat proud as it demonstrated a show of support and solidarity for the latter. Fiji Team leader and Commissioner

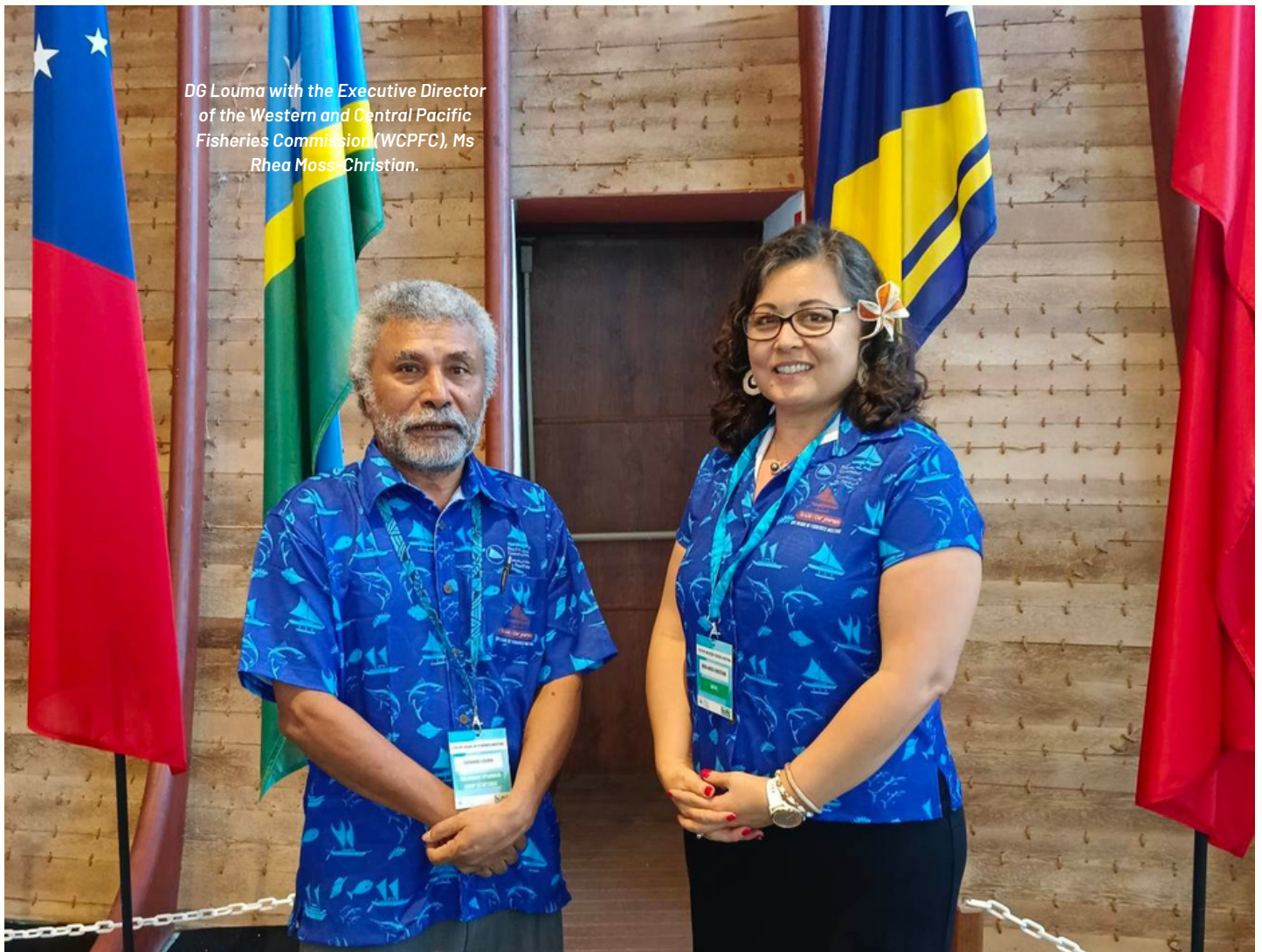
Eastern, Vitale Varo reciprocated the gesture by DG Louma saying that while their tasking was progressing well, the team is grateful for the role played by the Secretariat in facilitating their work on the ground in Vanuatu.

The 54-member contingent comprised officials from the Fiji NDMO, Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) and the Fiji Emergency Medical Assistance Team (FEMAT).



Fiji Rapid Response Team Leader and Commissioner Eastern, Vitale Varo during his team's presentation at the MSG Secretariat.

DG LOUMA MEETS WITH EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WESTERN & CENTRAL PACIFIC FISHERIES COMMISSION (WCPFC)



DG Louma with the Executive Director of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), Ms Rhea Moss-Christian.

The 15th Pacific-Community-SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting in Noumea provided an opportunity for the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat Director General, Leonard Louma, to meet with the Executive Director of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), Ms Rhea Moss-Christian, and exchange ideas on possible areas of cooperation, in managing shared fisheries resources.

The WCPFC is a tuna regional fisheries management organisation established to conserve and manage tuna and other highly migratory fish stocks across the western and central areas of the Pacific Ocean. DG Louma enquired if there were any likely areas that MSG could be involved in facilitating the better management and development of the other highly

migratory tuna fish stocks which were not adequately covered under the existing management frameworks. He noted that, on the basis of briefs provided to him, the Albacore fishery which was a big resource in the MSG countries, is still yet to establish an agreed management framework, and wondered if MSG might be able to play a starting role in this enterprise, in close collaboration with WCPFC and the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA).

Both DG Louma and ED Christian agreed to continue conversation on how the MSG and WCPFC can help complement each other's activities in the sustainable development and responsible management of common fisheries resources.

MSG SECRETARIAT & SPC TO RENEW COOPERATION



DG SPC, Dr Stuart Minchin, and the DG MSG Secretariat, Leonard Louma, following their meeting in Noumea.

The Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat and the Pacific Community (SPC) will soon renew their partnership to strengthen cooperation in the areas of health, fisheries and agriculture.

This, following a meeting between the Director General of SPC, Dr Stuart Minchin and the Director General of the MSG Secretariat, Leonard Louma, at the SPC Headquarters in Noumea, New Caledonia. The duo have agreed to renew the existing Memorandum of Cooperation (MOC) between the MSG Secretariat and SPC.

At the invitation of Dr Minchin, DG Louma attended the 15th SPC Heads of Fisheries (HoF15) Meeting in Noumea.

The opportunity enabled the identification of synergies between SPC's Noumea Strategy - "A New Song for Coastal Fisheries" and the MSG Roadmap for Inshore Fisheries Management and Sustainable Development 2015 - 2024.

Both the Director Generals acknowledged that COVID-19 and the ensuing lockdowns in the region demonstrated in an unequivocal manner the reliance of our people on coastal fisheries for sources of food and income.

DG Louma noted that the inshore fisheries sector is made more significant when one considers that women, by SPC's own accounts, represent 50

percent of the workforce in this sector. Since taking up office in September last year, DG Louma has taken a particular interest in implementing the MSG Inshore Fisheries Roadmap in recognition of the importance of inshore fisheries to the economies and livelihood of MSG countries and people.

He has since actively engaged in discussions with a number of MSG's development partners to see how best to implement the MSG Inshore Fisheries Roadmap.

Both Director General's exchanged specific ideas on Community-Based Fisheries Management and sustainable development in aquaculture/mariculture, the use of Marine Protected Areas (MPA) and Fish Aggregating Devices (FDA).

DG Louma also requested the results of the Spatial Mapping that SPC was undertaking to assist MSG with identification of the extent of coral reef acidification and mangrove forest destruction in the MSG countries.

The HoF15 looked at the impacts of climate change and the recovery efforts of Pacific Island countries from the COVID-19 pandemic on the management of sustainable fisheries and aquaculture resources, in relation to food and nutritional security, livelihood and environmental conservation.

DG LOUMA MEETS MSG HEADS OF FISHERIES IN NOUMEA



DG Louma (front, 2nd from right) with MSG Fisheries officials after their meeting.

Fisheries officials from the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) countries attending the Pacific Community (SPC's) 15th Heads of Fisheries Meeting in Noumea, New Caledonia met with the MSG Secretariat Director General, Leonard Louma.

DG Louma took advantage of their attendance and convened an ad hoc meeting to seek guidance on how best to implement the MSG 2015-2024 Inshore Fisheries Roadmap, against the backdrop of the efforts undertaken under SPC's Noumea Strategy - "A New Song for Coastal Fisheries".

While reminding them of MSG's own Inshore Fisheries Roadmap, DG Louma said that, in many respects, it mirrored the Noumea Strategy and therefore important to keep in mind during conversations surrounding the SPC Noumea Strategy and other fisheries matters.

"The MSG Secretariat will not duplicate anything that the SPC intends to do under its New Song but would want to identify synergies so efforts under the MSG Roadmap complement and add value to the management and development of the Inshore/Coastal Fisheries in MSG countries.

"I would also like to leverage the technical expertise and scientific data existent within the SPC to lend credibility to our fisheries efforts in MSG," DG Louma emphasised.

DG Louma sought the views of the officials on his intention to revive the operations of the MSG Fisheries Technical Committee (FTC) and the MSG Fisheries Working Group (FWG), including the recruitment of a fisheries officer to the MSG Secretariat. The officer is earmarked to coordinate work in the Fisheries sector, but with particular emphasis on implementation of the Inshore Fisheries Roadmap and to ensure a more integrated approach amongst MSG members, in the responsible management and sustainable development of the fisheries sector.

The meeting agreed that there was a great need and urgency to have the FTEC and FWG operational again to guide the Secretariat's work in the fisheries sector. A meeting of both these bodies will be convened before the end of this year.

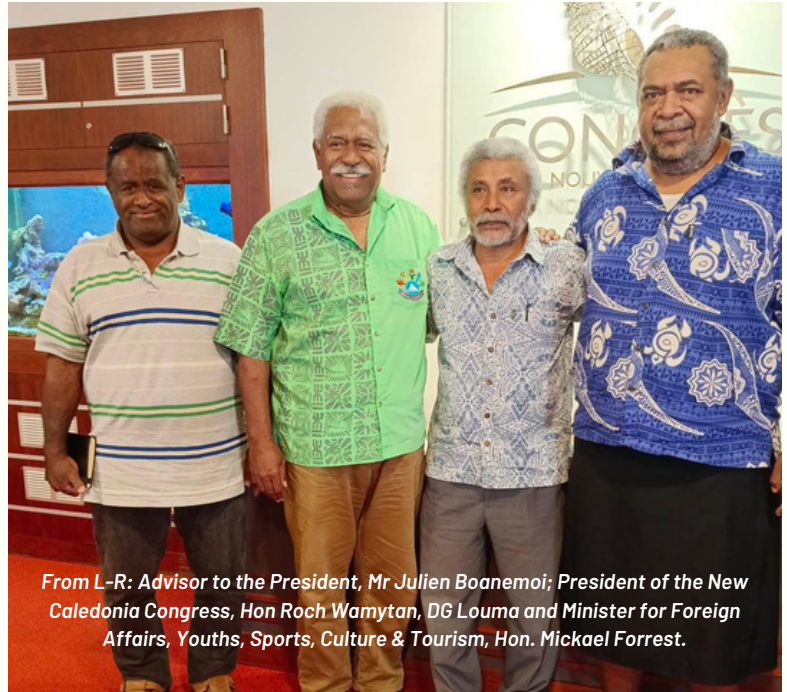
Proposals were made by the officials with particular focus on markets, joint certification, emphasis on Community Based Management of inshore/coastal fisheries, sustainable development of aquaculture and mariculture for food security, income and to ease pressures on wild stocks, improved cross border trade between MSG countries and possible joint management of BDM and Albacore.

DG Louma expressed appreciation to the MSG Fisheries officials for the opportunity to meet.

DG LOUMA PAYS COURTESY CALLS ON THE PRESIDENT OF THE GOVERNMENT & CONGRESS OF NEW CALEDONIA



DG Louma with the President of the Government of New Caledonia, His Excellency Louis Mapou.



From L-R: Advisor to the President, Mr Julien Boanemoui; President of the New Caledonia Congress, Hon Roch Wamytan, DG Louma and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Youths, Sports, Culture & Tourism, Hon. Mickael Forrest.

The Director General of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat, Leonard Louma, met with the President of the Government of New Caledonia, His Excellency Louis Mapou and the President of the New Caledonia Congress, Hon. Roch Wamytan while in Noumea recently.

The meeting with HE. Mapou discussed ways and means in which New Caledonia can be better integrated into the MSG and the Pacific region as a whole.

Both DG Louma and President Mapou agreed that there was a real need and potential to engage New Caledonia in framing cooperative measures in the areas of trade, education and human resource development, health, sports, culture, fisheries, technology transfer, security, humanitarian assistance, and people-to-people interactions.

DG Louma said that New Caledonia's greater participation in the activities of the MSG, Pacific Islands Forum and other regional organisations would greatly benefit the region.

"We had a very frank and insightful discussion on the proposition for New Caledonia to be a

Member of the MSG. I emphasised that the Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS) is a member of the MSG and its views on this matter will be crucial," said DG Louma. Another issue that was canvassed was in relation to the Trade Agreement between New Caledonia and Vanuatu and both expressed hope that outstanding issues can be resolved so that this mutually beneficial Trade Agreement can be concluded as soon as possible.

During the meeting with Hon. Wamytan, the latter reaffirmed his intention to have the New Caledonia Congress conclude cooperative agreements with all MSG Legislatures and sought the assistance of the MSG Secretariat to organise a meeting with the Speaker of the Papua New Guinea National Parliament to complete the exercise.

He advised that after the agreement with Papua New Guinea, which would signal the last MSG Parliament to conclude such an agreement, he intended to convene an MSG National Parliaments Meeting in Noumea, New Caledonia.

Both DG Louma and President Wamytan representing PNG and FLNKS respectively, were part of the 5-member MSG Eminent Persons Group (EPG) that crafted the "MSG 2038 Prosperity for All Plan".

SPECIAL MSG COUNCIL OF ARTS & CULTURE MEETING (CACM) SUCCESSFULLY CONCLUDES



The Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Council of Arts and Culture Meeting (CACM), convened as a Special Session and was successfully concluded at the MSG Secretariat.

Council Members from the MSG attended the hybrid session, via zoom and in-person in Port Vila, specifically to discuss the update and preparations for the upcoming Melanesian Arts and Culture Festival (MACFEST), to be hosted in Vanuatu in July 2023.

MSG Arts and Culture Officials, during the Special CACM were assured by the Government of Vanuatu that despite the devastating effects of Tropical Cyclones Judy and Kevin, the MACFEST would still be hosted in the latter part of July 2023 to coincide with Vanuatu's Independence celebrations.

The MSG Chair and Prime Minister of Vanuatu, Honourable Alatoi Ishmael Kalsakau Ma'aukoro confirmed the hosting of the 7th MACFEST in Vanuatu during his keynote address at the MSG Secretariat at a ceremony to mark the 35th MSG Day celebrations.

CACM officials confirmed on behalf of their

governments, their country's participation at the 7th MACFEST and indicated that they would be looking at ways in which they could assist Vanuatu with the hosting of the MACFEST.

The Special CACM also approved the logo of the 7th MACFEST 2023, including the theme. "Rebuilding My Melanesia for our Common Destiny."

Participation from Melanesian communities outside of the MSG Group Membership was discussed and it was noted that in 2014 and 2018, MACFEST welcomed the Melanesian communities in the Papuan provinces of Indonesia, Timor Leste and the Torres Strait Islanders of Australia into the festival.

It was agreed that this arrangement should be maintained in recognition of the fact that the Melanesian race extends beyond the defined boundaries of the MSG and to further reconfirm the inclusive nature of the MSG.

The MACFEST is the flagship cultural event of the MSG and Vanuatu has been given the honor to host the 7th MACFEST. The 6th MACFEST was held in the Solomon Islands in July 2018.

MSG SECRETARIAT EYES SECURITY COOPERATION & PARTNERSHIP WITH PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA



The Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat is contemplating engaging the People's Republic of China for cooperation on Security and sign on as its first official development partner.

This follows a successful meeting at the Secretariat between the Chinese Special Envoy to the Pacific, His Excellency, Qian Bo, and the Director General, Leonard Louma, who described the meeting as satisfactory.

"I had a very constructive discussion on a broad range of issues that pertain to the specific interests of my MSG Membership, and the needs of the MSG Secretariat, and was happy with the positive sentiments conveyed by the Special Envoy on the proposed areas of cooperation," he stated.

DG Louma confirmed that, "The Secretariat will now be crafting an Agreement that would be signed later this year between the Chinese Government and the Secretariat with the purpose of making the Chinese Government the first officially designated 'Development Partner' of the MSG Secretariat".

Issues discussed included enhanced Trade and Economic Development cooperation with the possibility of mounting trade expositions in China and in MSG countries; renovation and rehabilitation of the MSG Secretariat Building;

MSG countries easy visa access to China; designation of MSG countries as destination for Chinese tourists, Education/Scholarships; Health and Sports cooperation; and more cultural exchanges to foster better people-to-people understanding and relationship.

The Director General took the opportunity to thank the Chinese Government for assisting Vanuatu with the hosting of the inaugural MSG Prime Minister's Cup last year.

In relation to security cooperation, the Director General reaffirmed the positions expressed by the respective MSG Leaders that MSG would engage with its development partners on the basis of the needs of its members.

He noted, "My members have affirmed in very strong terms that no one will choose their friends or enemies for them. They have made it clear that they do not see any reason why their countries cannot receive security assistance, be it in training or equipment, from different development partners."

The MSG has the MSG Regional Security Strategy (RSS) and the RSS Working Group will be meeting in Fiji soon to finalise the text of the Strategy.

"Consistent with our Members approach, the Secretariat is not averse to cooperation with China in implementing certain aspects of the Strategy and will be carefully looking at the Strategy to determine areas where cooperation might be possible," DG Louma said.

On the MSG Secretariat Building, DG Louma while thanking the Chinese Government for their generous assistance in building it advised that the renovation and rehabilitation project would be packaged as a joint project request from the MSG member countries.

The project scope will include additional floor space to accommodate MSG Members' diplomatic representation to Vanuatu within the Secretariat - similar in nature to the concept of the Commonwealth Small Islands States Office in New York and Geneva.

MSG SECRETARIAT HOLDS CUSTOM CEREMONY TO SEEK BLESSINGS FOR REMOVAL OF WOODEN ARTEFACTS



Guests at the ceremony included MSG member representatives and MSG community leaders in Port Vila.

The Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat conducted a custom ceremony traditionally seeking the approval and blessings of the Malvatumauri Council of Chiefs, MSG member representatives and spirits embodied in the carvings, for the removal of the deteriorating wooden artefacts at the entrance to the building.

The artefacts, which represent our customs and traditions, were carved during the 25th Anniversary Celebrations in 2013 at the Vanuatu Cultural Centre by carvers from the MSG Membership. It was put up at the entrance to the MSG Secretariat building proudly displaying Melanesian heritage.

Director General, Leonard Louma, said the pieces of art are not simply decorative items but assume spiritual beings and embody respected ancestral deities of those that have left us.

"They are placed in the front of the Secretariat to watch over us, protect us and shield us from evil and those that wish us harm," he said.

"Taking them down is not something that can be lightly taken or executed in a nonchalant way. The weather and time (10 years) have taken

their toll on our guardians and it is now time to say thank you and ask them for their understanding that a change of guard is needed," he said.

"The carvings have rotten and while some have already fallen off, others are threatening to fall off at any time. This has become a public safety hazard and to avoid a disaster happening, and a potential legal liability court action against the Secretariat, it has been decided that we will need to take them off," he noted. The Secretariat intends to request carvers from our member countries to come back to Vanuatu and carve replacement pieces. Once these are carved, they will be put up in a small ceremony. DG Louma said the gift provided by the Secretariat which included root crops, a pig and mats signified the importance of the occasion, "to say thank you to the spirits that lie behind these artifacts and the respective deities they represent from each of our countries". The Chiefs acknowledged the Secretariat for the initiative and gave their blessings. Also present at the ceremony were MSG member representatives, MSG community leaders in Port Vila and an official from the Vanuatu Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

MELANESIAN SOLIDARITY PLAYED HUGE ROLE IN VANUATU'S INDEPENDENCE



Present at the launch of ""Taf Tumas II Becoming Vanuatu" were, standing L-R: Vanuatu's 1st Opposition Leader, Vincent Boulekone; MSG Secretariat DG, Leonard Louma; and Vanuatu's Former President, Kalkot Mataskelekele. Sitting is Vanuatu's first President, Ati George Sokomanu (L) and former Prime Minister, Barak Sope.

Melanesian solidarity and contributions were evident and underlined the conception and efforts that enabled the birth of Vanuatu as an Independent State, says Director General of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat, Leonard Louma.

DG Louma made the comment following the recent launch of "Taf Tumas II Becoming Vanuatu" in Port Vila, which was officiated by Vanuatu's Prime Minister, Hon. Ishmael Kalsakau.

Implemented by the Pacific Community's Human Rights & Social Development (HRSD) Division as part of the Pacific Partnership Programme, the Book, aimed at children, contains illustrations and non-fiction stories from various writers and artists on Vanuatu's independence-era stories.

He noted that most of Vanuatu's leaders who were instrumental in the struggle for independence were somehow connected to Fiji, Papua New Guinea (PNG) and the Solomon Islands either through marriage, work or education.

Vanuatu's first Prime Minister, Walter Lini's wife is from the Solomon Islands and the mainstay to his political career. Jimmy Stevens who was very much instrumental in sowing the seeds of 'self-

rule' in the minds of young Ni-Vanuatu leaders studied in Fiji and carried out his advocacy among them in Fiji.

Former Prime Minister and Independence Leader Donald Kalpokas studied in the Solomon Islands and Fiji including Barak Sope, also a former PM with his wife Mildred, who attended USP.

Former President and Ombudsman, Kalkot Mataskelekele studied in Fiji and PNG, while a former Deputy PM, Sethy John Regenvanu trained as a Presbyterian pastor in Fiji. These are only a few to name. According to 'Taf Tumas Becoming Vanuatu', a key condition of the 1978 Dijoud Plan which the British, French and Melanesian leaders agreed to follow to bring about Independence was political agreement for the Constitution.

The Council of Churches contributed a lawyer from PNG, Bernard Narokobi to assist in writing the Constitution from a Melanesian perspective.

DG Louma commended the notion of highlighting the "uniqueness of Melanesian solidarity and that special regional bond that we can always lean on to for support as has been beautifully demonstrated by Vanuatu's history and cleverly captured in the book".

FRENCH AMBASSADOR TO VANUATU PAYS COURTESY CALL TO MSG SECRETARIAT DIRECTOR GENERAL



French Ambassador to Vanuatu, H.E Mr. Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer and DG Louma (middle), flanked by Senior Executive Adviser, Chris Waiwori (L) and Political & Security Affairs Programme Manager, Ilan Kiloe following the visit.

The Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat received a courtesy call from the French Ambassador to Vanuatu, His Excellency Mr. Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer.

The occasion provided an opportunity to have positive discussions around MSG's ongoing efforts to find areas of shared interests between the MSG and France where cooperation can be forged. In noting MSG support for the Kanak's political aspirations and Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS) of New Caledonia membership of the MSG,

the MSG Director General emphasised that he intended to focus on constructive dialogue in search of mutually beneficial solutions rather than dwell on differences between parties. Discussions centred around exploring possible cooperation in the area of education such as French scholarships, capacity building such as training for Peace-Keeping operations, training in the area of information threats as a result of mis-information and dis-information, surveillance and possible 'ship-riding' arrangements, increasing commercial links between MSG countries and New Caledonia. The Director General stated that he was pleased with the open and very positive atmosphere in which the discussions were held and is convinced that these will further pave the way forward for better understanding of issues that both parties are required to address, but importantly help facilitate identification of areas of shared interests where mutually beneficial cooperation can be developed.

MSG DIRECTOR GENERAL MEETS WITH ULMWP

The Director General of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat, Leonard Louma, OBE, met with the chairman of the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP), Benny Wenda, and his retinue. The request by ULMWP for the meeting was made through Vanuatu's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Mr Wenda conversed on two key matters, firstly providing updates on the situation in West Papua, as they saw it, and secondly, sought information on the ULMWP application for full Membership to the MSG.

DG Louma opened his remarks by informing Mr. Wenda of the importance he placed on constructive dialogue between the two parties. Following that, he sought to explain the basic ground rules governing the operations of the Secretariat given that it is owned by five MSG members.

"The MSG Secretariat's conduct and actions on



ULMWP Chairman Benny Wenda (middle) and DG Louma (2nd from right) following their meeting.

any matter are defined and circumscribed by the MSG Leaders decisions. The Secretariat has no authority to act outside the collective decisions of the Leaders. As such, the Secretariat is not at liberty to prosecute the position of individual members on any matter," DG Louma said.

The DG also underscored that the powers to make a decision on Membership matters in the MSG, rests with the MSG Leaders which is their exclusive preserve.

MSG PLEDGES SUPPORT FOR FLNKS AT NOUMEA CONGRESS



The Congress was held ahead of bilateral talks scheduled between the French interior minister Gerald Darmanin and the FLNKS in Noumea.

The Director General of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat, Leonard Louma, attended the Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS) Congress in Noumea, New Caledonia which was held from 25-26 February 2023, at the invitation of the FLNKS Political Bureau.

Delivering his remarks, DG Louma said, "It is indeed a great pleasure to be here in Kanaky land to listen to ideas that the FLNKS Leadership has on constructive ways forward in our joint efforts to realise your right to exercise genuine self-determination, under agreed UN precepts and your eventual political aspirations of self-rule and sovereignty".

He stated that an important aspect of his visit was to demonstrate solidarity with FLNKS and reaffirm the support of the MSG Membership and its Secretariat, towards their legitimate cause.

He reminded those gathered at the Congress that the FLNKS cause for emancipation and decolonisation is one of the foundational reasons for the establishment of the MSG.

To improve the way in which the MSG Secretariat can render assistance to the FLNKS and its cause, a decision has been taken to re-establish the FLNKS Unit/Desk within the Secretariat.

This is in recognition of the fact that the fight for the FLNKS cause has reached a critical stage, after the Third Referendum, and the Secretariat

needs a fully dedicated person to assist with liaison work and coordination of efforts, both regionally and globally, amongst all stakeholders. Other reasons giving rise to the decision to re-establish the FLNKS Unit/Desk include:

- concerted effort that is required to ensure that the 2018 Action Plan approved by the MSG Leaders in Port Moresby on diplomatic approaches internationally and regionally, in support of FLNKS is implemented;
- the FLNKS decision of non-participation, non-recognition of the legitimacy of the Third Referendum and its subsequent result has fundamental implications for the MSG Secretariat's work; and
- FLNKS' decision to seek an Advisory Opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the Third Referendum would require a lot of intricate legal work and considerable diplomatic effort. The results of the 3rd Referendum, which MSG does not recognise, has raised the spectre of a possible motivation to delist New Caledonia from the list of the Committee of 24, and DG Louma opined that MSG would do well not to allow this to happen and all must work hard to avoid such an eventuality taking place at the United Nations. He reassured that the Secretariat will continue to assist their desire to establish Parliamentary cooperation between the NC Congress and other MSG Legislatures.

MSG SECRETARIAT DIRECTOR GENERAL CALLS FOR PEOPLE-CENTRIC SOLUTIONS TO SAVE INSHORE FISHERIES



Participants of the Regional workshop for the development of regional Community-Based Fisheries Management (CBFM) implementation guideline along with DG Louma and some members of his senior staff.

People-centric solutions must be developed to protect inshore fisheries within the Melanesian region which has been over-exploited and threatened as a result of the anthropogenic effects of development, says the Director General of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat, Leonard Louma.

He made the comments while opening the regional workshop for the development of regional Community-Based Fisheries Management (CBFM) implementation guideline at the MSG Secretariat. The workshop is part of the third phase of the Grace of the Sea Project (GOSP) in the coastal villages in Vanuatu, funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

DG Louma said community-based approaches such as that adopted by the GOSP falls right into the ambit of people-centric solutions and it is important as our Leaders have called on us to do this. He mentioned that the MSG Secretariat sees

this workshop as part of its plans to implement the MSG Fisheries Roadmap for Inshore Fisheries Management and Sustainable Development 2015-2024 hence the theme of his remarks, 'Giving meaning to the MSG Inshore Fisheries Roadmap'. The template he said, offers us a feasible pathway to implementing the Roadmap. The Vanuatu version of the implementation guideline of CBFM, including the tool and training manuals, for field officers have been developed by the Project and was officially approved by Vanuatu Fisheries Department (VFD). The workshop introduced the implementation guideline of CBFM through presentations and site visits and to get feedback from the participants to develop a regional version of the implementation guideline. Participants were from Vanuatu, Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands.

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