



STAGED LIMITED REARMAMENT OF RSIPF

Message from Hon. Manasseh Sogavare Prime Minister of Solomon Islands

One of the darkest eras in the history of modern Solomon Islands was from 1999 to 2002 when Solomon Islands experienced the so-called ethnic tension or social unrest. However, in 2003 Solomon Islands invited the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) with the mandate to help us restore law and order. As a consequence, law and order was restored; one of the hallmarks of RAMSI for Solomon Islands.

Today, the onus is on the people of Solomon Islands to continue the good work that RAMSI has done. The reality is, RAMSI is not here to stay, and it will not solve all of our socio-economic and political problems. I whole-heartedly believe the statement by late Dr. John Roughan when he said that "RAMSI has given us a breathing space, an opportunity to set things right once again."

In context, one of the state institutions we need to continually invigorate to help deal with law and order in the long-run is our Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF). Thus, the DCC Government is committed to continue to put in place further arrangements for the purposes of the RSIPF having an armed capability.

Specifically, the DCC Government is committed to ensuring that our RSIPF develops its operational capabilities so that it has the ability to respond to serious criminal threats and manage the security of Solomon Islands. Clearly, the need to develop a limited lethal armed capability for the RSIPF thus falls within the scope of the above DCC Government policy.



Prime Minister
Manasseh Sogavare

Further, security at our national airport needs to be tightened to meet international security standards.

The limited rearmament for the RSIPF will entail the arming of the following units within the RSIPF: Close Personal Protection Unit, Police Response Team and police at our international airport. It is a requirement that all members of these units who will be armed are selected based on their personal qualities to undergo a training program and will only be allowed to access firearms if they pass the rigorous training.

In order for the DCC Government to implement its policy on police and national security, there is a need for community consultation. My Government, as envisaged in its policy statement, will give our ongoing support to the RSIPF limited rearmament community engagement program. This is essential given that all of us have a role to play in ensuring the safety and security of Solomon Islands and we need to get the views of our people on this important issue of limited rearmament.

*Hon. Manasseh Sogavare, MP
Prime Minister*

Limited rearmament is fundamental to Solomon Islands security because the RSIPF need to have the right tools and skills to help them in the course of their duties. Similarly important, limited armed capability is essential in order for the RSIPF to protect our national leaders and other important leaders who visit Solomon Islands.

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Decision to rearm the RSIPF

- The Solomon Islands Government (SIG) made the decision that RSIPF needs to begin work on developing a limited firearms capability.
- SIG has authorized the RSIPF and relevant SIG agencies to work with RAMSI to prepare the force for the possible limited reintroduction of firearms.
- SIG will make the final decision on the type of firearms and ammunition to be used by the RSIPF.
- Reasons why the RSIPF need firearms
- To enforce law and order in Solomon Islands
- Protect communities, life and property, and to protect themselves
- Fulfil the national security requirements of the Solomon Islands.
- Provide protection to dignitaries (close personal protection) to Solomon Islands leaders or visiting VIPs
- Fulfil an international requirement that all international airports must maintain an armed security presence
- Destroy crocodiles, which are a danger to those Solomon Islanders living along the coast or near rivers.

Parts of the RSIPF to be rearmed

- Re-introduction of lethal firearms will be limited to only certain units within the RSIPF and the process will be done in stages.
- The Units to be rearmed at this stage are the Police Response Team (PRT), the Close Personal Protection (CPP) Unit and the Police operating at international airports.

Project structure and management

This project is sensitive, broad and complex and due to this a comprehensive project plan has been created. This includes a Project Management structure responsible for coordination and management, and an Oversight Committee responsible for ensuring the project outcomes are delivered. The Oversight Committee includes members of the SIG, RSIPF and RAMSI.

The project includes a number of work streams being;

- Firearms Selection - the selection and procurement of firearms and ammunition types best suited to the conditions of Solomon Islands and the RSIPF.
- Infrastructure - the design and construction of an armoury built to high security standards and the identification of a suitable firing range for ongoing training.
- Training - the design, delivery and evaluation of training including weapons handling, safe usage and marksmanship. Training also includes leadership, professional standards, discipline, command and control and planning. RAMSI are also training members of the RSIPF so they are qualified.



An RSIPF officer providing security at the Honiara International Airport. (Photo by RAMSI PPF)

- Governance – the review of current Use of Force, management structures and mechanisms and procedures and development of new governance for firearms use to ensure they provide appropriate control over the use and security of firearms.
- Monitoring and Evaluation – of the project overall providing key project documents for review and status reports. Develop the monitoring and evaluation plan of the RSIPF's lethal force capability and management and control of firearms and ammunition. Monitoring and auditing of compliance of governance and procedures.
- Community Engagement and Change Management – conducting a community outreach program to educate and involve the people of the Solomon Islands and members of the RSIPF on the limited rearmament project. Opinions of the community will be collated and provided to the Solomon Islands Government prior to Stage 2 of the project (Implementation).

RSIPF ready to be rearmed

- The RSIPF is a very different police force today than it was during the Tension period.
- More than 70% of its officers have been recruited after the Tensions
- The RSIPF has benefited from over a decade of extensive and rigorous capacity development from RAMSI
- The force has strengthened its accountability and disciplinary procedures since the Tension and with support from RAMSI these are further undergoing improvements.
- Any RSIPF member found to be misusing a weapon, not following correct procedure or abusing their position as armed police officers will be dealt with strictly according to Solomon Islands Law.

Process from here

- Extensive community consultations are being conducted and people's questions and comments fed back into the project
- Selection of officers to undergo training
- Careful oversight and monitoring by RAMSI staff and trainers
- Report on phase one (the preparatory phase of the project involving selection of firearms, training of police officers, development of accountability and governance arrangements, and construction of an armoury) to the Solomon Islands government for consideration.



RSIPF officers engaged in community consultation on the limited rearmament project. (Photo by RAMSI public affairs.)

For more information

Contact: RAMSI OSC

Phone: 677-36249

www.ramsi.org/contact-us/

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