

Opening Statement by Mr. Solo Mara
Chairman, MSG Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) &
Permanent Secretary, Fiji Ministry Of Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation
Special MSG SOM No.2 for 2011

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Head of Delegations of FLNKS, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Fiji,
Delegates,
Staff of the MSG Secretariat,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the 2nd Special MSG Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) meeting for 2011. I wish to officially welcome you to Vanuatu, our host country for our second special meeting for 2011. As you know, this meeting was agreed to during the Leaders Summit in Suva, almost five months ago so I am glad to see that you have all made it to Port Vila despite your busy schedules.

Colleagues, you will note from the agenda several important issues concerning our MSG region, to be discussed over the next two days.

To begin our day, we will receive progressive reports from the Chairpersons of the Sub-committees on Legal & Institutional Issues (SCLII), Security (SCS) and the Police Commissioner's Conference (PCC).

Following the Leaders Summit in March, I understand that these sub-committees have had a number of meetings to discuss a number of important issues like the harmonized arrangements on extradition, reciprocal enforcement of foreign judgments, custody and maintenance of children and legislative framework arrangements for the Regional Police Academy (RPA) and Formed Police Unit (FPU).

Furthermore, progress has been noted on the issue of the MSG Humanitarian and Emergency Response Force (MSGHERF), including related workshops on monitoring & surveillance systems in the region. I would also like to acknowledge the funding assistance provided by the Government of Luxembourg for those workshops.

I understand the PCC have also met several times to finalize arrangements for the working groups on RPA, FPU and Police Cooperation and they have been able to achieve some of their objectives with the kind assistance of the Government of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Furthermore, they have also been able to conduct their workshops on framework arrangements on information sharing in the region with the kind assistance of the Government of Luxembourg.

As agreed at the pre-summit Foreign Ministers Meeting (FMM) on 29 March, 2011 in Suva, the

Secretariat will present a more detailed paper on procedures and criteria in assessing applications for the status of Observership to the MSG for consideration by this Special SOM. In anticipation of associate membership applications to the MSG, the Secretariat will also present a paper on the criteria and procedures for associate membership to the MSG for consideration by this Special SOM.

Colleagues, further to the MSG Leaders decision at the 18th MSG Summit on 31 March, 2011 in Suva, on the Outcome of the MSG Mission to New Caledonia in June, 2010, we will receive the report on the meetings held with the UN Chairman of the Special Committee on Decolonization (C24) and others in New York, from 20 to 24 June 2011. In light of this progress report and as agreed earlier this year in March by Leaders, the Secretariat and the FLNKS will also kindly provide for our information an update on the preparatory arrangements for a 2nd MSG Mission to New Caledonia. They will also provide a time line on how to progress the implementation of recommendations endorsed by our Leaders.

This Special SOM will also be deliberating on the progressive report to be presented by the Chairman of the Trade & Economic Officials Meeting (TEOM) as required under article 8 of the Agreement Establishing the MSG.

Colleagues, we must begin to address some of our key challenges facing our member countries in terms of trade in Melanesia. This meeting will deliberate on the recent study that looked at MSG trade over the last five years, and also the recent proposals of rules of origin and the tariff implementation that were part of the outcomes of the recent Customs and Quarantine Subcommittee Meeting that was held in Nadi, in May. Another key area to be discussed at this meeting is the endorsement of how we can improve the clarity in the legal text of the Melanesian Spearhead Group Trade Agreement to accommodate new areas such as trade in services and labour mobility agreed by Leaders at the recent 18th MSG Leaders Summit in March this year. We will also at this meeting deliberate further on the outcomes of the Services Subcommittee that was held in June 2011 on the progress of the first discussion and negotiation in drafting a first Memorandum of Understanding on the MSG Skills Movement Scheme (SMS).

Colleagues, in light of our trade priorities I understand that all our Members are continuing to negotiate a comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the European Union and have been given the opportunity to discuss the analysis of the European Parliament Resolution that was kindly supported by funding by the Commonwealth Secretariat. As you may recall, the SOM and FMM in March, agreed to analyze the resolution of the European Parliament that was made in January that particularly called into question the key benefits of the iEPA relating to the global sourcing rules of origin on fish. Our members place priority on fisheries as one of the most important resource of our region. We must move forward with key recommendations from our members as the fisheries sector has the potential to not only improve live of our communities, but also increase our trade and contribute to continuous economic growth within our region.

Colleagues, while we look forward to address issues of trade and politics in our region, we must not forget key issues in terms of economic and social development of our people. As

agreed by Leaders at the 18th MSG Leaders Summit early this year, the Secretariat will kindly provide an update on the signing of the Treaty on Traditional Knowledge & Expressions of Culture to this Special SOM. We will also receive a report by Papua New Guinea on the outcome of internal consultations on the proposed Melanesian Games for consideration by you all at this meeting.

My fellow Colleagues, we also have before us at this Special SOM, some in-house issues that will be presented by the Corporate Services Division. I am sure you all, like myself would like to deliberate and endorse these administrative issues to further strengthen our growing organization.

At this juncture, let me thank you all for coming to the Secretariat headquarters and for all the hard work leading up to this Special SOM. I look forward to substantive deliberations on the agenda items before us and your cooperation for a successful two-day meeting.

Merci beaucoup!