



MSG Secretariat
Secretariat du GFLM

Melanesian Spearhead Group | Le Groupe Fer de Lance Mélanésien

**OPENING STATEMENT BY SOM CHAIR, PERMANENT SECRETARY, FIJI
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS & INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION,
MR. AMENA YAUVOLI
AT THE OPENING OF THE SPECIAL MSG SENIOR OFFICIALS MEETING
(SOM)**

MSG Secretariat Conference Room
16-17 May 2013
Port Vila, Republic of Vanuatu

Mr. Victor Tutugoro, the FLNKS Spokesperson and Incoming MSG Chair and your delegation
Colleague Heads of Ministries of Foreign Affairs of member Governments and your
Delegations,
Excellencies,
Director General of the MSG Secretariat,
Senior Officials,
Staff of the MSG Secretariat,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Nisa Bula Vinaka!
Good Dei lo yumi evriwan!
Good Morning to you all!

I must say I'm delighted that we are finally able to gather despite the demanding schedules of our respective responsibilities as Heads of Government Ministries. The fact we are all here demonstrates our commitment to our organization and I want to sincerely thank all members for making it to Port Vila.

In this regard, I recognize and acknowledge all delegates, in particular Mr Tutugoro who is here to brief us on the preparations for the Leaders' Summit. On behalf of the SOM, we thank you for your time and brief.

Allow me also in my capacity as Chair of the Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) and on behalf of our Secretariat to warmly welcome you all to the MSG headquarters here in Port Vila, Republic of Vanuatu. I understand for some of us, this is the first time we are attending a Senior Official's meeting held at the Secretariat.

Hence it's a good opportunity for us to get to know each other so that we can be able to share more frankly when considering the many important issues brought to the attention of the Governing Body for which we are a part as determined by the Agreement Establishing the MSG. Our role as the preparatory meeting for the Foreign Ministers and Leaders Meetings essentially renders for us a status that is crucial to informed decision-making. To this end, the participation of Heads of Ministries of Foreign Affairs as Heads of Delegations is so important to ensure we can consider the issues with some level of authority therefore propose recommendations that our Ministers and Leaders will appreciate have had the right level of prior technical consideration. I'm pleased to note that members appreciate this and wish to call on our continued participation in future MSG Senior Officials Meetings.

Colleagues, in my communication to you all in March 2013, you will note that I made a particular appeal to you all to attend this very important meeting on the eve of our Pre-Summit Senior Officials Meeting that is being scheduled to be held in New Caledonia from 13 to 14 June 2013. This Special SOM is to initiate discussion on a number of the key issues for formal consideration in June. This includes mainly the Agreement Establishing the MSG as contained

in the SCLII Report, the Chairing Arrangements for Trade-related meetings, the application by West Papua for Membership, the participation of observers, and MoUs with non-state organizations among other issues that are included in the agenda. Having a prior discussion ahead of the Summit will allow members to have sufficient time to consult on clear positions with Ministers and Leaders before they are able to gather in Noumea.

Further, members will also note that recently the MSG Chair appointed an MSG EPG led by Mr Tavola of Fiji to consult and develop a new vision for the MSG. The EPG had commenced their work and had completed consultations in Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Fiji and will be traveling to Honiara and Port Moresby for consultations from 20 May 2013. The consultations have been very successful and we are pleased that Mr Tavola, the Leader of the EPG, is here to provide the SOM with a progress report on the main issues that have emanated from their consultations so far. This is a privileged opportunity and I would urge that we reserve our comments on substantive issues until the EPG has completed its work. They will of course be submitting their report to the Leaders through the FMM and SOM in June in Noumea.

Ladies and gentlemen, this year is an important year for the MSG. I have just mentioned the important work of the EPG that is currently underway. This is happening as the MSG celebrates 25 years of its founding in 1988. Our organization has made and keeps making runs on the board on many initiatives that are now bearing fruit. A number of headline achievements can be drawn out. The MSG Trade Agreement is a flagship achievement of our cooperation while the establishment of the Secretariat in 2008 marked the beginning of formal operations for the MSG. We also have a culture and arts festival that has been showcasing our rich culture and arts heritage for many years and PNG is hosting the 5th festival next year. In 2014, New Caledonia will be hosting the first Melanesian Games. And we are now about to embark on developing a new architecture for our trade cooperation that will see, if all the requirements were met, closer integration among MSG members. Therefore celebrating 25 years of existence is significant to acknowledge the achievements thus far and mark a turning point for the MSG in terms of the promise in the new vision now being developed by the EPG and closer integration that could emanate from the new trade architecture. But as we look to the future, we may have to also ensure that the Secretariat has the capacity to respond to the new expectations hence the need for members to continue to assure sufficient resourcing of the Secretariat. I'm pleased to note there is a paper discussing funding for the Secretariat and that to date, members have been committed to maintaining their assessed contributions up to date. In regards I wish to thank all members for their continued support.

Finally, I wish to extend a vote of thanks to my predecessor, Ms Mataikabara, for her leadership of the Senior Officials Meeting since 2011 and look forward to continue the good work she started in ensuring engaged discussions and good outcomes. I do look forward to working closely with all of you and count on your support so that we will be able to complete our

business successfully tomorrow with good outcomes.

On this note, may I on your behalf thank the Secretariat for the arrangements for the meeting and invite all delegates to join me in attending to the business for our meeting.

Thank you for your attention,
Vinaka Vakalevu,
Thank you Tumas,
Oleti.