



**MSG Secretariat**  
**Secretariat du GFLM**

Melanesian Spearhead Group | Le Groupe Fer de Lance Mélanésien

**OPENING STATEMENT BY HON. BOB LOUGHMAN MP, ACTING MINISTER  
OF YOUTH AND SPORTS & MINISTER OF EDUCATION  
GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF VANUATU  
2ND SPORTS COMMITTEE MEETING (SCM)**

MSG Secretariat, Port Vila, VANUATU, 28 October 2013

Chairman, Sports Committee Meeting  
Senior Government Officials  
National Olympic Committee Representatives  
Invited Guests  
Director General and staff of the MSG Secretariat  
Ladies and Gentlemen

Bonjour and welcome,

On behalf of the Government and people of the Republic of Vanuatu, it is my great pleasure to first of all, welcome you all to the 'Happiest Place on the Planet' for the 2nd MSG Sports Committee Meeting (SCM) being held here at the home of the Melanesian Spearhead Group, the MSG Secretariat Headquarters in Vanuatu.

I am pleased to welcome you, members of the Sports Committee Meeting, in my capacity as Acting Minister of Youth and Sports, to the first ever MSG Sports meeting that is being hosted by our country. And whilst stepping into this role on behalf of my colleague Minister who is

attending an overseas engagement, I am indeed honoured that you have agreed to meet here as Sports is an important activity that contributes to the well-being of our people.

I also acknowledge the vision of our Leaders in endorsing the establishment of this body to facilitate among other matters, the inaugural Melanesia Games in 2014, in the pursuit of 'unity' amongst our populations – and to be more exact, if I may borrow a quote from the MSG Eminent Persons Group (EPG): “being united under the banner of the new vision with clear outcomes and to which we can claim ownership.”

Unity can be derived through sports as it encompasses people of all ages, cultures and language groups. By engaging actively in Sports, we will lead healthy lives, the education and training of our young people will be further enhanced, our cultural identity will be maintained and there are many tangible economic opportunities to be gained, resulting in the improved well being of our people.

There are many other positive social implications these activities have in our communities and I am delighted that the 2014 Inaugural Melanesia Games is youth-oriented and will focus on our youths, the Leaders of tomorrow. The Games will bring together the sporting youth of the countries of Melanesia in order to reinforce friendship and promote healthy behaviors.

The Melanesia Games is designed to not only cater for sports and competition but also to provide a safe and learning environment for the youths of our region to share their cultural identities and strengthen Melanesian solidarity and integration. Through this inaugural Melanesia Games, we also hope to promote respect, tolerance and sportsmanship (fair play).

The idea of organizing the symposiums to be held in parallel with the games is aimed at exposing our young people to the broader issues of sustainable development and well-being in our region in Melanesia and the Pacific as a whole. We want our young people to understand and value the crucial link between our cultural heritage and our natural heritage or the environment. We have to educate our youth to value the importance of looking after and using our land, forests and seas and their resources in a sustainable manner. This has been our natural insurance in an ever growing global economy, and will continue to be our insurance into the future.

Two years ago, according to statistics provided by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), the entire population of the Pacific was to have reached 10million and and by 2035, they predict this figure reaching 15million. The growth rate means that another 188,000 people – equivalent to the population of Samoa – are being added to the total each year.

This steady growth means increased demand on already stretched transport, energy, health and education infrastructure, not to mention food and water supply, employment opportunities and housing.

Out of the 10million people in the Pacific, most people live in Melanesia (8.8 million or 88%)

compared to Polynesia (668,000 or 7%) and Micronesia (546,000 or 5%). But what is not so well known is the extent of the differences in the population numbers within the region – between sub-regions, countries and territories.

According to the SPC report, Melanesia's population is growing by 2% a year, faster than that of Micronesia (1.5%) and Polynesia (0.7%).

For instance, Papua New Guinea, the largest Melanesian nation, is home to 70% of the region's inhabitants today and its population is expected to reach 10 million by 2030, making it important not to generalise across the region. The fastest growing countries are Solomon Islands (2.7%) and Vanuatu (2.6%), where high growth rates are due to high birth rates.

The least densely populated countries include our members - the Melanesian countries of Papua New Guinea (15), Solomon Islands (18), and Vanuatu (21). The territory of New Caledonia whose Kanak population constitutes about 44% of the population is ranked at (14).

**Why I am a talking figures this morning?** It is because with high birth and low life expectancy rates, Melanesia has a 'youth explosion' pyramid shape in its population profile. For example, forty per cent of the population of Papua New Guinea and 38% of that of Solomon Islands consist of children under 15 years. These percentages in Melanesia, equals almost 50% of our region's population.

What can we do for our young people apart from hosting the 'youth oriented' Melanesia Games? This is an important event that will help shape our thinking about how to address the challenges being faced by our young people. These challenges include the effects of global warming, climate change and loss of biodiversity, food security, to name a few. We need to take stock of the needs of our young population and find ways we can address their concerns.

During your Meeting, I challenge you to also consider topics that will create greater awareness about our region and about topics that will affect their future lives when planning symposiums and side events during the inaugural Melanesia Games next year.

I hope the Games will be the beginning of our collective efforts to create greater unity amongst our people and to develop a common destiny, for a better future for our young generation.

As Minister responsible for Education which deals mostly with youth and now Acting Minister for Youth and Sports, I am more and more concerned as I know all of you are about the future of our youth. I am encouraged that we are still interested to find ways to engage our youth and this 2nd meeting of the MSG Sports Committee will contribute to establishing the activities including the upcoming inaugural Melanesia Games in 2014 to involve our youth. May I urge all of us not to stop there but to continue to find ways either at the national level or through MSG Cooperation to ensure our youth are engaged in productive activities such as sports.

Mr Chairman, Senior Sporting Officials, ladies and gentlemen, for the next 3 days you will be discussing issues of eminent importance for this organization and I wish you well in your deliberations, for a fruitful and successful outcome to this 2nd MSG Sports Committee Meeting (SCM).

I also wish to reiterate the Government of Vanuatu's continued support towards the inaugural Melanesian Games 2014 as a stepping stone to the 2015 SP Games to be hosted by Papua New Guinea and the 2017 SP mini Games, we will be hosting.

I wish you all a pleasant stay while here in Vanuatu and hope you will enjoy our culture and warm Vanuatu hospitality. Please take the time to visit our famous market, situated in the heart of town. I know you will not miss this famous landmark!

With these remarks, it is my great honour to declare the 2nd MSG Sports Committee Meeting, Officially Open.

Tankiu tru, tankiu tumas, vinaka vakalevu, Merci beaucoup!