

20th MSG LEADERS SUMMIT

Statement to the Melanesian Spearhead Group Leaders

Honiara, Solomon Islands, 26 June 2015

Tenei te mihi aroha ki a koutou rau rangatira

As a Maori from the Ngati Toa tribe in Aotearoa New Zealand I would firstly like to acknowledge the tangata whenua & the people of the land - our hosts here in the Solomon Islands, including the Prime Minister and chair of MSG, Hon Manasseh Sogovare; and other distinguished leaders of Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Indonesia, the United Liberation Movement of West Papua, and FLNKS.

Congratulations on the positive outcomes of this summit including admitting Indonesia as an associate member of MSG and ULMWP as an observer. This is indeed a watershed period for the MSG.

It is what we have, not what we are given that separates one people, indeed, one nation from another. Melanesia has a proud, shared history, tremendous potential and high caliber and talented, adaptable people. All around us, change is happening. Change, and the pace of change, can be unsettling for some but there are hidden opportunities. We need to seize hold of those opportunities when they arise, lest they pass us by.

For a progressive, prosperous, peaceful and united Melanesia change is inevitable. Melanesia's place in the world is changing. Under the strong leadership of the MSG what's emerging is a new Melanesia where Melanesians are carving out their futures confident in the knowledge that they have something unique to offer the rest of the Pacific, and the world. They aspire to break new ground, foster new communities of interest, advance new ways of working together, and promote a distinct and valued Melanesian world-view.

For the people of Melanesia to succeed in challenging times they must not only be culturally, academically and technically equipped but also creative, innovative and connected. Melanesia can build on the traditional strengths that come from sea and land-based industries as well as the new and diverse activities that are advancing Melanesia's contribution to the 'big issues' of our age & sustainable resource use, community resilience in times of natural and induced environmental disasters, and climate change to name but a few.

I want to acknowledge the outstanding achievements of the University of the South Pacific throughout the Pacific and around the world. As New Zealand's defining tertiary education institution, with more Maori students than any other university in New Zealand, Massey University has provided much of the underpinning knowledge for our nation's growth and development in much of the 20th century. In the 21st century we aspire once again to serve and lead having a well-established reputation for outstanding research and scholarship, teaching and learning that is grounded in real-world issues.

And, so today more than ever before education is being recognised as the key to achieving a better and more prosperous world, and the best means we have of addressing the many pressing challenges that confront us. Education is proving to be the engine of a nation's growth and development.

We look forward to working with the Solomon Islands National University where we're developing a Memorandum of Understanding, and other Melanesian tertiary institutions in the pursuit of being a Pacific leader in higher education and scholarship.

I'm reminded of the words of one of our great Maori leaders, Sir Apirana Ngata who said:
Turn your hands to the tools of the Pakeha [Paligi] for the wellbeing of your body,
Turn your heart to the treasures of your tupuna [ancestors] as a Crown for your head,
Give your soul unto te Atua [God Almighty], the author of all things.

In other words: first; hold fast to your traditions and cultures, and retain control of your lands, possessions and autonomy. Second; embrace new technology, people and their ideas, and third; be in tune with your God, seek His guidance, and His influence in whatever you do.

Once again congratulations on the progress you've made. You can be justly proud of your achievements. May you all be blessed in abundance. May you great leaders of Melanesia continue to exercise much needed wisdom and pragmatic leadership in advancing the interests of all Melanesian peoples by:

- * Role modelling the right behaviours and attitudes (peace),
- * Challenging the status quo (progress),
- * Inspiring a shared vision (prosperity),
- * Taking the people together with you along the journey (inclusion).

And, in so doing, ensure the futures of your tamariki and mokopuna [children and grandchildren] are well-assured.

No reira, kia kaha, kia maia, kia manawanui,
Me te atua koutou,
Hei manaaki, hei tiaki
Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.

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