



**WELCOME ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF SOLOMON ISLANDS THE
HONOURABLE MANASSEH D SOGAVARE MP ON THE OCCASION OF THE
OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 20TH MELANESIAN SPEARHEAD GROUP (MSG)
LEADERS' SUMMIT IN HONIARA, SOLOMON ISLANDS**

The Current Chair of the MSG, Mr Victor Tutugoro of the FLNKS

The Honourable Peter O'Neil, Prime Minister of the Independent State
of Papua New Guinea

The Honourable Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, Prime Minister of the
Republic of Fiji

Honourable Foreign Ministers,

Heads of Delegations

The Director General of MSG, Peter Forau

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning, Gudfala morning tru, Nisa Bula, Bonjour and welcome to the 'Hapi
Isles'.

It gives me great pleasure to address you all on this occasion as we mark the official opening of the 20th MSG Leaders' Summit here in Honiara. On behalf of my government and the people of the *hapi isles* of Solomon Islands, and the traditional inhabitants and owners of the land upon which we hold this ceremony, I welcome you all. The last time we host the MSG Leaders' Summit was 10 years ago. With this, it's an honour to be the host again.

For those you have been here since last week, I do hope you have enjoyed your time and even took the opportunity during your free time to visit other places in Honiara.

We took the liberty to suggest a very challenging theme for this 20th MSG Leaders' Summit: ***"Let us build a strong Melanesia in the Pacific where peace, progress and prosperity is ensured and sustained for all"***. This theme amongst others falls neatly within the scope of the 2038 Prosperity for All Plan. The Plan is an ambitious and visionary one derived from the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) Report which I was privileged to be a member of under the able Leadership of Ambassador Kaliopate Tavola of Fiji.

By the way I must take this opportunity to thank the wisdom of the MSG Chair then, who is none other than my friend the current Prime Minister of Fiji (who is sitting right here) for the wisdom to conduct a five nation consultation with our people to establish their views on what kind of MSG they would like to be part of in the next 25 years. Our people are quite clear:

They would like to be part of a caring, resilient, progressive, peaceful and inclusive MSG that placed sustainable development in the forefront of its national and sub-regional development strategy.

Our people are not wrong. It is incumbent upon the collective leadership of MSG to maintain the relevance of the sub-region in line with the changing socio-economic and geo-political landscape of the global and regional environment we are part of. We would be irresponsible if we fail to do so.

I note that the 2038 MSG Prosperity for All Plan was adopted at the 2013 Noumea Summit. The leaders then have done their part. This Summit is expected to adopt the implementation framework of the Plan. Simply put, in order for us to achieve the objectives of a strong Melanesia in the Pacific where there is political stability, economic prosperity, social inclusivity of all and sustainable development as expected by our people, we have a duty to implement the plan.

That responsibility lies squarely on the shoulders of each and every member of the MSG at the national and collectively at the sub-regional level involving all players in the economy. That is what MSG is all about.

Since MSG was formed more than 25 years ago, we have seen the expansion in the membership and programmes. In terms of membership, from the original three countries namely; Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands, we have seen the admission of the FLNKS and later Fiji as full members. In 2011, we have Indonesia and Timor Leste as Observers.

At this Summit, I note we have applications for new membership to consider. All eyes will be on Honiara and the world is watching us and eagerly anticipating what the outcome will be when we deliberate on the application for new membership to the MSG. Let us not forget the dreams and wishes of our people to be part of our Melanesian family; the desire of our people for an inclusive MSG.

As a matter of fact the deliberations on these applications will test our commitment to a caring, progressive, peaceful and inclusive MSG. It will also test our commitment to the basic principles of human rights and rule of law as embedded in the United Nation Charters, which the MSG as members of the United Nations subscribe to. It is a test of our genuineness to solve a problem between two next door neighbours in the interest of regional peace and stability. Ultimately, it is a test to our claim to civilization and good corporate citizens of planet earth.

In terms of programmes, over the years this has expanded from trade to include other programmes such as policing and security, sports, environment, fisheries, governance and so forth to name a few. Some of the initiatives and programmes that MSG engages in are regional in nature. As such, they need resources to support their sustainability.

During the opening of the 5th MSG Police Commissioners Conference in Honiara last month, I reiterate that it would be a grave mistake for us to rely solely on regional strategy in order to achieve our aims and objectives when we are yet to strengthen our domestic capacity. We must not sacrifice our domestic resources at the expense of meeting regional strategy.

We can only move forward towards supporting a regional initiative when we are ready at the right time. This is because doing so would be like putting the cart before the horse. Therefore, it is important that in considering any new initiatives and programmes under the MSG, we must not duplicate the role of other regional organisations in the Pacific. Let us complement the work of other regional organisations for the benefit of our peoples.

Last week, our Senior Officials met and have deliberated on the issues that will be brought to our attention. For the last two days, our Foreign Ministers met and deliberate on the outcomes of the Senior Officials.

The next two days will be our turn as Leaders to examine and make decisions on the recommendations brought to our attention. It is not an easy task, but that is the nature of decision-making; we are required to make decisions, some of which will be tough, others of course we will involve reaffirming our commitment to ensuring that we fulfil our mandates.

Let me close by reiterating the need for us to work together in solidarity to make our sub-regional group, the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) in the Pacific relevant and a strong bloc in advancing our national as well as our collective regional interest for the betterment of our peoples now and in the future.

Once again I warmly welcome all of you to the shores of the hapi isles and thank you for your attention.