

A safer and more secure Solomon Islands

The Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) was an innovation in state-building at its inception. In July, the mission will mark its fifth year of contributing to the long-term security and stability of the people and Government of the Solomon Islands.

From the outset, RAMSI took an integrated approach to assisting the rebuilding effort involving police, defence, justice, humanitarian and governance specialists from the 15 contributing countries of the Pacific region.

As 2007 drew to a close, the Police Participating Force (PPF) and Solomon Islands Police Force (SIPF) Executive focused on enhanced capacity development initiatives during a series of planning days held in October and November. The planning sessions were designed to identify and address aspects of the relationship between the PPF and the SIPF and resulted in an agreed set of goals for both forces to achieve in 2008.

In July 2007, former Assistant Commissioner and former Chief Police Officer of the ACT, Denis McDermott took over as Commander of the RAMSI PPF. In the following introduction, Commander McDermott gave *Platypus* an update on these goals.

From the Commander

As we enter 2008, the PPF is working with the SIPF on a range of short, medium and long-term goals. These goals were identified and agreed after a review in 2007 of PPF operations



Photo: PPF Media

which followed a refinement of RAMSI's performance framework.

The SIPF Executive was actively involved in the planning process and, together with the PPF, endeavoured to meet the needs and demands of stakeholders through this redefined approach to capacity development in the SIPF.

In working towards a safer and more secure Solomon Islands, six target areas were identified: crime and intelligence, operations, directions and standards, SIPF administration, mission support and stakeholder relationships.

This mission is well placed to achieve outcomes not previously reached in missions of this nature and the PPF Planning and Development team will track these achievements through regular operational reporting, the response by the Solomon Islands police to capacity building initiatives, and the feedback from the SIPF Executive.

As the beginning of the year unfolds the SIPF and PPF, in cooperation with the new Solomon Islands Government,

have an opportunity to embrace new challenges and contribute to the international effort and achievement of mission objectives in the Solomon Islands.

On behalf of the RAMSI PPF team, I would like to look back at 2007 with the memories, lessons and triumphs we have faced together with the Solomon Islands community and look forward to an exciting and challenging year ahead.

A change of Government

In December 2007, the largest policing operation since the April 2006 riots was conducted during the nation's parliamentary sittings. The PPF, supported by the Combined Task Force (CTF), assisted the SIPF in ensuring that there was a safe and secure environment for the democratic processes to operate without interference.

A highly visible policing and military presence ensured a peaceful process while the Solomon Islands Government underwent a vote of no confidence, a change of government and the election of a new Prime Minister.



Photo: Roger Wheatley, AusAID



Photo: Taryn Doherty



Photo: Roger Wheatley, AusAID

Far left: Commander Denis McDermott and Commander Will Jamieson at the formal handover ceremony; Top left: Coastal shot of tsunami damage around Gizo, Solomon Islands; Bottom left: PPF was the first agency to respond with supplies; Right: Tsunami destruction, Gizo.

Year in review

An earthquake, a change of command, overwhelming community support and the introduction of three new police boats were some of the highlights for the PPF during 2007.

Earthquake and tsunami strike remote villages and islands

'At the time you just don't know what's coming...and we're only two metres above sea level on a tiny flat island...I turned back and the water was just draining away. It was like a sink; like you've taken the plug out and the water drains away...'

Former Police Force (PPF) Advisor Julie Williams who has since returned to Australia after completing her deployment on 12 April last year.

On 2 April, a major earthquake struck 350km northwest of the capital, Honiara. The earthquake and resulting tsunami, believed to be between from two to 10

metres high, struck the Western and Choiseul provinces in the early morning. The Government estimated nearly 7000 people were displaced due to the impact of the tidal surge destroying whole communities on the Choiseul mainland and surrounding islands. At the time, it was not known how many people had died or been injured as a result of the incident.

The PPF responded immediately dispatching two aircraft to Munda - the largest settlement on the island of New Georgia in the Western province. They assisted in the relief efforts coordinated by Australia through its international aid agency AusAID and supported by RAMSI.

A forward command post was established in Munda while the SIPP Police Operations Centre operated at police headquarters located in Rove, Honiara. The PPF established a major incident room to coordinate resources

and assistance with the SIPP Police Operations Centre.

In addition to the two aircraft, RAMSI provided two boats, three helicopters and a fixed-wing plane to assist in getting supplies to the affected area, airlifting seriously injured Islanders to Honiara for medical attention and transporting PPF and SIPP members to the affected areas to assist with the police response.

The coordinated response also included sending a radio technician to Munda to restore and improve communications between the remote village and Honiara, making safety assessments of damaged police posts and residences and bringing in relieving PPF members where necessary.

Many of the affected islands could only be reached by sea. Two patrol vessels and a sea-going patrol vessel were sent to the affected areas with emergency supplies including 150 boxes of water and two



Far left: PPF 1 vessel; middle: Advisor Margarete Roache Papeloi from Samoa with SIFP officer; Didgeridoo artist Adrian Ross with village children.

tonnes of rice. The vessels remained for two weeks while the emergency crew distributed the aid and transported injured people to places of treatment.

While the rebuilding efforts are ongoing, with Islanders from the worst affected areas slowly returning to their villages, the quick response from the PPF, AusAID and the International Red Cross, enabled the SIFP to return to community policing within two weeks of the event and work towards rebuilding the communities.

Changing of the guard

After two years as Commander PPF and as Deputy Commissioner of the SIFP, Commander Will Jamieson handed over command to Commander Denis McDermott during a formal ceremony at the Rove Police parade ground in Honiara in July.

Commander McDermott has nearly 40 years of community, national and international policing experience. For nine months in 2002-2003 he served as Deputy Commissioner to the United Nations Police in Timor-Leste. In July 2003, he retired after 36 years of service with the AFP and in 2007 accepted the role to lead the PPF.

People's Survey 2007

An AusAID survey released in September indicated strong community support for the mission with 90 per cent of respondents supporting the presence of RAMSI. The results also indicated that 57 per cent of those surveyed believed that general crime had reduced, as has serious crime (45 per cent), and that they would first report crime to the SIFP, then to their Chief then consider RAMSI personnel (52 per cent).

The survey, undertaken by Australian National University Enterprise on behalf of AusAID, sought the community's perceptions, attitudes and opinions in five key areas:

- the current situation in the Solomon Islands in relation to law and order
- responses of elected officials and public servants to community need
- access to basic services
- changes in household prosperity
- the availability and effectiveness of police, RAMSI and legal services.

The People's Survey is now an annual part of the Solomon Islands Government and RAMSI's review process. RAMSI Special Coordinator Tim George said the results were very encouraging for all members of the RAMSI mission.

"People from the 15 countries have come with a commitment to work together with Solomon Islanders to help them build a better future. It is good to have such strong feedback from the community saying, yes, please continue to help us rebuild Solomon Islands," Special Coordinator George said.

PPF I, II and III

In September, three new sea-going vessels were delivered to the Solomon Islands by the AFP to fill a need in the maritime capability of the SIFP and PPF. The Tier Two vessels are 13 metres long, have a versatile and long-range response capability, operate in moderate seas and can be deployed for up to two weeks at a time. The vessels can accommodate up to 12 passengers in addition to crew and carry up to one tonne of equipment.

Tour de Force and Christmas Carols

A morale boost arrived in late October in the form of a Tour de Force concert – the third to be held in the Solomon Islands. The PPF and CTF were entertained by musicians Russell Morris and Darryl Cotton, comedian Chris Radburn, magician Adam Dean, didgeridoo artist Adrian Ross and the Sydney detachment of the Royal Australian Navy Band. Performances were held at the Guadalcanal Beach Resort, Maritime base and Rove Prison.

The RAN Band, Mr Dean and Mr Ross also gave up their rest time to help entertain the guests at the PPF's inaugural Pink Ribbon Dinner. The dinner raised \$165,000 SBD for the Solomon Islands First Lady's Charity to help towards raising the awareness of cancer issues women face.

In mid-December, RAMSI hosted an evening Christmas concert at Lawson Tama, the biggest sporting venue in the Solomon Islands. Nearly 10,000 people saw some of the country's best musicians perform at the event. The newly-formed PPF Choir took centre stage to sing Christmas carols and Santa arrived in a RAMSI helicopter much to the children's delight. On Christmas Day the PPF Choir also visited patients at the National Referral Hospital.

RAMSI – 5th Anniversary celebrations

The AFP's International Deployment Group is working with RAMSI to design events to celebrate the mission's 5th anniversary in July this year. For further information visit: <www.afp.gov.au>