Solomon Islands National General Election

3 April 2019

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Acknowledgements

We convey our sincere appreciation and gratitude to the people and the Government of Solomon Islands, for the generous hospitality extended to us since our arrival on 27 March 2019.

The support and advice provided to the Group by the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission and all the stakeholders involved with the 2019 general election informed the Group's work and was greatly appreciated.

Our sincerest appreciation to the support and advice provided by the Commonwealth Secretariat Staff Team: Mr Albert Mariner, Mr Jonathan Cheng, Ms Sonali Campion and Mr Abubakar Abdullahi. Without their commitment and professionalism, we would have struggled to complete our task.

We convey our sincere gratitude to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Patricia Scotland, for giving us the opportunity and the privilege to serve the Commonwealth through this mission, in support of democracy and Commonwealth values in Solomon Islands.

Letter of Transmittal

9 April 2019

Dear Secretary-General,

I have the pleasure to submit herewith our Group's report following our observations of the Solomon Islands National General Election held on 3 April 2019.

The Group was of the overall view that the election was credible and the results reflected the wishes of the people.

The Group recognised the importance of this 2019 election following the withdrawal of the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) in 2017. We acknowledge the efforts of the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission (SIEC) in conducting this election following the adoption of the of the new Electoral Act in 2018.

The Group commended the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF), supported by the military and police personnel from the Australian and New Zealand Combined Task Force (CTF), which assisted the SIEC to implement the logistics and security plan for the election.

The Group congratulated all the successful candidates in the 2019 election, especially the two women who were elected.

Our report and recommendations are submitted with the hope that, if implemented, Solomon Islands' electoral processes will be strengthened. I hope the SIEC and Solomon Islands' development partners will give this report due consideration and provide the necessary support to implement the recommendations.

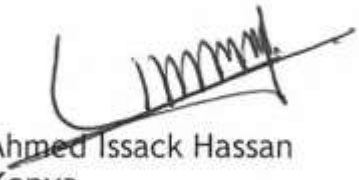
It was a privilege to lead this group of eminent Commonwealth citizens to support the Solomon Islands' democratic process.

Senator Lisa Singh
Australia

Sharon Bhagwan-Rolls
Fiji

Beverly Joeman
Malaysia

Dr Rajen Prasad
New Zealand



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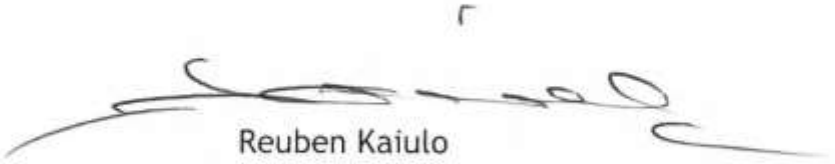
Kenya



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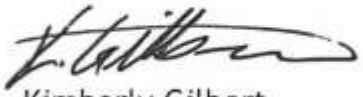
Papua New Guinea

Hendrick Gappy
Seychelles

Pesi Fonua
Tonga



Kimberly Gilbert
Trinidad and Tobago

Wilson Toa
Vanuatu

Chapter 1 - Introduction

At the invitation of the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission (SIEC), the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Patricia Scotland, constituted an Observer Group for the Solomon Islands National General Election that was held on 3 April 2019. The Group was led by Hon Sato Kilman Livtuvanu, former Prime Minister of Vanuatu, and comprised eleven eminent persons from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific. The Observer Group was supported by a four-member staff team from the Commonwealth Secretariat. A full list of members is at Annex C.

Terms of Reference:

"The Group is established by the Commonwealth Secretary-General at the invitation of the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission (SIEC). The Group is to consider the various factors impinging on the credibility of the electoral process as a whole.

It will determine in its own judgement whether the elections have been conducted according to the standards for democratic elections to which the country has committed itself, with reference to national election-related legislation and relevant regional, Commonwealth and other international commitments.

The Group is to act impartially and independently. It has no executive role; its function is not to supervise but to observe the process as a whole and to form a judgement accordingly. It would also be free to propose to the authorities concerned such action on institutional, procedural and other matters as would assist the holding of such elections.

The Group is to submit its report to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, who will forward it to the Government of Solomon Islands, the SIEC, political parties taking part in the elections and thereafter to all Commonwealth Governments."

Activities

The Observer Group was present in Solomon Islands from 27 March 2019. During three days of briefings, the Group met with the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission (SIEC), political party representatives, civil society groups, media, Commonwealth High Commissioners and other international organisations, and domestic and international observer missions.

The Observer Group was deployed around the country on Monday 1 April. Two-person teams visited five provinces and Honiara city. We had teams in Western Province, Isabel, Central Province, Malaita, Guadalcanal and Honiara city. The

teams met with other domestic, regional and international observers in each province, in order to build up a comprehensive picture of the conduct of the process.

Over the course of deployment, Commonwealth Observers met with election officials, security officials, regional representatives of political parties, media, domestic and international observers and voters.

On the basis of the Group's findings and observations, the Chairperson issued an Interim Statement on 6 April 2019 (Annex B). The Group's Report was completed in Honiara and thereafter transmitted to the Commonwealth Secretary-General.

Chapter 2 - Political Background

National General Election Context

The general election held on 3 April 2019 was the tenth since the country's independence in 1978. It was the first election held since the withdrawal of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) in 2017. RAMSI was a Pacific Islands Forum Regional initiative, led by Australia. It was deployed to Solomon Islands in 2003 and facilitated the end of the conflict (known as 'the tensions'), which affected the country from 1998 to 2003.

There were several key developments that shaped the political dynamic in the lead up to the 2019 election, including the passage of the Electoral Act 2018, and the second election held since the *Political Parties Integrity Act* (PPIA) in May 2014.

Fifteen political parties registered under the PPIA prior to the election. Of the 333 candidates who contested the election, 170 were declared members of a registered political party, and 163 contested as independents. There were 26 women candidates, the same number as in 2014. Nine female candidates contested the elections as Independent candidates as compared to seventeen who competed with political party affiliations.

Observers received many comments expressing voter concerns about alleged corruption amongst the political establishment and business donors. A core issue raised was the use of public money – particularly the Rural Constituency Development Fund (RCDF) and the terminal grant of SBD$400,000 provided to each MP before Parliament was dissolved at the end of 2018. These funds were alleged to have been used to support their political campaigns.

Some of the stakeholders advised the Group that the root causes of the tensions remain unresolved. These include disputes over land ownership, settlements in Guadalcanal by people from the other provinces; unequal distribution of development benefits stemming from natural resource and extractive industries; increasing unemployment with limited opportunities, especially for the indigenous community; and concentration of development projects in Guadalcanal and Western Province. A report submitted by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2014, which made recommendations on these matters, has yet to be discussed by Parliament.

Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI)

In April 2003, then Solomon Islands Prime Minister Sir Allan Kemakeza requested Australian assistance to address the breakdown of law and order in the country as a result of the tensions. Following consultations between the governments of Solomon Islands, Australia and New Zealand, a package of strengthened

assistance to support the Solomon Islands Government - RAMSI - was proposed and unanimously endorsed by a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Pacific Islands Forum. RAMSI was debated and unanimously endorsed by the Solomon Islands Parliament, welcomed by the President of the United Nations Security Council, and supported by the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG). RAMSI's arrival in 2003, under the leadership of Australia, and supported by the members of the Pacific Islands Forum, immediately restored law and order, and ensured the machinery of Government could resume operations.

RAMSI was a long-term commitment to Solomon Islands, aimed at creating the conditions necessary for a return to stability, peace and a growing economy. In 2009, RAMSI and the Government of Solomon Islands signed a joint Partnership Framework, which set out shared objectives and timelines for RAMSI's work.

On 1 July 2013 RAMSI's military component was withdrawn, with development assistance activities transferred to Australia's bilateral aid programmes.

On 30 June 2017, RAMSI's 14-year regional engagement came to an end. It was reported that the total mission cost was around AUD$2.8 billion dollars and the exercise was significant as it represented the first time 14 Forum Island countries participated in a Pacific regional engagement by providing military, police and senior advisors to the Mission in line with the provisions of the Biketawa Declaration of 2000. 1

Brief Historical Overview

Solomon Islands politics has been characterised by fluid coalitions of political parties and independent Members of Parliament. In December 2001, despite the tensions, a general election was held. Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare and the ruling People's Progressive Party (PPP) were heavily defeated, retaining only three seats, with only 19 Members of the previous Parliament retaining their seats. The People's Alliance Party (PAP), led by former Deputy Prime Minister Sir Allan Kemakeza, won 20 seats, with the Solomon Islands Alliance for Change (SIAC) securing 12 seats. Sir Allan was subsequently elected as Prime Minister, with the support of the Association of Independent Members (AIM) led by Mr Snyder Rini.

At the April 2006 election, 16 members of the previous government lost their seats. Sir Allan Kemakeza retained his seat but his party was considerably reduced in size. Snyder Rini's AIM did well, with 13 newly-elected members. Rini was subsequently elected Prime Minister by the new Parliament. Rioting then broke out and a large area of Chinatown in Honiara was looted and destroyed by fire by protesters who opposed Rini's election. In the same month, Rini stood down after losing the support of the majority of Members of Parliament and, in May 2006, Parliament elected Mr Manasseh Sogavare (leader of the Social Credit Party) as Prime Minister.

[1]The Biketawa Declaration, agreed to by the Heads of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) in October 2000, constituted a framework for coordinating responses to regional crises.

The Sogavare Government had a challenging relationship with RAMSI, and was ousted following a vote of no confidence in December 2007, precipitated by the defection of nine government Ministers. Derek Sikua, the leader of the recently established Coalition for National Unity and Rural Advancement, and Education Minister in the Sogavare administration, subsequently became Prime Minister.

Following the general election of 4 August 2010, the Solomon Islands Democratic Party, led by Steven Abana, secured 13 of the 50 seats. Eighteen seats were won collectively by members of other parties, with independents taking the remaining seats. Mr Danny Philip, leader of the Solomon Islands Reform and Democratic Party (a coalition of parties and several independent Members) was chosen as Prime Minister, polling 26 votes. His rival, Steven Abana, had the support of 23 Members.

In November 2011, following defections from the ruling coalition, Prime Minister Philip resigned. In the parliamentary vote that followed, former Finance Minister Mr Gordon Darcy Lilo was elected as Prime Minister.

The last general election, held on 19 November 2014, saw Manasseh Sogavare being elected as Prime Minister by the new Parliament. Sogavare led a coalition of parties under Democratic Coalition for Change (DCC).

On 15 November 2017, Rick Houenipwela was elected Prime Minister after Sogavare lost a vote of no confidence on 6 November 2017. Prime Minister Houenipwela led a Government comprising a coalition of parties under the Solomon Islands Democratic Coalition for Change (SIDCC).

Key Issues

Rural Constituency Development Funds (RCDF) and Terminal Grants

Commonwealth Observer Groups from the 2006, 2010 and 2014 elections highlighted the practice of sitting Members of Parliament being provided with millions of Solomon Islands dollars under the RCDF. RCDF funds are intended to support grassroots development initiatives. Widespread allegations persist that these funds are used by Members to influence voters through direct cash payments or gifts, thereby providing incumbent parliamentarians with an unfair advantage. Auditing the RCDF remains a challenge. At present, it was conveyed to the Group by various stakeholders that the annual RCDF allocation is around SDB$6.2 million for each Member of Parliament. On dissolution of the Parliament, Members received a Terminal Grant of SBD$400,000.

It was conveyed to the Group by stakeholders that the total value of all grants, including the RCDF and the Terminal Grant, provided to each Member could be up to SBD$13-18 million per year. While the Commonwealth is aware that these funds are legally mandated, the Group expresses the concerns placed before us

and the need for them to be addressed. The Group was made aware of a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Handbook on use of CDF and best practice which could provide guidance in this area.[2]

Women in Parliament

Before this election, only four women had ever been elected to Parliament. Section 48(1) of the PPIA encourages a political party to have at least 10% women candidates out of the total number of candidates it endorses to contest a general election. Four political parties satisfied this threshold of having 10% female candidates. The Democratic Alliance Party and the People First Party fielded the highest number of female candidates of five respectively.

The Act also has in place financial incentives, through a temporary special measures grant, for any party with a female Member of Parliament.

Of the 333 candidates that contested the 2019 election, 26 were women candidates – the same number as in 2014. As there were 447 candidates in the 2014 election, a proportionally higher percentage of women candidates contested in 2019.

Two women were elected: Tanangada Lanelle Olandrea successfully retained her seat in Gizo Kolombangara, and Soriacomua Freda Tuki returned to Parliament in Temotu Province. Both are members of the Kadera Party.

Youth in Parliament

Of the 334 candidates who contested the 2019 Solomon Islands National General Elections, only four were youth as their ages ranged from twenty six to twenty eight. The Solomon Islands describes youth as being between fourteen to twenty nine years and the Lower House Candidacy age is twenty one years. Therefore persons between the ages of twenty one and twenty nine years are considered youth and are allowed to vie for candidacy in the Solomon Islands National Elections. There are institutions that aim to encourage young people to get actively involved in the development of the country such as the Solomon Islands National Youth Congress and the youth parliament. However, while some youth show interest in that arena they seldom go a step further to enter into national politics.

In the Political Parties Integrity Act 2014 there is no mention of incentives for youth candidates. In Division 2 of Part 7 which speaks to Special Conditions, there are no special benefits such as a temporary special measures grant under the Act for political parties who have candidates that are twenty nine years and under. There are no incentives provided to political parties for electing youth

[2] Handbook on Constituency Development Funds: Principles and Tools for Parliamentarians

into Parliament as a candidate of their party nor in the case where a member of youth as an independent candidate subsequently joins a political party.

The only mention of youth in the Act is under the Minimum Provisions for the Constitution and Rules of Political Parties which mentions the creation of other divisions such as youth and women divisions.

Chapter 3 - Electoral Framework and Election Administration

Electoral System

The Solomon Islands Parliament consists of 50 members, directly elected from single member constituencies on the basis of the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system. The Parliamentary term is four years.

The Constitution requires that a review of constituency boundaries be conducted by the Constituency Boundaries Commission at least every 10 years. The most recent redrawing of constituency boundaries occurred in 1997 (increasing the number of constituencies from 47 to 50). In 2009 the Parliament rejected a recommendation from the Commission to increase the number of constituencies to 67. The largest constituency has 15,986 registered voters, whilst the smallest is Malaita/Outer Islands at 3142 registered voters.

The Prime Minister is the leader of government and is elected by the Members of Parliament from amongst their number. Lobbying for support occurs behind closed doors over the course of several days in Honiara following declaration of the results. If a coalition which commands the support of the majority of Members is formed, then the Governor-General can appoint their nominee as Prime Minister in accordance with the Political Parties Integrity Act 2014. Otherwise, the Governor-General will call a meeting of Members, where he/she then presides over a secret ballot for the position of Prime Minister in accordance with Schedule 2 of the Constitution. In this case, voting takes place through subsequent ballots, where the candidate with fewest votes is removed from the previous ballot, until a candidate receives a majority of support in the chamber.

Solomon Islands' administrative structure consists of nine provinces, with the capital city of Honiara administered as a separate district.

National Legal Framework and Regional and International Commitments

Solomon Islands' Constitution guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression, assembly and association, and participation in elections.

The key documents providing the legal and regulatory framework for the conduct of elections are:

- *Constitution 1978;*
- *Constitution (Amendment) (Electoral Reform) Act 2018;*
- *Electoral Act 2018; and*
- *Political Parties Integrity Act 2014*

In addition, Solomon Islands has signed or agreed to some significant regional and international commitments and instruments relevant to the conduct of elections. These include:

- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD);
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW);
- Convention on Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD);
- Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED); and
- Charter of the Commonwealth.

Solomon Islands Electoral Commission (SIEC)

Section 57 of the Constitution (Amendment) (Electoral Reform) Act 2018 provides for the establishment of the SIEC. The *Electoral Act 2018* provides the regulatory framework for the administration and conduct of elections. The functions and mandate of the SIEC as outlined in the Act are to supervise the registration of electors for the election of members of Parliament and the conduct of elections of such members.

Electoral Reform was undertaken in relation to the structure of the SIEC to be effective after the general elections. The SIEC will comprise a Chairperson, two members (of which one of its members must be a woman) and the Chief Electoral Officer (without voting rights).

The Chairperson must be an eminent person, such as a former Governor-General, former speaker, a retired judge, former Member of Parliament, a current or retired head of any religious organisation or of any civil society organization. A Commissioner holds office for four years, coinciding with the life of the Parliament. Commissioners work on a part time basis, receiving only sitting fees.

The Electoral Act 2018 recognises the position of Chief Electoral Officer and sets out his powers and functions. The position of CEO was not recognised in any electoral laws in the past.

The office becomes self-accounting with the Chief Electoral Officer becoming the accountable officer and the Commission having its own expenditure and revenue head. Before the Act was passed, the Commission had to work through the Permanent Secretary and the Ministry of Home Affairs budget head.

The position of the Chief Electoral Officer is recognised in the Constitution. There are eight permanent staff members. The current Chief Electoral Officer is Mose Saitala.

The new law provides for pre-polling. The SIEC conducted a pre-polling initiative for police and electoral staff only, on 21 March 2019. A total of 16

pre-poll centres were opened; one in each of the nine Provincial capitals and seven in Honiara. 1195 pre-poll votes were cast. On election day, these voters' names appeared on the voters' register but were marked as having pre-polled.

For the conduct of these elections, the SIEC recruited and trained approximately 3500 polling officials. Most of these individuals were public servants. The following structure was adopted for the conduct of these elections:

- Ten Electoral Managers, one for each of the nine provinces, and one for Honiara City, responsible for coordinating the process at the provincial level;
- 50 Returning Officers, one for each constituency, responsible for managing the elections at constituency level and declaring the outcome;
- 1043 Presiding Officers, one for each polling station, responsible for managing the polling stations on election day;
- Returning Officers and each Presiding Officer had two assistants each, for additional support.

Returning Officers (irrespective of gender) were encouraged by SIEC to actively recruit competent female Assistant Returning Officers. However, the manuals do not make any recommendations for recruiting female Presiding Officers or Polling Assistants.

Eligibility and Registration of Electors

In order to be eligible to vote, one must be an 'ordinarily residing' citizen of the Solomon Islands, at least 18 years of age, and registered to vote. Persons are disqualified from voting if they are declared to be of unsound mind or under a sentence of imprisonment exceeding six months.

As quoted from Section 4 of the Electoral Act 2018:

(1) Under section 55(2)(b) of the constitution, a person is ordinarily resident in a constituency if;
    (a) the person has been continuously residing in the constituency for at least 6 months; or
    (b) the person is taken to have been residing in the constituency under subsection (2)
(2) A person is taken to have been residing in a constituency even if the person is not residing in the constituency if the person is entitled to be a member of a group, tribe or line indigenous to the constituency.

The qualification of "ordinarily resident" provided in Section 4(2) of the Electoral Act 2018 is the authority that permits voters to register where they are not resident and seems broad enough to suggest they could register wherever they like. It was reported to us that this has given rise to many voters travelling some distance to register in constituencies other than where they

live and to which they had no connection. Furthermore, many stakeholders alleged that it was common practice for candidates to offer cash favours to electors if they enrolled in a constituency where it would be electorally advantageous to said candidates.

Some international observers also confirmed to us that they were aware of this practice. We observed people voting in constituencies to which they had no connection, by their own admission, and were only doing so to because a candidate had promised assistance to them.

It appears to us that there is a need to clarify, and tighten if necessary, the definition of "ordinarily resident" in Section 4(2) of the Electoral Act 2018 and to examine the extent to which financial incentives are being offered to voters to register in a place to which they have virtually no connection.

For this election the national biometric voter registration system (BVR) of 2014 was used. The BVR was updated between September 2018 and January 2019. Following the omission and objections process the final list of voters grew to 359,522, representing an increase of 71,955 from 2014. Overall, 48.6% of those registered were women and 51.4% were men.

The SIEC advised that there were approximately 4,000 instances of multiple registration during the 2018/19 registration exercise, with one individual allegedly registering more than ten times. The SIEC has referred all instances of multiple registration to the police for investigation. The SIEC expressed concern that a lack of resources will make it difficult to prioritise all but the most serious of these cases.

Political Parties Integrity Act (PPIA) and Political Parties Commission

In an effort to strengthen the political party system and culture in Solomon Islands, the PPIA was passed by the Parliament on 27 May 2014. It commenced on 30 June, following publication of the required Gazette notice. Regulations under the Act were made by the Prime Minister on 6 August, and published in the Gazette on 12 September 2014. The Act is administered by the new Political Parties Commission, assisted by the Registrar of Political Parties.

The mandate of the Commission under the Act is to:

- register political parties;
- formulate, monitor and review policies relating to the regulation of political parties; and
- issue integrity standards.

The Commission is comprised of a Chair and four other members, appointed by the Governor-General on the joint recommendation of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. Members of the Commission can serve a maximum of three terms of three years. The Group understands that the

Political Parties Commission did not have a Registrar for at least six months in 2018.

In addition, the Act makes provision for:

- the selection by a political party of its candidates for election, including a requirement that at least 10% of the party's candidates should be women;
- coalition agreements between two or more political parties, including the minimum requirements for these agreements;
- public funding of registered political parties, with an annual administration grant to the party of $20,000 for each elected member, and a further annual temporary special measures grant of $10,000 for each female elected member;
- reporting by political parties of donations received;
- licensing of campaign activities by political parties not contesting a particular election; and
- a prohibition on participation in elections by unregistered political parties.

The PPIA does not address other challenges to political stability in Solomon Islands, such as the tendency of coalitions to form and dissolve spontaneously, or for Members of Parliament to cross the floor (known as 'grasshopping').

The PPIA also provides a potential pathway through which the formation of a new government might occur. The Act obliges any parties forming a coalition to formalise an agreement regarding the coalition, which must meet the minimum requirements outlined in Schedule 2 to the Act. An important component of this agreement is that it must include provisions prescribing who the coalition may nominate as its candidate at the election of a new Prime Minister.

Candidate Eligibility and Nomination

Under the Constitution, in order to be eligible to contest as a candidate for election, a person must be a citizen of the Solomon Islands and be at least 21 years of age. A person is disqualified as a candidate if the person:

- is of unsound mind;
- is serving a sentence of imprisonment exceeding six months;
- is an undischarged bankrupt; or
- has allegiance to a foreign power or state.

Nomination Day was 6 February 2019. For the nomination process, the Electoral Act stipulates that the prospective candidate's nomination must be supported by three electors ordinarily resident in the constituency for which the candidate wishes to stand. A candidate may not stand for election in more than one constituency. Additionally, on submission of the nomination papers, a prospective candidate must pay a deposit of SBD$5000 (an increase from

SBD$2000 last election). A prospective candidate can be nominated by a registered political party or stand as an independent.

For this election there were 333 candidates, 170 of whom were nominated by a political party, with 163 independent candidates. The last day for the draw of the order of the candidates' names on the ballot paper was 27 February 2019.

Election Offences and Petitions

The Electoral Act outlines a series of election offences. These include: bribery; treating; undue influence; personation; illegal voting; false statements; and intimidation. Each offence is punishable by a fine and/or imprisonment.

Under the PPIA, it is an offence for a non-contesting party at an election to campaign unless it holds an election activity license issued by the Registrar of Political Parties. It is also an offence for a registered political party to fail to report the source of its campaign funding within two weeks after the election. Section 69 of the Act provides that each candidate must submit to the Returning Officer a statement of account, specifying all expenses incurred by him/her during the election campaign. This statement must be delivered within 90 days of the declaration of the election result. A candidate that spends more than SBD$500,000 in campaign expenses commits an offence. A candidate who accepts campaign donations from a non-citizen or a company who has a non-citizen shareholder commits an offence.

An elector or candidate may file an election petition with the High Court, to complain of an undue return or undue election. An election petition is heard in open court. The Court may summarily dismiss a petition if the Judge considers that there are insufficient grounds for the petition. A petition must be submitted within one month after the publication of the official results of the election. A decision of the High Court on an election petition is final, and cannot be challenged on appeal.

Key Issues

<u>Women's participation</u>

There was no increase in the number of women candidates for the election as 26 women contested in 2014 and 2019 respectively. This is disappointing given the efforts of women's civil society organisations and their networks, as well as training programmes by Solomon Islands' development partners. Despite the provision of reservations and incentives for women candidates in Section 48 and 49 of the Political Parties Integrity Act (2014), including a temporary special measures grant, the number of women elected to the Parliament remain very low. The Group noted that out of the six political parties that fielded female candidates only four satisfied the 10% threshold: Solomon Island KADERE Party, Democratic Alliance Party, Pan Melanesian Congress Party and the People First

Party. Democratic Alliance Party and the People First Party both fielded the highest number of female candidates of five respectively. Yet, despite the provisions of the PPIA, seven political parties did not field female candidates for the elections. The reason given by these parties was that no woman came forward to contest for the election on their platforms. The Political Parties Commission acknowledged that these political parties have not breached the Section 48 (2) of the Act which stipulates that: "Where the minimum number of women who have applied or agreed to be nominated as candidates of a political party is less than the number of women required by the political party to satisfy subsection (1), such a political party will not have contravened this section". Nine female candidates contested the elections as Independent candidates as compared to seventeen who competed with political party affiliations.

Women candidates cited cultural attitudes towards women's political participation, safety and security, and financial barriers as some of the key challenges.

Register of Electors

The new Register of Electors with pictures for this election represents a significant improvement.

However, concerns remain regarding the need for a mechanism to allow subsequent registration of those unable to register during the registration window (such as persons temporarily absent from Solomon Islands). Also, those aged under 18 years during the registration window, but who would turn 18 before the election, were not captured. Given that three months elapsed between the registration period and the election date, a significant cohort of people eligible to register as at the date of the election were effectively disenfranchised. SIEC will be looking at these provisions for future elections.

The Group was informed that voter identification cards were being 'sold' to candidates as an indication of the elector's support, in exchange for money or some other benefit. The Group observed relatively few electors attending polling stations without their card (although presentation of the card was not mandatory). However, by virtue that all electors have their pictures on the voters roll, this should not be an issue for identification.

Recommendations

The Group commends the actions of the Government of Solomon Islands to address some of the recommendations from 2014, such as including provision for pre-polling as well as updating the list of electoral offences. However, several concerns remain. The Group recommends that:

- the Register of Electors be kept under review to maintain its integrity and accuracy, and that continuous voter registration (CVR) be implemented;

- pre-polling provision be extended to other registered voters, such as those involved in essential services or residing overseas;

- temporary special measures be adopted to increase women's representation in parliament, with one option being a quota of seats for women and another being reviewing financial incentives for parties fielding women candidates;

- provision of greater resource allocation and facilitation of best-practice knowledge sharing for the Department of Women, SIEC and the Political Parties Commission to engage with women's civil society organisations and their networks to identify the best way to achieve gender equality in political representation, including through the application of temporary special measures;

- consideration of the issuance of voter IDs only after the completion of the objections and omissions period and the cleaning of the Register of Voters, rather than on registration day;

- further consideration be given to a review of the constituency boundaries with a view to standardising the numbers of electors across the constituencies following the upcoming census; and

- that the definition of "ordinarily resident" in Section 4(2) of the Electoral Act 2018 be reconsidered as the current definition is effectively taken to mean that electors can register wherever they like, leaving the registration system subject to abuse.

Chapter 4 - Election Campaign and Media

Media environment

The Constitution of the Solomon Islands guarantees fundamental rights and freedom of the press and this is generally respected. Throughout the campaign and election period, journalists were able to report freely. The radio and print media played a positive role in raising awareness around electoral issues and processes, and facilitating public debates.

Newspapers, magazines and broadcasters in the Solomon Islands are all governed by an umbrella organisation, the Media Association of the Solomon Islands (MASI), which promotes journalistic ethics, human rights and media freedoms. The Solomon Island Electoral Commission (SIEC) which has a small media unit, produced a Media Handbook to promote best practice in reporting the election and worked regularly with MASI to conduct a series of trainings with journalists.

According to the SIEC Media Unit, ahead of the 13 pre-election media trainings were conducted in 2017 on Media and Democracy, Voter Registration, Election Day, Parliament, Political Parties, Electoral Reform, Election Media Code of Conduct, Social Media and Election. 11 of the trainings were held in Honiara, 1 in Gizo and 1 in Auki.

Training programmes involved 10 stringers of the SIBC, 20 journalists from mass media organisations as well as 10 public relations/media personnel of the Solomon Islands Government's Communication Unit.

A training programme was also conducted with the SECSIP program in Auki for provincial level journalists and new reporters in Malaita. This particular training was mixed focus and included women candidates and CSOs groups representatives. However, media group went through the Election Coverage media code of conduct before signing the code and be given the accreditation. International Media were briefed individually on the code of conduct, some of them were sent the code to sign before they were given the accreditation.

The SIEC developed a Code of Conduct for national media organisations and the media unit managed the accreditation of journalists for the election period.

According to the handbook: "The Solomon Islands Electoral Office (SIEO) has developed a code of conduct/election media policy for all local and international media representatives reporting the National General Election. This code of conduct/policy is designed to balance the complementary role of the Commission and its officers, with those of the media in a democratic society. SIEO has been working closely with the media in past elections to ensure accurate messages reach citizens. Media plays an important role in information dissemination therefore it is important that the partnership

continues with the guidance of the Code of Conduct especially before, during and after BVR processes and Election periods"

The Code of Conduct includes details of the planned media briefings, accreditation process and the conduct expected by journalists and media organisations, as well as serving as a commitment by the SIEC to:

"1.1.1. Hold regular briefings for journalists, updating them on SIEC's activities;
1.1.2. Respond to media inquiries in a timely and efficient matter;
1.1.3. Where possible, facilitate access to SIEC sites and officials; and
1.1.4. Provide the media with access to results as quickly as is practicable under Solomon Islands law and established electoral conventions"

All media organisations underwent training on the media code of conduct before signing the code and provided with accreditation. International media representatives were briefed individually on the code of conduct, some of them were sent the code to sign before being given the accreditation.

It is unclear whether or how local media organisations adapted the Code of Conduct for news content and programmes produced.

Without a media monitoring unit, (primarily due to the lack of dedicated resources) the SIEC was not able to monitor compliance with the media code during the campaign and election period. However, it is understood the SIEC media unit would analyse news coverage filed by journalists in order to analyse the impact on voters' participation and reaction to the processes.

Women are still significantly underrepresented in the media but there is a Women in Media and Communication Solomon Islands (WIMSI) network, which held pre-election training to sensitise journalists on gender issues and reporting during the election period. WIMSI also intends to publish a gender analysis of election media coverage in due course. This will be a useful resource for improving quantitative and qualitative coverage of diverse women's participation in Solomon Island's political processes including parliamentary elections.

Election Coverage

It is notable that access to a television and print media is limited in several provinces. Stakeholders noted that radio is therefore the main source of information for many communities, especially those in remote locations. The state-owned broadcaster, Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC), emphasises its editorial independence from the government and provided practical non-partisan information about voting as stipulated by SIEC alongside news updates, advertisements paid for by candidates, and a series of leaders debates.

The SIBC has an AM transmitter which enables nationwide coverage and has a core group of provincial-level stringers.[3] However, the Group noted that during the election period major national media outlets did not have the capacity to comprehensively cover electoral issues outside Honiara and some of the provincial capitals. The group also noted that accredited media were welcomed by election officials in polling and collation centres where they were present.

Social Media

Internet penetration remains low in the Solomon Islands (less than 15%). Social media are used in Honiara and some provincial capitals, but due to the limited access to the internet they have less traction in other parts of the country. Facebook is the most popular platform with up to 90,000 active users, while the use of other platforms such as Twitter and Instagram is very limited. As a result, few of the candidates cultivated social media as a campaign tool. However, the SIEC and national media did use social media to provide voter information and updates.

Election Campaign

In line with Electoral Act 2018, the campaign period was launched on time, on 5 February, when Election Day was announced, and concluded at midnight on 1 April 2019. During this time, political parties and independent candidates engaged in robust and predominantly peaceful political campaign activities; in Honiara the Group observed lively public rallies and party floats. In other parts of the country boat parades were the popular mode of campaigning.

This is the first time in the political history of the Solomon Islands that a campaign blackout was enforced in line with the new Electoral Act 2018. Campaigning ended at midnight, 24 hours before polling day. Election eve, known locally as 'Devil's Night' in previous elections was a highly charged atmosphere, with candidates and supporters engaging in widespread scare tactics and vote-buying. In line with the Liquor Act (Section 82(i)) the Royal Solomon Island Police Force (RSIPF) banned the sale and consumption of liquor during the election week which was further extended for Honiara and Guadalcanal until 8 April. Following the dynamics of the electioneering campaigns, the RSIPF also banned float parades celebrating victory of candidates in the national general election on the street of Honiara, in the provinces or at sea.

3 A stringer is part-time or freelance journalist, videographer, or photographer typically assigned by a news organization to cover areas that are considered less newsworthy or that are deemed peripheral to the news organization's coverage area. A local newspaper may have stringers in surrounding small towns, whereas major news organizations may have stringers in dozens of countries around the world, especially in areas where they have no bureau or full-time reporters. Stringers also may be used in areas that are seen as dangerous "trouble spots," such as war zones or natural disaster sites, or for stories that would be too time-consuming for regular staff to cover. Source: https://www.britannica.com/topic/stringer-journalism

According to media reports, some political groups who were given approval to organise floats at the close of the campaign period failed to adhere to conditions that were attached to the approval of their request. RSIPF cited exceeding the number of approved vehicles for the float parades, disregard for passenger safety and traffic regulations which imposed great risk to both participants and members of the public.

The Electoral Act (Section 125) defines the limit for election campaign expenses for each candidate. However, the source of campaign funds was an area of contention [refer to Ch.2 and 3].

Recommendations

The Group recommends that:

- efforts should be made to increase the capacity of the media to cover elections in greater depth and the SIEC and MASI are encouraged to continue to collaborate to develop age, location, gender and disability inclusive approaches for information-communication strategies throughout the electoral cycle;

- efforts should be made to strengthen the capacity of provincial news stringers and promote greater partnership between mainstream national media and community media correspondent/focal point networks developed by groups such as Vois Blong Meri Solomons (VBMS) and WIMSI to broaden the coverage of electoral issues from provincial centres;

- national media organisations, in particular the SIBC, should be encouraged to develop and promote their own in-house Codes of Conduct for elections, drawing on SIEC guidance to ensure the voting public is aware of editorial standards and ensure clear demarcation between opinion (op-ed) content, daily news coverage and editorial lines particularly during the campaigning period;

- consideration should be given to provide support to the SIEC to establish a media monitoring unit to regularise the monitoring of print, broadcast and online media to support compliance with the Code of Conduct, as well as ensure accuracy in media content and hear reactions and complaints; and

- encouragement of greater resources for the Political Party Commission to undertake its key mandates including training programmes for political parties and candidates on how to broaden their campaign strategies to consistently focus on policy and development priorities, and strengthening the capacity of political parties to engage in inclusive dialogue and consensus building processes.

Chapter 5 - Voting, Counting and Results

Background

The General Election proceeded as planned in all of the 50 constituencies. Voting was scheduled from 7am to 5pm in 1,043 polling stations across the country, an increase of 176 from the 2014 Election. More than 3,500 Election Officers managed the poll and count.

As with previous elections, Solomon Islands used a first-past-the-post (FPTP) system where the candidate polling the highest number of votes wins. Each constituency returns a single Member of Parliament. Registration and voting are not compulsory.

The passage of the Electoral Act 2018 strengthened the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission (SIEC) and reflected some of the recommendations made by former Commonwealth Observer Groups, including:

- improved training of polling officials be undertaken to ensure greater consistency in the application of electoral procedures utilising, amongst other measures, audio-visual training material;
- empowering the SIEC to respond appropriately in the event that a *force majeure* situation arises;
- establishing procedures for pre-poll and out of constituency voting; and
- allowing voters still in the queue at 5 pm to vote.

For the first time, pre-poll voting was introduced for Police and Electoral Officials. This took place on 21 March. A total of 16 pre-poll centres were opened – one in each of the Provincial capitals and seven in Honiara.

Election Officials are required to perform their duties in accordance with this new Electoral Act, as well as a revised *Presiding Officer Election Manual* and a revised *Returning Officer Election Manual*. The Group found that these manuals covered substantial ground and also referenced some notable changes, including a recommendation by the 2014 Commonwealth Observer Group that the practice of recording the voter identification number on the ballot counterfoil be removed, to ensure secrecy of the ballot.

Each polling station is managed by a Presiding Officer, with two Polling Assistants. Training for Election Officials took place in 2 phases, with the ten Election Managers and fifty Returning Officers being trained in late January and the Presiding Officers and Polling Assistants being trained in the days prior to Election Day.

Candidates are allowed to have one polling agent at each polling station, and one counting agent at each counting centre, although they can nominate up to

two agent names for both processes. Written notice of such appointments should be provided to the Returning Officer not later than ten days before Election Day.

At each polling station, there should be one semi-translucent ballot box secured with five or seven seals (the fifth or seventh being used to seal the flap at close of voting).

Following the close of the poll, ballot boxes were transported back to a regional designated secure facility for storage overnight. From the following morning, ballot boxes were then transported to Provincial capitals, where the count took place for different constituencies.

Set Up Procedures

Under the Electoral Act 2018 and the Officials' manuals, the procedure for set up is as follows prior to the opening of the polling station:

- The Presiding Officer and Polling Assistants should set up the room with an eye towards ensuring: the secrecy of the ballot; the Presiding Officer, Assistants, Agents and Observers all have full view of activities; that the ballot box is clearly visible, and an orderly queue is maintained outside and there is no congestion around the entrance/exit;
- Affixing signs to the outside of the building and ensuring that the following documents are all visible outside of the polling station: Official List of Candidates, Symbols, and Colours; Polling Day offenses sign; Instructions to Voters sign; and a Voter List for the polling station; and
- Ensuring polling staff are correctly dressed, setting up the main table, securing forms (including preparing Polling Agent identification), and rechecking and accounting for all ballot papers.

Voting Procedures

Under the Electoral Act 2018 and the Officials' manuals, the procedure for voting is as follows:

- shortly before 7:00am, the Presiding Officer invites any Polling Agents, Observers, and Voters present into the polling station to inspect the empty ballot box;
- Presiding Officer to seal the ballot box on four sides or six sides (depending on the size of the ballot box supplied), with seal numbers recorded on the *Record of Ballot Box Security Seals* form (witnessed by two polling agents);
- Presiding Officer to note the witnesses that observed the empty ballot box and the sealing of the ballot box;

- Presiding Officer to ask all Agents, Observers and Voters to move away from the ballot box and for Agents and Observers to take their seats;
- at 7am the Presiding Officer announces that voting has begun;
- Electors approach the Presiding Officer one by one. The Presiding Officer must be satisfied:
    - as to the identity of the elector, by inspecting the elector's Voter Identification Card or, if the elector does not present a card, by asking for the elector's name and place of residence and comparing the information provided against the information contained in the Register of Electors;
    - that the elector is eligible to vote at that polling station, by checking the Register of Electors; and
    - that the elector has not already voted, by inspecting the smallest finger on the elector's left hand for indelible ink.
- the Presiding Officer asks the elector "Are you X of Y Village and is this your photograph on the register?";
- the Presiding Officer marks the elector's entry on the Register of Electors by placing a tick in red ink in the box marked "has voted";
- the smallest finger on the elector's left hand (or right hand, if the elector does not have a left hand) is placed into a bottle of indelible ink, up to the first joint (if the elector has no hands, then the Presiding Officer does not have to apply ink);
- the Presiding Officer stamps and marks the ballot paper, and issues the ballot paper to the elector. (Unlike in 2014, there is no longer a need to record the elector's Voter Identification Number on the counterfoil); and
- the elector proceeds to a voting screen, marks and folds their ballot paper, and places it in the ballot box.

While one Polling Assistant assists the Presiding Officer with the process of identifying electors and the issuance of ballot papers, the other Polling Assistant is positioned close to the Ballot Box, and ensures all electors place their ballot into the ballot box and directs electors to the exit. It is expected that the two Polling Assistants will switch tasks every 3 hours.

At 4:55pm, the Presiding Officer warns those present and outside the polling station that voting will end at 5pm and only those in the queue at 5pm will be able to vote. At precisely 5pm, the Presiding Officer indicates who is the last person in the queue for voting. After the polling station is closed, the Presiding Officer:

- seals the flap of the ballot box with a security seal;
- completes the *Ballot Papers Account* form, and accounts for all Ordinary Ballot Papers, Unused Ordinary Ballot Papers, Spoilt Ordinary Ballot Papers, and Tendered Ballot Papers; and
- packages all materials ready for collection.

The Presiding Officer and Polling Assistants are responsible for the safe delivery of the ballot box and other materials back to the Returning Officer. Transport is organised in coordination with the RSIPF in a convoy arrangement.

An elector may require assistance under several circumstances, including if the elector is blind, disabled, and/or cannot read or write. The Presiding Officer (or a Polling Assistant authorised by the Presiding Officer), escorts the elector to a voting screen, in the presence of a witness selected by the elector. The elector indicates their preferred candidate, and the Presiding Officer marks the ballot paper accordingly and folds and places the ballot paper in the ballot box.

Voting can be undertaken outside the polling station if an elector has access issues to the station. The Presiding Officer is required to obtain ID information, verify all details inside the polling station, and have the elector vote in a private area away from close viewing. The Presiding Officer then returns with the ballot paper and places it in the ballot box.

Counting Procedures

Counting of votes for each constituency is conducted under the supervision of the Returning Officer for that constituency. The counting procedure is as follows:

- once the ballot boxes have been received at the counting centre from all polling stations in the constituency, verification of ballots from each ballot box are conducted separately;
- mixing of ballot papers in batches from different polling stations and pre-poll locations will then take place in accordance with a numbered polling station system of mixing as advised by the SIEC just prior to the counting;
- counting for a batch can commence;
- ballot boxes for a batch are emptied onto a flat surface, and are then arranged in piles by the counting team under the names of each candidate an elector has marked a ballot paper for;
- where count teams reject ballot papers, they should be separated in three piles according to the rationale:
  - (a) does not have an official mark;
  - (b) ballot paper is informal; or
  - (c) pre-poll ballot is for wrong constituency.
- once ballot papers are separated by candidate, count teams will work in pairs to verify the pile for each candidate and organise the ballots in sets of ten and bundled in sets of 100;
- the number of votes for each candidate, and the number of rejected ballot papers, in that batch is recorded in the *Ballot Paper Count* form;
- a fresh count of all ballot papers removed from the batch is undertaken, and any error in the count is corrected, after which the Returning Officer completes and signs the *Ballot Paper Count* form.

The form may be countersigned by an Assistant Returning Officer or public officer present, and the details of the count copied by any candidate or counting agent present;

- the Returning Officer copies the recorded number of ballot papers from the "RO Count Verification" column in the *Ballot Paper Count* form to the "Summary of Candidate Votes per Batch for Constituency" table for the relevant batch; and
- once each batch count is completed, all counted and rejected ballot papers are then placed into separate envelopes from the counting kit, where the Returning Officer endorses the contents of each envelope and an Assistant Returning Officer or public officer present countersigns.

Once the Returning Officer has completed the counting and verification process for all batches of polling stations, the Returning Officer must declare to be elected the candidate for whom the greatest number of votes has been cast. The Returning Officer then notifies the elected candidate and the SIEC in writing.

Assessment of the Vote and the Count

General Observations

Training

- It was observed that the time provided for the Presiding Officer and Polling Assistant training varied across constituencies, from between one and a half to four days.

Pre-polling

- The Group observed that the registration period for pre-polling closed before the final appointments were made for all the electoral and police officers involved with the election. This meant some officials made arrangements to enable their colleagues to vote on the day, while others could not vote.

Polling Day

- Turnout: The Group observed long queues of voters early in the day, including large numbers of young people. In some cases, voters had arrived at polling stations before 7am. Observers did not observe any lines at the close of poll.
- Atmosphere: The Group noted the peaceful and orderly manner of voters, including those waiting in the queue. Voters queued up for long periods in hot and/or wet conditions highlighting their enthusiasm of the electoral process. The Group noted the alcohol ban may have added to the peaceful nature of polling day.
- Accessibility: The locations of some polling stations were not conducive to easy access for elderly and disabled people. Nonetheless, the Group observed that polling officials were ready when requested to provide assistance to those who needed it. The

support given would range quite widely and varied from assisting a voter to the voting screen to physically marking a ballot paper for a voter.

- Communication: The lack of mobile and internet coverage for certain rural polling stations meant it was difficult for Presiding Officers to communicate with the Returning Officer and SIEC.
- Visibility: Signage of voter information and voter lists were clearly presented on walls outside and close to the polling stations. They were placed in such a way to mitigate against congestion and allowed for an easy flow of voters to the entrance of polling stations.
- Identifying Voters: Some voters struggled to find their names on the voting list, and Presiding Officers would ask them to consider looking for their name at nearby polling stations or for the voter to show their ID card to check if the voter was in the correct polling station/constituency.
- Screen Layout and Secrecy of the Ballot: Generally, polling stations were laid out well to ensure secrecy of the ballot. Presiding Officials and Polling Assistants were positioned in places which supported the process and flow of voters. However, in some polling stations voting screens were positioned in such a way which allowed Election Officials, Polling Agents and/or Observers to see how voters were voting.
- Sealing and Labelling of Ballot Boxes: The sealing and labelling of ballot boxes was generally consistent. However, in some polling stations the Group observed fewer seals were placed on the ballot boxes than required. This may have been a product of intentional design or a consequence of insufficient training. While most ballot boxes were labelled at the opening of the polling station, in some instances the ballot boxes were not labelled properly with constituency information.
- Gender Balance: There were promising signs of an increase of female representation across Electoral and Police officials. The Group observed a good mix of men and women in the voting queues and did not observe any overt discrimination of voters.
- Campaign Material: On the whole, the Group did not witness any campaign material on Election Day or the day before.
- Conduct of Electoral Officials: In general, Polling stations opened and closed on time. The Group noticed Presiding Officers and Polling Assistants conducted themselves professionally. They often provided helpful information to voters on the voting process, including on how to mark and fold the ballot paper.
- Polling Agents: The Group observed that in some polling stations there were too many Polling Agents, while in others not all parties were represented by Agents. No Polling Agent displayed their identification as required under the Officials' manuals.

The Count

- The Group observed that procedures to ensure that effective and accountable chain of custody records were kept for all transfers of ballot boxes and other election material.
- The timeframe for commencement of the count of votes was inconsistent across Provincial Capitals. In some cases, counts did not commence until 3pm. Ballot boxes did not all arrive by the expected time.
- Once the count commenced, the Group observed variations in count procedures. Some Returning Officers were meticulous in their transparency but did not engage all count staff in the process, while other Returning Officers were more organised and efficient. This meant efficiency was compromised in some instances resulting in much longer counting periods. The Group notes that this was the first general election requiring batching of polling stations for the count and this may have contributed to inefficiencies and delays.
- The electoral officials are to be commended for abiding by the electoral process and ensuring transparency and delivering on the guarantee that votes remain secret through the new count procedures.

Provincial-specific Observations

Commonwealth Observer teams were deployed to seven locations across Solomon Islands. The provinces visited account for 39 of the nation's 50 constituencies. Teams observed the voting. Some teams observed the counting and tabulation process.

Key provincial-specific Observations, which are not covered in the General Observations before, are noted below:

<u>Honiara and West Guadalcanal</u>

- The Team observed that police visibility at all polling stations ensured calm and order. Roving police teams were observed in West Guadalcanal;
- Polling Assistants were prepared to assist the elderly and women with children;
- The poll opened and closed on time. Ballot boxes were sealed, and the seal numbers verified with polling agents. Some ballot boxes were labelled with the name of the polling station before the opening. Some were labelled at the close of poll;
- The start of the count was delayed but methodical and transparent. High presence of agents for all candidates were present at all polling stations and at the count centres; and
- There were some instances of tendered ballots.[4]

[4] Tendered ballots are differentiated ballot papers given to a voter whose name has already been used by a different voter.

Honiara and North and East Guadalcanal

- Police/Security were present but not intrusive, and included female officers;
- Observers not visible in area, except in Honiara;
- The layout could be improved in certain circumstances - two booths would be more suitable as sometimes if the voter takes time to cast his vote then the next voter in the queue has to wait; and
- In one case, a voter's name was not on the register and he was turned away.

Western Province – Marovo

- The distribution of election materials from the constituency distribution centre to polling stations was done professionally and with the full support of all electoral and security officials during daylight;
- The Team observed use of private resources (ships) by a candidate on Election Day, and following Election Day, for the purpose of transporting voters to and from the constituency from other parts of the Solomon Islands. These boats could transport over 500 passengers;
- The Team found that in a couple of polling stations the number of ballots in the ballot box by early morning appeared to be unusually high as compared to other polling stations visited during the same period;
- In four polling stations, seals were not applied properly to the ballot box. This oversight appeared to occur in a concentrated area of the constituency; and
- Some Election Officials were not using checklists during the distribution of election materials, which led to a relatively inefficient and ad-hoc process.

Western Province - Gizo/Kolombangara

- The Team observed that in some cases polling stations that were co-located did not see an even flow of voters. In some cases, one had long queues while the other was very quiet;
- The Team spoke to a young lady who along with several voters came to vote at a constituency she had never been to before. She admitted that her reason for doing so is because the incumbent MP for her constituency did not provide her with any assistance.
- There seemed to be inconsistency in how the indelible ink was applied to voters. In some cases, electoral officials were applying the ink with a cotton bud along the finger nails rather than dipping the finger in the ink bottle; and

- In some cases, the seals on the ballot boxes were not applied consistently and according to their manuals. Some were quite loose while in other cases not all seals had been applied. In one case, one side of the ballot box had no seal at all.

Isabel – Kia

- There seemed to be some confusion regarding logistics and transportation of ballot boxes and materials, following close of poll. The Team observed that in some constituencies, ballot boxes were transported to a secure storage location at night without security and polling agents escorting the ballot boxes;
- Low police presence was noted in comparison to other constituencies.

Central Province – Tulagi

- The Team observed general voter enthusiasm. For example, voters in relatively bigger polling stations came from several smaller villages of up to five kilometres away to cast their vote and were at polling stations by or before 7am;
- It was noted that even in polling stations identified as flashpoints during the last observation, voting was generally calm. In one particular polling station, voting was more orderly because community volunteers organised voting in batches;
- Some 27 per cent of the electoral officials at the polling units observed were female. According to a local election official, female polling officers could have been higher but for the fact that some men don't allow their wives to serve as polling officer. Equal opportunities were provided for women to cast their votes. Polling units observed appeared to be safe for women to cast their votes free of any forms of intimidation, coercion, violence or patriarchal voting tendencies; and
- Media was only visible at the provincial Polling Unit (Assembly Office) and collation centre.

Malaita – Auki

- Illiterate voters sought assistance in all polling stations visited. The Team witnessed voting by young, elderly and partially disabled persons. Reconciliation of ballot papers by counting officials was careful, transparent and accurate;
- There were tendered ballots in five of the polling stations visited; and
- Overall, the Team was satisfied with the procedures applied in opening of the first station, witnessed consistent sealing of ballot boxes and the orderly voting by electors in 15 polling stations. Counting observed in the three counting centres was undertaken with greater care and accuracy displayed by the officials.

The Results

Results as announced by the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission on 6 and 7 April indicated a seat distribution in the incoming Parliament as follows:

Kadare Party	8 seats
Solomon Islands Democratic Party	8 seats
United Democratic Party	4 seats
Democratic Alliance Party	3 seats
People's Alliance Party	2 seats
Solomon Islands United Party	2 seats
People First Party	1 seat
Solomon Islands Party for Rural Advancement	1 seat
Independents	21 seats

Recommendations

The Group recommends:

- greater attention be paid to the selection of polling station facilities, to ensure ease of access for disabled, elderly, frail and pregnant electors;

- consideration of the use of satellite phones for polling stations outside of mobile and internet coverage, to facilitate communication with Returning Officers, SIEC and RSIPF;

- the training of Election Officials should be standardised to ensure consistency;

- that the training of Election Officials places greater emphasis on polling station layout, particularly the placing of voting screens to ensure secrecy;

- there be a review of how polling officials be given relief throughout polling day;

- consideration be given to review the new count procedures to increase consistency and efficiency of the system, without compromising transparency;

- there be continuation of support for civil society organisations to increase their capacity to observe future elections, and to observe throughout the electoral cycle;

- earlier appointment of Returning Officers, Presiding Officers and Polling Assistants, to ensure timely training and the ability of election officials to pre-poll;

- continue to ensure that a broad program of civic awareness and voter education is implemented, in order to strengthen voter confidence in the electoral process;

- polling agents must have proper accreditation and visible IDs displayed at polling stations;

- that the practice of a Presiding Officer calling out the name of the elector once identified be introduced, for the purpose of transparency and to allow Polling Agents to follow who has voted; and

- consider highlighting the voluntary requirement of voter registration cards as part of voter awareness material, and how this improves efficiency of the process.

Chapter 6 - Conclusions and Recommendations

The Group commended the people of Solomon Islands for the enthusiasm and commitment in how they engaged in their national electoral process. The election was inclusive and competitive. A high turnout at campaign activities was observed in Honiara and other provinces. Voters were generally free to express their will. The elderly, women and young people were free to participate in the voting process, and received assistance from the polling officials when required.

The SIEC's role to strengthen the country's national election and the administration of the election under the new Electoral Act 2018 is to be commended. The role played by the SIEC officials, Election Managers, Returning and Presiding Officers in the management of election day and the count activities represents significant progress and indicates a commitment to strengthening the country's democratic practices.

The arrangements for pre-polling for all officials involved with the election is commended. Consideration should be given to allow other voters who are involved with essential services, such as health and education, to participate in pre-polling.

The Group commends the adoption of out-of-constituency voter registration for the 2019 election. Civic awareness and voter education are critical to ensuring an informed electorate, which is able to engage constructively in the nation's political and electoral processes. The SIEC could work closely with civil society organisations in this regard.

However, the Group notes that political representation of women remains low. Measures adopted thus far to increase representation of women in Parliament needs to be supported by all the political parties and relevant institutions.

The Group commends the role of RSIPF in supporting SIEC and ensuring the process was conducted in a peaceful environment. The support provided by Australia and New Zealand through the deployment of the Combined Task Group (CTG) contributed to delivering the required logistical arrangements for the election.

In the context of our Terms of Reference, this Report provides a number of recommendations for consideration to further strengthen the electoral process in Solomon Islands. Our overall conclusion is that the 2019 National General Election was conducted in a peaceful, transparent and inclusive manner. We congratulate SIEC, RSIPF and the people of Solomon Islands for participating and ensuring the success of the 2019 election.

In this Report, the Group has set out various recommendations and we outline them below for ease of reference.

Electoral Framework and Election Administration

The Group recommends that:

- the Register of Electors be kept under review to maintain its integrity and accuracy, and that continuous voter registration (CVR) be implemented;

- pre-polling provision be extended to other registered voters, such as those involved in essential services or residing overseas;

- temporary special measures be adopted to increase women's representation in parliament, with one option being a quota of seats for women and another being reviewing financial incentives for parties fielding women candidates;

- provision of greater resource allocation and facilitation of best-practice knowledge sharing for the Department of Women, SIEC and the Political Parties Commission to engage with women's civil society organisations and their networks to identify the best way to achieve gender equality in political representation, including through the application of temporary special measures;

- consideration of the issuance of voter IDs only after the completion of the objections and omissions period and the cleaning of the Register of Voters, rather than on registration day;

- further consideration be given to a review of the constituency boundaries with a view to standardising the numbers of electors across the constituencies following the upcoming census; and

- that the definition of "ordinarily resident" in Section 4(2) of the Electoral Act 2018 be reconsidered as the current definition is effectively taken to mean that electors can register wherever they like, leaving the registration system subject to abuse.

Campaign and Media

The Group recommends that:

- efforts should be made to increase the capacity of the media to cover elections in greater depth and the SIEC and MASI are encouraged to continue to collaborate to develop age, location, gender and disability inclusive approaches for information-communication strategies throughout the electoral cycle;

- efforts should be made to strengthen the capacity of provincial news stringers and promote greater partnership between mainstream national media and community media correspondent/focal point networks developed by groups such as Vois Blong Meri Solomons (VBMS) and WIMSI to broaden the coverage of electoral issues from provincial centres;

- national media organisations, in particular the SIBC, should be encouraged to develop and promote their own in-house Codes of Conduct for elections, drawing on SIEC guidance to ensure the voting public is aware of editorial standards and ensure clear demarcation between opinion (op-ed) content, daily news coverage and editorial lines particularly during the campaigning period;

- consideration should be given to provide support to the SIEC to establish a media monitoring unit to regularise the monitoring of print, broadcast and online media to support compliance with the Code of Conduct, as well as ensure accuracy in media content and hear reactions and complaints; and

- encouragement of greater resources for the Political Party Commission to undertake its key mandates including training programmes for political parties and candidates on how to broaden their campaign strategies to consistently focus on policy and development priorities, and strengthening the capacity of political parties to engage in inclusive dialogue and consensus building processes.

Voting, Counting and Results

The Group recommends:

- greater attention be paid to the selection of polling station facilities, to ensure ease of access for disabled, elderly, frail and pregnant electors;

- consideration of the use of satellite phones for polling stations outside of mobile and internet coverage, to facilitate communication with Returning Officers, SIEC and RSIPF;

- the training of Election Officials should be standardised to ensure consistency;

- that the training of Election Officials places greater emphasis on polling station layout, particularly the placing of voting screens to ensure secrecy;

- there be a review of how polling officials be given relief throughout polling day;
- consideration be given to review the new count procedures to increase consistency and efficiency of the system, without compromising transparency;

- there be continuation of support for civil society organisations to increase their capacity to observe future elections, and to observe throughout the electoral cycle;

- earlier appointment of Returning Officers, Presiding Officers and Polling Assistants, to ensure timely training and the ability of election officials to pre-poll;

- continue to ensure that a broad program of civic awareness and voter education is implemented, in order to strengthen voter confidence in the electoral process;

- polling agents must have proper accreditation and visible IDs displayed at polling stations;

- that the practice of a Presiding Officer calling out the name of the elector once identified be introduced, for the purpose of transparency and to allow Polling Agents to follow who has voted; and

- consider highlighting the voluntary requirement of voter registration cards as part of voter awareness material, and how this improves efficiency of the process.

Annex A – Arrival Statement

The Commonwealth

ARRIVAL STATEMENT BY HON SATO KILMAN LIVTUVANU

CHAIR OF THE COMMONWEALTH OBSERVER GROUP

SOLOMON ISLANDS NATIONAL GENERAL ELECTION 2019

We are privileged to be here in Solomon Islands to observe the National General Election to be held on 3 April 2019. The Commonwealth has been an active partner in supporting the country's democratic processes and has deployed observer groups to Solomon Islands since 2001.

I am honoured to have been invited by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Patricia Scotland, to lead a Group of eminent Commonwealth citizens to support Solomon Islands national democratic process.

Our Group members are from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific. We are supported by a staff team from the Commonwealth Secretariat.

The Commonwealth attaches great importance to the conduct of credible and peaceful elections as a means of giving citizens an opportunity to choose their leaders and to hold them accountable. The Commonwealth Charter is very clear on the "inalienable right of individuals to participate in democratic processes, in particular through free and fair elections in shaping the society in which they live. Governments, political parties, and civil society are responsible for upholding and promoting democratic culture and practices and are accountable to the public in this regard."

Our Group will observe and report on relevant aspects of the organisation and conduct of this election, including the environment in which it is held. We will consider the key factors that could impact on the credibility of the electoral process as a whole, and assess whether this election have been conducted according to the standards for democratic elections to which Solomon Islands has committed itself and as outlined in the country's Constitution and the Electoral Act 2018. We will be objective and impartial. We have met with some of the political parties and other stakeholders. The Group received a

briefing from the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission (SIEC) on the various aspects of the new Electoral Act 2018 under which this election will be conducted. We are pleased to note that some of the recommendations submitted by previous Commonwealth Observer Groups were accepted and implemented as part of the country's electoral reforms.

We plan to deploy teams to several provinces including here in Honiara City, to observe the vote, the count and the results tabulation process. We will coordinate with other international observers and we welcome the participation of domestic observers who have been deployed throughout the country. Our Group will return to Honiara to write and finalise our report before we depart the country.

This election is critical for sustaining the peace dividend the people of Solomon Islands have worked hard to secure. We commend the role that the Pacific Forum region played through RAMSI in supporting the country's efforts to pursue its peace and development objectives. We urge all the candidates and voters to participate peacefully in the country's election and be assured of the Commonwealth's commitment to strengthening your national democratic processes and institutions.

Tank yu tumas.

Honiara
29 March 2019

The Commonwealth Observer Group is composed of:

Hon Sato Kilman Livtuvanu, Chairperson – Former Prime Minister of Vanuatu
Ms Sharon Bhagwan-Rolls - Board Chair, Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) and Co-Chair, Board of Directors, Global Fund for Women (Fiji)
Mr Pesi Fonua – Editor and Publisher, Matangi Tonga Online (Tonga)
Mr Hendrick Gappy – Former Chairman, Seychelles Electoral Commission (Seychelles)
Ms Kimberly Gilbert – Board Member for Training and Development of the Caribbean Regional Youth Council (Trinidad and Tobago)
Mr Ahmed Issack Hassan – Former Chairperson, IEBC Kenya
Ms Beverly Joeman – Vice Chair, Sabah, Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (Bersih 2.0), (Malaysia)
Mr Reuben Kaiulo - Former Election Commissioner (Papua New Guinea)
Dr Rajen Prasad – Former Member of Parliament and former Commonwealth Envoy to Lesotho (New Zealand)

Senator Lisa Singh – Senator for Tasmania (Australia)
Mr Wilson Toa – CEO, Transparency International (Vanuatu)

The Group is supported by a Commonwealth Secretariat staff team comprised of:

Mr Albert Mariner – Head, Asia/Europe/Caribbean/Pacific Section, Governance and Peace Directorate, (Staff Team Leader)
Mr Jonathan Cheng – Political Officer, Asia/Europe/Caribbean/Pacific Section, Governance and Peace Directorate
Ms Sonali Campion – Programme Officer, Commonwealth Electoral Network, Governance and Peace Directorate
Mr Abubakar Abdullahi – Programme Officer, Good Offices Section, Governance and Peace Directorate

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For more information, or to organise media interviews, please contact Sonali Campion

Email: s.campion@commonwealth.int Tel: +677 7249473

Note to Editors
The Commonwealth is a voluntary association of 53 independent and equal sovereign states. It is home to 2.4 billion citizens, of whom 60 per cent are under the age of 30. The Commonwealth includes some of the world's largest, smallest, richest and poorest countries, spanning five regions. 31 of its members are small states, many of them island nations. Commonwealth countries are supported by an active network of more than 80 intergovernmental, civil society, cultural and professional organisations.
Visit www.thecommonwealth.org

Annex B – Interim Statement

The Commonwealth

INTERIM STATEMENT BY HON SATO KILMAN LIVTUVANU

CHAIR OF THE COMMONWEALTH OBSERVER GROUP

SOLOMON ISLANDS NATIONAL GENERAL ELECTION 2019

We commend the commitment of the people of the Solomon Islands for participating peacefully and in high numbers in their national general election, held on Wednesday 3 April 2019. We acknowledge the efforts of the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission (SIEC) in conducting the election following the adoption of the Electoral Act in September 2018. We observed some positive aspects of the process and recognised areas that could be considered to further enhance the country's democratic process.

The Group is of the view that the results of the 2019 national general election should reflect the wishes of the people of the Solomon Islands. We issue this statement as the count process is ongoing, with the official results yet to be declared.

Following an invitation from the SIEC, the Commonwealth Secretary-General deployed this Group to undertake this observation mission on behalf of the Commonwealth family. Our terms of reference are to assess whether the election was held according to the standards of democratic elections to which the Solomon Islands has committed, with reference to the country's own legal framework, as well as various international commitments to which the Solomon Islands is a signatory.

Prior to the deployment of our teams to different constituencies, we held meetings in Honiara with SIEC, some of the political parties, representatives of the media, civil society groups, representatives of women and youth organisations, other international observer groups and some of the Commonwealth High Commissioners. We also attended a security briefing from the Police Commissioner and received logistic support plans from the Commander of the Australian and New Zealand Combined Task Group (CTG).

We had teams deployed to Western Province, Isabel Province, Central Province, Malaita, Guadalcanal and Honiara City. On Election Day our teams observed the opening of polls, voting and the closing of polls.

The aim of this Interim Statement is to provide our initial assessment of the electoral process, based on representations made to us and our direct observations.

Legal framework and the election management body

This election was administered in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution 1978, the Political Parties Integrity Act 2014, and the Electoral Act 2018.

We welcomed the SIEC's decision to introduce pre-polling for the first time to allow polling officials and police officers involved with the elections to cast their vote. However, the Group noted that the registration period for pre-polling closed before the final appointments were made for all the electoral and police officers involved with the election.

The Group noted the new out-of-constituency registration arrangements. However, the lack of clarity around the definition of 'ordinarily resident' and where citizens can register and vote appeared to raise concerns. We also received several complaints about the absence of out-of-constituency voting arrangements that would have enabled workers involved with essential services, and others who reside and work in provincial capitals, including Honiara, to cast their vote without having to travel to their respective provinces.

Logistics and Security

Our Group commends the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) for the security and logistics plans put in place to ensure a peaceful environment for the national general election. We appreciate the logistics support to the SIEC and RSIPF provided by the Governments of Australia and New Zealand through the presence of the CTG.

The Campaign and Media Environment

Our Group observed some of the campaign activities in Honiara before teams were deployed to different provinces on 1 April 2019. We observed an energised campaign environment with large public rallies and lively party floats. The Group was not made aware of any restrictions on the freedoms vital to a campaign period, notably that of assembly and expression.

The Group commends the pre-election media training undertaken by SIEC and welcomes the positive *role that the radio and print* media played in raising awareness around electoral issues and processes, and in facilitating public debate. We encourage the SIEC and Media Association of Solomon Islands (MASI) to continue to collaborate to develop age, location, gender and disability inclusive approaches for ongoing information communication strategies throughout the electoral cycle.

Polling Day

Prior to polling day, teams met with Returning Officers in their respective constituencies and observed the distribution of election materials.

On polling day, voters turned out in large numbers. On the whole, the polling stations we observed opened on time around 7am. In many areas we observed high numbers of voters had already lined up before the opening of the poll.

Teams met with some of the candidate agents, domestic and other international observers, who were generally positive about the polling process.

The polling officials we observed carried out their responsibilities in a professional and non-partisan manner. We acknowledged the presence of the candidate agents, whose role it was to ensure transparency was maintained in the polling stations.

However, we observed several voters who struggled to find their names on the voter list. A few seemed uncertain about their designated polling station and in some cases voting screens needed to be more carefully positioned to ensure the secrecy of the ballot. There were inconsistencies in the way ballot boxes were sealed and labelled, and some teams noted tendered ballot papers had to be issued to a few voters whose vote was allegedly cast by someone else.

While some polling stations were not fully accessible, we observed that polling officials were ready to assist elderly and disabled voters.

Security presence at polling stations was adequate and contributed to the relatively peaceful and orderly environment in which the poll was conducted. We commend the election officials, as well as RSIPF and Correctional Officers, for conducting their tasks in a professional manner.

The Count

The Group observed counts in several provinces and notes SIEC's efforts to ensure transparency, while still delivering on the guarantee that votes remain secret through new count procedures. However, consideration should be given to review the current procedures to increase efficiency.

Rural Constituency Development Fund (RCDF)

The Group noted that the Electoral Act (Section 125) defines the limit for election campaign expenses for each candidate. The Group noted candidates raised concerns around the use of RCDF. The Group's Final Report will comment further on this.

Women Candidates

26 women candidates contested the election. We encourage the SIEC and the Political Parties Commission to continue providing an environment that would encourage more women, including from diverse backgrounds, to participate and contest at the next general election. Greater consideration should be given to engage with women's civil society organisations and networks to identify the best way to achieve gender equality in political representation.

Domestic Observers

We welcome the participation of domestic observers in this election. We continue to encourage the SIEC and stakeholders to support domestic election observation, which is critical for the transparency of election processes and further consolidation of democracy.

Declaration of Results

Some results have been declared. The full declaration of results will be issued in due course and we hope political parties, candidates and citizens continue to display the patience they have so far exercised, to ensure the whole electoral process remains peaceful.

The Group will finalise its report with detailed findings and assessment on this national general election. This report will be submitted to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, who will in turn convey it to the Government of Solomon Islands, the SIEC, and other national stakeholders. It will also be made available to Commonwealth Governments, and to the public.

Conclusion

It has been a privilege for our Group to observe this important democratic process in the Solomon Islands. The country's journey in consolidating its democracy and development continues and the Commonwealth will work closely with the incoming Government and other development partners. We hope that our report and recommendations, if implemented, will continue to strengthen the Solomon Islands' electoral system and democratic institutions. We extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone whom we have met and received assistance from in undertaking our duties, and especially the people of Solomon Islands for their warm welcome and hospitality.

Tank yu tumas.

Honiara
6 April 2019

For more information, or to organise media interviews, please contact Sonali Campion

Email: s.campion@commonwealth.int Tel: +677 7249473

Note to Editors
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Annex C – Biographies of Chair and Group Members

Hon Sato Kilman Livtuvanu (Vanuatu) - Chair

Hon Sato Kilman Livtuvanu (born 30 December 1957) is a Vanuatu politician. He had been Prime Minister of Vanuatu from June 2015 to February 2016. Kilman was previously Prime Minister from December 2010 to April 2011 and from May to June 2011, though his premiership was subsequently annulled by a court of law. He was elected Prime Minister again on 26 June 2011, thus beginning his first legally recognised term in the premiership; he served until 23 March 2013. He is also the current Leader of the People's Progress Party. He is an MP from Lakatoro on Malekula Island.

Senator Lisa Singh (Australia)

Lisa Singh has been an Australian Senator since 2010, representing the state of Tasmania. She is regarded as the first woman of South Asian descent to be elected to the Australian Parliament and follows in the political footsteps of her grandfather Ram Jati Singh, a member of the Fijian Parliament in the 1960s. During her term in the Senate, Lisa has served in various roles as a Shadow Assistant Minister and in 2016 was seconded to the United Nations General Assembly in New York as a delegate from the Australian parliament. She is a member of the Australian parliament's foreign affairs committee, privileges and law enforcement committees. In 2014, the Indian President awarded her a Pravasi Bharatiya Samaan for fostering friendly relations between India and Australia.

Prior to being elected to the Australian Senate, Lisa served in the Tasmanian Parliament from 2006 and as a Minister in the Labor government. She is a strong advocate for Australia's investment in international development, refugees, women's rights and the important role of the Indo-Pacific diaspora in Australia's future prosperity.

Sharon Bhagwan-Rolls (Fiji)

Sharon Bhagwan-Rolls is the Board Chair, ISG Gender Liaison, and GPPAC Pacific Regional Representative of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), as well as the Co- Chair of the Board of Directors for the Global Fund for Women. Sharon is a Gender, Media and Communications Specialist. As the co-founder of FemLINKpacific (2000-2018), she led the establishment of a women-led community media network and the Pacific's first

women-led community radio network and Women's Weather Watch inter-operable information-communication system.

She has also served as: civil society adviser to the United Nations on Women, Peace and Security; International Ambassador and Pacific Coordinator of the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP); World Pulse Ambassador (2019); and Steering Group member of the Feminist Alliance for Rights (FAR).

Beverly Joeman (Malaysia)

Beverly Joeman currently serves as the Bersih 2.0 Vice Chair (Sabah). She is involved in election monitoring and electoral reform through the Malaysian national platform, participated in the Expert Meeting on Election Offences During Election Campaign Period (Malaysia), observed Malaysia's 14th General Election (2018), and several by-elections, continues to organise smart voters/seminar/forum, and advocates for news voters registration and civil society rights.

Beverly was previously the Secretariat Director of Jaringan Orang Asal SeMalaysia (JOAS), involved in the advocating for Orang Asal Rights at the Business & Human Rights Forum, and at the 17th Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP) at the United Nations in Geneva. She was also part of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) team for JOAS, pushing for the ratification of the ILO Convention 169, and Malaysia's recognition of UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Dr Rajen Prasad (New Zealand)

Rajen Prasad is a former Commonwealth Special Envoy to Lesotho. He has been a New Zealand Member of Parliament and served previously as New Zealand's Race Relations Conciliator and Human Rights Commissioner, and Chief Commissioner of the Families Commission. He also has experience in judicial work as a Member of the Residence Review Tribunal hearing appeals against immigration decisions. He served for six years on the Board of Bank of Baroda (New Zealand) and was its Chairman for three years.

He is a former Associate Professor from Massey University and has extensive experience in strategy development, governance review and development, corporate governance and in social policy formation and implementation. He has written widely in his field and is currently a consultant.

Ahmed Issack Hassan (Kenya)

Ahmed Issack Hassan is an Advocate at the High Court of Kenya and an independent consultant on Elections. He is a Former Chairperson of the Independent Elections & Boundaries Commission of Kenya (2009-2017) and a Former Chairperson of the Commonwealth Electoral Network Steering Committee (2014- 2016).

Reuben Kaiulo (Papua New Guinea)

Reuben Kaiulo has been serving as a Senior Electoral Adviser to the Papua New Guinea Electoral Commissioner since 2015. He is the Former Electoral Commissioner for Papua New Guinea (1991-2003), where he managed three National Parliament General Elections in 1992, 1997 and 2002.

He has been a member of several Commonwealth Observer Groups, including in Zimbabwe (1980), Bangladesh (1996) and Fiji (2001). He was a Member of the IFES Observer Team that observed the 1999 Indonesia General election after decades of authoritarianism, and was in Vanuatu in 2016 as a Member of the MSG Observer Team. He has been awarded the Order of the British Empire (MBE) by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the second.

Hendrick Gappy (Seychelles)

Hendrick Gappy was the Electoral Commissioner of Seychelles from 1998 until 2018, with the additional responsibility of Boundaries Delimitation and also being the Registrar of Political Parties. In 2011, a new Electoral Commission was established with Hendrick as Chairperson plus four members. The Electoral Commission in partnership with all stakeholders undertook a massive Electoral Reform project on all legal instruments pertaining to elections. Prior to this, he served as the Director-General of the Management and Information Systems Division responsible for the National Statistics Office and the National IT Office. He has been the Census Commissioner on several occasions.

Internationally, Hendrick has been involved with various organisations including the Commonwealth, SADC, COI, the United Nations and others in the context of electoral observation, statistical reform, and evaluation of IT for voters registration systems. He has been a member of several Commonwealth Observer Groups, including in South Africa (1994) where Mandela was elected to power, Maldives (2013), Solomon Islands (2001 and 2014) and Antigua and Barbuda (2018).

Kimberly Gilbert (Trinidad and Tobago)

Kimberly Gilbert currently serves as the Board Member for Training and Development of the Caribbean Regional Youth Council (CRYC). She is tasked with designing and expanding development programmes based on the needs of the organization and of individuals. Moreover, she assists with the management and delivery of training and development programmes of CRYC and its members. Since taking office in January 2018, Gilbert has conducted several workshops, trainings and discussions with youth leaders across the Caribbean; equipping them with tools necessary for their development and that of the young people of their respective countries. Most notable is her management and execution of the Caribbean Youth Leaders' Workshop: Policy and Advocacy for the Sustainable Caribbean. This event hosted youth from fourteen different Caribbean countries and trained them in best practices for policy development and advocacy.

Kimberly recently served as the Returning Officer for the Guyana National Youth Council Election (GNYC). She introduced the use of an online electronic voting system to the process after concluding that the geography and economic status made it severely difficult for the GNYC members to congregate for one day of voting. Gilbert is currently building an online resource database for youth and youth workers in the Caribbean while planning the 6th Caribbean Youth Leaders' Summit.

Pesi Fonua (Tonga)

Pesi Fonua is the Publisher of the Vava'u Press Ltd, a Tongan publishing company established in 1979. He was Editor-Publisher of the Matangi Tonga, Tonga's national news magazine from 1989 to 2003. Following transition to an online platform, he has since 2004 been the Editor of Matangi Tonga Online.

Vava'u Press publishes notable books in the Tongan and English languages. In June 2019, *The Poems and Songs of Queen Salote*, a 420 page hard cover book, is scheduled to be published.

Wilson Toa (Vanuatu)

Wilson Toa is the CEO for Transparency International Vanuatu where he manages and supports projects and initiatives in the areas of transparency and accountability. A fter spending over a decade working in media and diplomatic missions, Wilson joined civil society in 2015 with the interest of encouraging partnerships between civil society and the government to promote policies that support better accountability and transparency in all sectors in Vanuatu. Wilson has worked for the National Media in Vanuatu, the New Zealand High Commission, Australian High Commission, and ABC International (PACMAS) and has been on different Boards and committees within the government and civil society. In addition to the various roles he has held, Wilson is also a trained Leadership Trainer.

Commonwealth Secretariat Staff Team

Mr Albert Mariner, Head, Asia/Europe/Caribbean/Pacific Section, Governance and Peace Directorate (Staff Team Leader)

Mr Jonathan Cheng, Political Officer, Asia/Europe/Caribbean/Pacific Section, Governance and Peace Directorate

Ms Sonali Campion, Programme Officer, Commonwealth Electoral Network, Governance and Peace Directorate

Mr Abubakar Abdullahi, Programme Officer, Good Offices Section, Governance and Peace Directorate

Annex D – Deployment Plan

Honiara and West Guadalcanal	Sato Kilman Livtuvanu Albert Mariner Sonali Campion
Honiara and North and East Guadalcanal	Senator Lisa Singh Hendrick Gappy
Western Province – Marovo	Ahmed Issack Hassan Jonathan Cheng
Western Province - Gizo/Kolombangara	Dr Rajen Prasad Kimberly Gilbert
Isabel – Kia	Beverly Joeman Wilson Toa
Central Province – Tulagi	Sharon Bhagwan-Rolls Abubakar Abdullahi
Malaita – Auki	Reuben Kaiulo Pesi Fonua

Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation

The Commonwealth Secretariat is a signatory to both the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and the associated Code of Conduct for International Election Observation Missions, which were commemorated on 27 October 2005 at the United Nations in New York.

Commonwealth Observer Groups are organised and conducted in accordance with the Declaration and Commonwealth Observers undertake their duties in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

Commonwealth Secretariat
Marlborough House, Pall Mall
London SW1Y 5HX
United Kingdom

thecommonwealth.org

The Commonwealth