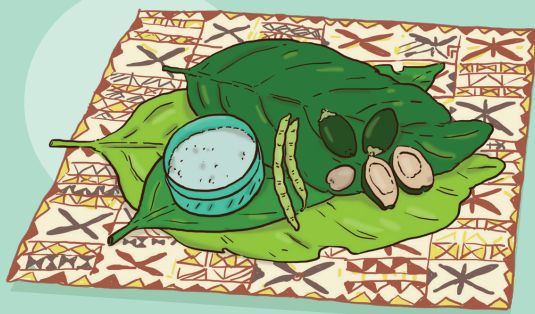


# Rising From The Ashes

Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Report

## Introduction

**Between 1998 and 2003**, the Solomon Islands experienced a period of extreme conflict, many people died and there was widespread destruction of property. The Prime Minister was forced to step down at gunpoint and government funds were stolen, thousands of people were displaced, and scores of women were raped. The conflict destroyed the economy of the Solomon Islands and created deep social divisions.



In September 2008, the Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established. The TRC collected the stories (statements) from more than 2,400 victims, witnesses, leaders and persons involved in the conflict. It also conducted public hearings and confidential hearings.

# A: Historical Background and the Tensions

The British first arrived at the Santa Cruz Islands in 1767. In 1893, the British government declared that the Solomon Islands were now under British rule as a 'Protectorate'. The British did not understand the context well and instead of recognizing the role of traditional chiefs they set up a system under which a District representative appointed 'headmen' and councils. This system did little to involve the local populations in governance matters.

The British ruled the Solomon islands through a colonial government for 85 years, from 1893 until 1978. During this time, they most often ignored existing land rights including customary rights and by the 1950s, 90% of fertile land along the coast was controlled by foreigners.



After World War II, the British decided to move the national capital to Honiara on Guadalcanal. Many migrants from other islands, particularly Malaita, moved to Guadalcanal looking for work and economic opportunity. The pressure caused by the migration caused increasing tension which led to the petition called the Bona Fide Demands of the Indigenous People of Guadalcanal.

**In 1978** the Solomon Islands became an independent country with its own Constitution similar to the British (Westminster) system. The TRC found that the highly centralized system was an insufficient role for traditional leaders that didn't create a national identity and created uneven levels of development across the country. This was a significant root cause to the what is referred to as "the tensions."

"the incapacity to find a solution for the Bona Fide Demands is at the bottom of the conflict, commonly referred to as the "ethnic tension" that erupted in Guadalcanal in 1998, and still bears potential for further conflict." - TRC



**The 1999** the Bona Fide Demands were again presented to the government and some payments for compensation were made. However, some of the compensation money was taken by corrupt officials, which increased anger and diminished the confidence in the government. The TRC found:

"1999 was the year with the highest number of human rights violations reported to the TRC. Most of them were cases of forced displacement related to property violation, often also of ill-treatment and sexual violence, and sometimes even to death. The overwhelming majority of human rights violations in 1998 and 1999 were committed by militants from Guadalcanal."



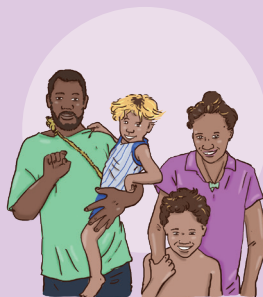
**On 5 June 2000** Some MEF militants raided the police and prison armories in Honiara. The armed MEF then forced the Prime Minister Ulufa'alu to resign on 14 June 2000. Two weeks later a new Prime Minister was elected, accompanied by claims that there had been widespread intimidation of voters by the MEF.

The government organized a series of peace talks created the Ministry of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace. From 9 to 15 October 2000, hundreds of delegates met in Townsville in northern Australia for a peace conference resulting in the Townsville Peace Agreement (TPA). However, violence did not cease in the Weather Coast and Honiara and other areas of Guadalcanal. By mid-2003 it was clear that the security and development prospects of the Solomon Islands had been destroyed and could not be restored without international assistance. On 24 July 2003 RAMSI, with a strong military element led by the Australian armed forces, arrived in the Solomon Islands and peace was quickly restored.

# B: Human Rights Violations

Human rights are the basic freedoms and protections that everyone has because they are a human being, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Everybody has civil and political rights as well as economic social and cultural rights.

According to international law the state has the duty to protect and fulfil basic human rights. The state also has a duty to prosecute those responsible for grave human rights violations and a failure to hold them to account is a human rights violation.



## Killings

The TRC estimated that about 200 people lost their lives as a direct result of the conflict. Most of those killed were civilians, not members of the various militant groups and security personnel, as seen in the graph below

suffered mostly by defenseless civilians used indiscriminately by armed groups to obtain information, punish and impose fear. At the time there was no state institution capable of protecting citizens.

## Sexual Violence

The TRC received 63 cases of sexual violation. Of all the reported cases of sexual violence, girls and women were the sole victims of rape cases. Boys and men, however, were also victims of sexual violence such as forced nakedness, violence against sexual organs and being forced to witness behaviour of a sexual nature. The TRC found that rights violations were perpetrated by all of the armed groups, including the police and Joint Operation members

## Property Violations

Property violation was one of the most common human rights violations committed by all of the armed actors who were involved in the conflict. The TRC received 1,882 testimonies of forced displacement with the names of 11,292 persons who had to leave their homes because of the conflict in addition to this there was 282 cases of loss of land.

## Abductions and Illegal detentions

The TRC documented 307 cases in which individuals were deprived of their liberty. Out of this total, 212 were cases of abduction by one of the militant groups. The other 95 cases were illegal detentions committed by state forces.

## Illegal detention

The TRC received 95 cases of illegal detentions committed by a state forces. Out these cases, 51 percent were committed by the Joint Operation and 49 percent by the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF).

## Torture and Ill-Treatment

The TRC received more than 1,400 statements that described experiences of torture and ill-treatment. Torture and ill-treatment were human rights violations

# Impact

## Impact on Women

Women survived displacement, killings, property violations, torture and ill-treatment, abduction and sexual violence. The trauma and ongoing consequences from these experiences continue to affect many women today. An important root cause of the victimization of women during the tensions was their lack of power and pre-existing lower status in society compared to men this must be addressed for lasting changes and peace to occur.



## The effect on children

Children were also victims of ill-treatment by armed groups. A major negative impact on children and on the future of the nation was the loss of educational opportunity for children due to the conflict.

## Impact on society

The tensions also had direct impact on basic social services; the majority of the population experienced economic collapse, social disintegration, and strained relationships between individuals and communities.



## Impact on business and the economy

Between 1999 and 2000, all major industries either closed or scaled down operations due to the prevailing security situation and the deterioration in law and order. A major impact of the conflict was that thousands of people who lost their sense of personal security and confidence in the future. This created a massive social traumatization that cannot easily be healed.

## Exhumations

Many cases of death during the tension were brutal incidents in which the family members have little to no knowledge of the whereabouts or what happened to their loved-ones. For the families, the missing were deprived of their place among the living community and denied their place among the dead. The TRC conducted four exhumations, in cooperation with the Director of Public Prosecutions and the police (RSIPF).

The TRC recommended that the process of exhumations be continued.



# Recommendations

## Mechanism for implementing the recommendations of the TRC

The TRC made a range of recommendations based on the deep inquiry into the tensions and the factors that had contributed to the violations. Recommendations involved rehabilitation of victims; decentralization of the governance structures; promotion of social and cultural activities to strengthen national unity just to name a few. The TRC recommended empowerment and legal protection for ownership by women of land, property and shares and reserving 30% of parliamentary seats for women.



## Mechanism for implementing the recommendations of the TRC

The TRC recommended that a Commission should be established by law with a mandate to strengthen national reconciliation. The Commission would be made up of seven Commissioners, each of whom must be individuals with a strong record of public service, integrity and independence. The Commission's work would involve developing a Comprehensive Reparations Plan. The Plan would include programs focused on compiling a national register of victims of the conflict and formulating programs to help repair the lives of those victims. The recommendations also included substantial areas of reform that should be undertaken in order to avoid recurrence of conflict and mass violations.

