



TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE CASE STUDY:

THE SOLOMON ISLANDS



Transitional Justice Case Study: The Solomon Islands

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Background

The Solomon Islands is an island nation with a population of approximately 700,000 in the South Pacific Ocean to the east of Papua New Guinea. Melanesian people are believed to have first settled in the area around 40,000 years ago. In 1568, sailors from Peru searching for the 'Southern Continent' arrived and Peruvian map makers later named the group of islands 'The Solomon Islands' because they believed the fabled King Solomons gold mines were in the region. Following this, the country received no other outside visitors for over 200 years, until the British arrived in 1767, followed by traders in search of whales, copra (coconuts), tortoiseshell and sandalwood.

The arrival of foreigners stimulated the development of increasingly different levels of opportunity and prosperity between areas of the archipelago. In particular the island of Guadalcanal became the focus for visitors, traders and whalers, leading to the establishment of settlements and the availability of tools, foreign goods and work opportunity. Faced with a lack of opportunity on their own island, settlers from Malaita and other islands came to Guadalcanal in search of work in the sugar and copra plantations. During World War II the US forces created bases on Guadalcanal. This also required a large work force and at the end of the war the capital city was moved to Honiara. The disparity in the development between Guadalcanal and Malaita and the resulting migration of many settlers to Guadalcanal was a key factor in the discontent and divisions which eventually led to mass violations.

The British ruled the Solomon Islands as a "Protectorate" for 85 years from 1893. The colonial administration did not understand the importance of local 'kastom' or traditions and imposed a system of District representatives who appointed headmen and councils rather than recognise and work with the existing social structures involving village chiefs. Following World War II, there arose a movement for independence which rejected British rule and argued for a return to traditional society with "kastom" as the guiding principle.

The British attempted to repress the independence movement and many leaders were arrested. However, significant support for independence continued throughout the period of British rule until it was finally won in 1978. The British largely ignored existing customary land rights, taking over areas that belonged to communities and allocating it to companies and groups aligned to the colonial government. By the 1950's an estimated 90% of the fertile lands along the coast was controlled by foreigners.

During the Constitutional drafting process prior to independence, there was significant support for adoption of a federal system of government that would recognise the traditional

powers of the chiefs. However, the influence of the British was strong and a Westminster model with a centralised government was adopted. The high hopes for independence were quickly marred by a failure of accountability and the arrival of logging companies from Southeast Asia, leading to a culture of nepotism and corruption.

The opportunities and level of development on Guadalcanal continued to be far greater than the rest of the country. Between 1970 and 1999 settlers, particularly from Malaita, poured into Honiara, resulting in a fourfold increase in the population. Many Malaitans had come from a harsh background and were highly motivated to succeed. Gradually they came to control the majority of the shops in the capital, were hired into government jobs and filled the majority of positions on the national police force.

Thousands of Malaitans moved onto land they did not own, gradually building and improving houses. In some cases corrupt village leaders 'sold' the rights of land to the migrants without the permission of the traditional owner groups. In many places, the government also provided permits to settle and build without consulting the traditional owners. The local population became increasingly resentful of the incoming migrants and incidents of violence increased.

A number of groups formed to try to deal with the problems, demanding action by the government. In 1988, a petition commonly referred to as the *Bona Fide Demands of the Indigenous People of Guadalcanal* was submitted to the government by a group of politicians and public servants. The demands included a controlled return of settlers from Guadalcanal and a sub-national government for the island. When the government failed to take the demands seriously, tensions between migrants and locals increased. In 1999, following outbreaks of violence the demands were once again presented to the government, this time eliciting a limited but insufficient response. The failure to act comprehensively on these demands contributed to the eventual outbreak of violence.

The massive levels of immigration combined with high levels of corruption and mismanagement of the economy led to low levels of support and confidence in the government. The 1997 Asian financial crisis created a situation where goods exported from the Solomons were not bought by their Asian neighbours and locals found themselves struggling to pay for basic needs.

The tensions between the people of Guadalcanal and settlers from Malaita, and the failure of the government to act, led to the formation of armed militia groups.¹ The largest group on Guadalcanal was known as the GRA,² later IFM, whose stated aims included a federal system of government with autonomy for Guadalcanal. Young men were forced and succumbed

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1. The historical information and background to the conflict is based on the Final Report of the Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This Report is not publicly available as it has not been released by the national parliament but is accessible at https://truthcommissions.humanities.mcmaster.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Solomon-Islands-Truth-and-Reconciliation-Commission_TRC_Final-Report_Vol1.pdf
 2. Guadalcanal were the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (GRA) who also called themselves Isatabu Freedom Fighters (IFF) and later changed their name to Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM).

to social pressure to join the militias which at the height of the conflict had around 10,000 members. The militia began attacking Malaitan settlers in Guadalcanal and labourers brought in to work on plantations. For the first 18 months of these attacks, which began in 1998, Malaitans did little in response, trusting that the police would eventually take action and that the two peace accords that had been signed would be respected. However, this did not happen and attacks on Malaitans increased. In 1999, small groups of Malaitans began to form and arm themselves. However, the GRA militants were stronger and had far more weapons.

By this time, the population of Honiara was around half Malaitan and half local. As the tensions increased, the Malaitans feared that the capital would be overrun by militants. In January 2000, a group of Malaitans travelled from Honiara to the town of Auki in Malaita where they attacked the police arms storage and seized around 100 guns. They then formed the 'Malaita Eagle Force (MEF)' militia group which took on the role of defending the city of Honiara, supported by many police and government officials. The vast majority of police in the Solomons were not armed and there was no permanent military force. The MEF declared all-out war on the Guadalcanal militants but the members were undisciplined and became involved in widespread violence and criminal acts including robbery, assault, rape and extortion.

The violence led to a general breakdown of the rule of law and the formation of other militia groups across the country. Guns were exchanged and criminal gangs used the political conflict as a cover for their violent activities. Houses were burned, women raped, perceived opponents detained, tortured and killed by various groups. A range of attempts to settle the conflict did not succeed. A large peace meeting with a 'kastom feast' attended by over 1,000 people was held in Honiara but this also did little to help. As peace descended into chaos, many police joined militia groups aligned with their ethnicity and the police force basically disintegrated, leaving nobody to even attempt to maintain order or protect the vulnerable.

The turning point in the conflict took place on 5 June 2000, when a group of MEF militants and police raided the police and prison arms stores and took control of more than 1,000 guns. They then arrested the Prime Minister and demanded he resign which he did and raided the government treasury. What remained of the security apparatus unravelled, leaving a failed state with no rule of law. Across the country, new militia groups were formed under the banners of various political agendas. These groups quickly became involved in killing, looting, rape and torture. Violence and displacement occurred in Honiara, on the Weather Coast, in Malaita and in the Choiseul and Western Provinces. Tens of thousands of people evacuated Guadalcanal and returned to their home islands. In the West of the country, armed militants that had been involved in the long running conflict in neighbouring Bougainville Island, in Papua New Guinea, came over the border and became involved in the conflict.

Following the raid and seizure of guns from the armoury the government arranged peace talks and created the Ministry of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace (MNURP) The Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA) established a peace office in Honiara and the Women for Peace Movement was formed. On 21 July 2000, representatives of the MEF and IFM met on the Australian Navy's HMS Tobruk to begin a series of ceasefire talks. However, the violence continued.

In October 2000, more than 100 delegates including militants, traditional leaders and government officials were flown to Townsville in Australia for peace talks, resulting in the Townsville Peace Agreement (TPA). The term of the TPA included:

- Weapons to be surrendered and stolen property returned within 30 days;
- Amnesty granted to the militants;
- MEF and IFM militants to be assisted by repatriation to their home villages and reintegration and rehabilitation programs;
- Malaita and Guadalcanal provinces would receive more autonomy; and
- Donor funds would be allocated to all those who had lost property.³

Despite all of these efforts, the Townsville Peace Agreement failed to restore peace. One of the most significant militia leaders, Harold Keke, was not present and he and his followers continued to kill, rape and torture on the remote 'Weather coast' of Honiara. Members of militant groups created havoc in villages across the country and the police lacked the discipline and force to stop them. The violence which had commenced in support of legitimate political claims had been replaced by widespread, uncontrolled criminality and an absence of state intervention.

Finally, on 24 July 2003, it was decided that an international peace-keeping force led by Australia with military and police from neighbouring countries would be deployed. The Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI)⁴ was deployed and quickly arrested hundreds of militants and confiscated their weapons, effectively ending the five-year long conflict. The sudden return of almost 20,000 people to Malaita from Guadalcanal created new problems. Many had been born and raised on Guadalcanal and it was difficult to absorb them into the impoverished communities.

The Solomon Islands TRC estimated that at least 200 people lost their lives as a direct result of the conflict, with most deaths the result of direct fighting, including combat situations, torture, beatings, kidnapping and abductions. In addition the TRC dealt with:

- 307 cases in which individuals were deprived of their liberty.
- 95 cases of illegal detentions committed by state forces.
- More than 1,400 reports of torture and ill-treatment.
- 63 cases of sexual violation.
- Tens of thousands of persons who were forcibly displaced.
- Tens of thousands of cases in which the homes of families were destroyed.

3. The Townsville Peace Agreement, accessible at

<https://peacemaker.un.org/solomonislands-townsville-agreement2000>

4. Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI), <https://www.ramsi.org>

Transitional Justice Initiatives

Transitional justice includes all of the measures a society takes to deal with a history of mass human rights violations including:

- Prosecuting those most responsible
- Seeking the truth about the violations
- Providing reparations to help repair the lives of victims
- Undertaking social, legal and institutional reforms that can reduce the likelihood of violations recurring in the future.

The response to mass violations in the Solomons has included hundreds of community reconciliation events, scores of trials in the national courts, an independent truth and reconciliation commission, limited and uneven attempts to provide reparations for victims, important security sector reforms, constitutional changes and other steps designed to reduce the potential for recurrence.

Prosecutions: The ‘tensions trials.’⁵

Soon after its arrival, the international peace-keeping force arrested hundreds of militia members, many of whom were placed into detention. The police began to investigate the most serious cases and prepare cases for prosecution. In 2005, the first of what became known as the ‘tension trials’ commenced resulting in the conviction of high-profile militia leader Harold Keke and others who received mandatory life sentences for murder under the national Criminal Procedure Code. Many of the Solomon Islanders serving as judges, prosecutors and police did not want to be involved in the ‘tensions’ cases so the required roles were filled by international actors.

As time passed, an increasing number of local professionals agreed to be involved in the prosecution process. The collection of evidence and prosecutions needed time and the local system became swamped, resulting in lengthy delays. Although there had been mass crimes committed, new laws such as those creating offences of crimes against humanity were not passed. Rather, the existing criminal laws were used, predominantly involving charges of murder and abduction. Although victims reported cases of sexual assault at the time of investigating the cases, the TRC found that no prosecutions for sexual assault related to the tensions had proceeded.

5. Renee Jeffries ed. *Transitional Justice and Action; Conflict, Justice and Reconciliation in the Solomon Islands*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. See also: Solomon Islands Case Study, Evaluation of Australian Law and Justice Assistance to the Solomon Islands, Dec 2012. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/lawjustice-solomon-islands-case-study.pdf>

Criticisms were raised that the process had involved ‘selective prosecution’ of militant leaders rather than target senior political figures that had been involved. Despite these shortcomings, the process resulted in dozens of convictions including many of those who had been most responsible for the most serious crimes. The Solomon Islands context therefore provides an example of a ‘hybrid’ model in which international judges and prosecutors were involved in prosecuting those responsible for mass crimes, relatively soon after the crimes had been committed by using existing laws rather than introducing new laws covering international crimes such as crimes against humanity.

In 2000 and 2001, the Solomon Islands government passed two Amnesty Acts designed to provide certainty to militants that if they surrendered their weapons there would be no legal repercussions for them. The amnesties included protection against serious national crimes such as murder. However, the amnesties did not apply to crimes that were violations of international humanitarian law. Although this terminology was not clarified in the laws, few defendants raised the issue during their trials and none succeeded in having it accepted as a valid defence.

One reason for this is that the peace agreements including the TPA and the Marau Peace Agreements offered amnesties on the condition that other promises were kept. These included that all weapons, ammunition and stolen property be surrendered and returned within a specific period. The laws also stated that crimes committed after the peace agreements would not be covered by the amnesty. The conditions for the amnesties were in general not complied with and they did not provide legal protection to those involved in the violence.⁶

Truth: The Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission⁷

The Solomon Islands TRC was established by an Act of Parliament in September 2008 and operated between 2009-2011. A National Selection Committee made up of representatives from the government, churches, traditional leaders and women’s groups received nominations and selected the five Commissioners responsible for the TRC’s mandate. Three Solomon Islander Commissioners were joined by two internationals: a former Commissioner of the Peru TRC and a senior judge who had served as the Vice President of Fiji.

The TRC completed its Final Report of more than 1,000 pages in 2012. The ‘TRC Law’ required that the Report be presented to Parliament and it was tabled as an “Order Paper” (NP/05/12/7) to the Seventh Meeting of the Ninth Parliament on 5th September 2014, which was the final sitting day of that Parliament. Although the full report had been tabled, as of the time of writing it has not yet been discussed by the Parliament. A summary of the TRC Report was produced in 2019.

6. Jeffries, *Ibid*, p 23.

7. The information relating the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was taken from the Final Report of the Commission, (1000 pages) and interviews with Rueben Lilo, former Director of the TRC in November 2021.

The TRC's core mandate was to promote unity and reconciliation and examine the human rights violations and abuses which occurred during the five-and-a-half-year period between 1 January 1998 and 23 July 2003. The human rights violations that the TRC considered included mass killings, abductions, torture, and sexual violence and the destruction and deprivation of the rights to own property and earn a living. The Law also required the TRC to inquire into, and report the truth about, the raid of the police armouries and to pay special attention to cases of sexual abuse and the experience of children during the conflict.

The functions of the TRC included:

- Conducting research, which included an in-depth investigation and analysis into the historical root causes, contributing factors, responsibility and impact of the conflict. The Commission conducted five in depth case studies on the armed actors in the conflict, women, youth, churches and regional histories (in Malaita, Guadalcanal and Western provinces).
- Holding public or closed hearings. The TRC held 11 public hearings (4 national hearings and 7 regional). A total of 242 people from different sides of the conflict were invited to publicly tell their stories.
- Recording the statements of victims and witnesses. The TRC collected statements from 2,362 people. Of those, 1,483 (63 percent) were from men, and 879 (37 percent) from women.
- Conducting reconciliation activities. A broad range of meetings, communal meals and discussions were conducted to promote reconciliation. Hundreds of reconciliation activities were also conducted by the government 'Peace Ministry' and religious groups.
- Conducting exhumations: The TRC conducted four exhumations, together with the Director for Public Prosecutions,
- Conducting special programs for women, youth and children. To ensure that women and children were sufficiently included a gender strategy was designed and implemented through the statement taking, public hearings and reconciliation.

In its Final Report the TRC referred to a number of root causes of the conflict, including the following:

- Failure to provide equal development levels across the country
- The lack of a strong national identity
- A weak police force
- Political leaders using violence for their own gain
- Lack of control of guns
- Using political goals to form armed groups
- Impunity and failure of the rule of law
- A failure to celebrate the great value of diversity⁸

8. Ibid. p. 732.

The TRC received 1,882 testimonies of forced displacement with the names of 11,292 persons who had to leave their homes. The testimonies related to thousands of homes that were burned and destroyed.

In order to ensure that women were included in the work of the TRC, an in-depth case study on women was conducted and three female researchers were engaged to document women's experiences.⁹ In addition to information from the public, closed hearings and statement transcripts, 100 additional interviews and 11 focus groups with women were conducted in Honiara, Guadalcanal, Malaita and Western Province.¹⁰ The hearings revealed that as a consequence of the sexual violence, there was a generalized state of fear among women. As stories about rape cases were spreading, women grew afraid that something similar could happen to them at any time. Children were affected by the tension in many ways. They were also victims of human rights violations and the breakdown of social services, with the loss of educational opportunities a major concern.

Reparations

The people of the Solomon Islands have a long tradition of local dispute resolution which relies heavily on compensation for parties involved in violence and disputes. "Kastom" is the dominant principle that dictates compensation must be paid for minor harms such as insults as well as more serious transgressions. This compensation is seen as a form of restorative justice, with the goal being the restoration of harmony and peace in the community.¹¹

During the later stages of the conflict and following the restoration of peace, the government accepted its responsibility to pay reparations to victims. However, there was not a high level of understanding of the principles of reparations and the government mixed this obligation with a desire to make payments to former militants to assist in their reintegration. The term 'reparations' was understood to include both assistance to victims and offers to militants to entice them to lay down their weapons. In order to fulfil these responsibilities, the government took out a loan of USD \$25 million from a bank in Taiwan.

However, designing a reparations or DDR program that is fair, transparent and just is a complicated matter that was far beyond the experience and capacity of those involved. As a result, a significant amount of funds were stolen or allocated to those who were not deserving while no reliable records exist to indicate where and to whom the payments were made. This has made attempts to remedy the situation extremely difficult as it is impossible to say if a victim, or indeed a perpetrator, has received a previous payment.

It is clear however that the vast majority of victims did not receive meaningful reparations and also many militants feel aggrieved because they did not receive the payments and

9. Ibid Solomon Islands TRC Final Report Vol 3 p. 539.

10. Ibid. Vol 2, p. 254.

11. Source: Australian DOD Pre-Deployment Handbook: <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a605160.pdf>

benefits they had been promised during the Townsville peace process. This is further complicated by the fact that many did not cease their violent acts as a result of that process but rather were forced to surrender by the incoming regional force of RAMSI.

The TRC reported the following:



In order to fund compensation for losses suffered during the tension, the Government negotiated a loan for US\$²⁵ million from the EXIM Bank of Taiwan. This solution only created more problems because Government institutions were barely functioning and anarchy and criminality prevailed. The presence of these funds generated a frenzy of covetousness as victims, militants, politicians and others staked their claims.... In securing the loan, the Government overlooked its lack of capacity to implement the complexities of the compensation program. ... The Government had no compensation policies or guidelines in place to regulate implementation of compensation payments. Neither were categories of human rights violations drawn up or adequately defined to ensure consistency and equity. The process was ad hoc and subject to the whims of the moment. The result was corruption, misappropriation and abuse of a significant portion of the funds earmarked for compensation.¹²

In order to remedy these outstanding issues, the government has recently adopted two new policies. The first, approved in 2020, commits to the establishment of a Commission for Conflict Prevention and Victims' Rights. This policy has been approved by the national Cabinet and is awaiting the drafting of a law to establish the Commission. The mandate of the Commission includes the payment of reparations to victims of the past conflict.

The second policy focuses on Demobilization, Disarmament and Rehabilitation of former militants. The DDR policy specifically states that no further cash payment should be made and provides education and livelihood training opportunities to former combatants in order to respond to claims of outstanding promises made in the Townsville Peace Accord.

Guarantees of Non-Repetition

SSR and the police retirement program

The RAMSI police from Australia and other countries that arrived in the Solomon Islands to restore peace remained for several years to ensure peace and security. Many of the police in the international force came from highly developed police services and assisted a broad program designed to build a new police force in the Solomon Islands. One of the major

12. TRC Report 2012: p. 278. See: Nicole Dicker (2017), "Development Aid for Reparations in the Solomon Islands": p. 203.

challenges to this goal was similar to many post conflict contexts where the members of the police force are corrupt, lacking in discipline and were involved in violations during the years of conflict. This creates the danger that it will not be possible to create a new, cleaner and more professional police force as the older officers are used to entrenched corrupt and unprofessional practices and will teach those younger to behave in a similar manner.

The challenge in the Solomon Islands was acute as the entire police force had imploded during the tensions with police at all levels becoming involved in militant groups. In order to avoid the poisoning of the new police force, a decision was made to offer incentives to police who had been involved in the conflict. The offer included retirement at full pay and as a result almost all of the existing 'Special Constables' retired. Although this was relatively expensive and could be viewed as unfair on those who had not been involved in the violence, a full SSR program in which the role of each police officer could be investigated was not feasible. The innovative policy was not without problems but it did succeed in removing those who would be likely to influence more junior members and weaken the police force again, providing an opportunity to build a new force.¹³

Constitutional Reform

Following the restoration of peace, a process of consultation and drafting of a new Constitution that would be based on a federal system commenced. The goals of many involved in the drafting process was to create a system of governance that maintains the beneficial elements of the traditional system of "kastom," taking advantage of the role of traditional leaders and providing significant independence to the different Provincial administrations. The issue of uneven levels of development across the country remains a significant challenge, as do high levels of corruption and nepotism.

Recent government policies on reparations and DDR

At the end of the conflict, significant funding was allocated for reparations and settlement of claims of former militants. However, as referred to above, this amount of USD \$25 million was not allocated in a transparent nor accountable manner. Many victims of the conflict have received no compensation while former militants claim they have not been provided with the assistance promised to them. This was further complicated by the fact that the promises to lay surrender weapons and demobilise were also not fulfilled by many militants at the time and it was not until the arrival of the RAMSI peacekeepers that they were disarmed.

In 2018, the Solomon Islands Government decided to try to settle the outstanding claims of victims and former militants by addressing the issues through national policies. One of the challenges of this approach was that the term "reparations" had become known in the Solomon Islands to mean assistance to victims and also assistance to ex-combatants. Under international law, reparation refers to a principle in which victims of serious human rights

13. Ibid Solomon Islands TRC Final Report Volume 3: The Law and Justice Sector during and after the tension p. 301.

violations have an inalienable right to remedy. This right is not given to them by governments and cannot be taken away or reduced by governments. On the other hand, the claims of former militants are not a form of reparations. They are the result of a political process and commitments made by a government.

The first step in addressing these issues, therefore, was to educate stakeholders on the meaning of reparations and also the experiences in other countries of Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) of former combatants. Consultations took place in a number of Provinces involving victims, former militants, government officials, lawyers, traditional leaders, representatives of women's groups, youth organisations and marginalised groups including those representing persons living with disabilities. Acting on the recommendations from the consultations, two policies were drafted, one to address the issue of reparations and one for DDR.

The national Policy on the Establishment of a Commission for Conflict Prevention and Victims' Rights was adopted by the Cabinet in early 2018. The proposal was based on recommendations from the Solomon Islands TRC but combined the recommended approach of dealing with reparations for past violations with the current and future needs to prevent the recurrence of conflict. The violence that erupted again in November 2022 is a reminder of the importance of a dedicated body to address threats of potential violence and combining this with reparations for victims was a design intended to keep the issue of victims' rights alive in a context where there was diminishing interest on past violations. The Commission was to be led by independent Commissioners, should receive funding from the annual budget of the Government and have the capacity to assess and provide reparations to victims.¹⁴

The National Policy on DDR

Following the adoption of the policy relating to conflict prevention and victims' rights, further consultations with representatives of former militant groups were conducted and the National Policy on Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) was approved by Cabinet in January 2021. The policy takes into consideration past experiences relating to the loss of funds allocated to DDR and the continuing concerns that no additional amounts in the form of cash should be allocated. The policy includes provisions to the following effect:

- A program of assistance to former militants will be established and implemented by a committee of representatives of the Ministries involved, under the Office of the Prime Minister;
- No grants of cash will be provided through the program;
- Assistance to former militants will be provided through educational opportunities, training and assistance to develop skills and livelihood programs;
- The program will have a limited temporal mandate of no more than five years, so that the outstanding issues can be considered to be settled.

14. The Solomon Islands Cabinet approval for the National Policy for Conflict Prevention and Victims' Rights 2018, hard copy in the possession of the writers.

- The opportunities under the program will be provided by the individual Ministries, such as those responsible for fisheries, education, agriculture etc. Coordination will be provided by the Office of the Prime Minister. The funding should be guaranteed under the budget of the national government.

Conclusion

When the Solomon Islands achieved political independence in 1978, they were left to confront the political and economic legacies of colonialism. During the British colonial period, local systems of governance were ignored in favour of a centralised political system. At the same time, the economy remained focussed on plantation crops and the export of raw commodities. Taken together, this created profound underdevelopment across the Solomon Islands and growing tension between different ethnic groups.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, social grievances descended into violent conflict. Armed groups, with both legitimate and illegitimate motivations, formed across the country and there was a complete breakdown of law and order. Thousands were subject to violations including sexual violence, theft, unlawful killing, internal displacement and torture. It was only after the arrival of international peacekeepers that the conflict was brought to an end.

In the wake of the conflict, a range of transitional justice mechanisms were implemented with varying degrees of success. This included hundreds of successful reconciliation ceremonies, a TRC that operated for over two years and trials of militant leaders involved in serious crimes. Other mechanisms, such as the early reintegration program which relied on money borrowed from a Taiwanese bank, were largely unsuccessful.

In 2021, unrest broke out in the Solomon Islands along existing ethnic divisions. The factor which ignited this was the government's decision to build stronger ties with the People's Republic of China over Taiwan. Forces within the country, who are in favour of Taiwanese support, were opposed to this move and the resulting tensions saw both peaceful and violent demonstrations. Neighbouring countries, primarily Australia and New Zealand, have also weighed in on the matter, fearing that a closer relationship between China and the Solomon Islands may undermine their own self-interests in the Pacific.

The events of 2021 reflect the legacies of transitional justice in the Solomon Islands. While not all mechanisms were successful, peace and stability has proved to be resilient. The unrest in 2021 did not evolve into a larger conflict, remaining largely confined to the Capital and lasting only a short period of time. With this said, there needs to be a further galvanisation of civil society including human rights defenders, churches, traditional leaders and women's groups and youth to demand to disseminate the TRC report and enact its recommendations.

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