The Solomon Islands **Truth and Reconciliation** Commission

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AGAINST US.

Robert Butrym 400035468 **HISTORY 4RR3: Truth and Reconciliation After Atrocity** Dr. Bonny Ibhawoh MARCH 21, 2023

Introduction

The Solomon Islands are a small archipelagic state composing of over 1000 small islands situated in the southwest Pacific Ocean northeast of Australia.² Their capital, Honiara, is located on the largest island in the country, Guadalcanal. Roughly one hundred kilometres to the northeast lies the second largest island, Malaita, which hosts a slightly larger population but has a less developed urban centres compared to Guadalcanal. Due to this, migration from Malaita to Guadalcanal had been commonplace for Malaitans hoping for better economic prospects.

Between 1998 and 2003 Guadalcanal was rocked by violent clashes between native Guales and Malaitans stemming from resentment towards the latter for perceived encroachment on the former's land sovereignty, and lead to led to at least 100 deaths and an estimated 20,000 displaced persons.³ The Townsville Peace Agreement was signed in 2000, but failed to prevent continued unrest until in 2003, when peacekeepers from the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) put an end to the conflict.⁴

In 2009 a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was organized to help make sense of the scope of the crimes and atrocities that occurred during the five years of unrest in the Solomon Islands. But what lead to these events? Who was involved and why? And how effective was the TRC in attaining their recommended goals?

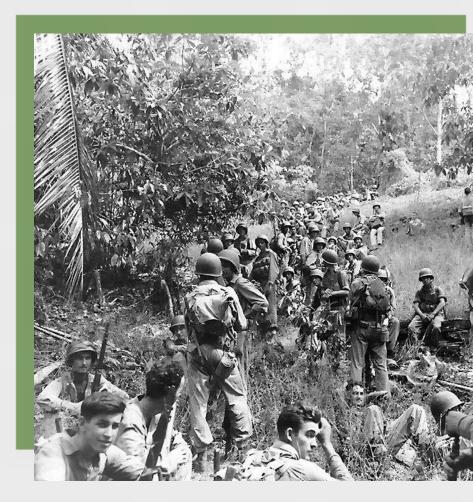


Map of the Solomon Islands⁵

Historical Context

Like many other post-colonial states, the Soloman Islands as they stand were thrown together as an afterthought by a departing British colonial administration that had discounted centuries of ethnic divisions and ancestry. After becoming a British protectorate in 1893, the British ruled mainly through government-appointed headmen and native councils.⁶ British plantation presence in Malaita forced many adults into working for the plantations, which after their closure in the wake if the Second World War WWII, forced a massive outmigration to the neighbouring islands.

In World War II the islands became a strategic location for the Allies during the Pacific theatre, as it became a key campaign after an Imperial Japanese invasion in 1942.⁷ As seen in the photo on the right in World War II.⁸ In August of that year a counterattack would reinstate Allied control over the island, and during Allied operations there rose a needed supply of labor, leading to an influx of Malaitans making the trip to Guadalcanal to aid in the war effort.⁹ Many of these Malaitans would stay following the war and settled in what is now the capital of Honiara.¹⁰ The legacy of WWII and the leaving of the US army left behind a massive surplus of munitions behind on the island, meaning that many military weapons were left in the hands of the islanders. Over-population and lack of good soil for farming further drove Malaitan migration to the capital for better economic opportunities in the following decades.¹¹ As the TRC found, "by the end of the 1990s, Solomon Islands was still a patchwork of local identities with little progress in nationbuilding."12



In 1998 these long-standing tensions came to a head when some Guales formed the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM, also known as the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army) and began a campaign of terror and violence towards Malaitan settlers on the island.¹³ Mayn Malatians retreated back into Honiara for safety, and in response some founded the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF) militia to defend themselves from attacks.¹⁴ When the tension started, more than half of Honiara's population were Malaitans, many of whom were born on Guadalcanal and lacked strong roots to their home island of Malaita.¹⁵ Due to the Solomon Islands lack of an official standing army, leaving attempts at maintaining the peace to the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF).¹⁶ Further complicating tensions owes to the fact the ethnic diversity of Malaitans and Guales in the RSIPF meant personal racial biases prevented effective policing to curb the sectarian violence. In 2000 Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa'alu was kidnapped by members of the MEF in a coup d'état who felt that he failed was doing enough to protect Malaitan interests.¹⁷

Historical Context cont:





Though an attempt at peace came in the form of The Townsville Peace Agreement in October of 2000, which was signed by the MEF, elements of the IFM and the Solomon Islands Government, sustained aggression by some members of the IFM kept the violence continuing.¹⁸

In April 2003, Sir Allan Kemakeza, the new Prime Minister of Solomon Islands, urgently requested international assistance to put an end to the violence, realizing the domestic ethnic sectarianism would prevent effective response from their own government. Through the Pacific Islands Forum, member states agreed to support the formation of a regional assistance mission to be led and funded by Australia and New Zealand with membership from all Forum countries.¹⁹ This formed the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), which arrived in July of 2003 and began aiding in the islands security. RAMSI was made up of soldiers, police and civilians from Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu.²⁰ Their presence lasted on the islands until 2017.²¹

In response to the atrocities, in 2008 the Solomon Islands Minister for National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace Shemuel Sam Iduri, proposed a Truth and Reconciliation Commission Bill to Parliament.²² On April 29, 2009, the TRC was formally inaugurated in the presence of Archbishop Desmond Tutu.²³ It consisted of five members from a myriad of provinces and civil societies from the island, and started in 2010 and concluded in 2011.²⁴ The final report was published in February of 2012.²⁵

Key Groups

Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM)²⁶: also known as the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army, was a nationalist militant organization that consisted of native Guales. The IFM mobilized due to feelings of Malaitains overrunning their island. It engaged in terror tactics to suppress migration of Malaitans, and even blockaded the city of Honiara during the conflict, preventing any Malaitans from freely leaving the city.²⁷ They were armed with homemade guns and left over munitions from WWII.²⁸ Though some segments of the IFM agreed to the Townsville Peace agreement of 2000, some segments, like the Guadalcanal Liberation Front continued to fight against the government and the MEF until 2003 when their leader, Harold Keke, surrendered to RAMSI.





Malaita Eagle Force (MEF)²⁹: The MEF was a militant organisation that grew as a defensive response against the IFM and consisted of native Malaitans. Fearing attacks from the IFM, the MEF mobilized to defend Malaitans and Honiara against aggression from IFM forces. In 2000, alongside noted Solomon Islands lawyer Andrew Nori, they launched a coup and captured then-Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa'alu after feelings that he was doing little to protect Malaitain safety on the island. Many wore masks to protect their identity.

Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF)³⁰: the RSIPF was the Solomon Island's main police force and criminal legal authority on the island. Since the country had no standing army, the RSIPF was responsible for dispatching units to prevent escalating violence during the conflict. However, as the force consisted of both Malaitans and Guales, ethnic division within their ranks severely limited their efficacy to operate.³¹ Once RAMSI intervened, the RSIPF was dismantled and relieved of their duties during the duration of the mission.



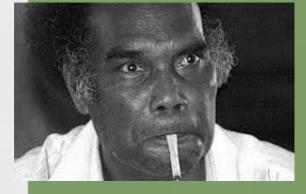


Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI)³²: RAMSI was created as a response to the 2003 call by of Solomon Islands Prime Minister Sir Allan Kemakeza for international regional assistance.³³ Consisting of members of the Pacific Islands Forum, RAMSI members included soldiers, police and civilians mainly from Australia, but included the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu.³⁴ In 2003 the Solomon Islands National Parliament unanimously passed the Facilitation of International Assistance Act 2003, which provided the authority under Solomon Islands domestic law for RAMSI's activities to end the civil conflict.³⁵ Though the tensions quickly dissipated, their mission ended officially in 2017 with the withdrawal of all remaining assistance.³⁶

Key Persons

Harold Keke: The enigmatic Guale leader of the Guadalcanal Liberation Front, Keke led the Liberation Front against the MEF and the Solomon Island government. He rejected the Townsville Peace talks of 2000 and continued to fight in the following years. Keke was suspected of kidnapping and murdering six Anglican priests during the conflict in 2003.³⁷ He surrendered in 2003 following the arrival of RAMSI and was placed into custody.³⁸

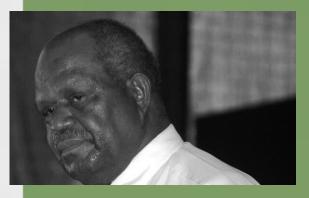
Prime Minister Bartholomew (Bart) Ulufa'alu: A Malaitan himself, he was elected as PM in 1997. Failing to control the rising ethnic violence and tension plaguing Guadalcanal, members of the MEF kidnapped him on June 5th, 2000 at gunpoint out of frustration and forced him to resign.³⁹



Andrew Nori: one of the country's first native lawyers, Nori became something of a spokesperson for the MEF. He aided the MEF in kidnapping Prime Minister Ulufa'alu. Nori accused Ulufa'alu of not having prevented an escalation in the ethnic conflicts on Guadalcanal.⁴⁰



Allan Kemakeza: The Seventh Prime Minister of Solomon Islands, elected after the 2000 coup. He enacted the request for international assistance and paved the way for RAMSI to come to the Solomon Islands to achieve peace.⁴¹



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SOLOMON ISLANDS TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION Confronting the Truth for a better Solomon Islands

FINAL REPORT

FEBRUARY 2012

Honiara, Solomon Islands

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TRC Facts:

Mandate:

The TRC of Solomon Islands was established under the Truth and Reconciliation Act (the "Act") passed by Parliament in September, 2008.⁴² It was first advocated for by the Solomon Island Christian Association (SICA) in the years following RAMSI.⁴³ As the Mandate of the TRC claims: "The general objective of the TRC was to promote national unity and reconciliation by engaging all stakeholders in the reconciliation process, by discovering and helping to understand what happened in the tensions and why."⁴⁴ It was also set out specifically to identify the root causes of the tensions and identify the specific human rights violations that occurred during the tensions.

Composition:

The Commissioners of the TRC were appointed by a National Selection Committee (NSC) chaired by the Chief Justice.⁴⁵

The powers of the TRC:

The TRC could gather information it considered relevant by appropriate means from any source, including conduct interviews and access any location, with police presence if deemed necessary Limits were that the "TRC preferred not to use the power to subpoena witnesses as it believed people would be more cooperative if they were persuaded rather than coerced into providing relevant information"⁴⁶

Public Hearings:

Public hearings provided opportunities for victims, perpetrators, and other actors to share their experiences with others on the Solomon Islands. For victims, "it was a significant way of allowing them to recover some of their human dignity by sharing their stories of violation."⁴⁷ For perpetrators it allowed them to explain their actions and make amends if possible. It allowed for open structured discourse between these two parties to construct with each other. Amnesty was not granted to those that testified.

TRC Final Report Outline

- Volume 1: Provides the Mandate of the Truth Commission, as well as outlines the history of the Solomon Islands, from pre-colonialism to post-WWII. It includes a detailed timeline of all related events during the conflict as well as key actors in both the militant camps and government.⁴⁸
- **Volume 2:** Details all the Human rights violations and abuses present during the conflict, including killings, abduction/illegal detentions, torture/ill-treatment, sexual violence, property violations, and forced displacements.⁴⁹
- **Volume 3:** Discusses the impacts on segments of the Solomon Islands' society, including the effect on women and children, the economy and education, and the exhumation of victims. As well as includes a 'pathway towards national unity and reconciliation.'⁵⁰
- Volume 4: Annexes which contains transcriptions of the public hearings from locations in the Islands such as Honiara, Gizo, Malaita, Tulagi, Visale, and Makira. Also includes transcriptions from youth and women interviewees, as well as both Guadalcanal and Malaitan excombatants.⁵¹
- **Volume 5:** The remaining annexes which contain the history of the Solomon Islands TRC and profile of its commissioners. As well as key documents and acts such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act of 2008 and the Townsville Peace Agreement of 2000.⁵²





The Reverend Canon Samuel Ata

The International Commissioners



Mrs. Sofia Macher Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi (Peru) (Fiji)

The National Commissioners



THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSIONERS⁵³



Mrs. Caroline Laore

Mr. George Kejoa (Died 2010)



Mr. Kamilo Teke (Replaced Mr. Kejoa in 2010)

Analysis

The response to the efficacy of the Solomon Islands has been a bit mixed in the decade of literature since its end. As a commission to establish the root causes of the conflict, the commission provides an excellent analysis of the historical roots that go as far back as colonization, providing excellent examples of the ethnic division slowly building since colonizers first reached the Islands.

But there has been some criticism for its failure to adhere or consider the traditional practices of reconciliation for the indigenous peoples of the Solomon Islands. As Jack Maebuta argues, "as TRC hearings do not utilise traditional rituals, they are likely to re-open old wounds and breed new resentments."⁵⁴ To some communities on the island, there is a necessity to consider these cultural practices to fit within the specific cultural idea of reconciliation. As the TRC was modelled closely off the South African one and was made up in part of non-native Solomon Islanders, there exists a cultural barrier that might have failed to understand the cultural milieu of the Islands. TRCs are not a one size fits all for every case.

Furthermore, the failure to hold subpoena powers has been met with criticism. This choice is complicated further since the TRC did not offer amnesty to perpetrators. As Maebuta notes, "Such a mismatch opens up further areas of debate regarding the realities of the truth-telling process in the Solomon Islands."⁵⁵

Finally, the role of religion in the TRC has remained contentious. It was initially the Solomon Islands Christian Association (or 'SICA') that made the initial calls for a truth commission in the early 2000s.⁵⁶ South Africa's TRC and its relationship with the country's religious authorities was a source of inspiration for the Islanders, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu was even invited to oversee Solomon Islands' TRC inauguration.⁵⁷ The importance of the church was diminished when the United Nations Development Program entered as the financial manager of the commission, and limited the access that the Solomon Islands churches had in the reconciliation process.⁵⁸ The counselling and interview processes thus became divided, and as:

As a result of this, two distinct narratives became apparent in the final TRC Report. On the one hand was a narrative that reflected the voices of those who testified – spiritual in tone and reflective of the Christian ideologies on which the idea of a truth commission was initially 'sold' to the Solomon Islands public. On the other, was an official narrative grounded in international legal norms that had seemingly little in common, ideologically, with the first.⁵⁹

The failure to understand the importance and respect of the Christian faith to many of the Solomon Islanders diminished the reconciliation process. As such, the TRC thus accomplished detailing what happened—the truth—but failed in reconciliation by their attempt to mold a national identity without considering the differences within it.

9

Conclusions

The Solomon Islands TRC was set up to an extremely difficult task. Its motto was: "Confronting the Truth for a better Solomon Islands."⁶⁰ But attaining that truth would be difficult. It had not even been a decade since the conflict that the TRC was operating, all whilst the Islands were being policed by a foreign coalition in the form of RAMSI.

Modelling it after the South African TRC was a noble effort, but with the UN's blockage of religious intervention and cultural practices, it failed to adequately achieve the reconciliation that would be a perfect fit for the peculiarities of the Solomon Islands.

As history had shown in the Solomon Islands—from colonization to World Wars, to ethnic conflict and foreign military occupation—a better Solomon Islands is always one step away but always out of reach. And though the TRC maybe failed to attain that "better" Solomon Islands, the deep reflection it required of its people made them more aware of not only how much further they have to go, but also how far they have come already.



Timeline of the Conflict:

- 1567-1568: Mendaña explores Solomon Islands.
- mid 1800s: Arrival of Christian missionaries.
- 1860's-1910: "Blackbirding"
- 1893: Solomon: Islands declared British Protectorate.
- 1896: Resident Commissioner Charles Woodford arrives.
- 1899: Germany cedes the northern Solomon Islands to the United Kingdom.
- **1942:** World War II: heavy fighting between American and Japanese troops, especially on Guadalcanal.
- 1946: Maasina Ruru Movement in Malaita.
- **1960:** Executive Council created as the Protectorate's policymaking body.
- **1974:** A new constitution adopted, establishing a parliamentary democracy and ministerial system of government.
- **1975:** The name Solomon Islands officially replaced that of British Solomon Islands Protectorate.
- 1976: January 2nd Solomon Islands attains self-governance.
- **1978:** July 7th Solomon Islands achieves independence within the British Commonwealth
- **1978:** September 27th Guadalcanal leaders raise demands for state government.
- **1988:** March Demonstration of Guadalcanal people at Government House as a follow up to their submission ten years previously.
- 1998:
 - March -September Rumours of formation of a militant group on Guadalcanal.
- \odot October Violence begins on Guadalcanal eviction of Malaitan settlers.
- \circ December 10th Harold Keke raids police armory at Yandina.
- \circ December 30th Bungana shoot-out; Harold Keke and Joseph Sangu arrested
- 1999:
 - \circ March Keke and Sangu released on bail.
- \circ May 23rd Reconciliation "Kastom Feast" in Honiara, boycotted by militant groups
- \circ May 26th IFM raid Malaitan settlements in Kakabona, Aruligo, Tenaru and Foxwood.
- \odot June 12th IFM raids CDC, east Guadalcanal.
- June 13th MOU signed between Guadalcanal Provincial Government and Solomon Island Government for negotiations to begin with rural Guadalcanal people and Government on the Bona Fide Demands.
- \odot June 15th Government declares State of Emergency.
- \circ June 20th Commonwealth Special Envoy Sitiveni Rabuka arrives in Honiara.
- \odot June 28th Honiara Peace Agreement
- \odot July Solomon Islands Plantations Ltd. closed down.
- August 12th Panatina Peace Accord
- \circ October 15th State of Emergency lifted.
- 2000:
 - January 17th Auki Police armory raided; public appearance of Malaita Eagle Force (MEF). Andrew Nori declares himself spokesperson of MEF. February Governor General declares IFM and MEF "unlawful societies".

- May 5th Buala Peace Communiqué
- o May12th Auki Peace Communiqué
- \circ June 5th Rove Armory raid by MEF and PFF officers.
- June 6th MEF places Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa'alu under house arrest, demands his resignation and declares "all-out war" on IFM.
- $_{\odot}$ June 7th MEF uses patrol boat to shell the IFM at Alligator Creek.
- June 10th Raid of police armory on Taro (Choiseul) by William Amalo and a group of South Bougainvilleans and local "Black Sharks".
- June 11th Militants from Bougainville arrive in Gizo
- ${\circ}$ June 12th Bobby Nare Sae shot and killed by Bougainville group and Black Sharks
- \circ June 30th Manasseh Sogavare is elected new prime minister.
- \odot July 10th MEF kills two IFM militants in National Referral Hospital.
- \circ July 13th MEF raids clinic in Visale and kills two men; it then burns villages in west Guadalcanal.
- July 18th Guadalcanal Provincial Government and IFM propose ceasefire.
- August 2nd Ceasefire Agreement
- September SIG pays Malaita Provincial Government SBD\$6.8 million compensation but most of money taken by armed MEF members.
- October15th Townsville Peace Agreement Harold Keke refuses to attend and forms Guadalcanal Liberation Front (GLF). MEF and IFM dissolved, guns surrendered.
- o November International Peace Monitoring Group arrives in Solomons.
- November 12th Ian Chapangi (GRA), Brianly Java (Black Sharks), Ivan Reve and Barry Ofuana (Bouganvilleans) shot and killed by Bougainvilleans led by Gregory Luavex at Room D, Gizo Hotel.
- 2001:
 - February 7th Marau Peace Agreement
 - \circ March First Joint Operation on the Weather Coast.
 - \odot September 22^{nd} IFM leader Selwyn Saki murdered.
 - December 5th National General Election held and is described as fair and free by international observers.
- 2002:
 - February Melanesian Brother Nathaniel Sado killed by the GLF
 - February 22nd Fred Fawcett-Kay and Rex Dahlia special constables shot and killed by Bougainvilleans and Solomon Islanders (locals from Western Province)
 - March International Peace Monitors withdraw from their posts amidst growing lawlessness.
 - April Six Melanesian Brothers murdered by GLF (date of incident was not known until months later).
 - \circ June 8th Ten Kwaio men murdered by GLF.
- August Group of SI women hold a meeting and make recommendations taken up to the National Peace Conference in August 2000.
- 2003:
 - \circ February 10th Sir Frederick Soaki, a member of National Peace Council and former Police Commissioner, murdered in Auki.
 - \circ June 15th-16th Marasa incident; GLF kills Adrian Bilo and John Lovana.
 - June 5th Prime Minister Kemakeza asks for military assistance and regional countries agree to send in troops to restore law and order.
 July 11th The National Parliament approves passekeeping plans.
 - July 11th The National Parliament approves peacekeeping plans.
 July 24th RAMSI arrives in Solomon Island⁶¹

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