

Launch of Solomon Islands Trade Policy Framework
Address by Hon. Milner Tozaka,
Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade, Solomon Islands

18 March 2015, Kitano Mendana Hotel

Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat,
Excellencies,
Permanent Secretaries,
Development Partners,
Members of the National Trade Development Council,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you here today to launch Solomon Islands first Trade Policy Framework.

I would especially like to welcome Dame Meg Taylor, Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. We are honoured to have you join us on this important milestone for trade development in Solomon Islands.

I would like to express my thanks to Dame Taylor for her words of support at this time as parts of our country struggle to recover from the devastation caused by Cyclone Pam. It has wreaked havoc across the Pacific and we do sincerely share the pain at the loss of lives and properties, particularly in Vanuatu. We pray for a swift recovery both here and for our sister Pacific Island countries namely Kiribati, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. I am confident that our Pacific resilience and strength will endure and help us overcome this disaster.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Solomon Islands is a trading nation by its very nature. We have been trading across villages, across the seas between our archipelago of islands, and indeed across the region for millennia. Historically, coastal communities traded fish and shells for crops cultivated inland by those communities that lived in the hinterland.

As an isolated small island state, trade has helped us overcome inherent vulnerabilities and opened up new possibilities. It has contributed to our economic development and provided us the opportunity to enjoy access to goods and services that we neither produce nor provide locally. Our Trade Policy Framework, launched here today, describes the way forward as to how we will harness trade to achieve our development aims over the coming years and beyond.

The very title of the Framework - Building Productive Capacity for Trade and Quality of Life - underlines the vision we hold for trade policy in Solomon Islands. Trade policy should not be created in a vacuum but should consider the wider aspects of Solomon Islands' culture and society. With the application of the framework we aspire for trade not only to instigate economic growth, but also to promote human development, reduce poverty, and improve living standards.

A common theme across the Framework is the need to enhance the productive sector by targeting supply-side constraints to trade. While we aspire to gain greater access to foreign markets, we face serious challenges in growing viable export industries and adding value to our abundant natural resources. We have a narrow export base and the economy faces a real threat with the imminent decline of logging. Implementing and building on the recommendations contained in our Trade Policy Framework, Solomon Islands will cultivate a dynamic and diverse productive sector which will enable us to truly take advantage of multilateral and regional trading arrangements.

Another important area emphasised in the Framework is the potential of labour mobility to benefit Solomon Islands. Expanding and targeting opportunities for gainful employment within the region will help us confront demographic and economic challenges including the high level of youth unemployment. Workers abroad remit earnings, invest in commerce and education, and return with valuable skills, as well as contributing to their host economies. As has been the case for many of our Pacific neighbours, increased labour mobility will empower Solomon Islanders to reach their full potential while contributing to vast improvements in living standards and economic gains.

The Democratic Coalition for Change government duly recognizes the role of trade as a vehicle for the development of our country. When we set out our objectives in the DCC Policy Statement at the beginning of the year, we documented our intentions to implement several trade-related strategic actions including to “Promote and Facilitate trade in cooperation with regional and international partners.” The launch of the Trade Policy Framework today is a demonstration of us taking action and diligently pursuing this objective, to which we remain committed.

I would like to emphasise that the Framework belongs to all of you present here today. Today’s launch by no means signals the end of the Trade Policy Framework process but rather the beginning of the implementation phase. This next phase will require the active collaboration and participation by Ministries and stakeholders in implementing the recommendations that will have wide-reaching benefits across our economy. It will be executed under the guidance and oversight of the National Trade Development Council, and as Chairman of the Council, I will personally oversee the process.

You will all receive a copy of the Trade Policy Framework and I urge you to carefully read through the relevant chapters, deliberate and embrace the recommendations, and to collaborate with the Council to work towards integrating Solomon Islands into the global economy.

Before I end, on behalf of my Ministry, I would like to thank all stakeholders, including Government Ministries, civil society organisations and the private sector for their active cooperation and contributions towards the formulation of the Framework over the past two years. In particular, I wish to thank the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat whose support has been instrumental in formulating the Framework. Thanks to them, we now join the growing list of Pacific Island Countries with a comprehensive Framework to guide trade policy.

The National Trade Development Council deserves special commendation for the effort they have invested in this document. It was under their guidance that the Framework was drafted and it will be their duty to breathe life into it through ensuring its recommendations are implemented.

I would like to express my gratitude to the consultants engaged during the process, Dr. Daniel Gay and Dr. Chris Noonan, for all their hard work and without whom, the completion of this Framework would not have been possible.

We are also immensely grateful to our development partners at the European Union for funding the Framework under the regional Pacific Integration Technical Assistance Project which aims to improve economic integration of Pacific Island Countries.

And finally, my thanks go to my officials in the Department of External Trade of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade who have laboured continuously to ensure that this crucial policy document could be presented to you here today.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it now gives me great pleasure to launch Solomon Islands Trade Policy Framework and declare the document official.

God bless Solomon Islands and tangio tumas.