



**SPEECH FOR THE HON. PRIME MINISTER
HON. RICK NELSON HOUENIPWELA, MP
LAUNCHING OF THE NEW BRANDING FOR TOURISM**

Thursday, 5th July, 2018

Kitano Mendana Hotel

Minister for Culture and Tourism, Hon. Bartholomew Parapolo

Ministers of the Crown

Chairman and members of the Visitors Bureau Board

CEO, Management and staff of the Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau

Permanent Secretary & Staff of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism

Overseas tourism stakeholders and partners

Solomon Islands Tourism industry operators and stakeholders

Invited guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

(Before I commence my remarks I would like for us to observe a Minute of silence in honour of the four Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau officers who tragically lost their lives earlier this year.)

Good Evening everyone! I am honoured and privileged to be present here today to launch the new Solomon Islands *“Tourism Brand”*.

I am sure that everyone is now in festive mode and I don't want to dampen the highly charged festive mood experienced by all this week.

Ladies and Gentlemen, that said, let me make just a few points pertaining to tonight's event. First, as we celebrate 40 years of nation-hood, we are reminded that there has been many challenges and setbacks in that period. At the same time those 40 years journey was full of discoveries and excitement.

Secondly, as important as it may be to Solomon Islands, the fact is that the logging industry was forecasted to decline, and Tourism has been identified as the industry to fill the void that will be left by the Logging Industry.

As such, tourism remains as one of the main priority areas of the Solomon Islands Democratic Coalition for Change Government.

During my recent trip to New Zealand and Australia, discussions with our long-time friends were focussed on a number of key issues, including economic empowerment.

We agreed that tourism is a sector that offers great potentials and opportunities for Solomon Islands. And we also noted it needs increased investment both directly into the sector as well as in supporting industries.

Undersea Cable

In that connection and thirdly, we underscored the connotation that the Undersea Cable is a “game changer”. As you all know, communication and energy costs in Solomon Islands are amongst the highest in the region, and most probably the world. Bringing this critical infrastructure into operation soon, will no doubt, be the catalyst to bring more cost effective telecommunications to Solomon Islands. I am grateful to say that this project is on target for connection in late 2019.

Munda International Airport

Fourthly, the investment and reforms taking place in the aviation sector, are geared towards boosting tourism development in Solomon Islands. The Upgrading of Munda airport to become our second international airport is an absolute critical infrastructure in this plan. Once completed, it will certainly help to increase visitor numbers to our beautiful shores.

Also the transfer of management of our domestic airports to commercial operations is also an important change to ensure not only efficiency of these facilities but also decency and upkeep. These changes, including the upgrade of the first four domestic airports, are to be implemented this year.

Upgrade of Supporting Infrastructure

Fifthly, the upgrade of the Honiara main roads as well as the upcoming expansion of Honiara International terminal, are also part of the government's plans to enhance development in this area.

But having those infrastructures in place is only the first step. We as a nation need to begin marketing ourselves and we need to be aggressive in doing so.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is no news to you all that the potential in the tourism industry is hugely untapped.

I am very certain that the Tourism industry provides greater hope now for the economy. In fact by 2018 the industry is already well placed to bring in \$500 million in foreign exchange.

Achieving this target is not the only goal for tourism. But enhancing

this goal will greatly assist the country in addressing the issues of unemployment, sustainable economic development and mitigating against such social problems as urban drift by our youths.

A Re-direction in Tourism Promotion

Ladies and gentlemen, more directly for the industry itself, to achieve our target in the next 5-7 years there is a need for a seismic change in the way we approach the industry. A total transformation is needed: one that will produce exponential growth in the industry. This will require, not only a whole-of- government approach, but also a combined effort between the government, the tourism industry private sector partners, as well as overseas partners.

As we venture into the next 40 years, one of the key agendas for this total transformation is to re-look at how we position, promote and market ourselves as a favorable tourist destination. Hence the need to rebrand.

Why should we rebrand?

The National Tourism Development Strategy: 2015 – 2019 requires that we undertake a brand audit. Consequent to the audit, a rebranding was recommended.

New competition, technological shifts or trends have emerged, which strongly recommend that for Solomon Islands to positively and effectively market itself, rebranding is necessary in order for us to stand out amongst our competitors.

Rebranding is a marketing strategy in which a new name, term, symbol, design, or combination thereof, is created with the intention of developing a new, differentiated identity in the minds of consumers, investors, competitors, and other stakeholders.

A new brand is a necessary marketing platform that draws in and connects not only every visitor to the Solomon Islands but more so, connects every Solomon Islander to our country.

As alluded to earlier a rebranding marketing platform requires the whole of government, acting together. So as part of our nation-building, all sectors must align their development programmes and activities that are meaningful and relevant to the people of this country. In this regard, the tourism sector is taking the lead in aligning the tourism brand to the country and its people.

The New Brand

Ladies and Gentlemen the “*Solomon Islands*” is the experience that we

want our visitors to enjoy. It has always been the ‘*Solomon Islands*’ and it will always be. Our uniqueness allows every visitor to experience Solomon Islands in their own unique ways. The Country has been ‘*off the beaten track*’ always. This gives the Solomon Islands the opportunity to claim characteristics such as *raw, uncomplicated, uncluttered, uncongested, unspoiled, and unlimited adventure*, to name a few features that are truly authentic to our islands.

Ladies and gentlemen, the name of our Country has a double meaning. As I mentioned earlier, the Solomon Islands is the ‘*experience*’ we want our visitors to taste and enjoy. In this regard, we can say the ‘*Solomon Islands*’ is *the adventure, the excitement, the food, the freedom, the smiles, the Cultures,...* and you can go on to add as many descriptions to what the Solomon Islands is.

This connotation gave birth to the rebranding of our country. The essence of the rebranding exercise is basic but noble – merely just bringing ‘*Solomon Islands*’ to the forefront of our marketing platform.

Therefore, the *Solomon Islands* is the promise that we are making to the international tourist markets when we market and promote our Country.

Ladies and gentlemen, a brand is a 'promise' and therefore every Government ministry and agency, every Solomon Islands' business entity, every corporate entity and business, every single Solomon Islander, is a 'touch-point' to deliver on this promise. In other words the Solomon Islands is 'us', individually and corporately.

Invited guests, ladies and gentlemen – with much honour and excitement, I have the pleasure to announce and launch that the **'Solomon is'** our promise, our pride, our identity, our experience and therefore **'Solomon is'** our brand.

Tagio Tumas