



STATEMENT BY THE HON. RICK N. HOUENIPWELA, MP, PRIME MINISTER OF SOLOMON ISLANDS AT THE CORAL SEA CABLE SYSTEM GROUND BREAKING CEREMONY IN HONIARA, 5 FEBRUARY 2019

The Honourable Speaker of Parliament

The Honourable Chief Justice

Caretaker Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade

Other Caretaker Ministers of the Crown and former members of Parliament

Senator, the Honourable Marise Payne, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Australia

His Excellency Roderick Brazier

Dean of the Diplomatic Corp, members of the diplomatic Corp

Board members of the Solomon Islands cable Company

Chief Executive Officer, Solomon Islands Cable Company

Invited guest

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good fala afternoon long iufala everi wan.

This ground-breaking ceremony represents another visible evidence in the strengthening of the Solomon Islands Australian relations – a paradigm shift of enormous proportions. Today we celebrate a new form of partnership Solomon Islands has with Australia. Over the years

we have been linked culturally, ethnically, socially, spiritually, economically and politically. Today, we celebrate a technological link that will provide a platform to enhance all existing and future relations between our two countries.

In this regard, let me welcome and recognise Senator, the Honourable Marise Payne, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Australia who has travelled here to represent her government at the joint ground-breaking ceremony, of this historic initiative that will result in propelling Solomon Islands in the modern world of Technological innovations. Honourable Minister, please convey my sincere gratitude on behalf of my government and people of Solomon Islands, to Prime Minister Scott Morrison, your government and the people of Australia, for this wonderful and exceptional gift.

Excellences, Ladies & gentlemen;

This project is going drive my country's development journey into the future. Indeed the delivery of the high-speed undersea telecommunication cable within the next ten months, will usher Solomon Islands into 21st century communication network, with bulk data flowing in an instant. It will revolutionize the way we do business domestically and externally.

The submarine cable is a critical infrastructure that will no doubt, bring the government closer to its people. It will redefine Solomon Islands' development and nation-building process. This technology will connect Solomon Islands to the global economy in a way, and with a speed not experienced in our country before. It provides a new communication highway within the country and internationally. It will drive sustainable development, facilitate trade, make banking easier, expedite

emergency response, simplify air traffic control operations, and opens tremendous opportunities for tele-medicine and tele-education, trade and commerce amongst others.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen

As you know developments such as this project come at huge financial cost. In this regard, I thank the government of Australia for meeting two thirds of the total cost of the project with only one-third being met by the Solomon Islands Submarine Cable Company (SISCC).

The Coral Sea Cable System will offer Solomon Islands a cheaper, higher quality and reliable high-speed internet more than 40,000 times faster - at 10 terabits per second - compared to our current speed of around 341 megabits per second.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen

For Solomon Islands, the investment in the submarine cable is a game changer. It will transform the lives of our people. It will enable us to explore opportunities of entering into commercial arrangements with business opportunities globally. The capacity of the cable is such that it is unlikely we will ever use its full potential, which means we can use it to our maximum capability.

I applaud Australia's stance in looking at this project from the development lens to assist Solomon Islands in achieving its development aspirations. I can assure you all that Australia remains a sincere friend and neighbour of Solomon Islands, and a partner of choice in many of its development projects.

Excellences, Ladies & gentlemen;

The speed in implementing this project has been impressive. As of today, I understand the manufacture of the cable is virtually complete, the survey of the sea-bed is complete, the laying of the cable is on schedule and the commissioning in December this year, remains a firm date on the schedule. By December this year, when the project will be completed and commissioned, it will be 18 months since the signing the Trilateral MOU in July 2018. This is truly a commendable achievement of a major project in less than two years.

The Coral Sea Cable System will connect Sydney to Honiara, a distance of over 4,700 kilometres. It also connects Honiara to Port Moresby, PNG. Additionally, it includes a domestic network of 740 kilometres covering Auki, Noro and Taro. I understand Foreign Minister Payne will be travelling over to Auki as well.

We hope to sign the Special Purpose Vehicle Agreement (SPV) soon. This will guide and manage the maintenance and operations of the cable. We look forward to participating in the SPV framework.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen

My government is mindful of the fact that with advancement also comes potential risks. In particular, high speed internet access also opens our users, and our country, to risks that must be managed. In that regard, I am very pleased to note that Australia is supporting Solomon Islands to develop protective mechanisms that will help us combat cybercrime and manage other associated cyber risks. In fact in a couple of days, we will be interviewing for the position of ICT Adviser, a position supported by the Australian government to be located in the

Office of the prime Minister and Cabinet, who will assist us in developing our cyber security capacity, among other things.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

At this juncture, allow me to acknowledge Australia's two billion dollars Infrastructure Fund for the region. I register Solomon Islands' interest to access this fund to support transformative and other game-changing investments in Solomon Islands, through this new facility as it rolls out. I believe there are multiple areas that this investment can unlock development opportunities for the country.

For example, in the agricultural sector, we would like to see biosecurity treatment facilities for our agricultural exports in both our international ports. This is to be complimented with testing equipment to accredit our products with biosecurity international standards.

In the renewable energy sector, we would like to invest in more hydropower energy in all our provinces that can accommodate such development, especially in locations where land is already registered.

In the maritime and tourism sectors, we would like to survey and update our navigational charts to enhance cruise tourism market in Solomon Islands. *Last Friday evening, I was on board the HMS Melville, one of two Australian Naval vessels with capability to do ocean hydrography.* I also understand that Solomon Islands now comes under Australia's remit in this area. It is the wish of my government that Solomon Islands be included in the Australian Navy's programme to undertake hydrography surveys, and develop new navigational charts for all hotspots for cruise tourism, and new ports from Shortlands in the west all the way up to Temotu in the east. This will provide a Melanesian cruise

tourism route from PNG in the west, all the way up to Vanuatu and Fiji in the east.

We also need Australian support to map out our continental shelf. This will greatly assist us in verifying our claims currently lodged with the UN Inter Continental Shelf Commission.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me close by once again thanking Australia for helping Solomon Islands realise its dream to be connected to a submarine cable network. Today, we are gathered here to celebrate this reality by being part of this ground-breaking ceremony.

There are a host of people who have played leadership, and other critical roles, in the project to date. First, I would like to thank, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for its ongoing leadership, support and financing. In particular I would like to mention Mr. Pablo Kang, head of the submarine cable taskforce; also the Vocus team and the various contractors.

Secondly on the Solomon Islands side, my appreciation goes to the Ministers and PS of the Ministry of Telecommunication and Aviation; the Ministry of Finance and Treasury; the Board of the Solomon Islands Cable Company; Mr. Keir Preedy, Chief Executive Officer of Solomon Islands Submarine Cable Company; and many others associated with ensuring this project achieves today's important milestone: a dream comes true.

God Bless Solomon Islands; God bless Australia, and God Bless the Solomon Islands-Australia relations.

Thank you all.