

THE PRIME MINISTER



**P.O.BOX G1, HONIARA
SOLOMON ISLANDS**

Speech by the Honourable Prime Minister,

Hon. Manasseh Damukana Sogavare, MP

Tuesday 7th July 2020

**42nd INDEPENDENCE ANNIVERSARY ADDRESS TO THE
NATION**

**"IUMI TUGEDA, ONE PEOPLE, ONE COUNTRY – UNITY
IN DIVERSITY"**

Salutation

Governor General of Solomon Islands His Excellency, Rt. Rev. Sir David Vunagi and Lady Vunagi;
Hon. Speaker of Parliament – Hon. Patterson Oti;
Hon. Chief Justice – Sir Albert Rocky Palmer;
Deputy Prime Minister – Hon. Manasseh Maelanga, MP;
Ministers of the Crown;
Leader of the Official Opposition – Hon. Mathew Wale, MP;
Leader of the Independents Group in Parliament – Hon. John Dean Kuku, MP;
Members of Parliament;
Constitutional Post Holders;
Commissioner of Police;
Provincial Premiers and Members of Provincial Assemblies;
Lord Mayor of Honiara City – Councilor Wilson Mamae;
Heads and Members of the Diplomatic Corps;
Our Development Partners;
Heads of Statutory Organizations;
Members of Solomon Islands Christian Association and SIFGA and other Religions;
Church Leaders, Clergies and Religious leaders;
Chairman, Executive, and Members of the Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce;
Chairman, Executive, and Members of the Chinese Business Association.
Chairman, Executive and Members of the Solomon Islands Indigenous Business Association.

Members of Civil Society and Community-based Organizations;
Senior Government Officials;
Traditional Chiefs and Community Leaders;
Fellow Solomon Islanders and Friends of Solomon Islands;
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Greetings

Good morning Solomon Islands and Happy 42nd Independence Anniversary celebrations. Today Solomon Islanders across this beloved nation of ours are celebrating this momentous occasion. I acknowledge Solomon Islanders living in other countries who are also celebrating our 42nd Independence Anniversary.

Greetings to those listening and watching in from our hospitals including those who are incarcerated, our thoughts and prayer are with you. I would also like to extend my greeting to those who are currently under quarantine in our quarantine stations.

As we celebrate our independence let us not forget those who have come before us. We are here today because of their vision, commitment, sacrifice and service to our country. I pay my respect and homage to them.

Oketa wantoks, our theme for this year's independence is "**Iumi Tugeda, One People, One Country – Unity in Diversity.**"

Self-Reflection

Fellow Solomon Islanders, 42 years ago on this very day we gained our independence from Great Britain when we achieved nationhood and joined the global family of nations. It has been a short but challenging journey since then as a nation.

We have come through some challenging times and I need not remind us of our most terrible experience 22 years ago when this nation was brought to its knees by the civil unrest.

Our young generations must not forget this dark chapter of our history. Our elected leaders both national and provincial too must always be conscious of what caused this civil unrest. I am beginning to see complacency, carelessness and taking advantage of our sad reality creeping in.

Let us use the occasion of the 42nd Anniversary of our independence to reflect on how we relate to these events to determine whether our personal responses are advancing peace and unity or greed and selfishness.

There is a reason why we study history, and that is so that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past. It pains me so much to see that despite our efforts we have not moved ahead as much as we would want to. Successive governments have had achieved some advancement but I must say that there is a lot that needs to be done yet.

Fellow Solomon Islanders, as your Prime Minister I will not shy away from the truth, it will be irresponsible of me to do so. In my

41st independence address I stated that, (and I quote) ***“Our growing population is putting a lot of pressure on this country’s service delivery. If we do not decentralize development to our provinces, we will have a repeat of what happened in 1998 except this time the scale be much larger, and the magnitude of what might occur will make what occurred in 1998 appear insignificant.”*** (End of quote).

We cannot afford to let that happen again. This Government will do everything in its power to prevent that from ever happening again. There is more that unites than divides us.

That said, I am comforted by the fact we have the *Facilitation of International Assistance Act* in place. This law allows us to call upon any country to assist us should the need arise in the future. We also acknowledge the Post RAMSI arrangement with Australia under our bi-lateral security treaty to ensure that we do not threaten the security of the region by not allowing our country to collapse economically and politically again.

The security and stability of this nation is of great importance.

Never again will we allow the future of this country and our children to be held at ransom by few people. This Government is committed and determined to prevent that happening again by addressing fundamental priorities which have for too long been ignored. Our resolve is stronger than ever in this regard. Come what may, this country will persevere and prosper. There is no other option.

As a matter of fact, the government is fully cognizant of the fact that, the long term unity and stability of our nation will continue to be on a shaky path unless we ground it on the appreciation of our people that they are integral part of the country's effort to develop our nation, which must be seen as fair and equitable, and that our people are actively engaged in it.

In this connection, the country is grateful to our traditional development partners for standing with us during some of the challenging moments of the paths we have travelled during our 42 years as a nation.

Fellow Solomon Islanders, yesterday morning I, together with the deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of Home Affairs, the 9 Premiers of our nine Provinces and the Lord Mayor of Honiara City jointly officiated at a ceremony commissioning the Unity Square at the Solomon Islands Ports Authority.

The Unity Square which is gifted to the Nation by Solomon Ports hosts the tallest flagpole in any Pacific islands country, standing to 50 meters (180 feet) in height and weighing some 12 tons of steel. This flagpole hoists the largest flag in the Pacific region, measuring 15 meters in length, 7.5 meters in width and weighing 25 kilograms. The tallest flagpole is surrounded by the flags for each of our 9 Provinces and the flag of Honiara City.

The commissioning of the Unity Square was a historic moment for our nation. The Unity Square is our newest national monument that depicts the theme for our anniversary – Iumi tugeda, one people, one country – unity in diversity.

The flagpole stands tall at the international entry seaport to Solomon Islands, and welcomes to our national capital all citizens from our provinces that come to Honiara. I pay tribute to the Chairman, Board, CEO and staff of Solomon Ports for this commitment to unity in our nation.

PRC

My good people of Solomon Islands, when I delivered my 41st anniversary address last year we have not yet entered into diplomatic relationship with People's Republic of China (PRC). As you are all aware, we now have diplomatic relations with PRC and we will continue to strengthen this relationship with our new friend.

I am pleased to say that our relationship with PRC has indeed blossomed since its establishment. The Democratic Coalition Government for Advancement is eager to explore what this new relationship can offer in terms of our development aspiration as a country.

Righteousness Exalts a Nation

Fellow Solomon Islanders, the Holy Bible in the Book of Proverbs Chapter 14 Verse 34 says that, ***“[R]ighteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.”***

It is very sad to see that we as a people and country have lost our moral compass. The moral decay of our norms, values, beliefs, convictions, ideals and culture is spiraling downward at an alarming rate.

Our attitude is becoming one of indifference and it breeds disrespect and contempt for what we hold dear as a people and country. This is a national pandemic akin to the global pandemic we are now experiencing. If we do not act now to stop this downward spiral we will reap the consequences.

It is my wish and plea that in whatever we do, we must do the right thing. We profess to be a Christian, yet many are not living like true Christians. We must learn to follow and obey our laws. We must respect each other, the public and other people's property as well.

Honiara is a city where people from different provinces live. Like Honiara, all our provincial capitals are also centers where people live and work together. We must appreciate our cultural differences and live together in harmony. Sadly, it is now common for people to use abusive words towards each other. This must stop, this has never been a part of our tradition and culture, we are better than that.

Our attitude has been quite disappointing. We must remind ourselves that we have a duty to ensure that our attitude is one that promotes respect, tolerance, humility and love. It is sad to see people disrespecting our public roads by spitting betel nut and throwing rubbish out of moving vehicles onto the road.

Some of us are inconsiderate by smoking in public vehicles and having no regards for other users. Some may think that these are petty things but this kind of attitude shows our lack of respect towards each other.

If we do not do the right thing we are breeding a nation of social deviants who have no moral compass, or values and this is dangerous.

Fellow Solomon Islanders, I will reiterate the call that I made in my last independence address. (I quote) ***“Our young generation who constitute our future, needs God’s wisdom and our guidance. Our young generation must learn to be responsible citizens. Parents, helping to mould our children to be responsible citizens is our first and foremost responsibility...I humbly call on all who are responsible for providing guidance, mentoring and leadership to our young generation to do so with the greatest of urgency.*”**

This includes the current government and its various institutions. We must leave behind a legacy we can all be proud of – a country with a strong economy, good infrastructure and a robust service delivery system that will infuse our young generation with national consciousness and good citizenship that will promote, uphold and respect others for the greater good of all.” (End of quote)

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has shown us the way to live in Paul’s letter to the Philippians Chapter 2, Verses 5,6-8, and I quote a short section as follows:

“The attitude you should have is the one that Christ Jesus had: He always had the nature of God, but he did not think that by force he should try to remain equal with God. Instead

of his own free will he gave up all he had and took the nature of a servant..” (End of quote).

Good people of Solomon Islands, our children and youth are our future. They are the building blocks of this country and we must invest in them in the way that God would wish us to nurture and guide our future generation, and that includes how we leaders mentor them by the way we conduct ourselves as leaders in the exercise of our official responsibilities.

Social Media and Freedom of Expression

Good citizens, I always have a strong view on the effects of social media. Whilst I appreciate its value I am also wary of its negative impacts. His Excellency Sir David Vunagi, our Governor General summed it up very nicely in his Queen’s Birthday Address last month.

(I quote) ***“Social media is an important medium of communication that we must use with civilized mind. It is a technological tool that allows people to share and receive vital information to enhance appropriate changes in life. In view of that, social media must be used with great responsibility.***

The catch words ‘freedom of expression’ must not be casually used to over shadow the importance of co-existence and cultural values. As citizens of this nation our fundamental rights and freedoms of conscience and expression are well guarded in our National Constitution.

However, we must not be egocentric and inward looking if we want to claim and demand those rights, privileges and freedoms. The Constitution is very clear that the enjoyment of the said right and freedoms by any individual does not prejudice the rights and freedoms of others or the public interest.

Here we are reminded about the virtue of taking others into consideration and affording them all due respect at all times...Social media has been used to incite division, hatred and bitterness.

Freedom of expression has been used to slander, incriminate, swear, intimidate and break down cultural norms. There is a lot of interpersonal insensitivity to say the least. If we claim to be a Christian country then let us act, behave and speak like one. (End of Quote)

Good people of our beloved nation let us take these words by His Excellency, our Governor General to heart and act on it.

2020 – A challenging year

This year has been one of the most challenging since we gained independence 42 years ago. About 7 months ago a virus called COVID-19 broke out in Wuhan, China. In March it was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization. Since then it has changed the social, economic and political landscape of our country and the world. This year has been an unprecedented time in the history of our country.

We have declared a State of Public Emergency, we also had a curfew and a lock down. We closed our borders and we embarked on a mass repatriation of our citizens and residents from abroad. Needless to say, this has put our country under a lot of strain. The circumstance have emphasized the significance of national unity and working together for the good of our country and each other.

Our economy has been hit hard by this global pandemic and the long-term outlook remains bleak. Fellow Solomon Islanders, this year is a challenging year for the economy. The COVID-19 pandemic is causing human costs worldwide, and the protection measures on social distancing and travel restrictions are impacting economic activities on a global scale.

The COVID-19 pandemic is having a severe impact on our economy. Even though we have no cases, we feel the economic impact on our shores.

Solomon Islands' economy is expected to contract this year. This will be a direct result of declines in logging, mining, agriculture and fisheries exports, a substantial reduction in tourism, as well as general depressed domestic demand.

Our economy is forecast to contract sharply to -4.9 per cent in 2020, with growth in the economy rebounding in 2021 in a 'v' shaped recovery setting. There are still many unknowns in relation to the economic outlook and lingering risks to achieving fast recovery. This underscores the importance of our stimulus package currently being implemented.

Most commodity prices have fallen slightly in the first few months of this year. Some have stabilised. The logging sector has represented an important component of the country's economy, in terms of revenue, economic activity and growth.

With the impact of COVID-19, we expect to see further reductions in the export of round logs as international trade continues to be disrupted and there is lower domestic growth demand in our export destinations. This will directly impact growth and be felt across our country.

Decreased activity in the economy translates to reduced Government revenues.

A slowing economy and ongoing international disruptions hurts our business, negatively impacts our farmers, and ultimately impacts our people and our communities across the country.

Fellow Solomon Islanders, this is the economic impact of COVID-19.

As a country, we have moved fast to protect our people from the risks, and we have moved quickly to design the stimulus package which will be vital to support activity to cushion the negative impact and keep our economy afloat.

This Government will work constructively to pursue priority reforms opportunities and provide a basis for sustainable long-term growth on a broader economic base. We understand the issues at play. We are closely monitoring and managing the economic situation by planning ahead while being ready to act as and when required.

Core components of the stimulus package have commenced, important infrastructure spending is in the pipeline and further reforms to the business environment will assist in the post-COVID-19 landscape.

Agenda of this Government

Good people of Solomon Islands, the priority of this Government is to ensure that our country maintains economic stability, remains safe and continues to progress despite the current situation.

To achieve these priority objectives, the DCGA is currently in the process of redirecting our policies to focus on investing into and firmly establishing the fundamental pillars of development based on inclusivity and meaningful participation that will also provide a catalyst for socio-economic growth in strategically targeted sectors.

In view of the prevailing circumstances, our policy redirection is also being designed to streamline government expenditure and maintain fiscal prudence to ensure value for money returns on all public sector expenditure and investments. Details of the policy redirection will also be reflected in the Budget.

Tribute

Fellow Solomon Islanders, this year has been an especially trying time for our country. We entered uncharted waters where our resolve was questioned and our individual and collective character put to the test not only by the global pandemic but also by our business and as usual politics. But so far we have stood tall and firm.

Our people and this country is bigger than anyone of us. Politicians come and go but our beloved nation will live on and persevere.

Allow me to thank each and every one of you, every father, mother, brother, sister, sons and daughters and our grandfathers and mothers of our beloved nation for your continuous and unwavering support, belief, commitment, dedication and prayers. This Government is and will always be eternally grateful to you all. Tagio tumas lo ufala.

On behalf of our people and the Democratic Coalition Government for Advancement I would like to pay my deepest respect and tribute to our public servants. I will continue to impress upon you that you are the government in residence, the tip of the spear in implementing government policy.

This country cannot move forward without your hard work, sacrifice and passion. Our children and country deserves the best out of you and nothing less.

This is a magnanimous responsibility that must not be taken lightly. Please discharge your duties with integrity and humility. "To Lead is to Serve".

To the private sector, I understand that this is a very trying time. That fact is not lost to this Government. Your role in propping up our economy is of paramount importance. You are the engine that drives our economy and this country is indebted to your contribution.

This Government acknowledges and notes the concerns that were raised in the two survey that the Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industries conducted to gauge the impact of COVID-19. Our door is always open to you to share ideas on how we can best serve our people and country.

Fellow Solomon Islanders, we are one of the 12 remaining countries in the world that remains COVID-19 free, and for that we thank our front liners for putting their lives in the line of fire to keep us safe. To our doctors, nurses, correctional service officers, police officers, immigration and customs officers, drivers, security personnel at quarantine centres, volunteers and everyone else who have contributed one way or the other, barava tagio true lo ufala.

To our bilateral and multi-lateral partners, I wish to thank you for your continuous support, especially during this global pandemic. You have always been a friend when we are in need. I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

To our Churches, you are the rock upon which this beloved country stands during these trying times. Your prayers and faith has indeed been a source of strength and inspiration. The spiritual guidance that you have rendered to our country is greatly appreciated.

Conclusion

In closing, let me once again wish you all a Happy 42nd Anniversary celebrations on behalf of the Democratic Coalition Government for Advancement.

We are one people, We are one Nation, We are Solomon Islands.

To God be the Glory Great things He has done.

I thank you all for your forbearance and attention.

May God Bless Our Beloved Solomon Islands from Shore to Shore.