



NATIONWIDE ADDRESS
PRIME MINISTER MANASSEH SOGAVARE
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Introduction

Fellow Solomon Islanders, it is with the greatest of humility to deliver my weekly address to the nation.

It has always been an honour as your Prime Minister to update all our good citizens within the four corners of our beloved nation Solomon Islands.

I also convey my sincere greetings to citizens and friends listening or watching in from around the world.

“Gudfala aftanun long iufala everiwan.”

Fellow citizens, as usual, I will be updating you on COVID-19 related matters as well as what the Government is doing in its different sectors during these trying times.

However, allow me first to provide updates on COVID-19 related matters in the health sector.

Health Updates

Fellow citizens, on the 23rd of August more than 20 Solomon Islands nationals arrived into the country from Samoa.

Although Samoa is also a COVID-19 free country, these nationals have been placed in quarantine and will only undergo one COVID-19 test as per the testing protocol this Friday.

As per our testing protocol regulations, only those with negative results will be released.

My good people, as I speak, our Solomon Islands Medical Assistance Team (SOLMAT) that were deployed two weeks ago to the Western border are still on the ground.

I would like to sincerely thank them and our many other front liners around the country for your continuous support.

The SOLMAT team have held several meetings with communities in the Shortlands, providing guidance on how to develop and implement their own community Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for COVID-19 preparedness and response based on their individual context.

They have also revised and improved Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for isolation and triage, and developed SOPs for

community COVID-19 preparedness and response for communities in the Shortland Islands.

Assessments have also been done and conducted by Environmental Health staff deployed on water and sanitation facilities along health clinics and quarantine stations.

The SOLMAT Environmental Health and Infection Prevention and Control staff also assessed the Nusatupe Quarantine facility.

The SOLMAT Team also completed assessment of Nila Area Health Center, Toumoa Clinic, and Harapa Clinic.

Furthermore, infection, prevention and control (IPC) training on-site for frontline police workers is continuing, as operations at the border are conducted in a safe manner to protect themselves and their colleagues from contracting the virus.

These activities are part of the overall objectives of the SOLMAT team deployed to the western border to support the provincial health emergency operation centre, to strengthen its health system preparedness and response at the border.

That said, I am also pleased to note that the teleconferencing Facility in Gizo, Nila and Taro is now operational.

The facility has now delivered an effective communication link, which has now provided daily communication between SOLMAT and the National Health Emergency Operation Centre, enabling the teams to discuss detail operation requirements and plans.

This is indeed a major boost to our preparedness at the western border.

On the same note, the National Health Emergency Operation Centre last week also deployed a team to Malaita, where they completed a two days' workshop on Standard Operation Procedures for their Emergency Operating Center and provided guidance on SOPs for Isolation and Quarantine management in Malaita Outer Islands.

Repatriation flight to PRC and Philippines

Fellow citizens, as you have been informed through the media last week, Cabinet at its meeting on Thursday 27th August 2020, has approved the repatriation flights to Guangzhou in China and to Manila in the Philippines.

The flight to Guangzhou will be tomorrow Tuesday 1st September 2020.

The first two flights to Manila are scheduled for the 15th and 18th September 2020 respectively, with the dates of the 3rd flight to be confirmed.

After careful consideration, Cabinet has approved that the flight to both countries will be subjected to confirmation from the Ministry of Health & Medical Services that all testing requirement prior to and upon arrival must be complied with and entry of all incoming passengers must be approved.

All passengers regardless of their nationality or status must undergo strict testing and quarantine protocols prior to and upon arrival.

According to our testing protocols, all passengers must undergo compulsory tests before boarding the flight. Anyone who is tested positive will not board the flight.

The flight to Guangzhou will be undertaken for purposes of facilitating the travel of PRC officials, PG2023 technical team as well as Solomon Islands citizens.

Regarding the repatriation flight to Philippines, Cabinet has also agreed following recommendations by the Oversight Committee, that repatriating our students should be prioritized because the Solomon Islands Government is directly responsible for our students' safety and well-being.

Well-over 400 students will be repatriated and all passengers must undergo the compulsory pre-testing requirements.

Our Ministries of Education, Foreign Affairs and Health are coordinating the testing arrangements for our students with the assistance from the World Health Organization.

Fellow citizens, the Government has acknowledged that this challenging and unprecedented time requires Cabinet to make tough decisions for the betterment of our country.

Therefore, the decision to repatriate passengers from China and Philippines was taken after a thorough analysis of risks and benefits. That said, my good people, I would like to make it clear that the same treatment is given to all our bilateral and multilateral partners who are needed in the country to advance our national projects and national interest.

China does not get preferential treatment, as people might like to think.

In fact, other flights to repatriate citizens currently stranded in New Zealand, Australia, United Kingdom, USA and other European countries, as well as to bring in key foreign personnel for our development partner missions to help finance major development projects in the country are also in the planning process.

The same arrangement will be done for engineers for TINA Hydro project, the International Airport and the Kukum Highway projects. There are no exceptions to our pre-departure

requirements as well as our post arrival quarantine and testing protocols.

Education sector updates

Fellow citizens, on the education front, the Government through the education ministry has reached out to our schools at the western border recently.

Last week, the National Disaster Operations Committee (NDOC) Education Sector Committee was amongst other sub NDOC committees that visited the Western Border.

The National Disaster Operations Committee Education Team supported the schools in the Shortlands, providing them with a three days intensive training on how school leaders should develop their School Incidental Standard Operating Procedures.

My good people, the intention and purpose of the training is to ensure staff and students understand and respond effectively to avoid panic in the event of any first positive case of COVID-19, and its subsequent contact tracing activities that will follow.

The expected outcome is to build capacities of teachers and students so that they can handle COVID-19 in any given scenarios, hence, mitigate the risk of community transmissions.

I must acknowledge our front liners in the education and disaster management sector for continuing their good work in preparing our schools within the emergency zones.

Tourism sector updates

Fellow citizens, despite the pandemic, I am also pleased to note that the Ministry of Culture & Tourism has held two fruitful meetings with the Malaita and Central provincial governments with two Memorandum of Understanding to be signed soon.

This is in regards to the continuation of the House No. 1 Project and Tourism investment facilitation programs for the Central Islands Province, which will host the Colonial History Museum of the country.

Moreover, the MOU with Malaita province will be for the Malaita Tourism, Culture and Information Center project for Auki. The MOU will also support the idea to revisit and recommit the Forest Lake Eco-Tourism Project and Cruise Ship program for Malaita Province.

These MOU's will set out the pathway for collaboration between the tourism & culture ministry and the Provincial Governments, for joint execution and implementation of key tourism projects over the next financial year.

By-Elections

My good people, apart from the COVID-19 related matters, allow me to update you also on some important information regarding the By-Elections.

This is for the Central Honiara Constituency, North East Guadalcanal and South Choiseul constituencies.

The Solomon Islands Electoral Commission have been given the go ahead by the Attorney General Chambers to proceed with the by-elections for the three constituencies although, there is a State of Public Emergency (SOPE) currently enforced in the country.

The Government through the Ministry of Home Affairs was very cautious in conducting the by-elections within the SOPE period because of the concern that the powers provided in the SOPE Regulations could jeopardize the integrity in the conduct of the by-election.

However, the Attorney General Chambers has alleviated this concern by assuring the Chief Electoral Officer that the powers provided in the Regulation will not supersede any directive under the Electoral Act for the conduct of a credible, free and fair election.

My good people, it is also responsible and fair that a by-election is conducted as soon as possible as thousands of our people in these respective constituencies have raised their concerns regarding their representatives and voice in Parliament.

Thus, the Ministry of Home Affairs are finalising its review of their processes in conducting the elections. The purpose of the review is to identify where in the election process a reform can be made to comply with the COVID-19 protective measures.

As such, the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Health will come up with procedures on compliance measures to protect staff and voters during the elections.

The proposed dates for the elections are in late November or early December 2020. However, depending on the current financial situation, the Home Affairs ministry will need to work closely with the Ministry of finance & Treasury.

Dates for polling, examining draft electoral timelines needs to be finalized before formal dates are announced. In terms of the by-election for South Choiseul constituency, the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission has proposed a date in early 2021, as it will be covered by the 2021 approved budget.

Ministry of Traditional Governance, Peace and Ecclesiastical Affairs updates

In terms of the traditional governance legislation, the MTGPEA is continuing with its consultation on the 'Traditional Governance and Customs Facilitation Bill' for Western province, Guadalcanal province and Honiara.

The consultation started in Gizo from the 4th – 8th August. As for Guadalcanal, consultations took place from 11 – 14 August. The consultation for Honiara City Council was done recently, which took place on Thursday 20th of August.

Consultations with heads of Churches, SICA, SIFGA and church administrators will also commence this week, Thursday 4th September 2020.

A National symposium for the Heads of Churches, Church Administrators, SICA and SIFGA will also be conducted starting this week from Monday 31st August to Wednesday 2nd September 2020 at the Mendana Hotel.

Other special groups and legal professional groups in Honiara will also be consulted in the coming weeks. Consultation will continue in the other five provinces of the country in the next few months.

An Anthropological Study on the Traditional Governance cultures of Solomon Islands will also be undertaken simultaneously with the ‘Traditional Governance and Customs Facilitation Bill consultation, in response to the recommendations of the Bills & legislation Committee. UNDP is supporting the Ministry to undertake the study, which will start in mid- September and throughout the next 5 months.

Conclusion

Fellow citizens, to conclude, as your Prime Minister, I appeal to our good citizens to continue to work together with your Government to carry us through these unprecedented times.

I am fully aware that some decisions might not go down well with some of our fellow citizens, but let me assure you all that all decisions are made after careful assessment and analysis based on evidence.

We, your leaders have been mandated by the people to serve in the best interest of our nation and its citizens and this is what we are continuing to do.

My good people, the Democratic Coalition Government for Advancement's overwhelming priority now is to safeguard our people from the deadly virus. That said, we must also continue to make sure that our economy remains afloat.

We must continue to remain vigilant, steadfast and united.

To God be the Glory great things He has done.

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

“U ME TUGEDA AGAINST COVID-19”

May God Bless Solomon Islands from shore to shore.