



SOLOMON ISLANDS
TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION
Confronting the Truth for a better Solomon Islands

FINAL REPORT

VOLUME IV
ANNEX I

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Honiara, Solomon Islands

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ANNEX 1

NATIONAL PUBLIC HEARINGS

1. HONIARA

Forum Fisheries, Honiara, 9-10 March 2010

Mr. John Dion's story:

It all happened when we started hearing rumors of the Guadalcanal Movement. Since I am part Guadalcanal and Malaita, I was a bit confused about which side I should support and the difference in cultural set up of the two provinces. The youths in my village chose to form a Guadalcanal militia group but I decided to remain neutral and refrained from participating. My decision to remain neutral caused me to move over to Honiara. I believe the Government and responsible bodies failed to quickly address the issue which left me in an awkward and stressful position throughout 1999. I can vividly remember 1 July 1999 as I felt sick that day and told my wife that I was going down to Visale Clinic. The GRA militia group entered the clinic as a nurse was checking my temperature. They dressed in our traditional *kabilato* wear and had painted faces and mud all over their bodies. They told the nurse they were looking for a Malaitan man. They walked straight to where I was and said, "this is the man we are looking for," and escorted me out of the clinic. They started bashing me up, accusing me of all sorts of things; tied both my hands and feet with wire cables and hauled me inside the boot of their Hilux and drove off towards my village. As we were approaching the house, they untied my legs and marched me towards my house. The church priest later told me that seeing them march me along reminded him of Jesus being led to be crucified. Arriving at my house they sat me in front of my children and wife and started beating me up. They said all sorts of things and labeled me a coward and tried to prove to others that I am a Guadalcanal man. I tried to make them understand the way I view the movement is of someone who has blood ties on both sides. I have high respect for the two warring factions and could not go against my father and mother's people. They then strongly emphasized that since I do not want to participate then I must leave Guadalcanal and go to Malaita or somewhere else. I accepted their proposal and in the end they discouraged me from going over to Malaita but I must remain on Guadalcanal.

At that time the MEF group was not yet formed and Honiara was the only neutral ground, so I planned to take refuge there. After talking to me they formed a straight line and took turns beating me up from 10 a.m. till 3 p.m. They pointed their guns at me and I reached the stage where I felt I was going to die. My family stood at a distance and watched. They told my family that they would kill me for refusing to participate in their movement and meetings. They also accused me of spying by suggesting I may have been a “spear” (spy), a term from Bougainville. They later demanded money from me to feed the soldiers, armies and commandoes in the bush. I tried to talk my way out of it since I did not have any money but they said that if I do not give them any money then the beating will continue and started beating me up again until I my whole body fell numb. They then went to my piggery and tied two pigs. I then asked my sister to give me one pig and that I would later replace it. However, to my horror, they got all my pigs including my sister’s.

After they finished beating me they assured me that they will not return to harm me anymore. The feeling I had afterwards was different. I felt traumatized and the incident will always haunt me. Every night the militants would come around my house and stood watching from behind the shadows. Not long after I learnt that the militants murdered few Malaitans living next to our community. Personally, death was just round the corner for me so I decided to move to a safer place. My wife and I decided to move over to Tabalia (Anglican mission). We stayed there for two weeks and the militants continued to visit the station to look for me. I spoke with the missionaries there and they arranged a boat to transport me to Tulagi and from there we came over to Honiara with only our clothes. It was also very difficult for us in Honiara since we did not have money to buy food. Luckily at that time several business houses were buying “noni fruit” so I went out around town to collect the fruits to earn some money to buy several items that my family needed. I managed to sell the fruit I collected and earned \$300 and we used the money to buy clothes for my children and a pot for us to use. I was welcomed by a priest at Holy Cross and the Archbishop assisted me with \$500. I remained in town and luckily managed to find a job at the Solomon Soaps Factory.

To me all these hardships, perils and havoc my family and I have experienced were something that could have been avoided by the responsible authorities of the Government. Leaders often take for granted and turn a blind eye to their people when they have power in

their hands. They forgot the importance of being together and the needs and realities of life at the grassroots level. The people in the rural areas do not understand what is happening in the upper level, they do not bend the law but they broke the law by taking the law into their own hands. They have their own interpretation of the law – “the law of the jungle” – where men have been killed and women raped for nothing. What has gone wrong with the government of the day? Haven’t we enough money or manpower to curb the uprising at the earliest of stages? I think it is a lesson to our future government and our young generation who are listening since they will be the future leaders. We should never repeat this experience.

I believe what happened was a result of total negligence. In the early stages of the tension I approached one of the RSIPF stations simply to report the matter of militant activities but the officers at the front desk laughed at what I relayed to them. Their reactions towards my concern as a citizen of this country is heart-rending and a contribution to what our country experienced. Problems or whatever we experience start small and develops and it does not take much to ignite it into flames that destroy whatever lies in front of it. I am a village man and I should not be here in town but working in my plantation. I have to cope with living in town simply because I fear both sides of the factions both in Malaita and Guadalcanal. I believe there are others like me here listening today who are forced to remain here in town. I personally feel that all these hardships come from responsible authorities during the tensions. However, I am so grateful to know that we are not forgotten.

Mr. Robert Panuel Buga’s story:

On 3 October 1998, on a Sunday, my uncle’s friends from Guadalcanal picked him up at KGV Market and drove up to Gold Ridge area. They drank beer all the way up. On their way back to Honiara, instead of dropping him off at my house, they went up to the Tenaru area at an area called the Gold Ridge Settlement. There was a group of militants along the road and my uncle said “good night” to them. From this the militants knew that someone from Malaita was inside the vehicle. When my uncle reached the Gold Ridge Settlement (relocation), the militants were fully aware that my uncle was there. The militants were angry and they approached and stood surrounding the house, and demanded the chief to

give my uncle over to them. The chief then said, “Okay, I will buy compensation for his head.” The militants refused to accept the chief’s offer and grabbed my uncle, hauled him outside and killed him.

I have not seen him since 3 October 1998. I would like to call on the group concerned to please come forward and tell me if he is still alive or where he is buried. If he is still alive I would like them to return him; if he is killed then they should also show me where he is buried. My uncle had three daughters and I am responsible for looking after them and we are all still waiting. The children are looking and expecting to hear something from their father. That is simply the story I would like to put across here. Like other victims I also lost properties, cattle, plantations and my uncle’s life. It is very costly and I do not see myself fit to stand in front of you all today, but I believe it was possible because I do have a good heart for our nation Solomon Islands. I would like to call on my good people if they could show me the whereabouts of my uncle.

Mrs. Edith Pandavisu’s story:

One morning on 9 April 1999 a group of militants known as the GRA came to our village and attacked my husband. My husband and I, along with our two children, were the only ones left in our village at that time. I was in the kitchen and my husband was with one of our children in our house when the militia group arrived. The militants wore traditional costumes know as *kabilatos* and were armed with spears, machetes, axes and homemade guns along with a .303 rifle. They entered and assaulted my husband with their knives and spears as if trying to cut a tree or a stick. His body was mutilated with knife and axe marks. He tried to escape towards the river but they continued slashing him with an axe, causing severe injuries to the back of his head and his spine. When he fell to the ground others continued to assault him. Other militants damaged our assets and properties, such as trucks, plates, pots, buckets and other valuable items. I froze in fear and watched as they continued to ransack our properties and assault my husband. I lost my sense completely and stood speechless, even forgetting about my children.

It was after my child called out for his father that I regained consciousness. My husband walked towards the river and fell. I screamed when they slashed him with an axe. As I was looking for my husband I came across one of his nephew who said he was killed near the

river. He asked me if I could help carry the body out from the sun. The militants issued out a strong warning stopping anyone to help my husband. As I was walking towards my husband he heard me and called out my name. He then told me to get him some water. I hurried and got a pot of water and washed his swollen face. The two bones on his left arm were broken and his right hand had deep knife wounds with flesh hanging out. I normally squirm at the sight of blood but I had to act quickly to save my husband. I washed him in the river and I told him to hide there while I run to get a doctor from the neighboring village. The doctor advised me to bring my husband over to his place and he quickly attended to my husband. After he was properly dressed my husband told me to hide him in a safe place, fearing that the GRA militants might return. I then told the doctor that I would try to get my husband out of the area and that if I did not return by 1 pm. then it meant something bad has happened to me. I ran four miles from my village to Selwyn College and arrived at the school at around 11 p.m. I relayed the story to my sister-in-law who then cautioned all the staff of the incident. I called the police and they questioned me as to why I was at Selwyn College when I should be at Tambea as it was easier for them to pick us up from there. I argued with them that all the militants were on their way to Tambea so going in the opposite direction was simply to avoid meeting them; and also, since the militants had barricaded the road by chopping down coconut trees along the main road and the bridges after Paru had been dismantled, our only hope of being evacuated was via helicopter or by patrol boat. They then advised me to return and that they would send a rescue party over to our village at Paru. I returned quickly and to my surprise the PFF personal had already arrived and my husband was safe under their custody. We boarded a three-ton truck over to Tambea Village and I returned to collect my children. We followed my husband over to Tambea and there we waited for the helicopter to arrive. At around 2 p.m. we arrived at the National Referral Hospital and the police went and took photos of the scene where my husband was assaulted. We arrived in Honiara and my husband received medical treatment. After he recovered, we fled to my husband's province of Malaita and stayed there until thing eased down on Guadalcanal.

Reverend John Buke's story:

People of Solomon Islands, I am here to tell my story about what happened in Bungana on Wednesday 28 December 1998. On Wednesday morning I told my family not to stay in Bungana or to even have breakfast there. Immediately after they left a GRA speedboat arrived in need of water and breakfast. I later saw a police Yamaha double fifty horsepower engine boat at the point and I heard people say "they are here". I started to worry and when the police boat came closer to where the GRA boat was under a tree, they fired a warning shot and said, "Do not move and stay where you are". I had never been a militant so I did not know what this meant so I stood still. The police boat came close to shore, after anchoring fired a second warning, and repeated their earlier warning. I then saw the leader of the GRA fire a shot and after the shot I heard the police say, "Okay you like it" and they started to shoot. I stood a little while longer then decided to leave the place because the branches of the trees hid me from their sights except for my legs. I walked out and when I looked back I saw they had shot the GRA leader's leg already and he fell closer to the boat. The other four GRA got off from the boat and ran ashore. I decided to cross the island because the police were still there with guns pointing into the bush and would occasionally fire their guns.

Effects of what I saw still haunt me as it was the first time for me to see such behaviour. To my understanding of humans, we should respect each other but at the time killing was an easy thing to do so this is one of the things that haunt me. Secondly, this event caused me fear as it was sudden and unusual, an experience one never expects. After the 29th I went to the hospital at Taroaniara not knowing what I was doing and nearly was mentally ill so I called my bishop to pray for me and that was when I received my first healing. I want to say without blaming anyone that next time we experience the pains and sufferings of the tension and next time we must not let it happen, we must deal with people before it comes to worst. I would like to say thank you to the members and leaders of TRC for the healing that you gave me. Let us remember that thousands are yet to be healed in our country before we can achieve true peace in the Solomon Islands. I was released on 2 January 1999; and that is all I want to say.

Mr. Ben Vatu's story:

It was 26 Nov 2000 when two colleague officers and I were posted to Ngalibiu Police Post, a community policing police post. It was about 8 a.m. when we were approached by ten or more GRA members. I tried to ask them but without warning they attacked us. I no longer knew the whereabouts of my two colleagues as there were many of them. I started to fight for my life while they punched and booted me and told us to get out of there. With a hard object I could not recognize they hit my head until I was unconscious. Shortly after that their leader told me I must leave. I had sustained injuries to my face and the back of my neck and the scars remain today. After that they left us and strongly warned us to leave. I was covered with blood and I think they thought I was going to die so they left us. I found my two colleagues and they were still okay. We decided to leave the police post and stood by the main road and a police vehicle came and took us to the central hospital. To the friends that beat my two colleagues and me I want to say I forgive you from my heart because I want peace to be restored to our country. To our Government I want to ask leaders to make this incident the first and the last because many have suffered. I think that is my short story I want to share.

Mr. Richard Selwyn's story:

I worked at LDA at Marmara, a property of the Solomon Islands Government. LDA stands for Livestock Development Authority, and it farms pigs, cows and chicken. I was working there when the ethnic tension erupted. On 28th of June we employees were surprised when the GRA came to the farm and searched for Malaitans. We were confused and did not know what to do. They ordered our friends from other provinces like Malaita, Isabel, West and Makira to leave. A person holding a gun demanded people to leave. As a person from Guadalcanal I felt okay with militants as they knew I was from Guadalcanal and they ordered and harassed friends from other provinces. The militants got people from different provinces and marched them and the children who were afraid called to me, "Richard, please come with us," and I told them I would. They took nothing from their houses, just the clothes on their back. Women had to carry their child and leave nothing else so I walked with them. From LDA we had to walk three kilometers to get to the police post at Kakabona where we saw military sandbag blockades belonging to the GRA. I had to leave

them there because I am not allowed to go beyond that line and returned to the farm. The farm is huge and everything was intact so I stayed to look after them.

Two days later I was in the feed mill mixing pig feed when they kicked the walling of the house and because it is a big house it sounded loud. Shortly after the militants appeared with serious faces and nobody spoke or smiled at me. I recognized only a few of them. They signed to me with the barrel of their guns and their hands to go outside. The feed mill machine continued to work as they took me out. When I got outside they marched me up to the river in the bush and when we reached there we saw some of their group. There they tied me and started to question me. They suspected I was a spear because I was not involved in the tension. They tied me and beat me and questioned me and I told them I knew nothing, was not involved in anything and that I am just working. They continued punching me until late in the evening. With a severely bruised face and my eyes swollen and bleeding, they tied me near a big stone. I thought I was going to die when one of them came and put his gun here. I was tied so I really could not do anything. He pointed his gun at my forehead and engaged it; a little pull on the trigger and it would fire and I could have fallen on the top of the stone. He pushed the point of the gun against my forehead but nothing happened. From my heart I knew I was going to die so I just thought of God and that if it is my time to die I would die but if it is not my time I would thank God.

After that they took me and tied me close to a big fire and continued to question and beat me. I was standing for quite a while and my legs started to tire and a man came from my back and hit me hard with a knife and it was really a strong force. I fell and could not stand and they left me lying and kept talking to me. It went on until they realized their suspicion was unfounded as I was not involved in anything. They left me there until early morning of the next day and the son of the late chief of that area came and asked permission of the group commando for my release because of my innocence. They cut me loose and I returned to the farm and continued working. I did not leave or run away although my wife and kids had fled to the mountain before the ethnic tension happened as she sensed the ethnic tension would be happen.

I was the only one at the farm as every other employee had left. The Minister for Agriculture appointed me to look after the farm and I agreed to it despite what happened as

the Field Force were looking after us at that time. I could still cross the lines to get animal feeds from Honiara. It went on until Malaitans saw me at Kukum Market as I was ready to board the market truck to pick up the feed. If I was not saved on time by a few police officers who grabbed me away, I could have died because the people who came to kill me were very serious. I went back to the farm and stayed there until June 2000 when the Malaita Eagles took over the armory. I could not get to Honiara and stayed put at the farm because fighting escalated as a result of Malaitans coming into possession of weapons from the raid and the GRA capturing weapons from Gold Ridge. There was no one around and I did not allow my family to visit me because of the fighting. The Malaita Eagle Force now camped at Kakabona, Aruligo and Visale and GRA forces that used to operate the frontlines lacked manpower. I was approached by the GRA to help. Being approached by a militant is very different so I had to cook and took it to the frontline. When I am at the frontline they introduced me and say, “Okay, you come up, machine gun here, you wear your helmet and jacket and you look.” I knew nothing about guns. While they ate my food, I was to hold a gun and stand guard, something “my heart” detested and was not my intention but I had no choice. After that I went home and from June right through to the year 2000 I experienced a lot of bad things: men dying, no company and living amidst fighting. My wife was pregnant at the time and I was worried about how I was going to handle things. We experienced shortage of food but suddenly there was a ceasefire so I instructed my wife to “hurry, go to some of our friends, get some money and buy us some rice and return quickly.” When my wife crossed the frontline there was heavy crossfire between the GRA and the Malaita Eagle Force. Fortunately some friends passed news for me to pick up bags of rice in a certain bush location.

Those are some of the hardships we experienced and when my wife was in labor I told her for us to go to Tamboko because they had a clinic there. We stayed two weeks at Tamboko and on 15 October 2000 the Townsville Peace Agreement was signed enabling us to return to the farm. On the 4th of November my wife gave birth and on the 12th of November 2000 I visited the Ministry of Agriculture enquiring about work. They told me LDA was now being liquidated and that I was to work for the liquidator. That same day the liquidator took a man to the farm to assess the damages. They were surprised to see the farm undamaged and appointed me to look after the farm. I stayed until I think around April

when a militant who had issues with the GRA threatened to damage LDA. I had a talk with the liquidator about what we were going to do to save LDA. We tried negotiating but it was difficult so I went to Tabalia to see the Head Brother and he told me to see the Bishop. The Bishop allowed two Brothers to come and stay with me to settle the problem and save the farm. It was difficult as militants still had guns and nothing was resolved. They murdered the liquidator in 2004; dumbfounded, I approached the Ministry of Agriculture but got nothing. LDA was damaged. That is the story of my experience throughout the tension.

Mr. Philip Beu Kwai's story:

I had worked and lived at Doma Plantation for about two years when on the 26th of December 1998 we were chased out. I stayed in town for three days and returned to the station on the 30th. After two months we got laid off and I went back to work for the Province, at Riuvaniu. I worked for one month, got paid and then worked another four days when on 9 June 1999 we heard the fighting was nearing us. On Wednesday midday, the 12th, we were at the station when we heard the sound of a conch shell from Vura village. We prepared to leave when the militants came and pointed their rifles at our mouths. I was shocked when they shoved the rifle barrel into my mouth. I begged them to let us go so they withdrew their rifles but kicked every one of us – even women and children. We were injured as we ran around eighty kilometers to reach the main road while they were at our back kicking us. They grabbed the women and young girls holding their private parts and whipped the children. We did nothing as they held their rifles, knives, axes, spears, arrows and slings. As we neared Vura Road I saw my cousin-brother with his family as well as a cousin. They were carried like pigs to the bush. We had not seen them again. We saw two trucks loaded with militants going down to Masaen near Tasi plantation. There they stopped and about a hundred GRA militants got off the truck. They took us and whipped us and shot us with spears and this is where it landed on me. When I turned around I saw they also speared my other brother here and he fell wounded and I took him to Number Nine Hospital and back home to Malaita where he died. They harassed all our wantoks, young girls – it was really bad, in fact it broke my heart and that is why I came today to say, you TRC with the Government, you must do something as we feel

terrible. For a very long time we have been hungry and today we are getting filled up again. We forgive them and not angry in what they did to us but we put these in your hands. On the church side and the Government side what you have told us or what you told them we cannot comment on. We have come and told you today of bad things that have happened to us and the bad feelings we had. Thank you everyone.

Mr. Selwyn Kei's story:

My story happened around the height of the tension in June 2000. It was on a Friday and I was an employee of the Solomon Islands National Provident Fund. I left my office at around 9pm and went home to Kukum Baha'i Center. I was crossing the road carrying my official documents when I saw a three-ton truck I recognized as belonging to Ela Motors packed with militants. When they approached me I knew they were MEF militants. They held me and the only thing they told me was, "we want to question you so we will be going to our camp." I was standing and asked them what they wanted from me as I do not know what I have done wrong as I am innocent. They grabbed me, punched my face and back and booted me, which was when I fell. They continued to kick me, held me and hit me with the butt of the gun and tied back my hands. They blindfolded me and threw me inside this white pickup truck and drove us eastward of Honiara. To my understanding we drove pass the Lungga Bridge as I knew their bunker was somewhere around there. We arrived there and it was one of their bigger camps and they took off my blindfold and I could see two poles with a crossbeam between them. They tied me to the two poles and I was in the center, like a goalkeeper. They tied another rope at the middle just like a lope, like someone who is about to get hanged and it was placed around my neck and they also did the same for my two feet. They pulled my hands wide apart and pulled me up to stand on tiptoes and started to question me. The only question they kept asking was, "how, you look like a spear, I think you spear for the Seagulls," which I honestly say today in front of the nation I am innocent of. When I answered them, "I don't know," they continued to beat me with sharp objects like a knife and a gun. They continued to beat me with the butt of a gun and you can now see scars on my face of a knife that went directly down my face. There they hit me with a barrel of the gun, which left a cut in the middle of my face. They went on hitting me the whole night and when I do not respond they tortured me, but when I

answered them they kept hitting and bashing me. At that time I did not know what to say and could not do anything as I was in so much pain. They butchered my back, cut my hair, and continued torturing me. I fell unconscious at times and found out what they had done to me only after gaining consciousness. It was nearly daybreak when someone came and told that I was going to be shot. I was losing strength as I had been tortured through the night [which was] cold and windy as it had been raining. My face was covered with blood from the cut and bruises and I swallowed most of the blood. They tied a rope around my neck, which almost choked me. In the early hours of the morning one of the militants came to me, who I did not recognize as my eyes were bruised. He came and said: “brother you keep on praying because God will set you free,” and I believe that militant was a converted Christian. He saved me by loosening the rope around my neck. I was still standing there when someone passed me a message that they were awaiting a decision from the commander deciding my fate. I lost a lot of blood and grew weaker whilst waiting for the commander to arrive. The commander arrived at daybreak and asked me if I was a spear. I replied that I do not know and he asked me my place of work and I told him my name. He tried to identify me but was not able to because of my bruises so he went back. He came for the second time and again asked my name and when I told him he seemed to know me. He turned to the militant and asked where my shirt was and luckily someone was wearing it, which had the SINPF logo. He was convinced that it was me and came much closer and whispered, “Sorry, my brother, it is not you that we are looking for.” He told his boys untie me and clean me up and to take me to the National Referral Hospital straight away. I was unconscious on the way and could not remember anything. That is what I experienced during the ethnic tension.

Ms Jerema Juss’s story:

To the people of Solomon Islands, I come here today to tell you my experience while at school at Selwyn College in 1999 and 2000. In 1999 I was preparing for my Form 5 SISC exam when everything at West Guadalcanal worsened and lot of us at school felt traumatized. I want to share with you things I saw. In September the GRA told their people to wear grass skirts whilst we stayed at school and prayed. We witnessed houses being burnt and gunshots at night. Malaitans nearby fled their houses and came to school seeking

help and we did help. We helped a person shot in the leg begging for help. The militants came and asked for compensation and the schoolteachers tried their best to sort things out peacefully. In September we had an assembly and the teacher told us that Malaitan students have to leave the school. It was emotional, we all shed tears and even the principal standing on the pulpit wept. In the end we had to be evacuated and had to sit for our Form Five exams in Honiara at St. Nicolas School. Some of us did not do well as we were traumatized by the events at Selwyn College.

I returned to school in 2000 and in my first week the militants showed up at our home. I hid with the kids while they asked for a car and said if they were not given the car they would take a little girl. The teachers arrived and we told them about the militants and even they could not do much and told us to hide whenever the militants came. A lot of girls were raped around July 2000. The militants came to our home again and the teachers told us to hide while they go out to meet the militants. The militants demanded, "Give us the car now," and they responded; "it's our car and we will not give you." "Give us the car or we'll shoot the kids." At that time I really could not think of doing anything; I thought I would be killed and the other kids started to cry and I tried to stop them. The militants found the car and took it away. After that incident our teachers said they had had enough and that we needed to go home. My teacher told me to take the kids home and so I went and said farewell to my friends. We cried and I found the situation difficult as it was also my last year of studies. I took the kids and we went home. I went home and my parent told me to continue but I could not concentrate and did not finish my studies. After two attempts I gave up. Even my teacher tried encouraging me but being traumatized it was too hard.

Mr. Shadrach Tabani's story:

I was posted to Kuma in the southern part of Guadalcanal from 1995 to 1998. In 1998 I was an employee at the Malaria Division and took my son to attend school in Kuma. A member of the GRA was shot during the Bungana shooting and a few weeks later the militants stole an outboard motor of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services that I used to look after. Maybe it is a crime but I sensed it was not, because nothing of this nature had happened before at Weather Coast. I had an assumption that there must be a problem

somewhere as church members of the SDA warned the church pastor to leave the village immediately. I was chosen to assist the skipper of the boat to take the pastor to Honiara. Before I go further I would like to make clear that I was the Malaria Officer responsible for taking medical services and emergency cases for the 12,000 people and for the outboard motor, which belonged to the people of the Weather Coast. I had been doing that service for three years and when the outboard motor was stolen, I knew I had to leave. I came to Honiara and after some time I decided to go home with my brother to spend the weekend. When my brother left me at Mberande River and went to his wife's village in the bush to attend a wedding and I walked home. On the Easter Saturday the tension broke out and people raided CDC 4 and CDC 3. At that time there were roadblocks at Binu and those of us there for the weekend were stranded with no way to return to Honiara. I was unemployed at that time and had been trying to contact my boss for any work but it was really hard as communication had broken down.

On the 1st of June 2001 they called us, especially the vector-borne disease program, to come together to do reconciliation. I came with some of the boys I am responsible for and the ones in Honiara especially from Malaita. We prepared ourselves and found time to do reconciliation. We went home and set our work plan and on the 1st of June 2001 I had to transport our other work colleagues to ICLAM Farm in western Guadalcanal. The GLF militants stopped us and beat me but I managed to escape and sustained minor injuries. At my brother's house ice cubes helped me feel better the next day. I still have the scars being gun pointed that day after they demanded us to wind down our vehicles windows. A single shot damaged the double Hilux that we were using: broke the front and back screen that cost about \$3000. The next incident happened at Horohotu while we were distributing bed nets and doing a net blood survey. Returning from work we were stopped by three young men who pulled the keys from the driver and took off. We had to look for transport and with the help of the pastor who lived there who gave us his motorbike and I came to Honiara to find transportation for my working colleagues. With the help of the Red Cross we managed to pick them up and return to where we were staying.

I also lost properties. When militants raided my brother in-law's house at CDC 1, they took a chainsaw that belonged to me. The MEF militants occupied my house at White River and I still have not got it back. I was ready to receive payment of lost properties

when I was threatened by a MEF commander who denied that I had a house at White River. How can he deny it when I have receipts, built it and lived in it between 1991 and 2000? I processed the transaction through ANZ Bank but when I checked nothing came in and because of the threat I did not go to collect the lost property payment. I did apply for first phase of the Taiwan Government payment but the money did not come through; maybe the cheque that they gave was not negotiable and should go straight to the accounts, and maybe a different Shadrach got the signed cheque but not Shedrack Tabani. After the ethnic tension I went to the people who are current occupants of my house at White River and talked with them but received no response. You might ask why I did not report it to RAMSI but for my safety I will not tell them.

Mrs. Margaret Alabaru's story:

On the 12th June 1999 we left home at 9 a.m. to gather food and coconut fruits. My husband then told our son to fix a bicycle so that he can get some coconut from one of our gardens on the other side of the stream. He went off on the bicycle and sometime later returned with a flat tire. I told him not to go as the GRA had been there yesterday scouting the area. I told my family that I would go to get some kumara [sweet potato] at our garden just next to the road and my husband wanted to come along with me. We went to the garden and came home with some kumara. We were at home till late in the evening and my husband decided to go fishing at the nearby stream. We waited for him to come home first until 12 a.m. and then it went on to 3 a.m. and I wondered what would be keeping him. Then I realized that the GRA were hanging around the stream. Our nearby *wantok* gathered her children and came to our home. I asked her what the GRA want and went into the house to wake my two sons and to carry my grandson. I panicked and suggested to my sons to hide in our house but they wanted us to escape. We fled to the church and was blocked and surrounded by the GRA. One of the GRA members tried to take a shot by aiming at my other son and the son of mine ran and tackled him down. I heard the other member of the militant say, "cut him". I turned and walked home holding my grandson.

Suddenly a helicopter arrived and the GRA fled. I went to the same place and to find my sons. I was then approached by one of my brothers-in-law and he told me that my husband was killed. When I went to see my husband's mutilated body, my son was standing there

and he walked towards me and stopped me. He told me the scene is bad and not to be viewed. It took me three years to mourn. The comfort and the treatment I received from my sons greatly helped me recover. Thank you. I want my son to continue;

Mr. Joseph Olebaru's story:

I want to continue with the story. We were at home and there were little showers of rain when the GRA shouted at us to our surprise. A *wantok* of ours alerted us that there were militants around. Because I am fast I was the first person to run to the other side of the drainage which was filled with militants. I turned to look for my mum and brother and felt bad for not thinking about them or anybody. I panicked and my uncle came and told me my father was killed. The police arrived and we took my father's body and loaded it on the back of the Hilux. My mum was inside the Hilux cabin thus she didn't see my father's body. I was 14 years old then and in Form 1 at Nguvia. My education was disturbed as a result of the ethnic tension and there are a lot of us who had the same experience. I am happy to share my family and personal experience and appeal to the perpetrators please step forward freely to reconcile with us so that we may find peace in our hearts.

Mr. Joe Kimharimanu's story:

The evening of the incident, my wife and I were at the Kukum Market selling betel nut. MEF members occasionally came to collect betel nut and helped themselves to our stall. As time went on I told my wife for us to stop selling betel nut because I am tired of militants taking betel nut and helping themselves, so I walked out to the back and went to see a member of the MEF around 8:30 p.m. I told the member of the MEF: "you guys joined the MEF and hardly sleep, every time you guys come to us and this is what I have seen". I thought I was just straight to the point and he got me wrong. I walked past him and watched people playing cards. Suddenly all the MEF members picked open the door and came in with rifles. I turned and look around but no one was at my back. They called me, "hey, you come," and my body started to tremble. They gun pointed me and marched me out through the door.

They took me with them in their Hilux down to G-Province¹ building and when we arrived they started to kick me and pulled me into the room. When I entered the building they torched my eyes and it hurt my eyes. Suddenly they gun butted my face; I started to bleed and another person hit me and I swallowed a tooth that broke and I got punched every time I said a word. I kept quiet as they continued to bash me and hit me with a hard object till I fell flat on the floor. I woke up at 7 a.m. to someone knocking at the door. I thought they would not kill me. I later realized it was a brother asking the militants to release me. He took me to the hospital and left me there. I saw nurses trembling as they tried to give medication because there were men and arms everywhere. I was traumatized as well, asking for a quicker release. I felt like everybody hated me and I went to the bus stop and went to my wife at the Kukum Market. I was exhausted as I told her to take me back home. I really needed privacy, I hated everyone. After home nursing with hot water etc., I recovered after a month and then went on to ask my wife if we could go home where I recovered fully.

Mr. Dick Tavake's story:

In 1997 I worked at the ECLAM Research Centre at Aruligo. At the end of 1997 three men armed with .22 rifles and one bush knife came to my home at Aruligo where I lived with my family. I purchased the piece land just adjacent to where the Central Bank area is. They warned me to leave within six months. I thought about my work at the ECLAM and the good money to support my family. I have kids in high school and I kept thinking about it for two months, whether to resign or to keep working because I still have two more years' contract with ECLAM. My family was sad about my decision to resign and I never told anybody the reason. I came to town unemployed and I still had kids at school. I went home and later learnt one of my friends died. He was from Guadalcanal and he was really a good friend and a lot of people knew him. We went to attend the funeral service and the dead body was transported by a small ship belonging to Hilda Kari. There were many of us who were good friends of the deceased, we drove up to Ruavatu and there was a roadblock where they stopped us and asked for smoke and betel nut. I gave them knowing they were my good friends. They asked me where I was going and I told them I was going to attend

¹ Guadalcanal Province headquarters, then at Point Cruz.

the burial of a friend. “When are you going back to Honiara?” asked the commander. I replied, “maybe tomorrow afternoon after the burial at 3:00 p.m.” It was on a Monday and we arrived at around 6 p.m. After the dead body arrived we saw five militants with .22 rifles, one bow-and-arrow and two of them with bush knives and wore *kabilatos*.

They sent for me and the women who were doing the cooking passed me the message that the militants were outside waiting to see me. I was afraid so I stood at the door and asked them what they wanted. They replied they were sent by the commander to let us know that after the burial we were to remain there. I asked them why and they said all the coconut trees were cut and fell across the road so we had to remain there and they were going to look after us. I said that I have kids in Honiara and that I was to sleep only one night and go back. The militants stayed with us till dawn and we buried the old man in the afternoon. I then insisted on driving back to Ruavatu and check the blocked road. I drove past but the other side was being blocked and I pulled over and talked to the commander and he said, “you can’t go; all of you will remain here and wait for the ship to be arranged.” I told him we did not bring clothes and we have children in town. He told me they had started to chase people around CDC and that really troubled me, especially my wife and me, as we had family back in town. We remained at the village until Thursday and I was getting impatient as my wife wept most of the time thinking of our kids. I asked the militants if I could go to a nearby village, Rere, and contact my children in Honiara through radiotelephone. They escorted us to Rere and we walked almost two hours to that village. They first asked me what I am going to say and I told them that I was going to tell them that we were held there by militants. The militants ordered me not to say that. I got through to my son and he asked us when we would be returning, he even told me that militants had driven CDC residents out and they now resided at KG Six National Secondary School. The militant told us not to tell them anything more but only that we would be back at home once the flooded river subsided. If we said anything more we would be killed. My wife and I cried as we could not tell our children the truth. I told my children exactly as I was being told by the militants and my wife and I returned very sad and troubled.

It went on for 14 days, we faced hardship and there were nine of us and 12 women. We men were restricted to go to the bush and we were allowed to go to the river and spend the whole day there. We washed ourselves and sun dried our clothes and wore them again.

Sometimes later they sent us a message that the ship *Kaona* would be back from Makira (Santa Ana) and pick us for Honiara the next morning. The ship arrived the next day and we boarded the ship. They did not even allow the ship's dingy to pick us up on the beach; they themselves did that and accompanied us to the Henderson area.

When we returned to Honiara everything was really bad, displaced people were everywhere. I was then asked by Tommy Chan to work as a security for him at his hotel. I had been unemployed for almost a year so I took the chance to work for Tommy Chan to support my family. It was Christmas time and my family left to celebrate it at our village. I kept working with the Philippine women supervising the staff and looking after all the business centers. One Saturday we closed the supermarket at 1:30 p.m., took the Land Cruiser to drop off our staff, drove through Mbokona Road and dropped a man from Western province, and came to the Lengakiki green tank area where militants stopped us with high-powered rifles. They wanted to use the Land Cruiser to go to *MV Ramos I* and asked for the keys. We argued for a while and they agreed to \$500. They butted me with the rifle and continued demanding \$500 and finally settled for \$50. I asked my daughter to give it to them and after she gave them \$50 they released us. I can still recognize the perpetrators today and I think this is the story of the past and I don't want to take action. I appeal to them to come forward and say sorry and we reconcile. I can tell you more stories but I only pick on the main ones.

Mr. Moses Garu's story:

My story begins on the 10th of May 2000 when I was the branch manager for DBSI in China Town. After arriving in my office around 10 o'clock, my office door was not locked and two colleagues were out leaving only my secretary there. I told my secretary that if anyone sought my assistance they had to knock before I opened the door. That morning four or five men entered the office and came straight for my door. I heard the doorknob click and open and I saw the first man with several heads following behind. Seeing them I thought I was going to die and I don't recall anything after that. They brutally slaughtered me, making several deep cuts into my skull. I was lucky it did not reach sensitive membranes. The cuts on my hand resulted in losing two bones from my left hand, my cheekbone was left hanging, and my neck was cut but luckily not deep into my spine.

Maybe because of police presence in the area it all happened in less than ten minutes and they left me to die.

I had a close friend who was also a police officer. He was around in the area and noticed that something had happened to me; but he just stood by next door even though the other officers ran away. After the men left in a car he came into my office and waited for any movement. My secretary who ran away came back in through another door and was sobbing outside my office, which by now was packed with people trying to get a glimpse of what had happened. The officer came in and said he heard something was moving in my office. The door then opened and he saw me coming out of the office, personally it was like a dream. I do not know what happened after the attack but these were the stories he related to me after the tension. When I came out he did not move and I exited the office thinking I was leaving the building but I was actually going into the main office door. I sensed that I was going the wrong door and when I got to around two meters before the main door, he came and held me and asked me if I can just hold on, and said “Moses, if you got that last strength just take one more step.” I responded by nodding my head and then I collapsed and he tried to carry me but he couldn’t because I was heavier than I am now. He asked for assistance from the people standing but nobody responded. He laid me down on the floor and ran outside to find help. Fortunately a police vehicle came and two officers came in the vehicle and they assisted me to the hospital.

At the hospital I sensed a tense atmosphere and I could hear people shouting, “kill those militants!” The two officers were very helpful and they rushed me into the operating theatre. I was very lucky at that time the doctors were all there and they attended to me instantly. The officer who was my close friend, part Malaita and Makira, remained with us in the theater but was in doubt if I was going to survive the ordeal. The operation went on until 12 midnight and the doctor thanked him for saving my life. He left and outside of the hospital people started to threaten him. The next morning he boarded the plane and flew off to Gizo and I remained in the hospital for almost the whole month of June, the same month the MEF and Joint Operation raided the Rove armory. My wife and our two-month old girl received constant threats and there were guns everywhere. They knew where we were and if anything serious happened to any of them (MEF), I would be the price for their

pay back. The whole time I was in hospital I planned our escape from the hospital to my home village.

According to my doctor I was to remain in hospital for at least three months because of the seriousness of my injuries, but because of the continuous threats I requested premature discharge. At that time there were roadblocks everywhere, I could not escape. One morning I was visited by some Anglican Brothers. I asked them for assistance to get me to my village and they said, "If you see us tomorrow morning we will help you get to safety." I prayed that they will come the next day and asked my wife to get me a *tasiu* uniform and a cap so that we can be prepared before they arrived. They arrived the next morning and I told my wife to call for my doctor so he could discharge me. He said I would die if I did but I insisted and told him to write a letter for me to sign and if anything happens to be me after my discharge it will be my own responsibility. He released me with all the required medication and my family and I left. We reached White River and I saw men with hundreds of guns pointing in all directions. At the time no ordinary vehicle could pass the checkpoint. As we drove past the checkpoint at the old crusher area my heart leapt and I cried with joy and relieved that I was now free and alive. This is my story.

Ms Pretty Rose Prokta's story:

I lost my husband, brother and niece. On 2001 December my family and I travelled to our village, Sepa Village in South Choiseul, for Christmas. In January my husband, who worked in the vessel MV *Tomoko*, was on his way to bring us back to Gizo when our younger child became very sick. I sent my little sister and brother to go and meet up with him to convey the message that we were not able to come and will wait for another trip. When he heard the news he followed the two back to our village and the vessel MV *Tomoko* left for Gizo. He stayed with us for several days and planned to go over to Gizo to catch up with the ship. He told me he would meet up with the ship and will come and pick us up on Wednesday 23rd January 2002. He took one of the boats and went across to Gizo so I waited for the day he promised to come and collect us. It was windy that day and I waited for his canoe the whole day until it was dark so I thought the strong wind may have prevented their coming. I asked my little sister to wait for us so that we can travel together to Gizo, but my elder sister told us that she was a week late from work and must get the

first available transport back to Gizo. A canoe came in from Noro to the neighboring village Boe and we arranged for a boat to come and pick up my older sister. I passed on a message with my elder sister to tell my husband to come by ship and not by boat.

When she arrived in Gizo she went straight to where my husband worked and asked for my husband. His work colleagues were surprised since my husband, brother and niece had travelled to our village in a boat a few days before. They informed their manager of this and the manager called my husband's relatives living at Y. Sato and Mahu to check if they were there but they were not which increased fear. He then radioed for us in our village. I told my little sister to answer the radio call and she returned and told me that they have already travelled down from Gizo to our village ten days ago. It was quite surprising why they did not arrive. I told my uncle to call all the station around Choiseul, Vella, Ysabel, Kolombangara and Shortlands, if they have spotted a ray boat with a 25-horse power Yamaha engine carrying three people but they reported that they have not sighted any boat of that description with three people.

I told my little sister to accompany us to Gizo and when we arrived we heard stories that they left Y. Sato wharf at 3 p.m. and went across Ma'are Point where people spotted a 75 horse-power boat trailing them. Whatever happened during their journey between Vella and Choiseul is not known but the three people on board went missing from that departure. We reported the matter to the police and we have had no response until now. To lose three people at once is unbearable and unacceptable; it is a big loss to me and our extended families. They went missing while travelling to our village and my family has lived with this for a long time and have been eager to know exactly what happened. If only we knew where they are or where they were buried it would relieve some of the pressures on us. The worst part is the not knowing. I do not know if their bodies were dumped in the sea or buried on any surrounding islands. We would like to know what happened to them. I would like the Government of Solomon Islands to do something about their sudden disappearance. For nine years now it has been like a scar in our lives that would not heal. On the other hand I would like to thank the Government for facilitating this healing process and giving me the chance to come and voice out what is in my heart. I want to be free from this terrifying ordeal of not knowing why the three members of my family were killed or missing. Thank You.

Mr. Benedict Maesua's story:

My father, five brothers and I were residing at Koibo, a village located east of Honiara, during the height of the tension. Although we were very fortunate none of our immediate families lost their lives, we were assaulted by GRA militants. My father first came and worked in the palm oil plantation in CDC 3 in 1978, which was owned by Solomon Island Plantation Limited (SIPL). At that time I was one year old and I enjoyed my early days there in the plantation with friends; we would go to the creeks, rivers, and went fishing in the sea. It was freedom at its best and I enjoyed it until 1995 when I was about to complete my secondary education at St Joseph's Tenaru. We heard rumors that all Malaitans on Guadalcanal would be evicted and even killed and from then on daily activities changed. Later in 1998 when the situation became very tense, we were nervous and unsure as to what we should do: should we fight to defend ourselves and our properties or should we pack up and leave. It was a very hard time to make any decision. Before the militants arrived people we knew came and warned us to leave. My father told us to go and live with an uncle called Willie who was married to a Guadalcanal woman and lived at Koibo, east of CDC 3. At that time we could not sleep, took turns staying up until morning and it went on for weeks. We were already victims before the militants arrived on 12 June 1999. Our uncle told us to just listen to what they have to say and warned us not to retaliate so we abandoned our intention to fight back with spears and knives. They arrived on Saturday and told us to leave or they will kill us.

The stories we heard through rumors in the past months were true: they had guns, young men were wearing *kabilatos* and holding machetes and they came in big group. We were fortunate because the surrounding communities who knew us well were also part of the movement. It was after this incident that militants severely beat up my father. I do not want to go into details but he sustained injuries to his nose and mouth. At that time the militants from the area all gathered at the station and burnt down houses that were owned by Malaitans. When assaulted and abused some Malaitan people at CDC 2 who retaliated. After boarding the vehicle we looked back and saw our house being burnt down with all the contents inside and saw a lot of people struggling to find transport, women and children crying and they looked traumatized. We were transported to the care centers in town, temporary makeshift shelter for displace victims, at Panatina school, Holy cross and

Multipurpose Hall. From there we waited for Red Cross to arrange transport us back to our home provinces. At that time there were so many things happening in the town and saw the formation of the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF), a group originally consisting of displaced Malaitan victims. I wanted to join the group but my wife discouraged me not to. The MEF officially was launched after the raid on the Rove Armory. I saw people being brutally killed and victims lose everything they own except the clothes on their back.

Mr. Odilia Sikwa'ae's story:

I am from Guadalcanal married to a Malaitan and we live at my home village called Kakabona. Some of my husband's relatives lived with us for quite a long time before the ethnic tension. One Monday morning the GRA went around telling all the Malaitan to leave and by Tuesday most Malaitans had packed and left. The few that stayed back were threatened by the GRA militant on Wednesday to leave immediately for town. My husband accompanied his relatives to town and I stayed back with my children and hid in the bushes. We stayed there until Sunday and I decided to go to church at the Tanaghai Parish.

On our way back my daughter who was eight years old and I were held at LDA by three GRA militants. The GRA were shouting that I was a spear (spy) but without knowing we kept walking. They caught up with us and tied my hand to my back and gun pointed me. Holding three rifles they lead us into the bushes while my daughter held my bag and cried seeing the militants hit my backside and legs with the butt of their rifle and swearing at me. As we went up the hill they told me that that day was my last. Along the way they questioned me if I ever thought of my husband, my children and in-laws and I replied I did think of them in my heart. They led us further into a bush road and told me that they were leading us to a location where they normally executed people. It was on top of a hill and the people who were responsible for carrying out executions were at the top of the hill waiting. My daughter continued to cry and I told her not to cry and that if God's will is for us to die that day then we will die and if it is not we will live to see the sun set. When we reached the top of the hill they separated my daughter from me and told me to stand up for them to shoot me. A GRA sharpened his knife and threatened to cut my daughter and when she saw this she ran to me and grabbed me tightly. They aimed at my leg and shoot towards me but surprisingly the bullet deflected back at them. It was a miracle.

As I looked up to their execution site I saw a lot of fair skinned people and thought they were Malaitans because of their skin color. As we went closer I realized they were men from Guadalcanal with *bakua* (fungus) skin. Shortly after that one of their leaders called from a radio instructing them not to kill us. They were instructed to bring us down to their other camp at LDA and one little boy who was on his way to buy sugar at LDA was instructed to lead us to the camp so we followed him there. A cousin-brother heard that I was held as a prisoner and interrogated by the GRA militants so he came and released the rope from my hands. He told me to get my children and to move in and live with him. We stayed with him after that incident.

Mr. Stone Puia's story:

In June 2000 the sound of guns can be heard everywhere. All the expatriates were evacuated and because my partner was an expat she was also evacuated with our two children on Wednesday and I drove her to the International Airport. I was driving back to my home at White River when men with guns pulled me over and grabbed me out from the car and led me down to a check point at the White River area. I was led down while they shouted "We have caught a live pig." They questioned me in relation to an allegation that I was planning to establish a militant group from Rebel Province to fight against the MEF. *(Victim starts crying and could not finish his story)*

Ms Serema Jaz's story:

In 1999 the tension was starting to build up at the western end of Guadalcanal and I was in preparation for the SISC Examination at Selwyn College. All students were traumatized by the unfolding events. The GRA were telling everyone to wear grass skirt. We witnessed houses being burnt down; we heard gunshots during class periods and in the night and saw people running into the school compound seeking assistance. I actually saw one victim bleeding from a gun wound with the bullet still in his leg. They often seek refuge for their safety in our school which led the militants to demand compensation from the school. All these happened until September, a month we student refer to as "Black September". The militants entered the school compound and demanded all Malaitan students to leave the school. It was announced during the morning assembly by our teacher and was very emotional for us. All the students cried since it was a critical time of our studies, preparing

for our final exam. For our own safety we were evacuated and sat for our final exams in Honiara.

In 2000 I continued with my studies at the USP Center. I was doing my first year semester when another incident happened. Militants came to our house at Panatina. Upon seeing them I ran into the house and hid with all the little children. They came and demanded the keys to our vehicle. A cousin went out to talk to them and they asked for the owner of the home. She told them that they were not at home and without any hesitation they told her they wanted the keys to our vehicle and that if they cannot take our vehicle she will be taken instead. When I heard that I was really scared because there were a lot of rape cases unreported around town during that time. They left without the vehicle but after we told our guardians that the militants arrived and wanted to take our vehicle they (our guardians) told us to leave the situation to them. Towards the evening all the children hid in the house and our guardians both went outside and confronted the militants. They tried to convince them not to take the vehicle but the militants insisted they hand over the keys or they will start shooting everyone in the house. It was a very terrifying situation and the children started to cry. After all the attempts my guardian gave in and the militants took off in our vehicle. We all decided that it was too much and that we have to go back to our villages. I was told by our guardian to take all the children back to our village in the province. It was really hard for me; I thought of my education. I bid farewell to my friends and classmates and it was very emotional as it was my final year but felt I could not take it anymore, that if I do not return to my village something bad will happen to me. Back in Western Province I resumed my studies but could not concentrate. It was really difficult for me and my teachers found my behavior difficult to cope with. This is my story.

2. GIZO

United Church of Solomon Islands, 13-25 June 2010

Mr. Felix Kojamana's story:

One evening on 5 October 2001 I was at Barabarakakasa village and saw a boat coming. At the time we were working as a community and we stopped and rested. The boat came ashore and fired two shots. One warning shot was fired at the village and everyone in the village ran out of their houses. We did not know what was going on. One of my brothers went towards five men and asked why they fired those shots as there were women, men and children. The five men attacked my brother and shot him but my brother tried to escape. There was only one bullet left so they fired at him but missed him. They went back to the canoe and loaded the guns. When they came to the village they started shooting at our engines, water tanks, water supply and properties. An elder in the village, a first cousin called Brian, went to the militants and told them not to harm us. Women, men and children had run away to the women's sacred place. A militant shot my brother who fell and died instantly. By then the militants took most of our valuable things, burnt most of the houses, including church buildings, and kept shooting at people fleeing into the bush.

Somehow I was brave enough to attend to my brother's dead body and after the shooting the militants left our village. Some of the people came out of their hiding places after two days for the burial. During the shootout, while people were running away in fear of being shot, a three-month-old baby fell and died instantly. Since 2001 north Choiseul had not received assistance either from the provincial member, the Government, or Parliament. It seems that no one cares about us. Some of us were asked by the TRC to come for counseling and to be included in this public hearing program. I heard that speaking up will benefit us the people of Choiseul and Western Province, to improve our living standards and become one people. Now I would like to appeal to anyone who is not in good terms with me to come forward so I can forgive you, so we can live in peace and harmony. Thank you.

Mr. Gabriel Tuke's story:

From 1998 to 2000 I worked for Gold Ridge Mining Limited. During that time I went through two incidents. Firstly, I would like to talk about Gold Ridge. I was employed by Gold Ridge Mining Limited as a heavy equipment fitter under UMW, subcontracted to Gold Ridge Mining Limited, and eventually I was transferred to Gold Ridge Mining. The armory takeover took place on 5 June 2000 early Monday morning while I was on my shift. I completed my shift at 6 a.m. and went back to the Camp. After I had my breakfast I went to my room and saw some of my workmates listening to the radio. When I got closer I could hear someone announcing the takeover of the armory on the radio. We were frightened and thought of our families in town and how we could get to them. I needed rest so I went to my room. All of a sudden I could hear heavy gunfire outside my window. My roommate and I did not know what to do. We went outside and we were asked to lie down outside our rooms. By then the Guadalcanal militants started beating up the officers who were manning the mining site. There was shouting, screaming and lots of gunshots. After a while the leader of the militants came and shook hands with us, talked to us and then left us and they went their way. All the company vehicles were taken and driven down towards Honiara by the militants. All we could hear were gunshots at Alligator Creek and did not know what to do. We did not work that day and during the night we remained indoors.

On Tuesday morning, 6 June, 2000, we went to check the workshop but it was already empty. Most of the toolboxes and other things were either destroyed or taken away. While we were there, a white Hyundai bus was driven into the workshop. One of the workers said, "Hey, one of the leaders of the militant group is in the bus." All of a sudden the leader of the group came out and started questioning. Some of the workers pointed at me. They called me so I went. The leader asked, "Are you Gabriel?" I said, "Yes, I am Gabriel." "You are part PNG?" I said, "Yes." They asked me where I lived in Honiara and I explained to them where I lived. The person doing the questioning was in possession of a gun. I did not recognize the type of gun; it was hanging over his shoulder. I was then accused of spying for the Malaitan militants. I was threatened and told not to go anywhere. I would have to wait for them until they came back. I waited all through the night being so frightened and went to see my immediate boss for any possible arrangement for me to go on the first trip on the chopper to town. On Wednesday, 7 June 2000, I took the first

chopper trip down to Honiara so when the militants came back on Wednesday morning I was not there. When in town I did not feel safe so my parents had to send me down to the Western Province on the MV *Tomoko*. I lost my job, I lost all my tools and I came to town with only the clothes I wore. Until I got my next job I was unemployed for more than three years.

In 2001, after the shooting in Noro, I was still unemployed so I came back to Honiara to help my family with the family business at Panatina. The shooting incident took place on Friday and on Sunday morning when five or six boys, whom I did not recognize, who may be related to the victims of the Noro incident came to the house and threatened us. They were not armed but they said they had guns in the Hilux. I was in the canteen when they came in the canteen, took some cash and some goods, pushed me out of the canteen, and asked for the car keys. By then I went up to the house and asked my mum and my sisters to go outside, but they came in after me. My wife and my son were watching me while I was shoved and asked to get the car keys. My dad tried to interfere but was slapped and shoved. They took the car and drove out saying they would come back to burn down the house. That night we were terrified but some friends came and spent the night with us. The militants did not come back. Due to this second incident my family and I had to leave town and go back to the Western Province and the canteen was closed down. I came back to the Western Province in 2003 and managed to get a job and make a living for my family.

Ms Elizabeth Takaingo's story:

I am one of those women who worked as a police officer. I was posted to Honiara and then transferred to Guadalcanal Province Police Post. I lived at Red Beach Settlement for more than 30 years. During those 30 years we lived in peace and harmony with no disturbance from any Guadalcanal people. The ethnic tension started in 1998 through to 2000. In 2000 when the MEF took over the armory, they came to Red Beach and asked us to stay together and to listen to what they would say. On the night of 16 July 2000 while we were asleep we heard gunshots coming from a patrol boat at sea. It was still dark and there was continuous shooting from Dodo Creek to CDC II. The patrol boat then came back and continued shooting in the dark. Bullets went through the branches of trees which sparked lights causing my old mother who was 72 years old to wake up and ask, "Do guns

have lights?” Nobody answered her because everyone was too frightened to speak. The shooting continued until daybreak. Our food storage was destroyed and after the shooting we went out and tried to retrieve some of our foodstuffs because they were scarce at the time. By then some of the men from the Joint Operation came ashore and their leader came to me and said, “You and your family must leave now. This is our last group and you must leave immediately.” We wanted to collect some of our personal belongings but we had to leave. We did not collect much except for a few items like a TV set and my dad’s suitcase. We were driven to town and spent the night at the Holy Cross Hall. Early in the morning on 17 July 2000 we went back to Red Beach to check our houses and I could not believe my eyes when I saw our house burnt to the ground. I felt very bad, they should have killed me, but being alive is more important than properties. I thank God as He was always there for us, comforting us, and helping us prepare our lives. I am happy to be here today to tell my story.

Mr. Nelson Siama Vatora’s story:

On 25 September 2001 at 9:30 a.m., I was with two men building a house at my home village, Canaan, South Choiseul. When I looked towards the road I saw a group of men with guns coming towards us. When they got to us one of the men pointed at me and the leader of the group asked for my name. The group leader asked whether a boy came to see me in the morning of that day. I said, “Yes, the boy came and bought cigarettes from me,” because at that time I operated a small canteen. He asked, “Where did the boy go after he bought his smoke?” I said to him, “I do not know which way he went, he does not sleep, he is from another place.” As soon as I said that he took his gun, put it against my chest. When he speared the gun to my chest, I fell to the ground and could not breathe. The old man whose house we were building came and held me while I was still on the ground and the group of men walked past. When I got my breath back I looked around and seeing the group going past, I got up and went to my house. When I got to my house I told my family that we should run away to the bush. We went and stayed in the bush for about two weeks. One of my sons did not know the first time we went to the bush so he said to me, “Daddy, that group of men when they came back was asking for you. I told them that you went to hide in the bush so the group went and burnt the house that belonged to that boy.” I

gathered from my boy's story that if I was there I could have been shot dead. Luckily I ran away and now I am safe.

When we were in the bush we experienced a lot of hardships. The children were sick and we could not take them to the clinic because those men's village is situated along the way to the clinic. My children could not go to school because of fear of being attacked. These are some of the things we experienced during the two weeks in the bush. After that time until today I would like to praise God. I would like to appeal to those people who harassed me during those times that today I forgive you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In case any of those people who harassed me at that time is here today, please, I would like to shake hands with you today. Before I conclude I would like to thank you, Chairman, Commissioners, and the good people of Solomon Islands as well as Western and Choiseul Provinces. That is the end of my story.

Ms Trina Paroe's story:

My story started back in 2002 when I was in Grade 4 at Gizo Primary School. In the morning we came to school, it was just a normal day for students to come to school and we were laughing, playing etc. While we were in the class three of my girlfriends and me were sitting by the door. We sat by the door on one of those desks. While we were there we heard the first shot and some of the students thought it was a bottle or something. The shooting continued and we looked out of the window towards the hotel. The shooting did not stop but continued. By then we were all frightened and did not know what to do. Our class teacher asked the whole class to lie down on the floor. Our teacher panicked too and did not know what to do but we remained lying on the floor. The teacher then told us that classes for that day would be cancelled and everyone has to go home. We were told not to go to the market or shops but straight to our respective houses so we did. This was a very bad day for me at school. I would like to appeal to those who were involved in the tension, whether you are in the Solomon Islands or overseas, that we were not happy at that time because what you did affected our learning. You had no respect, not only for the students but also for the people around Gizo at that time. One more thing is that we were reluctant to attend classes in fear that the shooting would take place again.

Mr. Nason Poloso's story:

During the tension I lived in Malahu village, which is in the boundary of CDC III in Guadalcanal. We were asked to leave the place because they alleged we were “spears” although we knew nothing about what was going on. We were still in fear of what they said to us when somebody came around and said, “Anyone who is half Malaita must leave the place, if not they will be killed.” That time I was very frightened because my wife is half Malaitan from east Kwaio. We did not know what to do because we lived far from home. One night two men came and threatened us again. They told us that we must leave immediately; if we do not leave they would kill us the next day. By then the whole family was so frightened, especially my wife because she is half Malaitan. We did not know what to do except to pray to God to ask for protection during the night. By daybreak while my wife and my niece were talking, all of a sudden our pet bird spoke out. We kept a bird as pet called Gwenda, named after my last daughter. To our surprise we heard the bird talking, this bird had not done this before. The bird talked out the second time in Choiseul language and said, “Grace reko half Malaita monjo”, which simply means, “Grace, you are half Malaita, you must leave.” My wife sent two of my daughters to get me and when we got together we all cried. By then we could not do much because something drastic just happened.

We tried our best to collect a few belongings and then we asked a small pickup truck from our *wantoks* to take us to town. Five families boarded the truck so we had to leave most of our belongings back at CDC III. At that time our mind was in turmoil. We were all frightened so we cried; even though I am a man I also cried. When we got to town we were looked after by the SI Red Cross at their care center. In Honiara, we were given food and other necessary items and eventually they paid for our fare back to Choiseul. When we got to my village, we encountered many problems: our children did not go to school due lack of money, we thought of our belongings which were left behind at CDC III. We could not do much but put our trust in God for his daily provision.

Mr. David Pitisopa's story:

In 1999 I worked for Goodman and Fielders International as a fitter engineer. I had to leave home early for work because of the distance from LDA to my workplace. Late one

morning I heard that GRA militants wearing hoods were chasing people out from their houses and stealing all the belongings. They lined up and marched innocent mothers and children all the way to White River without any of their belongings, including myself because I was at LDA. I had nothing with me except the clothes I was wearing as all our belongings had either been destroyed or taken away by militants. I lost a good job so I felt there was no future and went home to Choiseul. I appeal to GRA members who did that to me as well as the people who were victims at that time, you used those things and you were happy with them. We have been affected and victimized for the last ten years up until today. As regards to those good things you took away, it was you who used and benefitted from them, not our families. For those of us who lived in a good community at Mamara you caused this, and we are still suffering up until today.

I come here today to forgive you on behalf of my brother, Niger Pitisopa, who could not come because of being sick. He was an employee of Telekom. He was an Administration Manager of Telekom. He bought a piece of land at Rekohove, east Guadalcanal, built a poultry farm which accommodated about 1,000 birds, a sleeping house and a piggery pen to generate income. He asked me if I could go and get some of the things out from that place. He got a truck from Telekom and I drove up to Reko, which takes about half an hour. There we heard gunshots as there were also people from Malaita, Western, as well as other provinces. I had to put God first because militants were in possession of guns and knives and other dangerous weapons. When I got there, most of the things were destroyed; I managed to get hold of only a few things which were left. I was so depressed when I saw what happened. For those of you who destroyed my brother's properties, whether you live in other parts of Guadalcanal or Reko area, on behalf of my brother, Niger, I forgive you in the name of the Father, Son and His Holy Spirit.

Now I will talk on behalf my late brother, Jerry Pitisopa. During that time MEF and Joint Operation took over the state-owned armory at Rove to carry out their operation. They went up to Naha Heights, went to my late brother's house which he built there and pulled the house down. For those of you who did this to my brother the late Jerry and the remaining members of our family, I would like to say here they need school fees and things to support their families. You, my brothers, you destroyed their future. I am very sorry brother, if you are listening to the radio, and whether you are living in a house you built

with the materials you got from my brother's house and you are living in it comfortably, for the last ten years the late Jerry's family had suffered a lot. They have no future; you have got to come out clear my brother, you will see me on the TV and you should realize we suffered very much for the last ten years. My nephews, nieces of the late Jerry's wife, we all suffered. Whenever they wanted, the basic things, there was no money, you took away their future. My brother today, I am relieved I had to go through counseling, so I am relieved because of TRC which organized this program, the public hearing. Today if you are anywhere in the Solomon Islands or overseas, I forgive you, in the name of the Father, Son and His Holy Spirit.

Now, I appeal to you Commissioners, the election will be held in three weeks time, please let the new Government know, that I would like the TRC to remain forever in the Government and the future governments. We are not the only victims; there are a lot of them who could not make it to the hearing, especially for the TRC office to remain, so that counseling must be extended to the national leaders, provincial leaders, church leaders, and whoever was involved in the tension. Why I said this, Chairman, because the people of South Choiseul are still traumatized as the result of the tsunami. I just wonder where is the funding for tsunami victims, as for the people of South Choiseul; we are still living in makeshift houses, so I feel my request should go to Parliament. I appeal for the parties to think seriously about what I just have said before moving forward. Thank you very much Chairman, God Bless Solomon Islands.

Mr. Simeon Vanjua's story:

On 24 November 2000 I was in my village at Canaan, South Choiseul. I was with my family and friends when a group of militants from Choiseul came to my village. I thought they were going to a different direction, but they came straight to me. When they got to me they demanded I give them \$1,700. I told them I did not have any money. When I said this they pushed the butt of the gun at my neck. I did not say anything that time. I later said to them: "I am not going to give you any money today. If you can give me time I will look for money and give you tomorrow." They replied, "We are coming back tomorrow at 10 a.m. to get the money; if not, you and your people will be shot dead." The militants left me and went away. I struggled to look for money to give the militants the next day; otherwise,

my family and people would be killed. I did not have any cash so I thought of coming to Taro. Because of the ethnic tension, the bank agency at Taro was also closed. It was getting dark but the thought of the militants coming back at 10 a.m. the next day left me with no choice but to go to the next village and beg for cash. I went and a few people gave me some money, although not enough to make up the total amount demanded. Some of the people in my village contributed too and luckily we collected the exact amount the militants demanded. The next day, 25 November 2000, the group of militants arrived. I wanted to run away but if I did my family, my people and myself would all be killed so I waited and at exactly 10 a.m. they arrived and came straight to me. I took the money, the exact amount they demanded, and gave it to them. When they received the money they went away. When the people in the village saw this they all ran away to the bush and stayed there for about two weeks. It was hard to find food during those times. When you really think about it, being in the bush without food and other necessary items was serious. By 2003 we were once again free to move around to do our normal business. That is my story for the people of Solomon Islands to hear. This story is based on true events experienced by my people and me, as I am their leader or chief of our village.

I would like to thank the respective people who willingly gave me cash when I went around asking to make up the balance of \$1,700. The money they contributed was really a blessing which I paid to the militants in order to save lives of the entire village. If you are listening in I would like to say thank you very much for your financial assistance during that time. Without your assistance my family and the rest of the people would not have survived the militants. For those of you who were involved in that incident, wherever you are, whether you're around in the crowd or somewhere else, I would like to say I forgive you, "Lets forgive and forget the past." I would like them to come forward, if we meet here in Gizo, or at home, I forgive you, on whatever you did to me, my family and the people of my village. That is my short story and I thank you very much for the counselors. What I went through was a real burden to me and I am now relieved. I went to the National Referral Hospital for medical checkup (x-ray) twice, given medication but was not healed. I was ordered not to reveal to anyone that I gave the militants that amount of money or else I would be shot. Thank you very much counselors for this program. Now I am free and I

feel a lot better. Thank you very much Chairman, Commissioners and counselors. I am now free of everything. Thank you very much.

Mr. Blackie Steven's story:

My story begins in 2000. That year I was the chief security of Omex Logging Company, stationed at a camp on Gatokae called Kogungalaso. It was a new concession so we had not yet cleared the proposed campsite. The company, however, rented a house owned by one of the locals to accommodate all of us employees. We remained at that premise until one late Tuesday evening in 2000 when a group of men came to Penjuku village on board a white 75 horsepower banana ray boat. Nine men were on board and they arrived around 6:30 p.m. as it was getting dark. I was not aware of their arrival and was taking a short nap in the company house. They arrived at the nearest village and their leader briefed them of their mission and of who they were to look for. I usually spent the night at Penjuku village. They had planned to raid the village before coming over to our camp to look for me. They arrived on Tuesday and had planned to execute their operation on the following morning, Wednesday.

Wednesday morning came and they raided three houses at Penjuku village, thinking I would be spending the night in one of them. Luckily I was on an island. They raided the village and, since they were all armed, caused trauma and fear among children and women. People fled to nearby villages for safety. After that incident they warned all the villages not to go out to sea and to remain in the village until they caught people they were looking for. They further warned that anyone failing to comply with this rule will be shot without warning. I was not informed or aware of all these development and remained on the island along with other employees. That morning I sent out the company's aluminum 40 horsepower engine boat to the village to pick other employees to come for work. Arriving at the village, the company skipper met up with the militants who threatened him and took over the boat. Instead of picking up the employees, seven of the militant boarded and were taken back to our camp.

I was at the beach refilling the OBM tanks to send my son over to Gizo for school when the boat arrived. I saw the company boat approaching and it was loaded with more men than usual. I was quite confused because the boat came at a high speed and ditched quickly

ashore although I could see that none of the employees were on board. The men jumped out and ran straight towards me. They wore masks so I could not identify them. I asked them what had happened and they responded in a very harsh manner saying they have come for me. I was confused and wondered who these men were and how they managed to identify me. I asked them if they knew my name and they said my name. I was in a state of shock and tried to think of a reason why they would look for me. They were armed with high-powered guns (M16 assault rifles) and came and stood around me. I stopped pumping the fuel, stood up and tried to ask why they had come for me and who had sent them. They told me to shut up. I stood quietly and their leader clearly stated that they were sent by the Western Provincial government and that the Province had engaged them to provide security for the two provinces: Western Province and Choiseul province. They had come purposely to disarm me.

I argued that I did not have any arms in my possession. They alleged that I had guns, ammunition and grenades. I continued protesting my innocence but they insisted I was lying. I told them that I do not have money to even purchase a .22 rifle. They told me to stop lying or be shot. They claimed that I hid weapons by burying them under my house. Some of them really wanted to beat me, and told me to shut up. We continued talking and I maintained my innocence, banking on my honesty. However, they were not convinced. They instructed me to climb up a tree and remove the company's antenna. I did as instructed since their guns were still pointed at me. I removed the antenna and they instructed me to also remove the second one. I climbed up again as instructed. After I came down they told me to get them the company's two-way radio.

They later asked me if there was anyone from Malaita working with us. I admitted that we have few Malaitan employees working in the company. They then again claimed that these Malaitans are not working for the company but are working as security guards. I clearly told them that all my security officers are from Marovo, two of them are my brothers, and that all people from other provinces worked as heavy machine operators. They accused me of lying and ordered me to take them over to where the operators were. As we were walking towards the log pond they asked me if any of the Malaitans were at the house. I told them that the company's personnel officer is from Malaita and is in our office. Two of the armed men went into the office and lead him out at gunpoint threatening to shoot him. I

intervened and asked their leader not to kill him since he was an innocent man and had no affiliations with the MEF group as they had alleged. I further told him that we had been working together as a team since the company started operations throughout the Solomon Islands and that we were just workers trying to earn money to feed our families. Fortunately they did not kill him and they instructed us to go over to the log pond to meet other Malaitan employees.

We boarded the company's outboard motor and were taken over to our camp on the mainland. As we arrived our colleagues were quite surprised to see us being led towards the pond by the armed men. At the same time the militants' outboard motor also arrived and in it was a cousin of mine from Penjuku village. It was then that I started to reason that these armed men had been misled by someone who had grudges against the company over land issues. This particular person had attempted on two occasions to burn down the company's machines since their tribe had disagreed with the logging operation, but was unsuccessful. As we arrived at the log pond, their leader shouted for all the employees to come out from their tents and that all Malaitans should come out and line up separately at a spot he indicated. Everyone was too scared to come out and he called a second time in a very angry manner and threatened to shoot if they do not quickly come out. Eventually all the workers came out and all five Malaitans stood in a separate line as instructed. It was a very distressing moment for all of us since we knew each other very well. Some of the men started crying since they knew none of us had any affiliation whatsoever with the two warring factions in Honiara. I was instructed to sit and could only imagine what lay ahead of my Malaitan colleagues.

I gathered myself bravely and attempted to talk to their boss, to ask him of his intentions towards the Malaitans. I continued to press and protest their innocence that if he intended to kill the five of them he should kill me first since I knew to the best of my knowledge that they were all innocent. I begged him not to harm them but he ordered me to shut up. At the same time my two brothers working as security officers came and joined the line of the five men from Malaita. Their boss was confused and asked if those two were from Malaita. I told him that they were my brothers and he responded angrily asking them why they have lined up with the five Malaitan men. They responded bravely saying "If you want to kill these men, you might as well kill us along with them." Their boss was baffled at this point.

At the same time a huge long wooden canoe approached the shore filled with landowners and chiefs who disputed the logging operation and fabricated the stories that I had arms. As they were about to land, the boss of the armed men was furious and swore at the passengers telling them that he will shoot them all since he had put out an order that day prohibiting anyone from going out to sea during that operation. He was so mad he cocked his rifle and was about to shoot when the other men from Penjuku village, who accompanied him, stopped him from shooting, explaining to the boss that these were the very people who had sent them to come over and interrogate us. Their boss was confused and angry at the same time at his own boys.

He took off his mask and told me that it was now over. His boys also took off their masks and it was then that I identified all of them. I had known all of them very well. When they fled to the Western Province during the Bougainville Crisis I would give them food and money. I was even angrier at that time and asked them why they have done this to me when I knew them very well. They responded saying I was lucky it was them and that if it were a different group I would have been killed since their order was to find and kill me without questioning. They further declined to reveal the purpose of their operation, only that it was not to disarm me and that when they arrived they knew it was a land issue. However, their purpose for providing security has nothing to do with land dispute matters. I asked them to spare the lives of my colleagues from Malaita, and they agreed, but they insisted that they wanted to check the three large company containers at our log pond. I gave them the keys and they opened the containers and took whatever they needed: food, vehicle parts and tools. They loaded it onto their boat and offered to take it back to the island. As we approached shore they told me that it is now over and they apologized to me.

However, I strongly suggested that we should all go to my house, since they claimed to have been sent by the Western Province Police Commander, to search for weapons so to clear my name of the unfounded accusation. I told them that we have to go to my house to search for the weapons to fulfill their mission since I do not want another group to come after and accuse me of hiding firearms. Arriving ashore they went with me over to my house and did a thorough search in and around and found nothing. They returned to their boats and left. That was what happened to me.

Mr. Rolance Hilly's story:

Before going into my story I would like to briefly outline the core details of the situation during the ethnic tension, especially in Honiara. It was a chaotic time in the history of the Solomon Islands where law and order was crippled and our country was ruled by the barrel of guns. In June 2000 my wife submitted her holiday leave request to accompany our children on their school holiday break. The week prior to my wife's leave, about 7 a.m. on a Monday as we were preparing to go to work, the overall senior boss at Telekom called and asked me what I was doing. I found his question rather confusing but I replied that I was getting ready for work, to which he responded, "Don't go, there was a coup last night." I was shocked. The situation in Honiara was chaotic, masked armed men taking over the armory and the street. By that time my wife and our children had left for the holiday and I was left alone in Honiara. The armory takeover caused fear among expatriates and their embassies arranged evacuation for all of them, including my senior bosses and other expatriate technical people working for the company. In that week all international flight schedules were cancelled because of the takeover, the unlawful activities and the influential presence of militants over the international airport.

I heard on the 11 a.m. news that the international schedule flights were to resume the Monday morning when two MEF militants drove into the Telekom Ranadi compound. They walked straight towards my office. I heard a knock on my door and saw two men wearing camouflaged uniform. One of them requested to speak with me and I invited them in since one of them was a former Telekom employee. I could not identify the other individual. The former employee had approached my office on a previous occasion and I had agreed for him to produce the list of sales service he claimed to have done for Telekom. That particular morning when he showed up I expected that he would provide the list of items he had claimed. He instead demanded the company to pay him \$10 million, claiming that as a result of his termination he could not secure or find another job. I was stunned upon hearing the figure and explained the financial position of the company and that I am not in a position to authorize such large amounts. He continued to argue and I could sense that he was quite drunk. Logically I knew our discussion would turn violent since his voice was now very loud. I stood up and walked out of my office. He was fuming and kicked the door behind me with a loud bang, which was mistaken by my staff to be fired shots.

However, they saw me walking out of the room towards the Administration Department. An employee who worked as a driver approached the two men and tried to calm them down and it was then that the former employee ordered his other *wantok* who was accompanying him to get his rifle from their parked vehicle. He claimed that all of the Telekom workers wanted to challenge him.

As his colleague was returning to our office with the gun, all of my staff ducked their heads in great panic trying to take cover. He grabbed the gun from his *wantok*, roughly reloaded it and pointed it straight at me. I tried to calm him down and assured him that I will try and get him whatever he wanted. He threatened to shoot everything in the office. I rushed back into my office and called my boss at his residence on the Gold Coast, Australia. I managed to reach him and relayed the dilemma. He responded asking me of possible options I can take to make them leave the premises. I told him that I will try to offer him \$1,000. He further asked another option if this was refused. I responded saying I would increase the amount to \$5,000 and that that would be my last offer. I finished talking with him on the phone and went out to the unhappy former employee. He was continuously talking and issued more threats to burn down the office and kill all the managers. I approached him and offered him \$1,000 on the condition he leaves our office. He refused. I offered \$5,000 and still he refused. He told me that he will not change his stand on his demand for \$10 million. I could not negotiate further and things came to stalemate. However, he had enthusiastically lowered his gun from pointing it at me but kept talking and walking towards his vehicle and he tossed his gun in the vehicle. I followed and tried to calm him down.

All the Telekom staff came out after they learnt he had concealed his weapon. I walked to the other end of the engineering block and he went to the other end continually talking to the staff and using abusive remarks. Somehow some of my staff called up the MEF and paramilitary leaders and informed them we could not return to work since he was still in the compound. Not long after a group of men drove into the premises. They were police officers who had joined up with the so-called paramilitary group. They approached me and I relayed the situation to them. In response to the call made by our staff, they were sent over by one of their bosses who requested I see him concerning the incident. I got into their vehicle and as we were about to drive out, the former employee saw me in the vehicle

and angrily came towards us asking the paramilitary men where they were taking me. He said that he will get another MEF Commander [disclosed name] and they will sabotage all the exchange and satellite equipments on Ranadi and Point Cruz. This would cripple the whole communication system in our country.

Upon hearing this I was worried and came out of their vehicle. He told the police officers that they were only junior members of the MEF group and he claimed to be one of the founders of the MEF group. He instructed them to move out and swore at them. The paramilitary group felt humiliated from his remarks and drove off around 2:30 p.m. All my staff could not return to work and not long after I could see the former employee moving around talking and joking with his former workmates. Seeing that I was confident to call him over for a talk in my office, he responded well and I was relieved of the tense feeling I had at that time. We sat down and I asked him if he was just joking, he responded sternly and told me that he was not joking and had meant every single word of his demand. However, he had decided to lower his demand to \$500,000. I was again baffled at the amount and explained that I cannot assist him if the amount demanded is too high. He then lowered it down to \$250,000. I again explained the financial procedures of the company and that only directors are eligible to authorize such large amounts. He refuted angrily saying I was lying and that according to his knowledge I was the one responsible for signing the pay checks. I admitted responsibility for signing the company's pay checks, but for amounts less than \$100,000. I tried to convince him but he stood on the \$250,000 demand.

As we were talking, the company's legal firm, Sol Law, rang me up. They asked me about the situation concerning the demand and advised me to call the MEF Supreme Council members. I called their leader and even he was amazed over the nature of the demand. The MEF boss then requested for me to put [the former employee] on the phone so I called for him to come to the phone and they talked for some time. At the end of the conversation he told me that his boss wanted to see him. As he was about to leave he told me not to leave the premises since he will return. All my staff left at 4:30 p.m. but I stayed on since he had instructed me to wait for him.

As I was waiting in my office, something told me I had to find a way to escape to my family in the Western Province, away from all this hostility and intimidation, for my safety. Therefore, before 4:30 p.m. that day I requested my secretary to arrange for my airfare tickets over to Gizo for the next day. The ticket was prepared as I instructed. The militant then returned around 5 p.m. in the evening and relayed his discussion with his boss, and further told me that his boss had agreed for him to demand \$30,000 from the Telekom company. He argued that his boss has nothing to do with his demand since he was the one terminated by the company and not his MEF boss, and pointed out that I should add an additional \$20,000 on top of the \$30,000 to make it a total of \$50,000 which is his new demand. I looked up to the wall clock and it was already going towards 6.p.m. I told him to return in the morning and I would raise a check for \$30,000 as his boss had agreed upon. He left and Sol Law rang me up and asked me about my plan. I told them that I intend to give him \$30,000 and plan to leave for my own safety to Western Province afterwards on that same day.

Sol Law advised me on the matter and told me to advise him to collect his money from them (Sol Law), by signing the deed of execution, thus he can collect the money demanded from the bank since all the Telekom accounts had been closed as directed by the overall boss in Australia. He came the next morning and I explained the situation, and showed him the facsimile sent by the overall boss in Australia to the MEF boss. He was quite confused but I advised him to follow the procedures for his own good and to collect the money from the Sol Law firm. I signed a check for \$35,000, handed it over to him and he left. That is part of the story that I had encountered during the ethnic tension while working in Honiara.

I encountered several other incidents that eventually lead to the loss of my job. One encounter does not directly involve me but a colleague who was the Deputy General Manager Engineering (DGME) and I was the Deputy Manager Operations (DMO). He was harassed at one point and they removed the company vehicle from him. After the seizure they came to his house that same night and forced him to sign a letter at gunpoint, stating he had fully authorized that particular MEF member to be in possession of the company vehicle. The next day, our boss had proposed for us to meet all the managers in the various departments, basically to talk about office and staff matters. As I entered the room I noticed that my fellow colleague (DGME) had turned red all over as he was in a state of

shock over that incident, the seizure of the vehicle. My boss told me that he had agreed to resign and leave for his home in Australia. My boss turned towards me and asked if I also wanted to resign or to take a leave. All of the managers in the meeting responded reluctantly stating we have families and cannot afford to lose our jobs.

On another meeting he asked us the same question and then I agreed to resign but I asked him to give me time in discussing the offer with my family. After two weeks he called me to his office and asked me if I had thought about the proposal. Little did I know, to my surprise, that he had made an official notification to all the staff that I had agreed to resign. Up until today I do not know why I was asked to willingly resign. I blame the militants for the situation at that time as they pressured my superiors in forcing me to resign. I reluctantly quit my job. The consolation was he posted me to Gizo Telekom.

That then brings me to another situation when I was reinstated. After spending some time in my wife's village I took up the appointment on May 2001. Sometime later that year I had a call from Honiara, from one of the managers, telling me that they had gathered information from the police that militants from Honiara are planning to come over and sabotage Gizo Telekom. I was advised to implement some security strategies to secure the communication facilities. I discussed these with the boss and they agreed that I should engage a security group here in Western Province. It then happened that there was another militant group called the "Black Sharks" operating in Gizo. After meeting with my staff they all agreed that we should engage them to provide security for the company. Such approach was taken in Honiara during the period of lawlessness, where the management engaged militants to provide security at all the senior staffs' residences. It was a time when people made the best out of a situation, to engage militants or whoever was helpful at that time.

However, apparently there was no such thing as alleged by the information given by the police in Honiara, no militants from Honiara came over to Gizo. After three days I scaled down the security group operating the Gizo facilities. After a few days they (the Black Sharks) brought me a bill for \$25,000 for the three days of providing security. I was so shocked and did not expect people claiming to provide security for Western Province should also extort their way through and charge us for the service I thought should have

been free or reasonable. My boss called me up and asked for my opinion. I told him that the amount is not appropriate and I refused to pay and that I am only willing to pay if the amount is relatively reasonable at the minimum of \$3,000.

The militants sent over one of their members to my office. He was from Choiseul and he approached me in my office and asked for the keys to the company vehicle. I told him that I will not give him the keys to the vehicle and he left. I was not scared since I had experienced a similar situation in Honiara with the MEF militants. The afternoon the next day a real militant came. I also could have refused him but I knew that he had guns with him. I sensed his hostility and gave him the keys. He went out and drove off with the company vehicle. News reached my boss in Honiara and he decided to close down the Telekom operation in Gizo. I called up our premier and explained the situation and that Gizo Telekom will close and all form of telecommunication will be shut down if the vehicle is not returned. I passed the same message to other influential high-ranking figures of Gizo Telekom. Our premier was very worried since all the communication necessities in the provincial government and other business houses will be at a standoff. Eventually after a few days the province paid some money to the militants and the premier personally returned the vehicle and handed over the keys to me.

There was another incident in 2000 when I encountered militants in Honiara. One Saturday morning I was watching the famous football league Euro 2000 when two militants arrived and demanded my vehicle. They were not armed and one of them was also a former Telekom worker. I told them that it did not belong to me and that it is a company vehicle. They argued with me claiming that it was a foreign-owned company in which they were wronged. Solomon Telekom is a company owned by SINPF and the people of Solomon Islands. They insisted in taking the vehicle and since it was very early in the morning and I was trying to buy some time, I told them that we should go over to the Ranadi compound, thus they can get one vehicle each. They agreed and instructed me to take them to the company compound. They were drunk at that time. Apparently they had hijacked a Telekom vehicle and forced the driver to take them over to my house at knifepoint. As we were driving towards Ranadi, one of them told me to stop at Ela Motors as he wanted to go and get his gun from other MEF members who were providing security for the Ela Motors premises. I was even scared at that time. Fortunately he returned

without a gun saying his fellow colleagues had taken his gun, so we drove off up towards the company premises.

Arriving there I saw one of our female staff had arrived for work. She tried to talk with me because she knew that these two were militants. She knew of the situation immediately and called the MEF boss. As soon as we arrived they saw a newly bought company vehicle and one of them immediately told me to get him the keys to that vehicle. I told him that I do not have the keys to that specific vehicle and that the person entitled to it has the keys. Trying to buy more time I told them that there are more vehicles in the garage for them to choose from. We then walked across and his other colleague who was so drunk he slept at the back of my vehicle. As we were walking across, two Telekom technicians drove in, both were also from Malaita. That militant shouted for them to stop and as they came out he bravely told them to give him the keys to the vehicles. My two staff argued with him asking him who authorized him to take the company vehicle. He responded that he was instructed by his overall MEF boss and mentioned the name of his specific MEF camp. My two staff continued arguing with him and while this was going on their so-called MEF boss arrived and parked his stolen vehicle outside the compound. They walked into the company premises and asked me what had happened.

After relaying the incident they told the person to leave since obviously the alleged person came all the way from Malaita to join in with the MEF group. They further outlined to him the whole purpose of why the MEF group was formed, briefly stating that they are here to fight for the rights of Malaitans, not stealing from innocent people. He then asked for the other militant and I told them he was sleeping at the back of my vehicle. They went and took him out of the vehicle. In a very short while another vehicle drove in belonging to the paramilitary group. They came to me and asked the same question. I again relayed the story to them and they took over and apprehended the two men into their vehicle and left. That is my story of the second experience and encounter with the MEF militants.

I would like to highlight two things here: first is the harassment of corporate bodies. Corporate bodies like Telekom are here to provide service. Although they are a business in their own right they must be permitted to function without intimidation, harassment and other acts of unlawful abuses and violation. It does not only apply to Telekom but for the

lifeblood of any business establishment in any country, it applies respectively to all in the private and government sector. Militant activities had severe adverse effects on the functions of the corporate bodies and the economy of our country Solomon Islands.

Ms Andy Foaman's story:

I am married and have lived and worked in Gizo for almost 19 years now. Gizo is a peaceful place where women and children move about freely. The year 2002 was one of the worst years of my life. One morning in that year I came down as usual to work, having no inkling what the day held in store. When reaching the office I noticed that only few of the officers were present. The senior boss was not in, only the second in command and five of us. I sat down and continued to work as usual though I noticed that other officers looked unsettled and moving around nervously. I was the only woman working at that time and was in the office when I heard a loud noise that sounded like a gunshot. Upon hearing this I walked to a colleague and asked him if the sound was from a gun, but he did not bother to respond. I walked to another officer and he also ignored me. I walked to a window that faces the airline office and saw someone standing near the drain with a gun. I ran back to the other officers and told them that someone was standing outside with a gun.

As soon as I informed them of what I saw, shots were fired at the back door of our building, bullets sprayed into our office and at that moment we ducked our heads and escaped out of the office via the front desk. Unfortunately, the door was quite narrow and we had to run out one by one. I shoved other officers to go quickly, I jumped straight to the ground without following the ladder steps, ran towards the main road facing the Provincial office, down to the agriculture office near the seafront, around the building where we are now inside, and straight to the hospital area. I was frightened and traumatized by the sound of gunfire. No one should stand and wait for a bullet. I fled for my life from the hospital area towards the netball court where I stood and rested looking back down to the station. There was no movement and sound from that vicinity. I could see people quietly standing and looking towards the station, people in the hospital were also terrified by the gunfire, and women ran with their children.

I managed to reach my house and my husband was there along with three of our younger children; two, three and four years of age. My daughter attending primary school arrived

and was crying, she heard of the gunfire and was terrified. The teachers from the schools sent all the children back to their homes. Arriving home I walked in without talking, straight to our room and sat down quietly. I was so terrified I could not say a word; I froze for a few hours before my mind returned to normal. I stayed at home for a few days before returning to work. As a mother and a woman my mind was really disturbed, I was traumatized, could not think properly and was really unsettled. However, I would like to thank God for protecting my family during that incident.

After a few days at home, information came that everything was back to normal so I returned to work but felt really uneasy. At times when something was dropped onto the floor or on a table or a loud noise was created, it would cause me to tremble in fear and fright and it went on for a few months. As a mother I found it very hard to cope with the incident that happened. I would like to call on the person who did this to us that I have forgiven you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and that God loves you. I am here on behalf of my brothers and we have all forgiven you, I would like to appeal to all the church leaders of the nation and especially those in the Western Province, we must work together to try and help them, reach out to them since I believe that those people have never attended church on Sundays. We must show them love and invite them into our homes and assist them in whatever ways we can, to prevent them from getting involved in criminal activities.

Mr. Alrick Jemuru's story:

On a Wednesday in 1999, my community at Chea village on Marovo lagoon, ward 24, woke up and were about to start on their daily routine and children were ready to go to school when a boat came onshore firing two shots in the air. The people in my community trembled in fear and were confused as to where the shots came from. As we looked onto the beach we saw armed men wearing mask coming ashore. Women and children ran into their houses frightened. These men alleged that we were keeping a member of the MEF militia group. At that time we had an in-law from Malaita married to the daughter of our chief living with us. There must have been rumors circulating that he was a member of the MEF as they came purposely for him. Luckily he left for Honiara on Tuesday and the Black Shark militants arrived on Wednesday. We were thankful for that because if he were

present when the Black Shark militants arrived, we do not know what they would have done to him since they were all masked and armed and crossfire would have killed people or damaged properties.

We told them that he had left the day before for Honiara, but they asked us to show them where his house as they were not convinced. We showed him his in-laws' house and they entered the chief's house with guns, searched the whole house but could not find him. They returned and told us that if they hear we harbored any MEF member in our village, they will return to shoot everyone and burn all our houses down. After issuing their warning they left. We were grateful they left and never returned.

Before I resume my seat I would like to say before all the Commissioners that I am the next person to the chief in our village and that during his absence I was responsible in talking on his behalf. What happened to our community was a huge concern to us. That incident affected our people enormously and the Black Sharks patrolled our islands every day from Bunikalo and around our islands. We were quite happy at first since they provided us 24-hour security and every Sunday they would go over to Bunikalo to check all the boats that arrived. After that incident the people in our community were traumatized, men were scared to go out fishing and our children were afraid to go to school. The main income of the Marovo people is carving where every week they go over to IUPI Resort to sell their carvings. After the incident the men from our village were afraid to go and sell their carvings.

These are some of the effects it had on our daily life. I listened to the speech from our Premier and from the representative from Western Province, they pledged strong support towards the work and program of TRC; it is a very good program. We support this program and it is a very expensive program since it deals with more healing and curing and it does not come cheap as it requires a lot of effort, time and money. The question I would like to leave with you is: what mechanism do our leaders in the two Provinces (Western and Choiseul) have to prevent this from happening in the future? We the innocent people of Western Province and Choiseul do not want this to happen ever again. There should some strategies in place to counter such situations in the future. I am behind our leaders for supporting TRC but would like to put forward that if it happens again, is the province

prepared to counter act this kind of situation? The problem happened unexpectedly and since our two provinces were not prepared, we resorted to engaging militants in providing security for us. This clearly indicates that we were not ready to secure and safeguard the lives of these two provinces. Unfortunately in the end they harassed, intimidated and threatened innocent people of these two provinces; citizens of these two provinces were victims, their needs were not addressed.

Secondly, I would like to also say something to the Central Government. Yesterday during the hearing, several victims asked our Government how long they were to wait for rehabilitation. When natural disaster strikes our Government responds almost immediately to rehabilitate the victims of disaster. However, when it comes to man-made disaster, our Government is reluctant to address the issue. As far as we are concerned, it seems another ten, 20 or even 100 years will pass before the government does something. Most victims need rehabilitation as they have lost all their properties and were traumatized. My question is what the Government will do to address these issues. I am sad to inform the Commissioners that the Act which facilitates this process left us out in the dark, there is no rehabilitation in the TRC Act, there is no compensation or rehabilitation assistance; so what do you have for us as victims. Will we continue to be victims who were traumatised until we die?

When the new Government is formed after August, I would like to call on every people from the two provinces to rally ourselves forward to our 12 Parliament members to amend the TRC Act so it can facilitate the issues of rehabilitation and compensation. It needs to be amended through the legislation. If nothing is done then what we are doing now is just telling stories and the fear and trauma remains inside of us. People who lost properties want to be rehabilitated and compensated. When natural disaster strikes everyone works together, yet when manmade disaster occurs everyone closes their door. I appeal to the leaders of our two provinces to address these for the welfare of the people of Western and Choiseul Province. Thank you very much, Commissioners, I hope the message is clear especially to the people of our two provinces.

Ms Margaret Gina's story:

I was an employee at the Soltai Company at Noro. As we all know, the company contributed a lot towards the economy of this country. I represent the girls who were accommodated by the company. In 2002 most of my girls were harassed by militants. On 18th of March 2002, I called all the girls together to investigate their alleged harassment and threat. I was in charge of ensuring that my girls were comfortable in their stay at the company hostel. One night we heard aggravating remarks addressed to us from people outside. Although our hostel was fenced and we had security officer, they were afraid of guns since the militants were armed.

The militants came and threatened our securities with guns so they opened the gate to the hostel premises. The men entered and the security officers fled. I warned my girls that if anything happened they must remain calm and leave all the talking to me. The militants came and started abusing all my girls around 3 p.m. in the afternoon. Because of that our bosses called them early from work and they returned to the hostel. That evening towards dusk we started hearing more noises and they threatened to return at dark. I advised my girls to remain calm and if things came to a head, I had earmarked a safe location to evacuate them all and whatever happened we must all stay together. That night the militants returned along with their boss in a Toyota Hilux that belonged to the Solomon Island Water Authority (SIWA). They came and parked in front of the hostel; their boss came into the compound and entered our dormitories and asked where all the girls were. He was armed at that time and said he would shoot every one of us. He looked drunk and was quite aggressive. Although we did not know what his motive was, we knew he used to have a girlfriend living in the hostel. He asked for that particular girl and we told him that she was not there. He responded angrily and alleged that we were lying. He went over to the Hilux and returned with his gun. I warned all the girls to stay calm as he entered with his gun, walked around checking through all the rooms and walked back to where I was standing. I called his name and tried to talk to him but he turned his back to me and fired his gun in the air, after which he turned around to me and threatened to return the next morning and that no one will go to work. He told us that he will shoot all the tires of the vehicles that transport us to work daily. I remained calm and he left in the Hilux.

Our lives were threatened and every morning I had to report to our office and inform our bosses of all the developments. Everyone was scared of being intimidated by these armed men and despite the incident, our bosses could only advise me to report the matter to the police although there was nothing they could do. My perspective of the period is that it was evident our lives were at risk, we were not safe even in our own homes, and the institution mandated to uphold law and order was crippled. I accepted the risk to protect the lives of my girls since there was no one else to look to for help. I collected all our girls after this incident and we prayed for protection and guidance. I was accommodated at the matron's house where the girls would bring their blankets and slept over every night after the incident. However, when the incident occurred, all the employees from Malaita, Guadalcanal, Makira, Ysabel and Temotu had already been evacuated. I was left with employees from Choiseul, Western, Vella, Shortlands and Simbo.

I am indeed very happy to come before all of you to tell the story of how we were threatened by militants during the ethnic crises. There are even cases of rape reported by my girls, unfortunately I could not do much since law and order had collapsed during that time. After that incident we were visited by the overall leader of the militants and he told me that they were employed and engaged by the province to provide security for the people of the two provinces. He came purposely to apologize for anything his men had done to my girls. We talked for some time and I advised him and gave him a Bible. I really appreciated his visit and would like to inform you that my girls and I have forgiven you all, especially the men who had threatened us during that time. I would like to call on my good people from Munda, that besides this incident at Soltai, I was also a victim of another incident that happened to my family. I am married to a man from Kindu and my house was also burnt down. I would like to call on the people who had done this to me to kindly come forward so we can reconcile and forgive each other for what had happened.

Mr. Neboti Turukevu's story:

I am married to a woman from Guadalcanal and in 1998 was posted to the Marau Police Station. The GRA group was already formed and had started chasing and harassing people around Guadalcanal. Living at Marau, I witnessed all the activities that happened. The RSIPF had set up operations on all the police station around Guadalcanal to carry out their

operation duty. Early in the month of January 1999, the GRA militants came and chased the overall boss in charge of our station who was from Gela Province but married to a Malaitan woman. He had fled to Honiara and we were left with only officers from Guadalcanal. I was the only officer from Western Province at the Marau Station.

In the first week of June 1999 we worked almost every night from 6:00 dusk to 6:00 dawn. On that specific night I reported for duty at 6 p.m. and noticed that most of my colleagues did not turn up for work. I wondered about their whereabouts but continued to work as usual since I was on duty. At close to 8 p.m. my colleagues still did not show up, so I decided to take a short break to visit two very elderly couples who have a small canteen on the eastern end of the station. It was about ten meters away from the station and everything was so quiet, Marau being a small station. Upon returning, half way towards the station, I heard the sound of people running. It was quite dark and one was coming from behind and another two towards my left and right side. The man who came from behind pointed his gun to my neck and the other two stood on my side. All alone I thought it was the boys from Marau trying to scare me off. They told me not to move and I thought they were prodding me with a stick, I never thought they were bands of the GRA group, so I quickly shook my neck and bent forward causing the gun to come forward and I grabbed it, only then realising it was a real gun (a .22 caliber rifle). The other man standing on my right side discharged his gun but because it was so dark I did not recognize them. I apologised to them and they started assaulting me, shoving and hitting me with the butt of their rifles – all three of them were armed.

They told me to walk over to the station and continued hitting me all the way to the station. They told us to use the back door. Once inside they ordered me to lie facing the ground. It was really quiet around the station. I did as they instructed and remained quiet the whole time. They told me to wait for their boss and one of them discharged his rifle. After nearly 15 minutes I could hear women and children around the station crying and realized that they had been there for some time. After a short while I heard a heavier step enter the room. The leader of the militant group came to where I was then used the butt of his rifle to strike me on the back as I was lying on the ground. He asked me who I was and I responded and told him my name. He ordered me to stand and asked if there was any police rifle in the station. I told him that we had returned all weapons back to the

headquarter in Honiara but he insisted that I was lying, walked straight to me and told me that if he finds any gun in the station he will kill me.

He asked me to lead them into the police station so I took them in, as they continued pointing their guns at me. Their boss ordered all his militants to come forward and I saw for the first time more than 200 militants surrounding the station, armed with shotguns and .22 rifles. They entered and damaged the whole station, removing the docket, police files and evidence exhibits, especially items such as outboard-motor engines. They looted the whole station, cut off the two-way radio and removed the solar panel on top of the police station. I sat and watched as they ransacked and looted the place. After they left and looted all the shops belonging to the locals, they opened the provincial government shed and took all the fiberglass canoes owned by various provincial departments like the agriculture department and health departments. It continued until after midnight.

I heard someone crying as they carried him towards where I was and I noticed that he was a Guadalcanal police officer. The commander told me that he was one of the people who had been working against his operation around Guadalcanal and that he was going to be killed that day. I saw that he was severely injured with blood coming out of his nose and mouth. They left him in front of me and ordered and boys were ordered to guard the two of us while the officer was crying and holding onto my leg. The militants continued looting all the shops and loaded the goods into their boats. After that they went and started the tractors, there were more than 20 of them. They abducted me, took me in their vehicle and drove away. Along the way they continued to assault me and I later learnt that their boss planned to take me to Koli Point to be executed. The distance was quite far from the main road and so he was able to change his mind along the way and we drove back to their village. The ex-officer was their boss and they planned on taking me to the grave of their brother who was killed.

As we entered the village compound, all of them started shouting and they claimed to have captured one of the men who shot their brother. They discharged their firearms. As they lifted me out of the vehicle, I could see women and children running away, and there were more militants there: roughly between 200 and 300 camping around the village. They carried me and tossed me right between the two graves of their brothers and continued

assaulting me until I reached the stage where I could not feel a thing and was no longer frightened. I sat between the two graves and they continued to harass and assault me. All of a sudden, a brother colleague who was also a police officer walked over to me and the militants gave way. He came purposely to ask me which officer(s) shot their brother. As he was questioning me, they continued to assault me. I answered his first question and told him I did not know. The second question he asked I answered that I did not know and was not involved. I pleaded for him to try and understand that I was innocent and I called him “brother”. He responded angrily and told me that I am not his brother and he used abusive language towards my family. He then asked me the third and final question to which I responded in the same way. At that instant someone standing right behind me struck my head with the butt of his rifle causing a three-inch long cut on my head. Blood gushed out and I fell on the ground with my face covered in blood.

I got up and at the back of my mind I told myself that today is my last and they would execute me. They told me that they will show me how they kill Malaitans. They all moved back and I saw someone standing with a long sharp bush-knife. Seeing this frightened me again and the man was crying. They told me that he was the eldest of the two men killed by the police. As he was approaching the former officer standing holding his rifle, I then spoke to the colleague officer and told him that I am not afraid of dying and to shoot me. As he was reloading his rifle I could hear a vehicle approaching at a very high speed and came straight to where I was and fired a shot in the air. It was Andrew Te’e; all the militants moved out, he came and told them if anything happens to me he will kill everyone and burn down the whole village. His boys came and took me away in their vehicle and we went over to Mbalasuna; during that time, all the doctors and nurses from Guadalcanal came to help out with the clinic there. I was taken there and they dressed my wounds. The doctor told me that I must be admitted but being afraid I decided not to, so he told me that he will try and arrange for a transport to take me over to Honiara. A police truck was arranged and I went down to Honiara, stayed for a day in Honiara and on the next day I was flown to Munda and was reunited with my family.

Mr. Isaac Vula Tatapu's story:

The tension happened between January 1998 and mid 2003 when RAMSI came, but I would focus on the period from 1998 to the time I tendered my resignation as the Auditor General of Solomon Islands. Although the capital city of Honiara was the main area affected by the tension, the lives of everyone in Solomon Islands was affected. The three arms of the Government were ineffective: the first being the Legislative, second the Executive and the third Judiciary; hence it became obvious that suppression caused the Government to fail to perform its functions as mandated by the Constitution. The country was in a state of anarchy and we were prevented – especially the office of the Auditor General – from performing our constitutional mandate to work effectively with Parliament on matters of finance affecting the operation of the country. The situation was insecure for the staff and their families with staff leaving work in fear of their lives. Even advisors of the Auditor General had to leave for their own countries. That is what I call suppression of the constitutional function vested in our office.

I will now relate my personal experiences in the course of my work as AG in the year 1999 up until 2000, when the effects of the tension – collapse of rule of Law and order and MEF criminal elements – was at its height. These elements contributed to the intimidations, harassments and extortions suffered by innocent people. For me as Auditor General, people often mistook my position with the Accountant General and as a result I was harassed to make immediate payment or to solicit money. I had to tell them I did not control the government's check book which is the function of the Accountant General in the Ministry of Finance. This caused a few problems because obviously the people performing criminal activities were not educated and had no knowledge of the chain of command within the Ministry of Finance. However, because they were armed and were not trained military people in the use of weapons, it caused fear since a small mistake could result in death at any time. The physical and psychological strain from loss of staff who had escaped to safety was taking its toll on me. I felt abandoned and it caused me stress, agitation, disorientation and dislocation. The Honiara I knew prior to that was a peaceful place. People sitting here in the audience know that Honiara in the past was a place of peace, harmony and tranquility.

One night in April 2000, at the official residence at Lengakiki at about 7 p.m., a group of ten men arrived at my residence and were questioned at the gate by my in-laws who were residing with my family. My in-laws were students of Selwyn College who had escaped to Honiara following the crises. They engaged the ten men who I believe were criminals. They were harassing and extorting money from Asian business houses for their personal benefit. They came and demanded money from us but my in-laws tried to stop them entering the vicinity which resulted in a fight. In the end the ten men overpowered my three in-laws who ended up fleeing for their own lives. This left my family and me in the house and I wondered what would happen to us. Fortunately, I heard one of them advising the others not to break or enter into our house. They marched back towards their vehicle which was parked outside our gate. As they were driving off they threatened to return and burn down our house.

Fearing their return we packed all our movable assets and valuable belongings and moved to our neighbor, also from Malaita, who was willing to take us in for the night. We stayed there and watched closely but they did not return. The next morning we returned to our house. I had a serious discussion with my wife and children over our safety and security as a family and that I should resign and return to my home village in the Western Province. I tendered my resignation to the Governor General who reluctantly accepted my letter but gave me approval to leave with six months notice. That lapsed around June 2001 when I left for my home island of Simbo.

For me, Mr. Chairman and members of the Commission, this had set a new trend with my connection to Honiara. Since 1968 at the age of four I left my home island of Simbo to pursue my education and lived most of my life in Honiara. These traumatic experiences impressed upon me how Honiara was no longer the place I knew since 1968. The changes between 1998 and 2003 occurred overnight. To the perpetrators who had caused me physical and psychological stress, I think the truth has made me free. I call on those who had threatened my family and my staff, we no longer hold grudges and are willing to reconcile and forget the past. I welcome any reconciliation with those who had caused me stress and had forced me to leave the job. I believe I have more to contribute to our Government and our nation Solomon Islands as Auditor General simply in building Solomon Islands as an accountable and transparent nation. The Auditor General is a watch

dog to promote these gestures and to work with the other institutions like the Ombudsman, Leadership Code Commission to enhance good governance.

At this juncture I would like to take the opportunity to call on the politicians and all those taking up governmental executive responsibilities to act with integrity so that we abide by our constitutional responsibilities and the mandate vested on us to uphold what the organic laws of Solomon Islands require of us. We must remain truly secure with integrity in order for us to live in peace and harmony. I would like to commend the churches during the dark days when the Government failed to bind people. I would like to commend the effort of women and peace programs in courageously trying to appease the volatile situation by visiting camps and going beyond the restricted boundaries during the conflict. Our Government should not overlook these and assistance should be given to these organizations because they too were instrumental to peace during the crises in our nation. Thank you.

Mr. Lemek Tovavaki's story:

It happened on a Saturday in 2001 when I reported for duty around 11 p.m. at Gizo Police Station. The Senior Officer-in-Charge (OIC) was a sergeant from Malaita Province married to a woman from Western Province. We were carrying out our normal general duties when the OIC went to check another senior officer who was accommodated at a nearby hotel. While there the Black Sharks, a criminal militia group consisting mostly of Bougainvilleans operating around the Western and Choiseul provinces, confronted him and bashed him up severely, resulting in numerous injuries to his face. He managed to return to the station and requested assistance to leave Gizo. The leader of the militia group warned him that he must leave Western Province or be killed. Because I was on duty at that time I assisted and evacuated him to Kolombangara on board an OBM and dropped him off at Keina village since his wife was there attending a church gathering. Fearing for my own safety, I wanted to quickly get back to Gizo before daybreak after dropping him off. I arrived before daybreak and returned to my normal duty. Only my fellow colleague officers knew of this evacuation trip.

On Monday after that weekend I came down to the market and met someone from Guadalcanal who asked if it was me who evacuated the Malaitan officer to Kolombangara.

Without suspicion I told him that it was me who took him there for his safety because I wanted to be neutral and just wanted to help people in danger and to do my duty as a police officer.

Later that evening at around 8 p.m. some of my friends and I walked up to Gizo Top Hill to a corner shop to buy some cigarettes. On my way out a car was parked outside and in it were foreigners and one man from the Western Province. They took me and put me in the vehicle. I asked them where we were going and they told me just to follow them. I was seated at the back of the driver near the door with two others and one was in the front next to the driver. They questioned me again if I was the one who helped evacuate the Malaitan and I told them that it was me as it was my duty to do so as a police officer for his safety and because the leader of the militant group told him to leave that night as well. They accused me of being an informer for the MEF which I denied and I told them that I am not involved with any of the two groups in any way and that I was a neutral person. When I said this they hit my mouth with a pistol which permanently damaged a tooth. I felt sorry for myself for being accused and beaten up for doing all the right things and began to cry in the vehicle and told them that they will not get anything out of killing me. They drove on and told me that they were taking me to Paradise Lodge to kill me. Luckily for me it was a bumpy ride there so the driver drove slowly which I took advantage of and opened the door and jumped out of the car. I managed to run away from them because they were drunk so could not come after me. The next day I went to my boss and informed him of what had happened. I missed work for two whole weeks for the safety of my life. These perpetrators were three foreigners whom I understand are already dead and one was a relative from the West.

Mr. Thomas Gorakona's story:

One day I was planning to visit other relatives at a nearby village and was half way there when a militia group came and pointed their guns at me. Knowing that I owned a small refueling station business they ordered me to walk back to my village to give them a drum of petrol. They threatened to shoot me if I failed to give them their demand so I did as they instructed. They took the petrol and left but I could not get over the 44 gallons of petrol. It caused me to worry and I grew sick afterwards until today. Thank you.

Mr. Polycarp Kimata's story:

My story begins on an evening in 2001 at my village in Barabarae on North West Choiseul. That evening a group came to our place and as they arrived on the coast they started firing in the air. I did not have any knowledge of the person they claimed to be looking for yet they assaulted me and as I fell on the ground another one pinned me on the ground and asked if I was a boxer, daring me to try and apply my boxing skills with them while they were armed. I was helpless and there was nothing I could do. At that instance I saw one of my cousin-brothers being shot and killed. As he fell he cried out for me to help and I tried to run and assist him but they fired their guns at me. They missed and I fled into the bush as soon as I had the chance to run. I ran and swam across a very large river which normally I would not have dared to swim across as it was very wide.

Arriving on the other side I fainted out of fear and luckily one of my aunts came and helped me. We returned later that evening and discovered that the armed men had destroyed, ransacked and damaged all our properties. That particular group was from Choiseul Province and I knew most of them; some were living in Honiara and others on Choiseul. Back in our village later that evening we discovered that a six-month-old baby fell from his mother's hands as they were trying to escape the ordeal and died. We tried to get the injured quickly to Taro Hospital but discovered that the armed men had also sabotaged our OBM canoes and engines. I would like to call on those men who had done these to us that the incident is like a scar inside of me but I would like to thank the TRC for the healing process.

Mr. Raison Vengavangenge's story:

During the tension my family and I lived at Titinge village on the outskirts of Honiara. We lived peacefully until 1998 when the tension was very much felt around town when I was a grade two student at Mbokona. In May militants came and set up a bunker on the ridge opposite to our village and regularly fired weapons day and night. We could not sleep well at night and lived in fear. During the day a helicopter would hover above our village and militants would be seen walking around with guns. Our parents were very cautious over our movements. We skipped classes a lot and only my father would go over to buy food in town since he was from Western Province. Our mother is from Guadalcanal so we were

scared of being targeted by the MEF militants. On 9 June 1998 fighting had intensified so my family and I moved to Choiseul Province. I can still remember 13 ships left for Western Province at the same time that day fleeing for safety; some of the ships made double trips to meet the demand of service. Arriving in Choiseul we remained in the village peacefully but we encountered several difficulties, especially financially. In December 1998 my family and I decided to revisit Honiara simply to check our belongings and properties at Titinge. Arriving there we discovered to our dismay that our home had been ransacked, all of our properties damaged, looted or stolen. It was very distressful that we were helpless. My story ends here.

Mr. Ambrey Tapata's story:

In 1999 I was at my home village when my brother-in-law sent a message for me to come over to Honiara. Accompanied by my wife, I came over to Honiara and upon arrival went over to see the area my brother-in-law had bought on east Guadalcanal from the Guadalcanal landowners and proposed for my wife and I to reside and look after that area. I built a house on the land and started making our food garden simply to sell at the market. We stayed on the land for nine months and planned to bring our children over from Choiseul. My wife left to get our children from Choiseul and stayed behind. Three weeks after my wife left, I was asleep one night when five GRA men wearing *kabilatos* knocked on my door around 3 a.m. I woke up, opened the door and they pointed their gun to my head. I was in shock and did not know what to do. They asked me which province I was from and I told them my home province to which they told me to leave for my own safety since more GRA militants will come later to chase people from other provinces who were settling on Guadalcanal land. They advised me to leave the next day and they disappeared into the dark. I was unable to identify these five men. In the morning I stayed at home and started to think of ways to get our belongings over to safety and to find possible ways to notify my family in Choiseul of the unexpected warning. I was starting to worry when a relative living nearby came to my house and confirmed that the same five GRA men arrived at their house issuing the same warning.

We both agreed to leave the area for our own safety but we could not transport all our belongings. We managed to come down to CDC 3 and boarded a truck over to Honiara. In

Honiara at that time all the night ships were actively operating to transport people over to their respective provinces. I boarded MV *Lauru* and I and came over to Choiseul. After reuniting with my family in Choiseul, I heard on the news that the ethnic crisis had peaked and more people have fled to their provinces. I thought so much of the belongings and properties I left on Guadalcanal and it was very distressing to learn that all my properties were ransacked, looted and burnt by the GRA militants.

Ms Irish Hivalulu's story:

I am happy to be among the thousands of victims throughout country to come and share with you my story and experience of an incident that occurred in my community at Bareho during the period of the conflict. One Sabbath morning while having our breakfast we heard the sound of an OBM engine approaching our village. I looked out and saw three ray boats approaching our beach front. They came and anchored just outside of Bahero Island and shortly after we saw one of the boats approaching the beach with armed men wearing camouflaged uniforms and hoods (beanies). They came ashore and walked straight towards our house. In a great state of panic on seeing these armed men; a young boy in our village ran around telling everyone to run away and hide. My nephew insisted that we should remain calm and listen to what they had to say so the boy left our houses quickly through the back door and ran towards the mangrove. He was spotted running out and the Black Shark militants from the boat jumped out from their boats and gave chase. Some ran along the road and others tried to flank him, however, they were unable to catch him. For all of us in the village it was a terrifying scenario seeing armed men running up and down the village, children and mothers crying in a state of shock and confusion and fathers' running and leaving their families behind. It was one of the most frightening moments in our community's history; the elderly were even more frightened. There was nowhere else we could think of to take refuge in but the mangrove – everyone fled and hid in the mangroves. The militants asked my nephew who it was they saw running out from his house and he told them that he was a boy from the village and that although we tried to stop him he was very nervous and had to run.

They argued with my nephew for some time thinking that he was the Malaitan they had come to look for. Other village men came and confirmed to them that he was only a boy

from the village and that the person they had come for was married to one of my sisters and was not in the village. The Black Shark group alleged that he was a member of the MEF group. We told them that he had left for Honiara a few weeks ago and that he occasionally came to our village but not often and lived with his family on a small island next to ours. After talking with them they left in their boat to the next island and I do not know what happened to the people there that day.

After they left a lot of question crept into our minds. From what we had heard these so-called Black Sharks were engaged to provide security for us the people in Western Province; however, from our experiences that day we were not impressed since they had threatened the lives of the very people they were supposed to protect. They should have carried out their operation in a manner that was appropriate and acceptable to everyone in the community, considering women, children, and the elderly people. We were instead all treated as criminals. They pointed their guns at everyone causing fear and trauma, especially for us women and children. After the incident we mothers were scared to go to our gardens, the men from our village were afraid to go out fishing and life generally was not normal for everyone. Our church pastor continuously encouraged us to go on with our daily activities despite the incident and the effects of trauma it had on us, and that we should put all our trust in God for protection. On that Sabbath we prayed asking God to give us the peace of mind despite that incident. My story ends there.

Pastor Lemek Kisini's story

I today sit in front of you all to tell my story of the time I was employed at SIPL and residing up at Ngalibiu at CDC1. On 11 June, the GRA militants came and forced us to leave and we escaped that night. Somehow I managed to gather all my children and sent them over to Honiara on board a truck but I remained back to try and look after our belongings. In the morning I went to Honiara with some of our belongings and joined up with my family who were accommodated at a care center at Panatina Campus.

The company manager somehow decided to appoint me as a security in charge of the company vehicles and assets. I was transported back to my division at Ngalibiu, CDC1, and continued to carry out my responsibility as delegated by the manager. One night the GRA militants came after I had locked the main gate so they could not enter into the

company premises where all the vehicles and other equipment were kept. A security officer went out to buy smokes and left the main gate open. The militants who were waiting quietly in the dark jumped out and forced themselves into the company premises and demanded the key to the company shed. When they approached me I told them that the overall boss in Honiara was in possession of the keys, not I. They argued with me claiming I was lying and then angrily ordered me to lie down facing the ground and not to look around. They pointed a gun to my head and forced their way into the shed house and took all the safety equipment inside – mostly clothing, footwear and tools – and removed everything. I feared for my safety so I returned to Honiara the next day. My boss approached me and asked why I allowed them entry into the company’s shed. I responded telling him that my life is more important than those items; after all, most of the company’s assets were insured, but not the lives of us workers. He admitted that he agreed with my explanation.

Later we went up to CDC and transported everything down to Honiara and stayed for some time until we were made redundant. It was then that I decided to return to Choiseul. Fortunately my boss who was an expatriate approached me and reemployed me to look after the company vehicles and asset at Ranadi. I remained and worked again and the MEF group assisted me in looking after the company’s property there. I continue to work until the company made us redundant for the second time and I eventually returned to Choiseul and stayed until today. I am very happy to be amongst the victims retelling their experiences during the tension. Thank you very much.

Mr. Winston Pitavoka’s story:

In 2001 I was in Grade 2 and was only 12 years old when I met an armed rebel group from Choiseul on my way home from school. I was pointed at with guns by these men and was trembling with fear since I did not know their intention. I was abducted and taken to their place at Taravara village where I was tied to a chair with a Japanese type of fishing rope. They told me of the reason I was apprehended as a fully grown criminal and that I will be released after my brother agreed to hand over his gun to them. I spent the night there and they gave me no food or water, I cried the whole night thinking of my mother and father, the fate of being killed was already tormenting my mind.

After some time they decided to take me along with them to Gizo, planning to drop me off on a raft out in the middle of the ocean between the islands of Vella and Lauru. My hands were tied and they left me there and they set off towards the island of Vella. I managed to get onto the raft and as I stood on the raft looking down I saw large sharks circling around the raft. I cried because I was so scared and I thought that day would be my last since I was left out in the ocean thousands of kilometers from the closest shoreline. I was totally hopeless and I thought so much of my parents and could not help myself from crying. The bleak state of hopelessness gave me courage; I prayed and put all my trust in God.

I stood on the raft until I saw a boat approaching, they had returned and I was again picked up. They hauled me roughly on board and we came over to Gizo. Arriving there, other members of their group who were closely related to me came and rescued me. They untied the rope from my hand and helped to transport me back to my village. I was saved and finally reunited with my family. I relayed my ordeal to them and they all cried for my ill-treatment. Today I have forgiven all the men who had done this to me.

3. MALAITA

Airahu Training Center, 27-29 June 2010

Mr. David Maoi's story:

During the tension in early 2000, I worked at the Ministry of Finance in the statistics office as a security officer. I was to be on duty one day and came down to the office when two men grabbed me. I knew they were from Malaita and I told them that I am also from Malaita. They grabbed me by the neck and pushed me against the wall and started punching me on the face. I fell and they started kicking me, even my groin. I tried to save myself by hiding my face and rolled over to the Government Printer's office towards the edge of the concrete cement to prevent my body from further assault. They continued kicking me and I continued defending my face. When I felt them move a little, I quickly got up and ran towards the refueling station in front of the Tongs building. As I ran one tried to flank me on the side and the other tried to open the door to the building. Luckily I hadn't opened the door before they started assaulting me; he later joined in chasing me. It was raining very heavily that time and I was wearing sandals; there were pools of water everywhere and my sandals were slowing me down; a sandal broke and I fell. As I fell, they caught up with me and stepped on my head, forcing my face into a pool of water; they hit my head against the ground; at that time I could not do anything. Luckily a group of people were at a nearby shop, they were my *wantoks*, and were looking after a shop owned by a close relative, Mr. Clement Honi'ora. They saw all that was happening and came and helped me. There were about 20 of them, they came and fought the two men from continuously attacking me. I was shocked when they attacked me and I could not fight back since I did not know if I had done anything wrong.

Mr. Peter Tolota's story:

I was among the thousands of victims around Solomon Islands. I was an employee of SIPL which was greatly affected during the conflict. It was on a Wednesday that we heard gunshots in the station. People started moving out from the area not long after with some of their belongings. We boarded the company vehicle and were transported down to Honiara where we were accommodated at the KGV School. We decided to go and collect

our belonging as the tension was reaching boiling point and we were unarmed to defend ourselves. We did not feel safe even in town so we arranged transport back to Malaita where we found it very difficult. I did not expect to lose my job and properties, but it happened and we had to return. Life in Malaita was very hard since I had not prepared financially. Arriving there, we did not have a house and even a space to grow a food garden. We lived with *wantoks* and there was not enough space to accommodate my whole family. I lived with my brother and my wife and our children lived with her parents. I felt totally hopeless and could not support my family. It was one of the most difficult times in my life and has left a scar on me. In Malaita we heard that the Government will compensate people who had lost jobs and properties on Guadalcanal. I submitted my claim for loss of employment and properties but people living luxuriously in town jumped in and claimed the money for themselves and we ended up with nothing. Despite this, we continued to remain back in Malaita and struggled to make ends meet and to rebuild our lives. When I learnt of this [TRC] program I joined in and it helped me a lot, in healing me as a victim.

Ms Elsie Laumae's story:

My husband and I worked in Honiara. We bought a land from a landowner from Guadalcanal at Gilo near Mberande. We lived together happily and we loved and respected each other. Thinking that nothing of this sort would ever happen, we continued to stay but heard rumors that Guadalcanal militants would chase all Malaitans away from Guadalcanal lands. We approached the landowner and he told us not to go but to remain since he owns the land and no one will chase us out. We saw people fleeing to town. We stayed until we heard and saw the fighting intensify in 1999. One morning the militants arrived around 5:30 and we later found out that our Guadalcanal neighbors had fled earlier during the night since the militants had ordered them to leave. To avoid being caught in the middle of the fighting, when they arrived they fired a warning shot for us all to move away from the place. I was so scared and was shaking. I started accusing my husband for listening to the landowner and because of that we were all going to die. I ran to neighboring villages but the situation there was also the same: everyone was in great shock and panic, children were crying and mothers screaming in fright. The militants told us that if we remained till

evening they would kill us all. We could do nothing since none of us had a vehicle, so we gathered together in an area and waited. We continued to group together and became more worried since it was getting close to the afternoon. Somehow a vehicle on its way to Numbu to transport a bulldozer arrived and we warned him that it was too dangerous to go up. The driver turned the truck around and we all jumped in it and went down to Honiara. It was God who made it possible for the truck to come for us. The painful part of the conflict was that the militants chased us like dogs. We left all our properties behind, leaving us with only the clothes we wore that day.

Mr. Felix Laumae's story:

It was 7th of June 1999, about 5:30 on a Wednesday morning that we saw a man who was severely assaulted with the butt of a rifle by the GRA militants. His face was covered in blood and militants were on their way to where we were. However, they retreated and hid in the bushes when seeing a vehicle. When the vehicle passed, a man from Malaita was walking along the road so they called him over to them. They then grabbed him and assaulted him resulting in serious bodily injuries. Two weeks prior to that all Malaitans had a meeting and were warned of the worst to come; that if we heard gunshots it signaled that the GRA had arrived. Soon after we heard the first gunshots and gathered together. But our Guadalcanal friends and neighbors had fled to the bushes for their own safety. We managed to get one pickup truck and collected everyone together. The idea was to get everyone together and if anything happened we would die together as a family. That same morning we heard that a Malaitan man was killed so we knew that our lives were at risk. When the body was taken away we expected some retaliation from his relatives so we tried contacting the Tetera Police Station but they had attended another situation at Kakabona and there was no police available to transport us to safety. We were caught in the middle with no transport and time was running out. It was a morning of sadness. Mothers cried, children cried and there was nothing anyone can do. If the militants had arrived at any moment we would have been killed. The point I want to stress here is, "Why did it all happen?" I questioned myself for the past ten years, still I could not find the answers; the pieces of land we bought from landowners is only a small fraction of the lands that your ancestors sold to foreigners during the 1900's and the late 1800's and yet we became victims of your actions.

Mr. Ofaisui Suiasi's story:

We settled in Aruligo on an area where my parents and my uncle bought from the landowners 20 years ago. We planted large scale plantations of coconut and cocoa, raised chickens and pigs, and continued to settle there and had no plans of returning back to our home province of Malaita, thinking that we would settle there for the rest of our lives. We fulfilled all the requirements of acquiring land according to Guadalcanal custom: apart from money we gave pigs and other food items which they call *chupu* in order for us to feel free to make gardens and cut trees outside the boundaries we bought from them. Unfortunately, the ethnic tension took place. Shortly before it all erupted, we were warned by the landowners, friends and other neighbors that the movement will chase everyone out from Guadalcanal land. We ignored the warning and continued to remain with our properties until we felt the situation was really tense. We then arranged for a truck in town to come and collect us with our belongings. The truck we arranged could not come because there was a roadblock at Tamboko village so we were stranded for another week.

One afternoon while sitting at home we heard gunshots and were informed by a boy that the GRA militants had arrived and were attacking our neighbors. Fortunately for them, all their women, children and the elderly had been transported to town a few weeks back and the only ones left were the men and teenage boys who stayed back to look after their properties. Surprised by the unexpected arrival, my family and I ran into the bush that evening around 4:30. We hid in the bush the whole night, it rained heavily and our children cried since we had not eaten dinner. We hid in the bush until daybreak. My uncle told us that in the morning all of us must walk down to the main road. We walked past our house down towards the main road.

While we were heading towards the main road we met a three-ton truck loaded with GRA militants going in the opposite direction. I walked with my face to the ground and I thought the truck would just pass us by. Unfortunately, it stopped and some of the militants jumped out. Anticipating death, all of a sudden I felt a heavy boot land on my bum. It pushed me forward and then the butt of a rifle landed on my back. I was so terrified my body was numb all over and my mind could not think. All I remembered them saying was,

“Why are you still here? We do not want you here.” They marched us down to the main road, harassing us along the way.

When we reached the main road, my father approached the boss of ICLAM asking if he could lend us his truck to transport us back to Honiara. He agreed and we boarded the truck. All my family members were told to sit in the middle of the vehicle while the militants stood all around, pointing their guns at our necks the whole way. I sat down without uttering a word, trying to ignore all the happening around us. When the gun was pointed to my head I was just wondering when the militant would pull the trigger. I thought it would be my last day as we reached the roadblock at Tamboko village. The truck stopped and the militants there wanted to search us, but other militant members on board the vehicle claimed that they had searched us, so we were given the OK and we went past the checkpoint.

They dropped us off at Kakabona and told us to walk all the way from there and not to return. My mind at that time was stalled with fear. I continued to walk towards where the Field Force officers were standing without talking and looking back at other family members. Reaching them, my mind returned and they asked me where we were when the helicopter and the patrol boat were sent over to evacuate people around our area. I told them that we lived further inland far from the main road and the coastline; from our place it was an hour walk to the beach. That is why we were not aware of the helicopter and the patrol boat sent to evacuate people.

Mr. John Sihola’s story:

Thank you, Chairman and Commissioners of reconciliation. Before I begin I want to let you know that I lived at an area called Sasari, close to the Ngalibui area, opposite a refueling station just along the main road; my brother bought that piece of land from the landowners. My family and I lived there from 1994 up until 1999 when the tension took place. My brother who bought the land divided the land between us and his sons. We planted food gardens such as tomatoes, beans and cabbages and every morning the women would get the produce down to the Fishing Village market; the income we got was very good; they can collect between \$400 and \$600 just for half a day.

One evening my brother and I were sitting down and telling stories. The landowner was our neighbor – he came over and we were cracking few jokes and telling stories. Later he told us how friendly we were and that we have showed great respect for him and his family, and they loved us so much, but he has to warn us that the rumors about GRA were true, and if we happened to go down to Honiara, we mustn't return for our own safety – the militants are building up near Bokokimbo, Mberande and Reko; as a good old friend he felt that he is obliged to warn us beforehand. That weekend we gathered few belongings and fled to town; over the week we received news from the landowner that our house had been burnt down. We were shocked but were relieved of the news; some of our belongings were also burnt inside well, nothing was left. Our women cried when we heard the news and thanked the Lord for speaking through his heart in warning us; we believed if it wasn't for Him some of us may have lost their lives.

Shortly after the incident, my brother started to fall ill; he was admitted at the Central Hospital. The rest of our family returned to Malaita in MV *Ramos I*. I remained with my brother in the hospital; he died later and I took him back to Malaita and was buried there. I came back to Honiara because we heard the Taiwanese Government had donated money to assist the people who had lost their property during the crisis. I collected the forms and took them back to my family for us to fill and sign together, listing the assets and properties we lost. I met all the requirements for submitting the claim. After submission, I followed up with our claim but could not locate our names on the list.

We have not received any money for the property we lost up until today. It came to the point that I began to think that the money allocated for all the displaced people was not enough for all the displaced Malaitans; possibly that is the reason why some of us did not receive the lost property payment. A good illustration is in how we were served food in the motels we were accommodated in to attend this public hearing; if there is a shortfall in the plates served, someone must have eaten two plates for himself. According to rumors, Guadalcanal people do not want Malaitans to live in Guadalcanal and Honiara anymore.

I wish to appeal to the current Parliament members from Malaita Province to make good decisions; we do not want our children to be victims of such atrocities, where human beings were cut into pieces as snakes or cats. All of us are God's image and humans should not be

in such an inhumane way. I call on our national leaders, especially Malaitans, to refrain from corrupt practices, but to uphold peace and serve their people and our country, Solomon Islands. The cause of the ethnic conflict is still unknown; I am not a well-educated person, however, I believe corruption is also a driving force behind this conflict.

I believe these are some of the things I wanted to share with you all today, thank you Chairman and Commissioners of reconciliation and our counselors for helping us to go through this process. We the people from Small Malaita are way behind compared to other constituencies on Malaita; we struggled very hard to earn income; despite our hard effort we get a small income. I think I will stop there. I would like to thank the nation for listening, the Chairman of TRC, NGO's, Kairi and Martha for your support and for organizing this hearing. I feel better and lighter when I share with you all my experiences. Once again, thank you everyone.

Mr. Ben Siru's story:

I would like to thank Martha and Kairi for their counseling, and also for other countries overseas for supporting our country financially. I would also like to thank all the important people here and everyone present in this building today. I left Malaita in 1975 for Honiara. I worked for the government for three years; my contract lapsed and I renewed my contract for another three-year term. I saved money and then I approached one of the landowners on Guadalcanal because the landowners had been selling land to people from other provinces. I approached my children and my relatives and told them that we must try and buy land from the landowners. Afterwards, I went to Roroni village where I met one of the landowners. His name was Mathew Fafanga. He lived at Ngorabau near the Kautave School. I told him that I am interested in buying land from any landowner. He told me that his land is available for sale but first he will have to consult his tribe and families and would let me know of any decision in due course; that was in 1980. I returned to Honiara and waited eagerly for his response; the landowner sent news for me after meeting with his people.

I came up and bought a large portion of land from him for the price of five shell money and \$3,000. My uncle Mr. John Maetia assisted me financially to acquire the land; he was an honorable Member [of Parliament] at that time and supported the idea of buying land from landowners. The landowner told me that the land transaction has been done through the Guadalcanal custom and that after the purchase he has no any right over it anymore. We settled in 1981 and 1982 on the land. It was registered and subdivided between my family and Maetia's through the Ministry of Lands and Development. I returned to town and continued to work for the Government. The land I bought was quite big so I told my son that I will engage laborers to clear the area so that we can plant coconut and cocoa; he agreed with the idea but warned me not to employ too many people or people from other different language groups in Malaita, simply to avoid having problems with our new friends the landowners. I engaged 12 laborers.

I continued to work in town and built two permanent houses. I let them out for rent and I returned and resided in the new area bought. According to my view, I had planned the future of my children very well and thought nothing would happen. I built another two permanent houses in the area I bought and I invited my brothers and relatives employed by SIPL to come and make their own gardens in the area I bought. I planted five acres of cocoa plantation and two and half acres of coconut. I even bought native taro crops from Malaita and planted them in the area.

We stayed and worked, until one day in 1999 I received a letter from the eldest son of the landowner; the letter was delivered by some school boys from Ngorabau. When I arrived from town my wife told me there was a letter delivered for me. The letter's contents advised me to stop working in the garden and on the land I bought. I questioned myself, why? I bought the land according to the Guadalcanal custom. I called for him to come and explain the reasons I cannot work on the land I bought from them. Next morning he came and invited me to his house and explained to me that the Guadalcanal people are planning to chase every Malaitan from their land, and we should be prepared to abandon the land for our own safety, and they have been planning this for the past two years. It will happen very shortly. It then came to my notice that what I had been hearing was actually true.

I told him that I will gather all my belongings and leave; however, I remained because I was enjoying all the profits from my gardens and from other commercial crops I planted. I remained until I heard that people from CDC2 had been harassed and had fled to Honiara. My wife told me that we should call for our son in town to come up and get all our belongings before things get worse. I told her not worry, we should remain since I had spent a lot of money on employing laborers; we must remain until we completely harvested and sold our produce at the market. We stayed until I learnt that all the Malaitans around the SIPL area had been evacuated to town. I was left alone with my wife at Ngorabau. I heard that there was a road block at Ngalibiu, and no truck from town could pass through. My wife was starting to worry. I told her not to, but to pray and we are God's servant; he will find a way for us to get back to town.

We continued to stay and then one night I heard somebody turning on the tap on one of my tanks. I looked from my window and I could see lots of men standing and walking around my house. I knew instantly that they were members of the GRA group. I can see some of the carrying spears, machetes and bows; none of them were holding a gun. The militants had arrived at my settlement; it was around 10 p.m. in the evening. I then heard a knock on my front door; he knocked for some time and then I heard him say, "Daddy". I was confused and wondering who would call me my "Daddy" when all I can see from my window were GRA militants. I opened the door and I realized that he was one of my cousin-brother's sons; his father was married to a Guadalcanal women. He told me that they had come to burn down my house. I questioned, why? You did not give me any letter of notice. Suddenly one of their leaders shouted from the dark, he told me to shut up and I was too tiny to argue with them.

I told him not to burn my house down but to wait until 5 a.m. in the morning; I will go to my brother at Rorone for my nephews to come and help me get my things to safety before you burn my house down. Their leader insisted that I should pay them compensation if they are to give me time to get my things out. He demanded a shell-money, but I told him I do not have any. They consulted each other for some time and they decided that they will give me until 1 a.m. in the morning to leave. At that time they will return and I am still there, they will burn my house down along with me inside. They left and I stayed and

waited and one o' clock came but they did not arrive. At 5 a.m. in the morning I walked to Rorone village, woke my brother. He came down and assisted me in gathering some of our belongings, using wheelbarrows to get to his place. My wife wanted to get most of our belongings but I told her not to since we do not have a vehicle to carry everything. In my house there was also a small canteen, I left it all behind.

About 1 p.m. in the afternoon, I walked from Rorone to the main road. I reached the main road around 4:30 p.m. I waited along the road and I heard a truck approaching. I was alarmed, thinking it was one of the GRA's trucks. I was trying to hide in the oil palm but I noticed that it was a truck belonging to one of my *wantoks*, Jimmy Rasta. He asked me if I was all right. I told him that everything is not good. He was on his way to Ruavatu to collect some members of his family. He asked me how many of us were still there; I told him, my wife myself and our two grannies [grandchildren]; he advised us not to take our baggage since it may weigh us down but only the clothes we had on that day and to wait along the road for when he returns. My wife my two grannies arrived on the main road and the truck returned and we boarded the truck back to Honiara. As the truck was taking off, I almost lost my breath because I thought of all the properties and assets I left behind. I was in town when news reached me that my house was burnt down the first night we arrived in town. All my belongings I left with my brother at Rorone were also looted and burnt.

I was chased out of my settlement by members of GRA. During my nights in town, I could not sleep well. We were promised money to help as return to our respective villages; when I went to collect the money, my uncles had collected the money on my behalf. I went to the Red Cross and checked with them on when the ship they arranged for us will depart; the ship was fully booked every time, and the person responsible for issuing tickets allocated his *wantoks* to be first on the list. One of my cousins assisted me with \$200 to pay for my wife's and my sea fare. We tried to live in town but the environment did not suit us well. The situation in town was starting to become very tense.

We boarded the ship and travelled back to Malaita. My family and I were dropped off at Kwai island, as I was planning to go up to my brothers further inland. My brothers sent us news that they did not want us to come up and live with them; we should remain there with the people along the coast; there was no place for me there, so I remained along the coast in

a very old house in bad state. I continued to live there with the same clothes that I was wearing in Honiara. It was a difficult situation for me. I was treated as an alien in my own home village. However, being a Christian, despite all these hardships, I left all my trust in the God almighty. He never let me down in times of trouble. I stayed for a week and another relative sent me a message for me to vacate the house and he threatened to kill me. I told my wife to ask her family to bring food for us. One morning, while we were having breakfast, one of my grannies questioned me, “Grandpa, where are the people who always come to visit us while we were in Honiara?” It was sad and heartbreaking for me. My wife’s parents came and told us to move in and live with them. We lived together but we found it very difficult. We squeezed together in one house and food was not enough for all of us.

I was starting to build a house when news came that the Government will give money to displaced victims. I went over to Honiara and submitted my claim for lost property. I waited and followed up. However, for reasons I do not know, I did not receive any money for the property I lost on Guadalcanal. We returned back to our village and tried to run a transport business. We met a lot of resistance from our own brothers. They did not allow us to build a house or make food gardens in our own tribal land; property payments were dished out and we were left out. I went to town to collect rental from my two houses in Honiara but the people who occupied my houses do not have any money to pay the rental. In Honiara, I met the people who chased me from my settlement on Guadalcanal. I met them, shook hands, and they told me that they are looking after my cocoa and coconut plantation. I am still waiting for the lost property payment our Government promised; it is ten years now I am still waiting. If a mother left her home and promised her children that she would return the next day, her children will be waiting anxiously her return.

My properties in town were not destroyed, but all my properties and assets on the outskirts of the Guadalcanal Plains were all destroyed – my three-bedroom house; apart from other valuables, my Datsun pickup was also destroyed. I would like to call on the Government that I am still waiting for you to fulfill your promise in compensating me for the properties I lost on Guadalcanal. If you cannot fulfill your promises, then you must know that we will all face judgment one day before the Lord Almighty. I am willing and happy to reconcile

and forgive the people who chased us from Guadalcanal. In 2009 my eldest son passed away; he died because of stress and worry because our very own people treated us poorly. He returned to Honiara and after building his house, he was admitted at the hospital, his leg amputated and he died on March 13 2009.

I am a happy person because the Lord has changed my heart and mind since there is nothing too hard for the Lord. He feeds me and watches over me daily. I am unemployed but the Lord still provides for me and my family and I believe He does the same for all of us sitting here today, because we are all God's images. I would like to pass a message to my relatives in Honiara I would like to pass my message to people residing in Kobo1, 2, 3 and Mamulele. I would like to remind you my good people about what we have gone through on Guadalcanal. I want you all who have nothing to do there, please come home. If you are a student, I want you to do your best in your studies or if you are employed keep on the good work; but for others who were have nothing to do in town, please come back home, there are many things to do here. Come back and let us develop our province; there are things you can do to earn money – plant cocoa or coconut, make garden; you can earn money to survive. If you stay in town and have nothing to do you will end up committing crime and involved in other criminal activities such as stealing. I would like to call on people such as John Maesitana and George Akotu, if you have nothing to do, please come home. Lastly, I would like to thank Kairi and Martha for their counseling and the TRC for providing food, accommodation and transportation while we are here in Auki to attend this public hearing; you have spent a lot of money in facilitating this program. Once again everyone, thank you for listening.

Ms Jenny Taloi's story:

Good morning Solomon Islands. This morning I would like to share my story with you all. In June 1999, Saturday afternoon, we were attending our church worship program (Seventh Day Adventist); news came that GRA militants had attacked the Mberande area. I left church with my children and we walked home. As we came past the Tetera police station we saw a large crowd of people gathering around the vicinity. We arrived at home and my elder children were already waiting for me at the door, and relay*ed to me the breaking news of the attack. They had killed some Malaitans living around the Mberande area.

They asked me, “What are we were going to do?” According to the rumors, the militants will enter the Tetera areas tonight. I told them that only God knows of the situation and only He can protect us. I gathered my husband and all our children together and we prayed. During the night we could not sleep, we stayed awake all night on alert in case of the attack. Next morning, on Sunday, we felt that we had to move out and gathered some of our belongings, and waited for any available transport to Honiara. Our attempt to catch a truck was unsuccessful; the vehicles that came were there to collect only their *wantoks*. We waited until afternoon before we were offered a lift down to Ngalibiu. When we reached CDC1, we heard that a Malaitan man was killed by the GRA militants; we gathered around with his family to mourn.

Towards late evening on Sunday, we were transported down to town in the huge harvest trucks; we were dropped off at the makeshift shelters at KGVI School. While residing in the care centers, my youngest daughter and I decided to go to the shops in Chinatown. When we entered the shops we saw two men staring at us; even my daughter noticed that they were watching us. I tried to convince them by smiling back but they continued to stare at us at an unusual and ill-tempered manner. From their body gestures, I can tell that they were two angry men. We hurried out of the shop and tried to seek refuge in another but they continued to stalk us. It was then I noticed that one was clutching a chain and another had a dagger. I told my daughter we should walk quickly to a shop near the bus stop. As we were walking towards the shop, one of them intercepted us and blocked our path; another with the knife stood behind us. It was a terrifying moment. The one in front asked where I was from; my daughter witnessed the scenario and started to cry. Somehow I gathered my courage and told them, “I am a Malaitan woman.” As soon as my response got to them. they apologized and left. It happened so fast, several *wantoks* who recognized me came to our aid and asked, “What was the problem?” I told them of the story but the men had disappeared already. It was one of those frightful moments in my life.

My daughter and I got on a bus straight back to the makeshift centers. I informed my husband of the incident and further protested that we should all go home. He took heed of my plea and went to their company’s head office to arrange for our sea fare tickets to Malaita. We boarded *Ramos I* back to Malaita. There we lived with our relatives. Life

was hard at home: there was no land available for gardening; the landowners sent us a letter questioning who authorized us to come and live on their land. I lived with my children and tried my best to support my children, especially with their school fees.

Today, I would like to convey my message to the GRA militants who chased us out from Guadalcanal, and the two MEF men who had attempted to take our lives: from my heart I have forgiven you all, although we had lost most of our properties. I would also like to thank the TRC for organizing this program and also thank the field workers for assisting us and bringing us to come and share our story with you all. Above all, I would like to thank our heavenly Father for looking after me and my family in coming this far; once again everyone, thank you.

Ms Nelly Misiboe's story:

Thank you counselors for making this hearing possible and for giving us the opportunity to tell our stories of the experiences and sufferings we encountered during the conflict. One Wednesday morning we were all at home; my mother was in Malaita and she was to arrive that afternoon, my father left early and will wait for her at the at the Point Cruz wharf. We stayed and my elder son decided to go to town. As he was walking down towards the main road he saw two truckloads of GRA militants. At that time the helicopter was circulating around the area so the militants took no notice of him. He was afraid and returned. We stayed and waited for our parents until it was already dark. During the night we could not sleep; we heard gunshots and noises along the road. In the morning, I woke up and prepared breakfast for my brothers and sisters. I was about to share food for them, when one of the landowners came to our house and told us that we must all leave and go to town. Just as he was warning us, we heard the militants shouting and they were coming straight at our house.

We quickly ran into the room and closed the door. They were provoked when they saw us closing the door; they shot at us but the bullet went under the house. It was a terrifying moment and I urinated at the very instant moment; they came to our house. They smashed the louvers and broke the door down; they entered and ordered us to go outside of the house. We were grouped together and they continued to check other houses around the

LDA married quarters. After checking, they escorted us down the road, pushing, shoving and assaulting us along the way. I was carrying my youngest sister and her weight was weighing me down; at one point because of her weight I wanted to leave her behind, but my conscience told me not to. I struggled to take us all the way. Trees were cut onto the road; we were instructed to jump over the trees. My other younger sister at one stage fell when she was attempting to jump over the fallen trees; seeing her fall, I cried and at the same time struggled to help her back on her feet. It was a very heartrending moment in our lives. I struggled to keep up with my sister's weight until we reach the other side where the Field Force officers were manning [their station].

Mr. Luke Suia's story:

The distance from LDA to Kakabona was seven kilometers. They marched us along the road as if we were prisoners or some kind of a domestic animal that was led to be slaughtered. They were standing all around us as we were marched along the main road; they abused us along the way and sexually harassed my sisters by touching their private parts. We were instructed not to look back or we will be shot at; it was a very tormenting moment in our life. They harassed and abused us in all unspeakable ways that contradict our culture, and they

laughed sarcastically in a state of great enjoyment; they used abusive language and swore at the Prime Minister. I was 13 years of age and understand all the developments that unfolded. When we reached their bunkers at Kakabona, they told us to walk all the way to where the Field Force officers were standing, using abusive language on us; [we walked] towards the Field Force officers. Our parents could not come through because of the road block and were standing on the other end waiting and looking for us. The whole of the time we were looked after by my elder brother and sister. The Field Force officers arranged for a truck to come and pick us up and we were sent to one of the makeshift centers at the Multipurpose Hall.

Personally for me, I would like to say to the people who did this to us, that I have the heart to forgive them for what they have done. I thank the heavenly Father for looking after us through these very bad times. I know the Lord still has a plan for our lives and that is the very reason why we are still alive and still breathing today. I would like to appeal and

encourage that programs like this should be conducted around the whole of Malaita, especially at Malu'u and Atori. I do believe many victims on Malaita and Guadalcanal need to attend this program, thus they can be healed of the scars that left them victims during the ethnic tension. Thank you.

Ms Tafisia Misiboe's story:

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to come and share with you all our experiences during the ethnic tension. Being a mother who has the responsibilities in looking after her children, it was heartbreaking to hear their side of the story. My husband and I had planned to move out of the area before things got out of hand. I went over to Auki on Friday and I promised my children I would return that Wednesday. On Tuesday morning [in Auki] prior to the arrival of the ship, I was at the wharf and was waiting to board the ship on her return trip back to Honiara. The ship arrived in Auki and the people on board shouted at the wharf, "GRA militants have chased everyone from Aruligo and are now advancing into town." I was so scared and worried about my children at LDA since they were left all alone with their father. When I arrived at Honiara, their father was waiting for me at the wharf; as I came out, I asked for the children. Their father told me that the GRA militants had erected a roadblock at Kakabona and no vehicle can pass through, not even the police. We rushed down to White River and saw a lot police officers standing there. We tried to go through but were warned not to go down since it was too dangerous. I was even worried, but cannot figure out what to do. We returned to the police headquarters and waited. I was praying quietly in my heart for God to keep them safe and that they would come out from the siege area.

We waited until it was 6 p.m. Someone came to me and suggested that I should go to Holy Cross and ask if the bishop could assist us to go and get our children at LDA. He replied that it was getting dark already and we should not risk ourselves being shot; we will have wait for the next day. My mind was flooded with fear and worry. Negative thoughts started creeping in my mind, of my children being killed. Morning came and the bishop assisted us to where our house was; we get there but the house was empty and there was no sign of my children. Our hope collapsed. We returned and the bishop told us that we will try and find them in case they were already in town. We first checked at Bishop Epalle

makeshift center but they were not there; the driver advised us to check at the Multipurpose Hall, since some of the people displaced from LDA yesterday were transported there.

When we arrived there, I saw my daughter carrying our youngest child my heart was full of pain and sorrow, since she was the oldest among our children and she had taken full responsibility in looking after her brothers and sisters. I asked them of how they managed to come out from LDA. They relayed the story to us; it was so painful to hear of how they were treated. There were three things that really disturbed me and created a feeling of hatred towards the militants: first, how they treated my children; secondly, when we reached our house there was nothing left and all of our personal belongings were destroyed, damaged and looted; I tried to collect some of our belongings but the militants were also present when we were at our house; thirdly, they chased us out from there and my husband lost his job. He spent his whole life working there, even before all our children were born. He worked there for 20 years, and was expecting to get his long service package on retirement and we could return and settle back in our home village on Malaita.

However, because of the ethnic tension we were denied all of the benefits. It really affected him and all of us, his family; my husband and I had been deprived of the future plan we had for our children. We returned to Malaita afterwards, and he stayed with us for only two years and passed away; my husband died of stress and worry. He left me with eight children, and I have been struggling hard to look after and provide for my children. It is very difficult to raise a family without a father; sometimes people assisted us with food and clothes. As of today, it is now eight years since he left and as for my children, they have all grown up now and I am a little relieved of some of the burdens.

What I want to say now, to those that were responsible for mistreating my children and for all the bad things they did to us, I promised myself from my heart that I am willing to forgive them; time has healed my wound and we should all move on with life. I would like to call on the Government if they can recognize the families that were victims during the crisis, the widows and children who lost their fathers as a result of the ethnic tension, basically to finance their education fees, or give assistance in any form that could help. I believe as of today, in sharing my story publicly with everyone, of the feelings of hatred,

pain and suffering of the ethnic tension, I have been released of the burden; and now I am healed of the wound inflicted in my heart by the tension.

I would like to thank the TRC for organizing this program, Commissioners, secretary and the counselors for their tremendous effort in reaching out to us victims of the ethnic crisis. I am indeed very happy and would like to proudly commend you all for your good and hard work, in reaching out and getting us to come here today. I was surprised when you arranged for a vehicle to come and pick us in our village. I did not expect anything of this kind would be organized; I thought that the experiences we had during the tension will be for us to sort out ourselves. I would like you to continue on with such a program and I believe it is God who puts such initiative into your heart in conducting such a profound and very important program. Once again, I would like to conclude by saying, may the grace and fellowship of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all. Thank you.

Ms Helen Lovilia's story:

I would like to say good morning to everyone who is here today. I am very happy to have come and to share my story with you all. Since I went with my husband to live in their village at Marasa, I found it very difficult. When I arrived at Marasa Bay, GRA militants came and took me away from my husband. At that time I was returning from church service with other women; along the way we sat down for a rest under a rain tree. I do not expect anything like that would happen to me. As we were sitting, I saw all the GRA members lining up in a military style parade. I asked another woman why were those men parading and dressing in camouflage uniforms. As we were talking, a man came to me and said, "I doubt if you will still be alive at the end of the day." Shortly afterwards a militant approached me with a machete and asked if I was a Malaitan woman. I was so scared and remained silent; he told me not to cry, or he will chop my neck off. He took the machete and put it on my neck; as he was talking, another man came and pointed his gun to my head. I was so terrified and thought that will be my last day, since I do not have any *wantok* around to help me. At that time there was nothing else on my mind; I thought only of my parents, but they were far away from me. They tied my hands and marched me down, they mocked and teased me about the marching band-style singing groups that Malaitans normally have in their churches. They continued to mock me sarcastically; one

of them ordered me to face towards him, and he said right to my face that today is my last, and he will cut my throat with his knife. On hearing these continuous death threats, I had already anticipated my death and that I will not see my husband; that he would only come to collect my body for burial.

Fortunately, news reached my husband and he ran to where we were, using a shortcut. With a small knife, he spied from a few meters away; as we came close to where he was hiding, he jumped out quickly and cut the ropes from my hands. As he was trying to free me, the church bishop came; my husband pleaded for him to help us. The bishop came and took me away from the militants to his house. We arrived at his place and he shared with me from the Bible, encouraging and praying with me. I really thank the Lord Almighty for saving my life; that day I thought I was going to be executed and will never to see my families again. Shortly after we were rescued by the bishop, the militants burnt down our house with all the contents inside; we were left only with the clothes we wore that day. When we arrived in Honiara, my brothers helped us and bought clothes for us. While we were on our way to Honiara, on board an Anglican ship, MV *Southern Cross*, my husband was a bit reluctant and feared for his own life. I told him not to be afraid since I believed that no harm will come to him.

As we arrived at the wharf, surprisingly, we were treated very well by the MEF militants. They transported us to my family in Honiara. The Lord provided a way for us to travel safely back to my village in Malaita. When we arrived in Auki, members of the MEF group helped to transport us in their vehicle to my village. My family was shocked to see us. I was surprised at the reactions of the MEF militants; they treated my husband well with love and respect.

I would like to thank you all for organizing such a program for us victims, to share and bring out what we have been keeping in our heart. When I first arrived in Auki for the hearing, the very bad experience I had during the tension was creeping and creating feelings of anxiety within me, but now after I have shared with you all of my pain and experiences, I now feel that my burden has been removed and I am free indeed. I would like to convey a message to the people who have threatened to take my life. I now have peace in my heart and I have forgiven you all.

Mr. Abraham Manai's story:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to come and share with you all my story and experiences during the tension. Before I proceed with my story I would like to thank our leaders in facilitating the TRC, the Commissioners, the trauma counseling team and the NGO group for assisting us. I was born in Marau. I lived there on the island until the ethnic crises erupted. Not long after we heard that one of my brothers was killed by GRA militant on the mainland; he was bashed to death; that was at Makina Parish. One Friday morning a boat came ashore on our island. I was the first to go and check out the people arriving on the boat; the men who came were armed with two guns, a homemade and a pump action shotgun. I said "Good morning" to them but none of them responded. They arrived simply to demand compensation from us, if we want to still remain on the island. If we fail to meet their demand by 6 p.m. in the evening, they will return and kill everyone on the island. I found it hard to comprehend since we have been living there for so many years already. I couldn't eat because I was so scared and I never felt hungry. One of the men in our village went around collecting money from everyone; they demanded \$1000 and we managed to collect it before 6 p.m., so we were saved that day.

Shortly afterwards, another boat arrived at our village and, as usual, I was the first one to get to the boat with my mother; again they demanded \$300 and a pig because my uncle said something against them (GRA militants). I didn't know what to do; my mother wanted to talk to them but I wouldn't let her. We went back to our house and she asked me what they wanted. I told her of their demand and she cried and said, because of your uncle we must try to solve the problem and meet their demand. That evening around 6 p.m. they came and got what they demanded.

On Sunday afternoon, we went to an island called Marapae; we stayed there with no food and axe but though it was a Sunday we had to work to make shelter for us. A thought came into my mind, that I should try my best to go to Honiara to get a 44 gallon drum of petrol; at that time because of the ethnic tension no ship wanted to service the people within our area. The next day the patrol boat *04* reached us at Marau. I was lucky to get on board with others from our island and went to Honiara. I went over to my relatives in town to ask them to help me buy a 44 gallon drum of fuel. I bought the drum of petrol and boarded a

ship, MV *Kopuria*. (it is now called MV *Small Mala*) and went straight to our village on Marau island. The next day after arriving, I took my mother and sisters across to Are'Are on an outboard motor canoe. We arrived there and my uncle welcomed us. I left my sisters there and returned to Marau with my mother in the boat. My wife and children were still at Marau so I had to return.

Back at Marau I spent a night there and in the morning I left Marau for Honiara on board a ship with my wife and children. My family and I stayed at the Multipurpose Hall at the makeshift center for displaced victims; my parents continued to remain back on Marau to look after our properties. While in Honiara I thought and worried a lot about my parents. I stayed for a month in Honiara, then I took my family back to Malaita in Are'Are; from there I boarded an OBM boat and left for Marau again to get my parents. Arriving there I told my parents that I have come to take them over to Malaita. My father didn't want to come with us to but promised that he will follow a week later. I took my mother over to Are'Are and a week later my father arrived. All of us were safe and sound but we lost our assets and properties. As for me, I lost my regular income job at Tavanipupu resort. We returned to Are'Are and had to start all over again, since we do not have any house, asset or properties there.

Mr. Jonathan Puaga's story:

My story begins in 1973 when my husband and father-in-law both worked at Doma plantation and my father-in-law asked the landowners for an area for us to be able to make our gardens. We began gardening and later on my husband's family managed to buy that area from the landowner, where we planted our coconut plantations and everything that would have benefited and sustained us in the long run. The name we gave that area was Tomba, which is near Doma. We lived there having no problems with the landowners and other surrounding villages and our children attended Tamboko Primary School. We planted coconut and other food crops to sustain and benefit us. Then one day in 1999 our children returned home from school and told me that the Guadalcanal children at their school told them that giants from Tatuve will come and eat all Malaitans. My children were scared when they heard the stories. I told them not to be afraid of any giants, they no longer existed, and it was a lie. The next day they came back with the same story again and

later on we heard that GRA militants were fighting and started chasing out all the Malaitans at Tangarare. That news refreshed our memories and we began to reason out the possible meaning of the giants story told to our children at school. [*Rest of story not recorded.*]

Mr. Lore Lonkona's story:

I lived at a settlement opposite the Komukama village, along the Mberande River. In 1975 my father and his brother bought a piece of land there, and we settled there in 1991. In 1995 my father bought another piece of land two kilometers from the Mberande bridge, about three kilometers from our first piece of land. We lived a normal life like everyone else: making gardens, feeding pigs and chickens. About three months before we were chased from the area, we heard that people from Tangarare were fighting with the Malaitans there. We remained and wanted to hear the true story about all the fighting since we have not heard anything from the Government in relation to the problem between Guadalcanal and Malaita, or the main cause behind the tensions. About a week before the GRA militants arrived, I went down to town and saw the Multipurpose Hall packed with displaced Malaitans who were chased and harassed by GRA militants from the west end of Guadalcanal.

Seeing all these developments, I decided to head back to our settlement at Mberande. I got a lift from a Guadalcanal friend and along the way we picked up another friend who dropped off at another village called Kwaleasi close to where we settled. After going past the Tetera area I began to feel uneasy, especially after witnessing the displaced people in Honiara. I asked them what to do if we came across GRA militants and they advised me not speak in pijin but we all should communicate in the Mberande language. When we left the SIPL boundary, I noticed several houses along the road totally burned down with only their frames remaining. I asked, "When did this happen?" When we reached the next settlement I noticed that the houses were also burnt. On our way towards Mberande, we met another taxi coming down and he stopped us and asked if anyone from Malaita was in the car. He saw me and advised me that GRA militants had erected a checkpoint and were waiting further up the road. If they caught me they would have killed me. I was a bit worried and asked my friend if we could leave the car and walk on foot across the bush.

They advised me it was not a good idea because there was GRA camp further up the hill and because they were known to use *vele* (black magic), they could easily see us.

We decided that the other would go first and we follow; he would reach the checkpoint first and when they cleared the checkpoint we would follow without stopping. We saw four GRA members standing along the road and they blocked the road with logs. There were others sitting along the side wearing *kabilatos*. We followed the plan and I was relieved when we passed the roadblock. We reached the main road close to the Mbalasuna bridge and they dropped me off. The driver warned me to be careful next time. I walked all the way up to my place.

On Sunday morning I went over to another Malaita settlement around the area and warned them all of current developments. One night the militants came around my area and tried to scare me but I continued to stay. A landowner who was a very good friend told me to take my children to live with them and if the militants came he would tell them that I am a very good friend; he even offered to take me to the GRA camp and introduce me to the militants so they would not harm me. I consulted my father and brothers on the matter but they advised me not to and I was also afraid and did not accept the offer. I remained there for another week but could not sleep well at night. I told my wife to pack our belongings in case we had to move out quickly. Feeling insecure, since I live a few kilometers away from my family and other Malaitan settlements, we moved out and lived with the rest of my relatives.

After living with families and relatives for three weeks, our women went over to sell our produce at the market; but they had to return very early with a message passed on by police officers at Tetere Station that GRA militants from Weather Coast would attack our settlement that night. After hearing the news we packed our belongings but unfortunately for us we did not have any vehicle to transport us to Honiara. There were around a hundred of us Malaitans, including women and children. We stayed awake all night and it rained until morning. All our belongings packed outside were soaked with water. In the morning while we were trying to select someone to go and find transport in town, we heard people shouting and crying further down. The GRA had attacked other Malaitans living around the Tasimboko area and the people were running to take refuge where we were. We

panicked from the unwelcome news, so much so that my father collapsed and died instantly. We heard gunshots further down the road but there was nothing any one of us could do. The immediate plan was for someone to go down to Tetere Station and get transport. Everyone, including myself, was too frightened to volunteer to go. I eventually decided to go and luckily I was picked up by a car owned by another Malaitan man. He transported me to Tetere Police Station where I was assisted by police officers in a police vehicle down to Honiara.

When we got to Alligator bridge we met a cousin driving in the opposite direction. I transferred into his vehicle and I told him of the incident and that my father had died. He arranged for six trucks to come up and get us all down to Honiara and we were transported to a makeshift center at the Kingdom Hall. We left Mberande at around 5 p.m. the next day. We took another trip up to collect some of our belongings, especially cooking utensils and furniture. After a few days, some insisted on returning to collect some of the things they had forgotten. At the Metapona bridge the police officers told them not to take the risk, since the GRA had erected lot of roadblocks along the main road up to Mberande. We continued to live on the makeshift camp at Kingdom Hall. During our first week in town many of us were admitted to the National Referral Hospital from drinking poisonous water. The GRA militants put poison in our drinking water and tanks.

Pastor Festus Fikumane's story:

I was an employee of the Solomon Islands Plantation Ltd. and had worked there since 1974 as a single man. My wife was also an employee there and we married in 1975 and lived together at SIPL. I wanted to build a church for us to worship, like Abraham and Jacob who built a place of worship everywhere they went. When we started building the church, the housing authority told us to stop since such development had to go through the planning board. I applied through the housing authority and later given permission to build. We built the church with local materials and later in 1992 built a permanent building. We continued to work for SIPL until my wife told me that she wanted to retire. Those days we walked to work and after discussions we decided she would resign and return to our village. I continued to work and a brother negotiated with one of the landowners to sell a piece of land to him. He came to me and we contributed to buy a piece

of land near the Balasuna Division, on a road going up to Tetuva. We built houses and started to make food gardens and raised chickens. Shortly before the ethnic crisis, my brother suggested I retire and help with looking after our small poultry farm. The first shoot-out occurred at Mberande where two men were killed and many houses burnt down. Many people residing along the Mberande area fled their homes for safety. That morning one of them came to where we were and told us of the attack; he was in great state of shock and fear since they were caught unawares. My sister-in-law told a boy to let me know of the situation and he ran to where I was and told me of the attack. I almost fainted because of fear; when the news reached me, we ran back to the house and gathered a few of our belongings and tried to catch any available transport down to town.

The SIPL Company arranged vehicles to take all their employees down to Tetere Police Station. The station was full of displaced victims and some of us were transported down to Honiara that day. A vehicle transporting displaced people came past Binu and the militants shot a passenger who was sitting at the back of the truck. He was rushed to the Referral Hospital. SIPL company trucks continued to transport people down to town the whole day. Some people from far distances were dropped off at the Tetere Station and told to find the next transport down to town. When we reached Honiara they accommodated us in a makeshift center at Kukum Campus. We waited thinking the fighting will stop but it got worse. The GRA militants continued to advance towards the town area and on hearing this I was so afraid I left Honiara onboard a ship to Malaita.

News reached us in Malaita that the Taiwan Government had given funds to help displaced people who had lost their properties on Guadalcanal. I came up to Honiara and members of our church told me to submit a claim for the church building that was destroyed during the conflict. I filled the form, signed it, and gave it to the Ministry of Peace and Reconciliation. My brother also submitted a claim for our property lost at Balasuna. We waited until today but have not received anything. There were lots of false claims submitted and at the end of the day people who genuinely lost properties on Guadalcanal received nothing. Thus, I want to call on our Government to employ trustworthy people in their office, not self-serving people. I call on the people who will be running for this coming election to address this lost property issue.

Mr. Joash Tolo's story:

I live at Fulisango area in Honiara and in 1999 I went over to cut timber at the Mt. Austin area. I planned to build an extra house to rent out in the Fulisango settlement before retiring back to my village. I went up to the bush and we made our camp just near where Abraham Eke was logging at Mt. Austin. Eke was operating a large-scale milling operation at Mt Austin with the landowners at Barana village. I sought permission from the landowners and they allowed me to buy trees and mill them in the bush. We continued cutting timbers there, not having any idea of what will happen later. There were a lot of us Malaitan milling timber there at that time and others were selling them at the timber yards around Honiara. News reached us that GRA militants would attack us. We continued to work until the GRA militants unexpectedly arrived, shooting warning shots in the air. They were armed with homemade guns. We were shocked and did not know what to do since we do not have weapons to fight back. They came through the mountains and along the head of the Lungga River. A Kwara'ae man who owned a 3-ton truck, Mr. Binalu, was at his camp milling timber with his boys using chainsaws and a Lucas mill when the militants arrived. He jumped into his truck and took off without stopping for his boys. He stopped further down the road and sounded his horn to call us so we can quickly flee. My chainsaw was still in a log but I did not have the strength to pull it out from the 16-foot block of wood. I left the saw and fled for my life. We all ran into the bush and caught up with the truck further down the road. All of our chainsaws with a Lucas mill were left behind and the driver drove off. We could see them chasing us on foot pointing their guns as they did. We reported the matter at the Naha Police station and the Police Field Force stopped them from advancing into town. Everyone around the outskirts of Honiara were shocked at the news and fled inland to safe areas where large number of people settled. It was a very frightening moment in my life.

Mr. Christopher Sudenge's story:

One Friday morning in 1999 my uncle and I went to the Yacht Club area to prepare to go fishing. At about 3 a.m. we went out to fish around the raft left by the NFD. We had a good catch, around 200 bonitoes in our canoe, and happy with the catch we decided to return to Honiara. As we were getting close to the shore our engine broke down so we had

no option but to go ashore and fix the problem. As we neared the shore I spotted a village. I told my uncle and we paddled towards it. When we reached shoreline, we pulled our anchor out. As we pulled our boat ashore, we saw someone staring at us and suddenly men wearing *kabilatos* came out from the bushes and asked us where we were from. I told them that we were fishermen and had mechanical problems. They grabbed us and started assaulting us with their rifles. They pointed their knives to our necks, blindfolded us and took us to pig pen and told us that they would consult their boss on what they should do to us. As they left we started crying. During the night, while we were sleeping, an old man came and told us that he can help us. He took us to his home and we asked him if he knows of a way we could contact my brother. He led us to a clinic and asked the staff and we contacted my brother in Honiara and passed on the message. We stayed overnight and very early in the morning my uncle came in a boat with another spare engine. We put the spare engine on our boat and the old man warned us to go quickly before the GRA arrived. We thanked the old man and took off to Honiara. In Honiara we received news that the old man that saved us was killed by the GRA militants.

Mr. Matthew Amali Toma's story:

One Saturday before we were harassed by GRA militants, I was at home alone while my wife went to our garden to collect sweet potatoes to bake in the traditional way. She then went fishing while I stayed at home looking after our children. Shortly after, I took my bicycle and rode off to the station close to an area where an excavator was digging close to a playing field. When I returned I met a friend I knew well. Arriving home, I left the bicycle and walked over to another man from Kwaio, a Malaitan. As soon as we were about to talk in his house, we heard something that sounded like a gunshot, but was louder than the sound of a gun. I quickly ran back to my house to check my two children. As I approached our house I saw two of my children running back to the house after the loud sound. I had three children: a two-year-old, a four year-old, and a five-year old. Only the two youngest came back to our house and I could not locate the eldest one. We ran into the house and hid in a room. The GRA militants came and threw stones at our houses and smashed the louvers, my children were very frightened and were crying.

I decided that we should not remain in the house so I grabbed my three-month-old baby, covering her up with her mother's clothes, and we came out of the house, followed by my two children. As we were about to reach the church area, three men came and blocked us from advancing towards the church building. They stopped us along the way and their commando asked me where I was from. I was so scared and said I was part-Malaita and Gela. He ordered another militant with a gun to shoot me and I anticipated death. Fortunately, that gun could not fire so he ordered another one to cut me with his knife. My two young children were standing right behind me and were crying unstopably and I was still carrying my baby. The man held a hook knife we used to harvest oil palm. He slashed me with the hook knife but I believe God Almighty was with me so the knife did not penetrate deep into my skin.

I jumped out from them and ran to the other side of the drain behind the church. I stood there and called for my two young children to follow and they came quickly to where I was standing. Their mother was walking back from the creek when she heard the loud noise. As she was approaching our house, the other person who was driving the excavator warned her not to go to the station where we were. He further told her that I could have already been killed by the GRA militants. She took a shortcut route through the oil palm plantation and caught up with us. I gave the baby to her and advised her to catch a bus or any first available transport down to town. I must remain and try to find our eldest son who was still missing and would follow later. Most of us watched helplessly from a distance as the militants continued to ransack our house, damaging and looting our properties. Not long after we heard a helicopter and a police vehicle approach and all the GRA militants ran and escaped into the oil palms. We called for the helicopter to come down.

I returned to my house to get my bicycle and rode to the station. There I saw a man from Baegu who was shot and his condition was critical. His little child was also injured, the skin on his face was torn and hanging. He was transported to the hospital in the helicopter. I went around looking for my son and saw a dead man lying near the water pump area. I returned and told his wife since we were neighbors and his body was transported to the hospital in a police vehicle. It was late evening when I found my son.

A company truck was arranged to transport people down to town and my wife and children went all the way to her brother's house at Skyline Ridge. I jumped in one of the trucks and was transported down to Tetera Police Station, and we spent the night there. The whole night I could not sleep as I kept thinking of how they had tried to shoot me and the knife they struck me with. I thought I should have been dead. The next morning on Sunday people were being transported down to town so I jumped in one of the vehicles and followed my family up to Skyline. We lived with my in-laws there and later felt that that area was not safe as well since it was on the outskirts of the town boundary close to Choviri Settlement. We moved out and lived with another relative up the ridge at Koa Hill and arranged to transport the body of our neighbor killed by the GRA to Malaita. When we arrived in Honiara, the daughter-in-law of the deceased person killed by the militants was admitted at the Referral Hospital. She died shortly after she heard of her father in-law's killing so in that one day we had to arrange for two coffins and transported the bodies over to Malaita.

We arrived home and lived with only the set of clothes we wore the day we fled from the SIPL area. While at home we heard of the displaced people's funds donated by the Taiwanese Government and came over to Honiara to follow up with the displaced payment, going from here and there and ended up getting nothing from the money promised. I managed to get my family back to Malaita with the assistance given by our employer, the SIPL Company. My family and I have remained Malaita until today. This is my story of how we were chased out from Guadalcanal and the harassment treatment we got from the GRA militants.

Ms Elizabeth Lado's story:

From 1999 towards 2000, when the tension occurred, I lived with my children in our settlement along the Lungga area. One day my nine-year-old son saw some boys wearing *kabilatos* trying to swim over to our settlement. I was frightened as we had heard rumors about the GRA militants. My husband arrived from the garden around 5 p.m. as it was getting dark, and I told him of the new arrivals and their warning for us to leave the area. We could not sleep at night and in the morning we arranged a transport to take all our children over to Honiara, leaving all our belongings behind: our pigs, poultry, cow, our

gardens, most of our personal belongings and our house. We fled and lived with relatives at Burns Creek. On Thursday we boarded a ship to Malaita. Life in Malaita was very difficult, we did not have a house, no space for gardening and my children starved.

Mr. Jack Daldani's story:

I am a farmer and we came to Honiara because my father worked for the Government. In Malaita when two brothers fight their father will intervene and try to solve their issue in a way where both parties are happy. If the government had paid more attention to the ethnic crisis rather than trying to ignore it and viewing it as a very small issue, it would have been solved at the very earliest of stages. The two rival parties, Malaita and Guadalcanal, are his sons. The Government should recognize the chiefs and elders in the communities and engage us in creating a dialogue to address issues at their early stage. If the Government continues to ignore such issues and not involve us chiefs and community and church leaders in the future, I am sad to say that we are bound to repeat the mistakes of the past and it will be worse than before.

4. TULAGI

Roman Catholic Church, Tulagi, 9-10 September 2010

Mr. Peter Samora's story:

When the incident happened to me I was working as a security officer at the Australian High Commission. After work one day, my friend who was a neighbor and I went back to our own homes together. It was during the height of the ethnic tension so people were not safe. I arrived at my home and rested for a while and then I went to bed. I had my extended family at home with me. At about three o'clock I heard someone calling outside. My wife woke up and tried to wake me up. She tried to lie to them but it was hard as they had heard her talk to me. I thought they were boys from our local area so I got up and walked towards them. Past the first door, I saw them and one of them called my name and said, "What you have said about us was really bad." I replied that what I had said was simple and that what I had said was I told the children who were with me at home to go back home – "and you have to go through the bush as now the Malaitans are the ones with guns. If they know you were here they might come and they might kill you." My wife went into the room and she got \$100 and gave it to them. I was worried and went to my boss and told him that I have to quit work and find any possible transport back to Savo Island. I came home and I told my wife that I was going to my Island Savo and I would take the twins with me and she would stay with the rest of our children. I then walked down to Rove and met my nephew. I asked him where the canoe was and he told me that the canoe was at the Yacht area. I told him to bring the boat to Rove Market for me to take the children across to Savo as it was so dangerous at that time.

That afternoon I took the twins with me and the other little girls to Savo Island. This was a weekend and on Monday I came back. A Langa Langa woman who was a neighbor saw us pulling the boat up at Rove and came to tell me not to go to the house as it was burnt down and that my family were all at All Saints with the Sisters of the Church. I told my nephew to stay put as I was going to get a taxi to All Saints. When I arrived I saw them crying at the Sisters' house and upon seeing me came to tell me how they bashed one of my nephews, burnt the house and took the boy with them. I told the *Tasius* [Melanesian

Brothers] that I would be taking my family with me to Savo and asked them if we could use their vehicle to just look around my house and then get the canoe from Rove. We found nothing where our house used to be and went over to Rove, boarded the boat and left for Savo.

After a week, we were at a fundraising just next to our village, when two men from the group that had pointed guns at me at Honiara came up to me and said, “Well, you are here, you the man who said bad things?” They even said that I was a spy for the Malaita Eagle Force. I told them that I am not a spy and that my house was burnt in Honiara and my nephew was killed. Tension eased after my elder brother talked with them. They told me that they would be watching us. Nothing happened to me after that and we stayed there until we returned to Honiara. That was my experience during the ethnic tension.

Mr. John Kosigala’s story:

It was about 6:30 a.m. one Sunday morning on 5 December 2001. I was still asleep when armed militants arrived in a boat at the village where I was staying. They surrounded our house. My parents were outside where the water tap is to wash their faces and prepare for church, when the militants asked my father where I was. He told them I was still asleep in the house and they came to me at the house. They pointed their guns at me and told me that that they were looking for me. Shocked, I got up and took my shirt, which was hanging on the line and went out. At that moment they fired their gun, making my parents think they had shot me. They marched me to the beach where one held a .22 rifle and the other a pigeon gun. Another person was on the beach with a high-powered rifle and it was the first time I had ever seen such a powerful weapon. They told me to stand at the beach and I thought they were going to shoot me. They then marched me to another village at Reko where they captured one of my brothers as well. With guns pointing at us, they marched us to the beach and my other brother was ordered to pick up stuff off the beach and he did what they told him to do. Those men were drunk and they started to hit me with an empty bottle of SB. I sustained injury and they demanded we each pay them \$500 or else they would shoot us.

People had started to come out of the church but they could not say anything as they feared being killed. An elder brother talked with them and they agreed for us to pay \$200 each. The people came and started contributing to the sum needed and gave it to the militants. The militants then got money from the youths and from other people in the village, ordered us to follow them, ordered me to get into the boat before we left. I was covered with blood and when in the canoe, they took us to the clinic and they got me dressed and they told me to get back into the canoe and we went to another place. We arrived at the village and they fired their rifles and they broke into the houses and took all the belongings and ordered me to carry all the things to the canoe. I was just doing what they had told me to do. After they got everything into the canoe; they told me I was free to go and I thanked them. When I arrived home they washed me with hot water to ease the swelling. I suffered severe pain to my teeth. That is the end of the story and before finishing off I would like to say thank you to you and the TRC officials for coming and for availing us of this program that we hope would help us to try to restore or rehabilitate ourselves and families.

Mr. John Fataka's story:

Thank you for allowing me to tell you my story and what had happened to me. I was working in a shop at the height of the ethnic tension. I decided to go to the village in West Guadalcanal to get my father as he was from Malaita. At the time no truck from west Guadalcanal could come over to Honiara except vehicles belonging to the Anglican Melanesian Brotherhood. I went to the Mission Place and boarded a truck to Kakabona. I saw the roadblocks for the first time and the first one we passed belonged to the Police Field Force. The second roadblock we passed belonged to the GRA on our way to Aruligo. We passed another roadblock in what used to be ICLAM and we drove to Kohimarama and I dropped off there as my village was at the other side. The Brothers asked me what I intended to do and I told them I wanted to walk to the village where we stayed. They drove on and I went to the village. On the way I came to a place called Kondevele and met with three GRA vehicles. One vehicle belonged to Telekom, one belonged to the Police and the other one I could not identify. They stopped beside me and a commander asked me where I was going and I told him that I was going to get my father. He told me that they would come after me. They left me and I went to the village.

I then arrived at the village and told my parents my experience on the road. I told my mother I had to take my father as he was from Malaita. At that moment the militants came in front of the road and they stopped and they demanded me to pay a compensation of \$150 and a pig. I had to find a pig so we went around finding places where we could get a pig. After some time we managed to get a pig and we gave them the pig. At Kohimarama they heard news that really made them angry so they kicked me, punched me and they insulted me. They continued doing this repeatedly. After that a woman from Savo who was a neighbor asked my mother to take me to her home and kept me that day. The next day the militants came back for me and I was sitting outside, not expecting them to arrive at the place where I was staying. I was facing the sea and at that time I was thinking and praying to God to help me get out of that place. I then had a feeling and it felt like someone was just behind me and when I turned I saw men with knives, spears and guns of all kinds. They had already surrounded the place where I was staying. The first thing they told me was, "Are you John?" When I said yes they started bashing me up at that village Tamale. They tied my hands and legs and dragged me through the road to my mother's village. There was a vehicle there and there they bashed me in the jaw four times. After that they carried me and put me inside a truck and took me to Tamboko, a village next to Kakabona. Arriving at Tamboko, I could hear they were going to kill me. At last I was sitting at a house purposely built to question a prisoner to be killed. I was sitting there when I heard a voice telling them to release me and to find out any reason. When I heard that voice I was really happy and thankful to God as I could have died that day. I thank God for that, and then I sat down and they did not allow me to look anywhere but their eyes. After awhile, two commanders came and they took my hands and released me.

They untied the ropes from my hands, released me and drove me back to Kohimarama. I thanked God for what had happened. We went and met with the Head Brother at Tabalia and he told them to release me as I am his son. I did not go to my mother's village; instead they drove me to Tamale village where the woman from Savo was staying. I stayed with her but could not eat as my jaws were badly hurt and my whole body was in pain. The whole day I could not eat any food so this woman baked a yellow coconut and she took the water and fed me with it.

I planned to leave Guadalcanal and prayed to God to show me the way out. At last something happened. A boat from Savo went ashore at Tamale village to find petrol. I think it was made available to me by God to rescue me. I walked to the boat and asked them and they told me that they would be going back and I asked them if they could pick me up. From that time I realized that I have to thank God for the opportunity. The men loaded the petrol onto the boat and we left for Savo where I stayed with my brother-in-law and at Palola village with a sister. I asked my brother-in-law if he could find me transportation to Honiara as it was risky there. He managed to find a police officer from Savo who said he could take me. So early the next morning a police officer got up and drove his boat to the other place where I was staying and he picked me up. I got into the boat and we crossed over to Honiara.

I was so thankful to God to have helped me and I want to tell the people who had caused me this pain and, if they are listening today, that I am sorry if I have wronged them in any way. Please forgive me and if they heard my name please if they want to reconcile with me, please come forward. If they wish to make reconciliation according to our custom, church or other modes, please do not hesitate to contact me. I would be grateful for that and want to thank those who had helped me through those hard times. I do not have much to give you as a form of appreciation, only God would help you and in my prayers you are remembered for what you had done to save my life.

Ms Annie Kauroa's story:

In 1998 there was a shoot-out at Mahu village in Kakabona between the Police Field Force and the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (GRA). Early the next morning my husband woke and walked from Mahu to White River to catch a bus to work at Goodman Fielders. When he was on his way and he was right at Tanavasa village, he saw them burning the school and he came back to the village. He went house to house in Mahu village and told everyone that they were coming. I saw militants running through the village and women and children crying. It was sad seeing them being scattered all over the place and some even ran to the main road as they were looking for a place to hide. It was a bad and sad time for all of us. My husband came and woke me up from bed and told me that we were about to be killed and I panicked in terror. He got the outboard motor, tank and hoses of

the outboard motor and took them to the beach. We did not know what to do and my children were crying and asking me where they would hide from the militants. I could not also tell them which place is safe so they followed what their dad told them to hide in a shed, which we used to store our canoe. They called me to go in with them and I thought I was carrying my two children but it was only one and the other one was on the bed. At that time I did not know what really happened to me and I turned and saw the other one was still on the bed and he was still sleeping. I carried both of them, one on my left and the other one on my right side, and then I covered them properly and we went out of the house.

We then went out to the beach and we got inside the boat and then my husband pushed the boat and we got out to a little deeper area. At the same time we saw the patrol boat come out of the point and I told my husband to hurry before we might be killed. We went past Bonagi, Visale and then we went across to Savo and then went ashore at Tulagi. When we arrived ashore, I went to my sister and wept bitterly. To worsen the situation, we had nothing; we did not take anything with us and my little babies only had what they were wearing: shirts and the other little things. We had nothing at all except the boat and outboard motor engine. Even the Red Cross did not help us and only my family helped. I had filled up forms that might have helped us but nothing had happened to me. I am a woman I should not be building a house for my family but actually I need to have a home for my family to stay. I had two houses and I had lost everything inside and even the houses. I have lost everything and I am appealing to the Government to help TRC with its work; and it must stay on to help those of us who had families and homes that were being destroyed. That is all I have to say and I want to thank you for your help.

Mr. John Geredala's story:

Between September 1999 and June 2000, several things happened to me while I was in my village where I was chairperson of the [village committee]. The first incident happened one evening when a group of 18 men arrived on the field. They passed us and I just greeted them and asked them where they would be going. They reached the middle of the field and came back our way, flashing their torches and charging towards us. It was 8:00 p.m. in the evening. They came and told me that I was one of the men in Savo they were searching for. As they came closer, all my friends whom we were sitting together fled. I was alone,

standing, and the first person to approach me was armed with a pistol while another one torched me and they accused me of insulting them when they came around in the village. I told them that I have nothing with them and that I was finished working as a Member. After they left me, they went and took one of my cousin-sisters to marry one of their men who had a disease at that time. After that they returned to my village but did not come to my house.

The second incident happened after attending church service; returning home I met a group standing in front of my house. As it was daytime I saw them clearly but I could not recognize any of them. Most of them were armed with homemade guns and I think two of them were armed with shotgun rifles. They said they were sent by Harold [Keke] to see me and collect \$2500 for sparing my life. I had no choice but to give them the demanded money. The third incident was when I was at the plantation. While I was working at a copra mill they harassed me and took me back to the village. They demanded \$1,500 for insulting them. I told them that I have no money to give them. We managed to give them \$700 and they left us. The fourth time they came they fought with me on a Sunday afternoon. When they came, I tried to prevent them from doing anything and in return they fired a warning shot with a shotgun rifle. They then bashed me up and then they continued to bash me and after that they left me alone in the village.

They told me that they would be coming for me again and I had to sort my problem with the so-called IFM, a militia group from Guadalcanal. At that time I thought of going to the person in charge for all these things. The first incident was on a Sunday afternoon when a huge crowd of people arrived at my village. This group wore *kabilatos*, some wore camouflaged army uniforms and some wore jeans. They were all armed with rifles and homemade guns. We had a long argument and they took \$1000 from my family. Because these people crossed over frequently to our village, on these occasions we argued a lot and people in the village and my family in particular experienced fear daily and we did not know what would happen to us at any time and moment. It was not easy, most of the time they came to our villages, threatened and demanded money. Still we gave in to their demands.

The last time they approached us was at 2:00 a.m. and I was still awake and could sense something was wrong with me. I turned on to my bed and could feel something pointing at my head. I opened my eyes and saw guns pointed at my head. I went outside and saw many of them all armed and the first person to run towards me butted me with the back of his rifle. I tried to convince them for us to sort things out. Another person jumped in and then took his homemade rifle and hit me with and it landed on my chest. We hid from the flying bullets. The third man came up and I pushed him down the stairs. When I bashed him back, they fired a first warning shot and they told me not to fight any of their boys. Then I saw someone under the ladder shouting to the boys that he had found a rope and they were thinking of using the rope to tie me with. Another word I heard from someone from the other side shouting “vanisia, vanisia,” which means, “shoot him” in Guadalcanal language. They told me to come down the stairs and I told them that I would not be going down and then the argument went on for some time. The other family members got up and they contributed up to \$1,000. They gave them and then they left us.

An incident happened as I went ashore at the Yacht Club waterfront. The MEF came and stole the outboard motor and demanded I pay \$2000. They were accusing me of insulting the MEF. The argument went on and some of my brothers were also there and we ended up giving them \$1,500. The second incident occurred when I was going home to Savo. The MEF along with the [police] Marine came and assaulted me and took everything I had on the boat with me. I stayed there at the Yacht Club and then I tried my best to find fuel for my engine. At that time I had no money. Those incidents happened to me when I was in Savo and Honiara. The two militia groups, the MEF and GRA, caused me trouble. I am so happy that this program really helps me a lot to rehabilitate myself and my families as well.

Mr. Matthew Taravalu’s story:

I am a man who stayed in Tulagi and I had been selling petrol and kerosene to the people in Central Province. I had heard stories about the Malaitans and the Guadalcanal people who had conflicts in and around Guadalcanal. During those times we took fuel and cargoes to supply the people in Central Province. I did not know that people came day and night to steal fuel from my place. One night an armed group came holding about five guns. They came in a 30 horsepower engine. The boat they came in belonged to the MEF. When they

came to the place where we stored our fuel, I was in front and my family was at the back and they called out for fuel. I thought they wanted to buy fuel. I went to them and one of them came and placed his gun at the verandah where we used to sell fuel and oil. He told us how to cock a gun and went on to cock the gun. While doing it he fired a shot and it went through the roof and I think it was a mistake. I was shocked as I did not expect them or knew anything about them. I did serve others that came that day. They demanded fuel and after they left I was worried as I have family at home. I left them for a moment and they were panicking and my wife told me that I should take them to the village as it was not safe to sell fuel to the people.

I then went one early morning and got them to the village and then I came to Tulagi and did the selling. I stayed there for a week and I decided to leave to see my family; so I left on Friday. I arrived home and went to my family and we stayed there. On Saturday night we were on the verandah at home telling stories with my brothers since a cousin-brother was visiting us. We heard there was a canoe coming towards the village and my brother wondered whether it would stop or go by. We heard the sound of the engine grow slower as it came ashore and we thought it might be the people in the village. We were telling stories when they suddenly appeared with knives, sticks and one of them came right up to where we were and cut the floor with a knife. My wife came behind me and into the house. I sat on the flooring and then the same person again took the knife and cut the floor. I did not know where my cousin-brother went to and how he managed to get out. I got up the second time and told them to stop, for us to talk, but he went on cutting another walling of the house.

At that time I thought we were going to die and the noise woke my children up and my wife was afraid. I told my wife not to be afraid and to take my children through the window to their grandparent's home. My wife did that. When the same person started cutting again I told him I can go with them but put down the knife. They asked me if I had a pig and I told them yes, that I had one; so they stopped and told me to show them the pig. They told me to tie up the pig and prepare for them a small amount of money as well; to give them when they returned. They demanded a pig and \$3500 and then we waited for them until morning.

I then told my daughter to go and tell the chief of the village. The chief came and told them to collect their demand and they left. I was traumatized after the incident

5. VISALE

Roman Catholic Mission Station, West Guadalcanal, 23-25 June 2010

Mr. Martin Tulele's story:

When the tension reached its peak in 1999, my family and I ran a petrol depot and a small retail shop. We were taken by surprise during the early years of the conflict between 1999 and year 2000 when our family business was exposed and we became victims. The GRA came to our store and took whatever they wanted. We were powerless because the militants were aggressive, living according to jungle laws. We could not stop them and our small business eventually closed. My family suffered because it was our livelihood support. There was not much option left for us because of their pressure. My family suffered a severe loss because we no longer enjoyed the fortunate provision we got from our small business. When our small business collapsed, my family was left with nothing and we hid in the dust because it totally changed our lifestyle. As a result we were victimized and traumatized.

Mr. Kamilio Teke's story:

Chairman, Commissioners: Twelve years ago I experienced difficulties during the ethnic tension. I was displaced from Nazareth Apostolic Center with my family. After displacement I went through three different locations, three different times. I was dead but then risen to life 12 years ago it seems. To me it was just like yesterday, it is very clear: the barrel of guns, sharp knives and twisting of hands on three different locations and three different times. I was appointed by the national Government to work as a peace coordinator of Guadalcanal Province. There was no space in the Ministry to work so I was put in a room in Chinatown to do my work, which was also the office of the People Alliance Party (PAP). At that particular facility there was only one way out so if anything happened I could not escape. I was there sitting on my desk when I saw three militants enter the room. As I have said, I could not escape since there was only one exit; so they came straight to me. One of them, with a sharp knife, put his knife right under my chin and throat – I couldn't talk or move but remained still; he said, give us \$3000 right now, or he will take my life. At that very moment there was not even a penny or a cent in my pocket

and I was not able to give them what they demanded. I struggled to speak and told them how I can give \$3000. He released the knife from my neck and I told them I had a guarantee at the bank and they agreed to wait for me to go and get the \$3000 from the bank; one of them told me that if I did not return with the money he will be the one who will remove my head. I went straight to the Chinatown Plaza because the Premier and his Permanent Secretary of Guadalcanal Province were there. I rushed upstairs and asked him if he could help me with \$3000. The PS responded positively and he gave me \$3000. The Premier instructed him to give the money to me. I came down to the men waiting and still holding the machete and gave them the money. That was my first experience of the ethnic tension. Thank God for talking to the Premier and his Permanent secretary for coming to my rescue.

My second experience was at the old SIBC building at Town Ground. I went there to work as the Government had asked me to do. Normally, every 4 p.m. after work I would walk down as far as Goodview Shop at Rove and then either walk up the hill or I caught a cab up home. On this particular day, while walking alone up the road to the police headquarters, there was a group of men watching me from the Children's Playground. They called out my name and instructed me to go over to them. I continued walking because I had the feeling that if I went over to them something bad would happen to me. They ran across the road and flanked me in front of the monument of the late Sir Jacob Vouza. They punched me, I fell to the ground and they started booting me. Luckily some men came to my rescue when I yelled out for assistance and I was rescued from the group of men. They called a taxi for me and they took me to my home. That was the second incident that happened to me during the tension.

I found it hard to absorb such experience since such life was not normal to me. At the height of the ethnic tension I tried to get my family to the western end of Guadalcanal – my original home; unfortunately I was not able to do so because of the very tense situation of the ethnic tension from one end to the other end of Guadalcanal island. I told my wife we should go across to Malaita and so we went over to Malaita and lived for a time at the Rokera Parish Catholic Mission Station, and later moved to my wife's original home village. On July 25 2000 we were building a kitchen and trying to sort out ourselves since

we had just moved in and trying to make our stay sustainable since we did not have a house. At about 11:00 a.m. my youngest son looked up the hill and saw eight militants wearing masks holding six .303 rifles coming down towards our house. He was about to run but I pulled him back and told him not to run or they would shoot. I calm him down and advised everyone not to talk and that I would talk on our behalf. They arrived and two of the guns came straight for me: one in front and the other on my rear, pointing their guns to my chest, the other on my back. Seeing all this, no one uttered a word, the others stood around us, they had six guns; just imagine; one is enough to kill a man – an army to come for just one person is very powerful and very painful. One of them said, “Is your name Kamilio Teke?” When I said, “Yes,” they said, “Let’s go.” I asked, “Where to?” and was brave enough to ask them who sent them to get me. They gave me a name I do not want to reveal at this point in time. They were carrying out orders from him so I said I would willingly go with them. My wife and children started crying. I called them to come close to me and told them that we must pray to the almighty God to thank him and ask for protection. I said a short prayer and as we were about to leave, my wife ran up to them and asked, “Where are you people from? Are you from Malaita? And if you are from Malaita do you know your custom and culture? This person you take did not come here on his own will, he is my husband and I brought him here. If you want to kill him, kill me first.” I calmed her down and told her to remain and look after our children. I told them that I will go with them and asked them if I could go to my room and collect some extra clothes. They did not allow me to do so, so I went with them; we boarded a boat and set off.

About 200 yards away from the shoreline they put a mask on my head. I trusted in the Almighty God so I did not panic. We went off as far as Afio – where one of the substations of Malaita Province was. We went ashore but I remained sitting in the canoe with the mask. They collected fuel and other necessities from the shops, came back and we took off again about 1 p.m. A little further out at sea; they put their guns closer to me and fired in the air five times but I remained calm. We continued our journey and it rained very heavily with very strong wind. I did not have any protection over my body; I was soaked wet and almost died of cold. It was very cold and they kept watching, talking and questioning me. I remained steady and continued to put my trust in God. We went as far as Kiu and Hauhui, somewhere around that area; I did not know exactly what their plan was

but I can tell that we were going towards the shoreline to a very isolated and lonely place. Upon arriving close to the shore, the commando said we should not be doing this but to continue on until Hauhui. At Hauhui they went ashore and did the same thing they did at Afio: collect fuel and other things they needed from the retail stores. I remained in the canoe, sitting cold and soaked. When they finished their business there we continued on with our journey.

Arriving in Auki they took me on board the MV *Ramos III* and locked me in one of the rooms next to the kitchen in the vessel. I remained there with two securities with no dry clothing. It was always cold and I was hungry but did not have anything to eat. I followed their orders and at 10 p.m. someone came on board and asked the militants if he could come and see the person who they claimed to have arrested. They showed him the room and he entered the room, looked at me steadily and asked me three questions. After I answered the questions he asked, he turned to the militants and told them that I am innocent and that “if we have a transport we should sent him back to his home with his family.” He instructed them to give me dry clothes and some food and that from then on I was in his custody. [He said,] “When we arrive in Honiara, keep him on board until the ship is clear, then I will come and collect him myself.” They gave me a plate of rice and a cup of tea and a militant gave me his overalls to wear. Next day by I was still in the stuffy room and feeling very uncomfortable, still worried and uncertain of what lay in front of me, my future.

We left Auki 10 in the morning to Honiara. On board the ship I heard them say they were going to take me to one of their camps and they would panel-beat (torture) me. After arriving in Honiara I stayed on board until the commando came back and took me and they followed us; we went to the MEF Supreme Council for questioning. When we arrived there, someone saw me; he said, “How did you get here?” I told him that he gave the orders for them to come and get me. He invited me into his office and asked me some questions; this person asked me the very same questions that the other commander in Auki asked me. I answered him the same way as I answered the commander previously at Auki. Only after that, he turned around and he told them that they have to release me. They took me to Holy Cross Cathedral and I was to wait there until they can arrange a transport back

to my family. He instructed them to find me clothes and they released me. Although they did not cause any bodily injuries, the pain I felt was quite heavy, somebody who is not able to face such a situation or panics, will die along the way, because the appearance and sight of someone holding a gun and the way they play around and handle the gun was really frightening and threatening; and the fact that I had anticipated my death and was uncertain of what lay ahead of me during that time; and the fact that I had left my family behind was very painful, and not knowing what would or will happen to them. These are some of the experiences that happened to me during the tension.

Ms Emannueler Kilu's story:

In 2000 I stayed with my husband, our firstborn baby who was about three years old and another one who was two years of age. One evening at about 10 p.m. we heard noises outside the village. Some boys who were walking around the village warned us not to sleep because they had heard an engine of a ship that was berthing nearby. We slept at 12 midnight for a short while and at around 3 a.m. we heard people making noise in the school area. My husband and I got up and went to the beach where we met some of the boys in our village watching a vessel. As we looked further to the island of Savo we saw an outboard motor boat approaching the Visale clinic area. I asked a boy standing beside me if he knew who those people were as it was still dark and we could not see clearly. It was a white-colored open boat, probably a Yamaha ray boat, and all the passengers travelling inside were trying to hide while the boat approached the shoreline. The boy told me that the people in the boat may be the Malaita Eagle Force militants. Upon hearing that, I turned around and walked quickly to my house. I heard gunshots and it was the first time in my whole life to hear such noise from a high-powered gun.

When shots were fired I ran for my life. I do not know which direction my husband took. I ran straight to our house and caught up with him there; he grabbed our eldest child and I carried our baby. At that time I can hear people screaming in the village since they were shocked. I carried my baby with only a piece of cloth and a piece of trousers; we ran into the coconut plantation area. There we met some of the villagers; we hid there with the others. At that time my younger brother came to tell us that something had happened. On his way as he came close to the school, the MEF had already positioned themselves around

the vicinity of the station; as he look across towards the station and he saw men with guns standing around the area, he thought they were Guadalcanal militants; as he approached them the MEF members saw him and called for him to go to them. He walked straight to them and they grabbed him. Upon realizing that they were Malaitans, he could not escape; they took him to the clinic and locked him in a room that used to be a maternity ward. In the room he met an old man. He advised him not to run but to remain calm because the area was already occupied by the MEF. From the room he saw another boat arriving with more men; they were also armed with high-powered guns, machetes, axes and spears.

When he saw this, he was so frightened and decided to escape; he left the room and walked towards the nurse's house; it was at that time that a member of the MEF saw him and shot him in the leg; he lay there but was still alive. The MEF operation continued within the Visale area until 12 midday. Another member of the MEF came through the church into the sacristy room, and out from the bell room (he even rang the church bell); as he came he realized that my brother was still alive. When my brother was shot, he was still alive, and crawled all the way from where he was shot towards the priest's house. That man was armed with a pump-action shotgun. When he saw that he was still alive, he took the shotgun put it to his head and shot him at point-blank range, killing him instantly. When this happened, one of my cousin-brothers was watching from a distance and saw all this when it happened. The MEF militants came on board the ship *MV Daula*, they left after 12 midday. The Guadalcanal militants came and took my brother's body to our village and it was buried the next day. I would like to conclude by saying that we the relatives and family members of the deceased have forgiven you the person who did this to my brother from our hearts; and would like to appeal and ask if we all could live in peace and happily together with each other. I would like to invite my brother to come and continue on with his side of the story.

Mr. John Tara's story:

When the MEF members left I came and saw where my brother's body was lying. I went and called for my cousins to come and help me carry his body; they came and we took his body back to our house. We stayed there, our friends and relatives came to comfort us. I

do not want to talk long. I would like to call on our leaders to find a way to bring peace in our area. I think that's what I want to share with you all. Thank you.

Father Lionel Longarata's story:

My story will cover two areas. First, the incident in 1999 that was on 17th June. In 1999 the story of the tension was very high. I was in Fiji at that time. I came home quickly because I heard the first shooting incident had occurred at Kakabona. I was so worried about my family so I flew home. After arriving from the airport, on my way to my house, I was stopped along the road; the militants demanded money from me before I can go to my house, so I gave them money. When reaching my house, my family had already left. I discovered that they were hiding around in Honiara, so I arranged for a flight for my family to Mbabanakira for their safety. I had to come to Honiara to continue with the work I had been assigned to do; I was the Secretary managing the Board of Mission for the Church of Melanesia but was living in fear. One night I went out to one of my friend's homes for dinner; when returning back to my house, I discovered that my house had been looted, all of our belongings and other properties that we had packed ready to be transported to my home village in Marasa, south Guadalcanal.

Although the church had arranged for a ship, *MV Kopuria*, to get our belongings over to my village, there was nothing left for me to take back to my family. When I arrived at our village, my family expected me to arrive with all our belongings but to their dismay I arrived back with nothing but myself. That doesn't worry me so much because we have another home at Marasa, a fully furnished permanent building with four bedrooms. Despite the loss, we continued on with life. I was made the assistant priest in that rural parish by the bishop and was so glad to work along with my people, ministering to them.

In June 2003 another thing happened in our life. On June 15th 2003, there were rumors that members of the GRA had been hiding at the bay of Marasa and had been there for several days. They were preparing an ambush for the boat which was bringing ammunition and rations for the Joint Operation on the Weather Coast. The boat arrived in the afternoon and we heard exchange of gunfire. Marasa is about a mile inland from the beach, we heard gun fire. As a priest I tried to do my best to ensure that everyone was safe by gathering them

together; and I warned them to keep away from the main road in case they were caught in the crossfire. In the evening on the 15th, the shooting continued, and suddenly I met several members of the Joint Operation running up inland on our road leading up to Mbabanakira, about seven miles inland. I asked one what's wrong; he told me that they had run out of ammunition and he was going to get some more ammunition. We waited but no one from the Joint Operation returned. From that moment I knew exactly what will happen next.

That night we moved to where we could be secure from the GRA militants, hoping that nothing bad will happen to us. On the 16th of June 2003, very early in the morning, I was surprised that we had been surrounded by a large group [of GRA militants] and all armed; we were warned not to react or to move away from where we were. They rounded everyone up and instructed us to march down to the beach. Most of the men's hands were bound together; with women and children, we started walking down towards the beach. I was called to stay out from the group with another chief and to go further inland and tell other villages there to come down to the beach; and we were only given one hour to get them down to the beach or they will start killing people. Knowing that it was difficult to get everyone down within the time given, we attempted but managed to get to only two villages within an hour. We told them of the order and they followed us down to the beach front.

Arriving at the beach with other villagers, I could see that everyone had been gathered together by the GRA militants. The militants ordered that nobody is allowed to talk or cry, and they were to answer all the questions asked in a manner that pleases them, the militants. There were two boys in the midst of the militants; they were tortured in an unspeakable manner; they were bashed, butted with their rifles, and stoned, streams of blood were running down from their faces; they were tied with both hands behind their backs and were ordered to dance while blood ran from their bodies. Eventually on the beach the younger one died on the spot; then elder one tried to escape but he could not do it. They continuously butted him with the bottom of their rifles, they stoned him and he fell; while he was on the ground, one of them with a machete cut his back open; all this happened while everyone was watching, young and old, women and children witnessed everything.

After being killed, their bodies were dragged further down the beach to where the sun was shining, and the heat of the great gravel of Marasa heated their bodies.

They finished with what they did and looked around and saw me sitting down amongst the crowd and they said I will be the next victim. They came towards me pointed their guns at me; with both of my hands tied behind my back, I was pushed down to stay between the two dead bodies. After two hours the bodies were taken away and then buried in a shallow grave. When I was still amongst the people, normally the militants would line everyone up and assemble everyone in groups, women, youths, men and children, everyone has to count his or her own head. We all ate nothing and drank nothing. I was taken away farther from the main group and the rope they tied me with was also tied to a boat pulled up on the beach which was covered with a huge canvas. I was finding it hard to breathe at night; they used to check me every 30 minutes by poking the canvas to see if am still there. We spent the whole night there, with all the people still sitting down according in their different groups, except for me still tied to the boat under a canvas. I also saw that there was nowhere to escape, and if I ran I am nor faster than a bullet. I remained patient and prayed the whole night, and I believed that God will release me. I never stopped praying that night. I can still remember the prayers I offered that night; it was the very prayer offered by the repentant sinner, the prisoner who was crucified with Jesus on the cross. I repeated it over and over again and singing it in my heart, "Father, remember me when I come into your kingdom." Shortly afterwards, by midnight I felt the rope tied to my hand was somehow loosened and released. I was amazed and slowly retyed the rope myself instead.

Morning came and I was told that the boat was going to leave for Marasa with some of their so-called commanders, to meet with their boss to decide my fate, whether I am going to be killed here at Marasa or at their camp. I was lucky to join up with the whole group and we were moved to a shady area between the coconut trees. There was no food or water and there was nothing anyone could do, although the children started crying for food. Their parents resorted to coconut fruits to feed their children; the elders had no choice but to drink from the dirty polluted Marasa River. All of us were under great fear and the group of people decided to form themselves into prayer groups, all members of different religions groups, Anglican, Roman Catholic, and the SSE Church, and they prayed for me. Some of

the chiefs from the inner part of the Marasa valley, Hauvalisi, came down and discovered that I was waiting for my sentence. They decided to collect money from the surrounding villagers; they collected \$10,000 to pay for my release. When they went over to give the money, the militants refused; there was nothing anyone could do but to wait patiently.

We waited until 5 p.m. in the evening and we saw a boat at a distance coming towards Marasa, and we knew that the decision on my fate was near. They arrived and came on shore giving orders and gathering people together and started talking. Some of the Melanesian Brothers were there with us and so they told us that the Melanesian Brothers are going to be released and they have to leave the place (Marasa) immediately. They were to be taken to Wanderer Bay and to find their way back to Tabalia.

The next order that came was to give me some kind of warnings. I was very surprised because the actual words they said were, “God spoke to the boss that you are to be released.” Before they did that, they read out all my charges. The charges were that I called them “murderers” and [said that] “Christians should not be murderers and arsonists.” Surprisingly, they told me that I was to be released, and they repeated that three times. I could not believe that with my ears; one of the commanders came and untied me; as he was untying my hands, he discovered that the rope had already been loosened.

After being untied, we were still under their control. We were told to come together and they warned us that they will burn our village down. We were worried so we decided to pay them some compensation according to our custom, a pig and a custom shell-money. They returned the shell money but they killed and ate the pig. After enjoying their feasting, they went up to where we live and burnt down our homes. At around about 7 p.m. in the evening we saw the brightness of the fire further up where our homes were. We sat on the Marasa beach and waited for them to leave so we could go to see if any of our properties were spared from the flames. There were more than 50 homes burnt down with nothing left; the whole village of Marasa was reduced to ashes. I can still recall that was the greatest moment of great pain over our losses, especially for our wives; we had lost everything – nothing was left except for ourselves.

That night they kept on firing their guns in the air. Early next morning we saw the patrol boat go past and again they used us as human shields. They told us to line up and sit on the beach, and they hid behind and watched the patrol boat. Unfortunately the boat did not come to shore, possibly because they knew we were used as shields or held as prisoners. They went to Mbiti, and went ashore in their boats with guns; they did that several times. One of their GRA commanders was watching the patrol boat from the top of the hill; he watched closely until he gave orders to his boys to leave our area immediately since there were too many officers coming on shore from the patrol boat. He actually counted the number of trips the boat took to shore. They left quickly and we were free from their control and influence. We rushed to where our homes were and to our dismay they were in ashes. That evening there was no place to keep the women and children. Luckily they did not burn down our chapel building; women and children slept in the church and we the men and boys slept outside. After going through those hard times, we decided we have to continue on with life. My story ends here.

Mr. Christopher Uro's story:

Thank you. Concerning my story, it was a Saturday, I forget the date. I and my other two brothers went out fishing at the beachfront near our home. At around 2 p.m. we finished fishing and started walking back to our homes. As we reached the main road, we heard the sound of vehicle coming from the eastern end of the road. I looked but did not realize that it was a police vehicle, since we have a similar vehicle in our area which belongs to the Anglican Church (Kohimarama). I kept on walking and when the vehicle nearby turned around, I saw that the vehicle was fully armed and a light machine gun was mounted on the top of the cabin, and all the passengers sitting in the cabin and on the rear were armed with high power guns, followed by two three-ton trucks and another Mitsubishi Hilux. I yelled out to my other brothers to run, the MEF militants had arrived. We all ran and they started shooting at us, with the automatic rifles; we ran and they continued shooting towards us; we ran in separate directions. As I ran, they continued shooting and I jumped into a house, and they continued firing at the house. I looked out and saw that they had aligned them in a military-style formation, covering each other as they advanced towards the house I was inside. I realized that they were closing in. I broke the wall of the house and I jumped

down. It was a raised floor-house; when I dropped down, some of them saw me, and continued firing at me. I ran towards a coconut tree to hide myself from the oncoming bullets. As I was about to reach the coconut, a bullet hit me on my hips; I felt that part of my leg grew numb so I fell and lay flat on the ground. While lying on the ground, they ceased firing for a while because they could not see me, and were trying to see where I was. I gathered my strength and ran again in a bent-forward position. I ran as far as my legs could carry me; they continued firing at the direction where I was running. I fell down for the second time again and decided not to stand but crawled further away again.

Shortly after I could tell that they had left, so I got up and walked further away toward the road leading to some of the gardens. There I met a man who came and asked me what had happened. I told him the story and showed him where I was struck by the bullet. He assisted me and took me back down to the main road to the clinic at Visale. I inquired about the other two brothers; fortunately they were safe, they were also shot at but they managed to escape. I stayed at the clinic where I was injected and they removed the bullet from my hip; they advised me to remain in the clinic, to continue with my injections. The whole night there I could not sleep because the group that shot me went down to Selwyn College. Fearing they might return on the way back and would come to kill me, I woke up very early and left the clinic. I could not walk properly but I had to force myself for my own safety.

Arriving back in the village, there was no one in our village. I thought they must have gone down to our small church since it was Sunday. I went there but the church was empty, there were only ten people in church. After church we could see the patrol boat coming in from Tambea point, and the captain from the patrol boat warned everyone in our area to keep clear of the road; if there is any disturbance along the road, the paramilitary [PFF] group will resort to shoot-to-kill. He used the loudspeaker to warn the people on the shore and inland; upon hearing this, I slowly started to walk home; when I was about to reach our house, which was close to the main road, I saw a helicopter hovering above our heads. It was flying about 300 meters from the ground level. The helicopter came first before the convoy of trucks with the Selwyn College students. The helicopter open fired on us, and the patrol boat starting shelling the area from Tambea to this end of Visale.

Shooting started again. I did not know what to do, so I hid under a *ngali* nut tree, since the helicopter was hovering too close to the ground and I did not want to be seen. The truck went past and the helicopter continued to advance further in front towards the town. Seeing things had cleared, I got up and went to find my parents. I think that is my side of the story and my experience during the tension.

Before I resume my seat, I would like to take this opportunity to share some of my concerns to our Government, because all these military equipments that came through our country at that time should not be used against the people of this our own country. Unfortunately our Government allowed such weapons to be used by militants to kill innocent people, and we the people from northwest Guadalcanal were victims from these weapons. They should be used to protect people, not against our own people. Now we are trying to establish peace in our country. I suggest that our Government should compensate the injuries and the deaths that occurred during that time. I would like to appeal to the two provinces concerned to come together and reconcile. I would also like to appeal to other provinces within our country who were involved in the conflict. I would like to call on them to come forward and reconcile with Guadalcanal province in order for us to establish a perfect and lasting peace in our country, Solomon Islands. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Chairman and the Commissioners and the TRC for identifying us the victims, and in giving us the opportunity to come and share our side of the story and our personal experiences.

Mr. Collin Vigorau's story:

I will start by telling my story on what happened to me as a victim during the ethnic tension. My Sunday School coordinator and I (the assistant coordinator), went on a tour to Tulagi to one of the communities there. After completing our tour in a week, we returned to Honiara, on board a fishing boat. We arrived in town around 8:30 in the morning, and took a bus to the office of our Archbishop, Adrian Smith, at Holy Cross; we reported to the office and later we went down to the Rove Chancery office. We went there purposely to collect our monthly allowances for the touring program we had completed; from there we took a bus back to Holy Cross. On our way in the bus, I told my friend I will drop off at the old Guadalcanal provincial office to go to the shops and buy some things I need; I would

catch up with him later at Holy Cross Cathedral. If I do not come up to the office, I will go straight to where the church had accommodated us at Nazareth Apostolic Center (NAC) near Tenaru school.

As I dropped off and walked across the road towards where is now the Frangipani Ice and was walking towards the ITA building, as I was walking, I felt that someone was stalking me. I turned around and saw two men following me. When I reached the Victoria Store just opposite the main market, I went into the Acor Bookshop there and met some of my friends from Kwaio and some of the shopkeepers there. I asked them, when they arrived; and one of them told me that they had arrived three weeks ago, from the Tenaru area, an area owned by the CEMA company. They said that the Guadalcanal militants came and chase them out from that area, saying they did not want any Malaitans to live on Guadalcanal. As I was talking to them I could see the two boys who were following me waiting outside the main door. I took the clothes I bought and came out of the shop.

As I was about to walk towards my destination, the boys attacked me. The first thing I heard was they accused me of being a GRA militant. I tried to defend myself; they grabbed me and took the bag I was carrying and I was left with only the clothes I was wearing. When I looked further up front, I saw a crowd of people coming towards me. As I looked out, I could see a chance to escape if I ran towards the main market bus stop to the Wesley United Church and up to Holy Cross area. The traffic was busy at the time. I ran across the road and a car and a bus stopped. As I was running past the bus stop, more and more people who were travelling in the vehicles jumped out and came to where I was; others who heard when the crowd yelled "GRA!" came and joined in with the other mob. I could not run any farther; the crowd of people blocked my path. They came and I could not attempt to do anything but wait and expect the worst to happen.

The beat me up, kicked me, stoned me, and punched me; my whole body went numb. I could not feel anything. As I struggled to gain my consciousness, one of them came and punched me on my head, and I flew into a nearby drain. While I was in the drain, the mob continued to assault me; one of them held a brick and was about to strike it on my head when a friend who recognized me intervened and told him to stop and protested on my behalf that I was innocent. The angry mob then turned towards him and started accusing

him. At the same time, a police vehicle came through the crowd and they dispersed quickly. They took and rushed me to the National Referral Hospital; there I was given eight stitches on my head. The doctors advised me to remain in the hospital but I insisted that I must go to Holy Cross Cathedral since I do not feel safe here. They took me to Holy Cross and I stayed there for three weeks, in one of the priests' houses; the whole three weeks I could not eat anything. The Sisters came and assisted me in nursing my wounds and softening food for me to eat. After another two weeks, a priest from the Philippines came and was to visit the Visale parish. I requested to go with him back to my village.

Arriving back in my village, a group of GRA militants came and threatened me. They claimed that I was a "spear" (spy); they pointed their gun right to my chest and marched me along with one of my sisters and an in-law to Manikiki. There someone came and told them to take us back to our village. After a few days later, I came back to NAC at Tenaru. The next morning they [the militants] erected a road block on Alligator Creek. I remained there and did not return to my home village until 2000. I was there at Tenaru when the MEF came and did a shoot-out at Alligator Creek, using the patrol boat. All the students at NAC fled to Tetere [police] station; we remained there until the warring parties signed the Townsville Agreement, before we could return back to our school at NAC. After that, I made up my mind and told our bishop that I am not able to continue on with my work with the church, since I wanted remain back in my village. That is my story.

Ms Claudina Kovi's story:

On the 3rd of July 2000 it was almost lunch so I was cooking food for my granddaughter who had returned from school. We were having our lunch when the first group of MEF militants came across the Vara Creek bridge. They came in two groups; the other came from the top of the hill down to where we were. The group that came across the bridge fired shots in the air; we continued eating and the group continued to advance towards our home. I was at the water and my son and his daughter were walking towards where I was. When they reached the main road, the two groups caught up with them. One of the MEFs butted [my son's] head with his rifle, but they continued walking. When they were about to reach Ngalitatae, the group abducted him and forced him into their vehicle; his daughter ran back to me and told me of what had happened and she fainted afterwards. I was still at the

water. I left what I was doing and ran to where it all happened. I shouted at the group in the vehicle to return my son, “He is my beloved, please return him back to me, he has done nothing wrong against you.” My husband was from Gela so my children were part Guadalcanal and Gela (Central Islands).

I ran after the vehicle and continued to shout after them and the vehicle stopped. I went over to them and clearly saw that they were all armed. I continued to protest his innocence, but the men in the vehicle told me that they took him only for questioning and he would be returned afterwards. One of my elder sons also came and we tried to convince them to return my son. They took off and I ran after them. When I reached my office at the Red Cross, I went to the bosses and used their phone to call around for help. I was advised to call the *Tasiu* [Melanesian] Brothers. They came and we went around to the MEF camps at Gilbert Camp and Mbokonavera, but there was no sign of my son. For five days I could not eat or drink. I was so sorry and continued to go around looking for my son day and night. It was so painful in my heart, because he was our breadwinner; my husband had died and he was the one supporting us.

Another time the MEF members came to our house and accused me of hiding guns in my house. I was shocked when they accused me of this as I am a woman. I do not know how to use a rifle, and why should I be using one when I do not even know how to operate it. They went in my house and checked everywhere but they could not find anything; they continued to ask me where I hid the gun; I told them that I have no guns. I continued to protest and plea that they must return my son. I was not afraid of them anymore. I told them that my son was innocent and had done nothing wrong against them; he is very kind to everyone and has a lot of friends from Malaita and other provinces; he has never hurt or stolen anything from anyone, he loved everyone. When I came to Vara Creek, I met a three-ton truck fully loaded with MEF. I stopped the truck and asked them for my son. They came and told me that they do not know who took him or of his whereabouts; they apologized and some even cried. I told them not to cry but to return him to me or, if he is killed, they should return his body; thus I can arrange for a proper burial, on his rightful land, Later I learnt that he had been killed.

After the tension, when peace was declared, the MEF militants would come and cry with me, they offered me transport whenever they saw me along the road. I told them that I wanted them to tell me where they had buried my son, so that I can collect his body for a proper burial. They would cry when I asked them. I suggested that they should all come to me I will arrange for some *Tasiu* to sit with us and then we can reconcile and forgive them for what they had done. I am willing to forgive them although they had murdered my son.

One day I went to the old G [Guadalcanal] province office and saw one of the officers who came that day and took my son. When that officer saw me, he tried to hide. I saw him and yelled out, “Don’t hide! You are one of the men who came and took my son. Please come out and tell me where you have buried my son. I am old and do not have a job to support my children and grandchildren, and my husband die a long time ago; the person who supported us was my son who you took away from us.” One day I returned to my house and found out that the militants had burnt my house and had destroyed most of our properties. I have no home up until today and have suffered a lot.

After the peace, two *Tasiu* Brothers approached me and told me that they knew where he was buried. I prepared everything for a proper burial; they dug his body at the Tenaru beach area. When they arrived at the area, some of his cousins who were part-Malaita recognized his shoes and the belt he was wearing. They returned his body back to me that evening; most of his friends also came. I told them that peace has come and I do not want anyone to retaliate after this. We all sat and mourned over his body. I told them that God had taken him and we all must leave happily in peace. I heard of the TRC program and my name was listed to come and share my story with everyone. I would like you the Commissioners and I would like you all to work towards peace in our country Solomon Islands. Once again, thank you everyone.

Pastor Sia Tavuata’s story:

This event occurred on February when a group of women and I went to a church program in another community. On our way we met a group of militants. When they saw me, they called me to over from the whole group of women, and they told me that tomorrow is my son’s final day, if we do not pay compensation by tomorrow; they demanded a pig, one

shell money, \$500 plus some food; and I was to go and leave it at Vila [near] Visale. I asked them why they wanted to kill my son; they told me that my son had written an article in the *Solomon Star* criticizing the Guadalcanal militants. After hearing this, I was worried. I decided to return straight home but then I followed the group to the church program; we prayed that night for my son. In the morning when I returned home, I told my husband of the story, and our relatives and neighbors helped us to collect foods, and prepare the things the militants had demanded. When everything was ready, we loaded them in a boat and went down to Vila. Arriving there, there was no one there; three militants there told us that their bosses had gone up to Honiara. They radioed over to Honiara and their bosses told us to leave all the food there and we should go up and meet with their bosses in Honiara.

We took the boat over to Honiara and tried to catch up with their bosses before dark since that was the deadline given for my son. When we arrived there and went to my niece's house, she asked me why we arrived so late in the evening. I told her of the story and she told me to leave it all to her; she arranged for everything and called the militants and their bosses. They came along with my son; we and reconciled together and shook hands, and everything was settled in our traditional way.

That was the first part of the story. After a month, a second incident happened to us. On April 7th, as usual, we finished our dinner and were sitting down telling stories and laughing together as families normally do, when all of a sudden five militants arrived and walked straight into our house with their guns. They opened all the doors checked inside the rooms and told us all to go out from the house. They were looking for my other son; they claimed that he was a "spear" (spy). As we went out of the house, more and more militants arrived and walked straight into our house. They smashed the walling and louvers and took everything in our house. We had a small canteen and they loaded everything into their boat to take back to their camp. We stood and watched; there was nothing anyone could do. Their bosses instructed them to get all the prayer books, hymn books and Bibles because they will burn our house down. I approached their boss and begged him not to burn our house down. He listened to me and he told the other militants not to burn our house down. A militant said that if I did not want them to burn our house, I should give my son to them. I called out for him in the dark and surprisingly he came out.

As soon as the militants saw him, they ran over to him and started assaulting him, kicking, punching and butting him with their rifles. I went over and cried for my son. They pointed their gun at me and said they will shoot if I cry. I could not hold back but cried in my heart. They continued assaulting my son until he fell unconscious. Before they moved away from him, one of them came to me and demanded that we must give them \$500 cash. I was shocked when they asked for more money since they had taken everything in our house. How can I get the money they demanded? As I looked across, I saw one of the boys from the nearby village. I called for him and instructed him to go to their village to one of my brothers-in-law and ask him to give me \$500; he left and returned with the money. I gave the money over to them and they said “Good night” and left.

It was really unbearable since they just destroyed and looted our properties and harmed my son. When they left, we stood there and could not speak and sleep well at night and I tried to nurse my son for the injuries he sustained from the militants. I would like to appeal to the boys and men who had harassed and assaulted us and destroyed our properties to come forward and we can shake hands together and forgive them for the things they did; thus we can establish love, peace and joy among us. Thank you.

Mr. Bernard Gado’s story:

Thank you. I reside above the Mbokonavera Heights, which in my dialect means Papaho. I live with my mother, father and two sisters. We lived in a permanent house with three bedrooms. I quite remember in 1998 stories of the GRA circulating and I witnessed a large group of people who fled from areas around Guadalcanal east and west. I found it hard to move around in Honiara; at that time I was married and my wife gave birth to twins; three days later, in May 1998 [1999?], I saw a lot of people moving from end to end [of town] and residing close to where we lived; and they stayed together at night and sometimes during the day. I heard a lot of stories of the movement; one evening I was at home; my brothers, sisters and mother had left our home for safety reasons; my wife was discharged from the hospital with the twins; we lived for only three days at home with my two newborn babies. Evening came that day and I saw some young boys with some men, moving around with knives; they damaged properties along the road in an angry manner. I was worried since we did not have anywhere else to go. I thought of going to my relatives

but they felt the same way. Luckily my sister in-law came and collected my wife and the twins. I asked my father if he could also leave to a safer place but he refused; my father has numerous health complications – he has eye problems, knee problems and has undergone a major operation that still requires attention.

We remained at home; at around 9 p.m. in the night, stones were thrown onto the roof of our house and people started moving in close to where we were. I asked my father if he could leave and he did. I stayed back but outside the house I saw the large group come and force themselves into my house and take all our belongings inside. I ran to get assistance. I went to the first house but the owner was afraid to help. I went to the second and the owner was brave to assist. We called for police; they arrived in a Hilux with four officers. They took me to where my house was but people had blocked the road with stones. I removed the stones and we went through; arriving there, we put out the fire and I managed to save some of our belongings and clothes for my children. However, the crowd of angry men continued to build up, until the police were afraid of being outnumbered by the crowd. The officer told me that they will have to withdraw back and they left. Luckily more police arrived after that and I continued to go and collect some more of our belongings.

After they dropped me off at Central Police station, I waited there until the next day before I could go and join with the rest of my family in our village at Mataniko. We lived there on my wife's land; I found it hard to look after my twin babies; we lived there until year 2000 and could not move around. There was nothing much I could do to earn income since my business was affected; I was the first on Guadalcanal to operate a video shop with a license. I spent the money I earned to help my family

One day we heard that the Rove armory was taken over by the MEF Joint Operation. The situation was different compared to the past; gunshots can be heard everywhere, night and day, and everyone was afraid even more. After a week, when we still remained after the takeover, one afternoon I heard a shout. I was on the other side of the street. I managed to run but the women advised me not to. When I could see further, I can see the group grabbing my nephew about 30 meters away. As I came closer he was forced into their Hilux. There was nothing anyone could do, and that was the last time I ever saw him again.

All of us in the village began to feel worried more than before, since we could tell that it was no longer safe to stay there; all of the men decided that we have to move to a safer place. We met together and decided to leave that night. It was a full moon; we waited until the cloud covered the moon and we moved; when it was uncovered we hid again. However, we managed to flee to the bush. We remained there for almost a week. While there, I thought so much of my wife and children, so I arranged for them to come after me; they left one night and we lived in the bush. The people in our village separated: some went to Western Province and others who had connections in Malaita went there: I and my family remained in the bush with no shelter, but we used palm branches to keep us from sun. I managed to send a message to my wife's parents to come and get us.

They arrived a week later and we journeyed across the jungle; it took us two days to reach the village. In their village the situation was same as in the town; there was disorder everywhere. During the day we would go and hide in the bush and return at night. I was worried for the safety of my children. One day one of my children was so sick, we gave him some medication but there was no improvement. I asked the nurse where else can I go to get help. She told me to go to Mbalasuna. I walked all the way there; I met a few truck along the road but they did not offer me any assistance. Luckily a good-hearted person offered me a lift to Mbalasuna. At that time the warring parties had signed the Townsville Peace Agreement. We stayed on at Mbalasuna for a week. Still my child had not improved, so I had no option but to go down to Central Hospital. I was so worried and asked for assistance from the National Peace Council (NPC) and they helped me out. I was advised to go with my wife to help out since we had twins.

I left all fear and went along with my wife in the NPC vehicle. As we approached Alligator Creek, the fear in me started to build up again. As we came to the checkpoint, the vehicle slowed down and a member of the MEF stood up and came; when he saw me, he told me to wind my glass down. He was a friend and was happy to see me. He asked me why I moved out from Mataniko. I told him that we had to flee because the environment was not safe; he held my hand and cried. He ordered the other militants to let us through the checkpoint, and we were admitted at the Central Hospital and my twin recovered. We returned to the same village in which we lived. At that time the TPA had already been

signed; however, still the situation was has not improved: militants were going around firing shots in the air. Eeveryone was still scared, until year 2003 when RAMSI intervened.

Ms Jaqueline Rege's story:

My story begins when the Joint Operation came to the Weather Coast on South Guadalcanal on a Monday October 14th. Nine of them came to where we were hiding and they were holding four guns. It was in the morning. One of them came and told my husband to surrender and that if he did not they would kill him. I and my family and my husband's sister and brother witnessed this incident. My husband surrendered to the police who held a .22 gun. On Wednesday 16th October 2002, nine of the men came again and threatened us very early one morning. They instructed me to call for my husband to follow them to a place where they would keep us prisoners. They had taken everyone there; my husband and I were the only ones left to be rounded up. When I went into the house to collect our bag, one of them followed me and stood by the door and pointed the gun at me, telling me to hurry up. They escorted us in a military style fashion. We were in the middle; two of them were in front and another two behind. As we followed them, I was carrying my baby and my husband was holding the hands of my two children. The distance to our destination was quite far and along the way when we reached isolated areas, the Joint Operation men started assaulting my husband. They shoved, kicked and butted him with their rifles. It was really unacceptable because they did this in front of me and my children and he was holding onto my other two children. Because I was also afraid of their guns, it was so painful to see all these happen and not being able to do anything. As we walked, they continued assaulting him.

When we reached the area where we used to live, we saw that all the houses were burnt down. We met another group of men who were also holding guns and knives waiting for us. When they saw us, they started abusing my husband. When we reached them, they told me to take my children and walk away and said they would take my husband to a place where they had already prepared for him. At the same time, I saw the policeman who told my husband to surrender do nothing to save my husband. They threatened me with their guns and led me and my three children away. They took us to a place where we would be kept as prisoners. That day we waited but my husband did not return. They had my

husband and they killed him. We heard two gunshots and I learnt that it was that time he was killed. They buried his body afterwards but we did not see his body after he was killed. They showed me his grave after RAMSI arrived. The other incident that really affected us was our houses being burnt down and our properties stolen and looted, leaving us with nothing.

Ms Gladys Voa's story:

My story begins on the 13th of March, 2001. It was a historical event for our village. At around 6 a.m. patrol boats arrived and berthed right in front of our shoreline. We woke and saw the Patrol boat *Lata*. It was an unforgettable day, where different types of people – old, sick, disabled, breastfeeding mothers, pregnant mothers, children and babies – were not shown mercy. They started shooting from a big machine gun; it was like spraying a water hose onto plants in a garden. Everyone was terrified and in a great state of shock and confusion, not knowing where to hide. We tried to find shelter for our children and we struggled to find food for them to eat as they were crying for food. It was very difficult without any cooking utensils and because we had fled further inland, when most of our lives we lived on the coastal area. We started to make gardens and shelter and it took the children quite some time before they adapted to the new environment.

We continued to live in the bush and were afraid to come down to the coastal area since the people who came in the patrol boat were fully armed and would kill anyone on sight. The country's policy on firearms was no longer effective. People carried firearms around threatening and harassing people. While there, we were under strict control by the militants. We sought permission to go and find food or go to our gardens. They would allow us but under a strict timeframe and orders. We lived in fear, not knowing our fate. On the 17th of March 2001 all our homes were burnt down and all our belongings were looted and stolen by the Joint Operation team who came in the patrol boat. It is still evident today if you come to our place you will only see burnt posts standing up where our village once stood. The total number of houses burnt down was 102 and we remained in the bush for seven solid months. After seven months, the militants came and ordered us to return to our village. We were treated like criminals and they warned us not to return to that place.

If anyone of us returned they would be killed without questioning. On 23 September 2001 they burnt the area where we used to hide after the patrol boat attack.

When we came down to our village, it was heart-wrenching. Again, there was not a house standing; grass had grown up and we had to start all over again, trying to build shelters and gardens. It was very sad and hard for us as we tried resettling again. We had to go back to where we used to hide and collect food for our children. All of this was caused by the Government because, from my understanding, patrol boats should be used to look after our waters. However, this one was used to kill innocent people on the Weather Coast. It was an awful thing to do. You were not allowed to say anything; if you talked, they would point their guns at you. It reminded me of Proverbs 16 verse 1: “We may make plans, but God has the last words, man creates plans to kill us, but God has the last word, if we are to die or not.”

Mr. Jeremy Tavuata’s story:

The GRA stayed during February 1998 at two houses near my place at Mhora used by the people of the area going to their gardens. That was when the GRA was just formed. During the three months that they were there, other members of the GRA came and stayed with them. Some members of the group were known to go to the main village at night. One night four of these boys went to my mother-in-law’s house where my wife was staying. I had just come back from Honiara that evening and my wife told me the GRA boys had been there during the night while they were asleep. I told her to leave it until the morning and I will personally go and see them for the type of attitude they had was not respectable and unacceptable and that it will bring disrespect to their group. That was what I told them and it is from that that they accused me of being a spy and that I was fourth on their list of spies.

That evening, after I had said those words, they came to my house to demand \$200 and a 20 kilo. bag of rice as compensation and said they would kill me the following day if I did not give them their demand. I said if that is the case, then they should come tomorrow because I will be going to Honiara. In the evening I returned and they came to wait for me at Marubo which is where they usually go to from their camp before continuing to my place.

Coming from town after passing a bridge, the driver put on the high lights of the vehicle and we noticed them standing there wearing *kabilatos* and holding spears and knives. Then they stopped us and asked for me; some other passengers in the truck said to them that I was inside; I said to the driver to turn off the lights of the vehicle so that I can jump out of the truck and run away. The gang searched the truck but I had already run away. As I reached my house they caught up with me there. As I had not expected them to come to me that night, everything they had asked for I had already taken away to my mother's house, telling her if they asked for it, then give it to them. So they took what they wanted and left. They told me that it is okay now but my name is still on the paper and that I am a spy. They threatened me three times, the first which I've already mentioned.

The second time was not long after the shooting at Bungana when, I guess, some members of the GRA went to prison and upon release they went to Lambi. That time I was ready to go fishing so I went to a person named Martin Tulele at Tuarere to get some petrol. I saw them there waiting to go in a canoe. I got some petrol and left, fished for a while and reached Tiaro early in the evening and returned about three o'clock. At about 4:00 I realized I was running out of petrol, so I decided to go back. On my way back to Summate Point, I could easily see Lambi and a boat coming out. I thought it belonged to some people coming back from the clinic because I didn't think militants would use a 9.1 horsepower engine going that slow. I went on but to my surprise two of them called out to me. I could make out guns hanging in front of the men so I decided not to go to them. I realized that they were the same people who tried to kill me last time. I started to turn away and that was when they fired two warning shots. Thinking it was nothing, I continued on but they fired another shot which got me thinking that if I went on, that would be the end of me; so I lifted the empty petrol can to show them that I was running out of fuel. They told me to go to them so I did. I went closer to them and they asked why I didn't go to them when they called me earlier. I said I didn't have enough petrol to go anywhere else but home. They asked me if I knew them and because I was scared, I said no. They came into my boat with two containers of petrol and refilled it themselves and said that we will go to Tangarare.

It was getting dark and as we approached Tiaro, one of the GRA members asked to me for a place that sold beer and I said, "Yes, last time they used to sell beer at Tiaro." They indicated for us to go to ashore there. Once we reached shore they asked where the house of the person who sells beer was; I told them that the person who sells beer was approaching us and they told me to call him to us. Once he saw us he wanted to turn around as he saw us with guns and at that time they had also given me a gun. Nevertheless, he came and I told him that the boys wanted two cartons of beer. He did not recognize any of them so he gave the beer to me and we continued on as it was already getting dark. From Tiaro we reached an island and a GRA member told me to turn off the engine and to shut my ears as he would give out a warning shot. He let off two rounds and I asked him what that was for and he said it was a signal for the two other canoes we were waiting for. Suddenly two 40 horsepower engine canoes both filled with men approached and circled us. They told us to take the lead and all three of us continued on to Tangarare.

Upon reaching Tangarare, they pulled ashore the three canoes and asked me if I knew where girls were and I replied that I did not know because that was not my place. We continued on to the principal's house and he showed us the girls' dormitory but told us to wait for the matron. The GRA members disregarded his words and continued on to the girls' dormitory. I was holding a shotgun unwillingly for I did not even know how to use it. When we reached the dormitory, we knocked on the door and the girls opened it and cried as soon as they saw us. One of the GRA members took a girl who knew him and they talked outside while we waited for them which was about an hour or so. All the school boys had already run away, including those from Malaita.

After that we went back to the beach and I was told that we would be going to a place called Haliatu. After arguing a while, a few of the boys that were in my canoe went back up. I tried to tell them that our parish priest had already booked the use of my canoe the following day. One of them agreed that I should go back and helped me lift the canoe back into the sea and then I left them around 12 o'clock at night and returned to Lambi. All my relatives had thought that I was already dead and I arrived safely back at two o'clock.

After four days an old man died. After coming back from the funeral in a Hilux owned by Gold Ridge Mining, we stopped a Land Cruiser and I asked a knife to cut my tobacco. A

GRA member was behind the vehicle I asked the knife from, when he jumped out and started arguing with me, accusing me of asking the knife to cut him with it. After arguing for a while and trying to explain to him, I gave up and said, “Okay, just leave it like that, let’s just straighten the problem out, it’s nothing big,” because I knew it was pointless carrying on. He did not want to straighten the problem but said to leave it for the next day.

At that same time the patrol boat had come to pick up some Malaitans. The next evening they accused me of going to town to tell the patrol boat to come to Lambi to get the people from Malaita, so they came and destroyed my parents’ house. I was not there and I was awakened by the noise they made while they did it. After asking some of the people there what the commotion was, I was told that it was my parents’ house being ransacked by the GRA members. I went over and realized they had stolen everything, including all the cargo of our little canteen. I could not do anything about it since they had guns and I was afraid that they might shoot me with them. I then heard them telling my parents that if I did not go to them they would burn down the house. I saw my mother thinking and then she came for me and told me what I already knew. I knew that they would burn our house if I did not show my face, so I went to them regardless of what would happen to me. They had six guns with three pointed to my neck and the other three at my legs and two boys with bush knives stood at my sides. Unexpectedly, they started punching and kicking me and one of the boys hit my head with the butt of a gun which knocked me to the ground. They continued to kick and hit me for about 30 minutes. I lay motionless, knowing if I moved it would be worse; so I lay there until I could hear no more movement around me. When I saw that they had all gone, I got up and left; and that is my story.

Mr. Nickson Enoch Leana’s story:

The first problem that happened was our whole village being held at gunpoint [by the Joint Operation] because we were accused of being part of the GRA. All of us men managed to escape so they held the women and children at gunpoint and burned down 22 houses. After doing this, they did not return to town but they stayed on at a police post near our village and trained our young men on how to use guns to defend themselves. For the duration of their stay, they would always move around and shoot randomly, which made us men fearful

of moving around the place. We men continued to stay at our garden houses for two months until they left, which is when we came back to rebuild the destroyed houses.

We continued living there until the year 2003 which was when we experienced another situation. The Joint Operation returned to our village again and hunted us men again, accusing us of being members of the GRA and burning down our houses. We men lived in hiding from them in the bush for another two and a half months. This time they held my wife and children at gunpoint and shot at me. Luckily I escaped by jumping into the river. However, they went to the other side of the village and shot at my brothers there but they too managed to escape and hence our stay in the bush for two and a half months. I have a lot of things to say but I'll just make it short.

Ms Shaniella Talasifera's story:

Firstly, it is very painful, hard and touching for people such as myself to share such things as this. I have been harassed and threatened several times on different occasions with my two sons. One of my sons was six and the other was four. My husband was also there but in order to protect my husband it was only me and my two sons who went to confront these people. On Marau we had fallen victims to three groups: The Marau Eagle Force, the RRU [Rapid Response Unit] and the Guadalcanal militants. On the 7th of July was the first operation of the Marau Eagle Force in our area. They came and destroyed the Catholic Mission Station which is less than a minutes' walk from where we lived. When they came, they came through the station at about half past six in the morning while we were asleep. When the shoot-out occurred, our men who were only there to protect us were helpless for they had nothing to defend themselves with; thus they could only tell us women to run away and to run away themselves. Hence we ran away and stayed in the bush for three months which was when I could no longer hear any more gunfire and see any of my family members. I wondered whether they were still alive or whether they were dead already. This led me to go to the other island to check for my other family members. My husband agreed to this and I and my elder son warned him to keep to the bushes.

As we reached the other island, we met with the Marau Eagle Force who are my own brothers, cousins, nephews, uncles and in-laws. They started accusing me of spying for the

GRA and pointed a gun to the bottom of my chin which caused my son to ask me why his uncle was trying to kill me. As the gun was pointed to my neck, they asked questions about the GRA but, of course, I knew nothing, thus I could not reply. They persisted, accusing me of trying to get information for the GRA. My very own uncle then threatened to kill me, saying that he would break all my teeth with the gun he was holding and that if my husband was there he would cut off his head. They then left to meet their superiors to decide on our fate on whether to beat us or kill us. One of the boys that they placed to guard me and my son had noticed some betel nut that I had left in my canoe and said to me after the militants had left: "If you give me some betel nut, then I will help you escape." So I told him to take the betel nut from my canoe. He then told me to follow the path through the mangrove and my son and I did so to find his wife waiting there with their canoe. We then waited for the boy to bring our canoe to us and all four of us paddled to the next island. I was so relieved to reach the other island without being caught. Having reached the other island we made our way through a plantation of coconuts there and then we noticed two 40 horsepower canoes approaching and they asked the people there whether they had seen me and my son. After asking an old man who denied seeing us, the old man came over to us and told us to go the next village and that I would meet my mother there. I was overjoyed to see her there and as she held me I cried for I had not seen her for three months and thought her dead already. She then told me that she was scared stiff of the guns and told me I should go soon. She told me how the Marau Eagle Force were treating the civilians there so unjustly and that it was really stressing her out.

Eight months after the tension had finished, my mother died. Her last words to me were that she was finally at peace for there were no more guns and that she would pray for me and my children for a better life. Now I really miss my mother. At one time I and my son were near to the seaside and some of the militants shot at us. At that time my husband was in the mountains and as soon as he heard gunshots he knew that it was us who were being shot at, so ran down to the seashore to meet us. After dodging bullets several times, we finally made it to safety. I would always go down to the seafront even though I was risking my life to find food for my family. Nobody except the militants would be seen around there, not the villagers or those from the surrounding islands would be seen there. Even the

militants from Guadalcanal had already moved out of the area after the Operation on the 7th of July. I think that is all I have to share with you.

Mr. Aloysio Tungi's story:

Firstly, the GRA came and asked me to join them but I refused. Hence, after three days and nights, they came and took my canoe and outboard motor. Then on another day, since I have three little canteens, I took a boat and went to buy cargo for my store. When I came back, I left some at my store at Koana and I took some and went down to my place. When I reached Lambi, some of my people told me to go and hide but I did not want to go and hide because I knew I had done nothing wrong to them. So I went to where they were to ask for a boat from another person. As I reached the place, they told me to go to them; so I went and they told me to go and call another GRA member; I did as I was told. After that, I wanted to return. As I was returning, I noticed them following me and then they started beating me and I fell down. After the beating, I lay there from 5 o'clock up to around 8 or 9 o'clock when I felt my head go dizzy. I fell down again and when I got up they hit me with the butt of the gun and I fell down again. While I was lying there, the militants went and broke bottles at the fisheries at Lambi. After breaking the bottles, they came and got me and threw me onto the bottles that they had broken, put a gun into my mouth and left it there for about three hours, during which time I could not speak. Then they took money from my pocket and they took the cargo from my store and they ate it all.

For two days I lay there with the point of a gun in my mouth. On the third day I wanted to go home because I felt a little bit better, so I managed to get home with a friend on his boat. I told him when we got home, "I'll give you the money for your petrol." But when we reached home, the militants had already burnt down my store and my house and presumably took my money. Every day after that, the militants saw the other two stores and would come and demand money and pigs until both closed down. That's when I ran away to stay in the bush because they would come and shoot all the time. As soon as we saw a boat approaching, we would run away and hide. One time I went to Tangarare because I felt sick and as I reached a point at Paina, I met them there and they pointed a gun at me again and demanded, so I took them back to my home and gave them money. That resulted in us having no more money and food. The next time they came, I told them that

we had no more money to give them and that they could shoot us if they wanted to but they did not shoot. That is the end of my story, thank you.

Mr. Serilo Voli's story:

The first two meetings were held at my place and the third which I did not attend was at the Anglican area. I did not attend the third meeting because I had to work on my cocoa for some money. I finished work at around 10 o'clock and went to join the meeting but it was finished so the militants questioned why I was not present at the meetings; I explained that I was not there because I was busy with my work; when all my work is finished, I will join up with them. They took me and we came along the road to a place called California, however, in the Ghari language we call it Caltonia; there a militant came and started accusing me of being a spear (spy). His name was Komkambanisi; he was part-Guadalcanal and part-Malaita from the Kwaio area. He jumped out pulled out his copra knife and put it against my side. I quickly replied and said, "Hey, what are you trying to do, my boy?" At that time my mind was beginning to fill up with fear, thinking today will be my last day. At the same time, Keke and Joe pulled out their guns and put them to my head; other militants came in and tried to knock me down.

They marched me towards my house along the public road; later they told me to stand up for 30 minutes and they ordered me to kiss the ground; they even told me to use some bad and abusive language against myself and my family. I told them that I am a Christian man, and will not say such bad words; if you want to kill me, go ahead and do as you wish. I stood they told me to open my mouth and they put their gun inside; they ordered me not to move. I stood for another 15 minute; then they asked me again, "Are you a spear? I said, "No, I am not a spear." Joe told Keke to sit down and he took me to be court-martialed; in the end, I won the court and they compensated me with eight strings of *tavi* (shell-money).

I took [the militants] to my house; they gave me a gun and told me to follow them. I told them that I was not physically fit to go with them but they insisted that I must follow them. We went to the top of a hill and worshipped some ancestral spirits; we killed a pig and feasted there. We stayed there and they taught us the new ones how to shoot with a gun but I told them that I have bad eyesight. Afterwards, around 5:30 p.m., we came down to the beach to be transported to the Weather Coast area on a 75-horsepower engine. I told them

that I will have to let my family know that am leaving with them. They told me to meet up with them. They took off at 6:30 and I remained back at my home. My story ends there.

Ms Sedika Haletia's story:

My story begins during the time the Joint Operation came in from Honiara and landed at Marasa. They arrived on the 4th October and made their camp and settled there. Rumors circulated that they were looking for leaders of GRA and its members. The people on the coastal areas held a meeting and decided to make a protest march to prevent them from going over to our areas. When they arrived, the community groups went over to them and told them to turn around and return back to Honiara. Their commander refused to listen to our concern and in the evening I was sitting in my house when I saw them coming into our village. I whispered to my husband and told him to hide. They came and asked for my husband and I told them he was not at home and they left. On the 9th of October they carried out their first operation but could not go through so they returned and came back to ask for my husband. A police officer came with a gun and pointed it to my face and started accusing my husband and myself of being spears (spies). He asked for my husband and I told him he had gone to the next village. He labeled my husband a coward for refusing to join the Joint Operation, even accusing me of being too bossy over my husband. I said that he has a duty to look after his family and I do not want him to get involved in any trouble. He told me to get my family and all our belongings and move out from where we were because they will go to Honiara to collect more weapons and men, then they will return on the patrol boat. I told them that I cannot move out from my place since most of my family's gardens were there and that if we moved we will not have anything to eat.

They came over to Honiara, collected all the things they needed and returned on the 16th of October. That Sunday evening my daughters and I were walking home from the next village when we saw the Joint Operation team fully armed with more men. I asked them where they were going and they replied they were just strolling along the road. They went to the next village and caught one of my cousin-brothers, tied his hands and marched him and assaulted him along the way. At the same time, I noticed they were looking for all the men and boys who had refused to join the Joint Operation. I told my daughters to go and tell their father to hide and when we ran they saw us move, they ran after us. Someone

fired a shot in the air and told us not to move, but we continued running and he followed us to where I was running. He caught up with me and asked for my two daughters and husband, to which I told him that they had fled the area when they heard gunshots; there was no one in the village. The man told us not to move or he will shoot us while he told his other colleague to watch us closely. We remained standing and when he returned later he asked us where everyone in the village was and said we did not know.

Not long after that, my husband and I returned to our house. We were staying around the house when the Joint Operation arrived and pointed their guns at him and led him away for questioning. He returned afterwards and warned us that the fighting will get worse and advised us to keep away for our own safety. In 2003 the Joint Operation came and demanded a pig, a shell money and \$1000 cash as compensation from two separate communities within our area. We collected the money from the two communities and gave them what they wanted. That same month they came and ordered us to go and find my husband immediately and that they will wait for us at our house. I went and found him under a tree near the riverbank and when he saw me he knew that something was wrong. He waved and told me to go over to him. I told him the Joint Operation were waiting at our house and had sent for me to come and get him. He asked me, "What for?" and I told him that the Joint Operation had demanded two pigs and \$700 cash from us, and that we are to give it by Tuesday next week. He told me not to worry and to tell them that we will meet their demand. I returned and told the Joint Operation and they left.

They returned on Tuesday and we and everyone in the two communities collected money and gave them \$1,200 since we did not have a pig. They took the money and left. We continued to stay and tried to live a normal life; however, they returned again and this time they came for my husband. He had to give them one shell-money, \$1,000, and a pig. I asked "What for?" and they replied it was for their boss. I told my husband and he told me that we will try and meet their demand. They were supposed to come and collect the compensation from us on the 20th of May but on the 19th they came around our village.

My sister was on her way to the garden one day when she met men sitting along the road. They called her to go over to them and they questioned her about her husband. She told them she did not know where her husband was and they started beating her up and fired

their guns in the air. They told her to come and get me and my husband; she came and I could see that her eyes were swollen. She told me that the Joint Operation had told my daughters to go and cook some rice to feed the Joint Operation men. One of them pulled out his gun and fired seven shots in the air; we remained calm but could not do anything. Everything calmed down and we gave them some cooked food and they left soon afterwards. My husband told them to come back tomorrow so that we can solve the compensation they demanded from him.

During that time, after the Joint Operation left, my husband was not feeling comfortable back at home. He asked me why I behaved in such a risky way and I told him that I have to speak out since they disregarded our rights as human beings and they had no respect for my husband who was the chief. There are ways to solve problems in our culture but in 2003 the Joint Operation came and harassed and shot at everyone in our village. We fled and slept in the bush; they burnt and looted our properties; we lived in the bush for three solid months; we had no shelter and had been living with other people in other communities.

It was after they had burnt down our homes that I noticed my husband no longer had peace in his heart, it was so heavy for him. It was after RAMSI intervened that we were able to return back to our original place and started rebuilding our lives. My husband always told me that he cannot live long with us because he felt that his body was not the same as it used to be in the past. Not long after that in 2004, he took our youngest daughter with him to town and he died in town three months after; that was the last time I ever saw him alive. The message he left for me with our relatives was very painful; he told them to tell me that he needed to rest from all the things that had been worrying him and if it is God's will one day we will meet each other in heaven. I was not with him when he died; I arrived the next day. I was discouraged from taking his body back to my village but I insisted and in the end I succeeded and took his body to our home village. My story ends here.

Pastor Benjamin Sam's story:

First and foremost it was by God's intervention that I was rescued on Saturday 12th June 1999. Eight armed men holding a rifle, shotgun, homemade gun, a pistol and a machete appeared at my village of Saripa. I can remember they arrived without my noticing. I

came down to have my shower in preparation for the morning Sabbath day worship when they pointed their gun at me and instructed me to stand still or they would shoot. I followed them as instructed; two of them went into our house and ordered my wife to open our room for them to take my shotgun rifle and ammunition. After getting the shotgun, they forced me to go with them to their camp called Kulu. I asked them on the way what I had done and one of them replied that I will find out later. We reached their camp about 7 a.m. where I was led to their high-ranking commander with more armed men. The eight men left me there and their mission was over.

Whilst at Kulu, the commander asked four men who labeled me a spear (spy); they said they knew me and one of them said yes and that my name was Ben Sam and he was a spy. The commander asked him if he could give some proof really was a spy; he replied by saying that he'd only heard it from other people. He asked the second man and the third and they responded in the same way as the first. The overall commander was angry and told them that if he called for the fourth man and he said the same as you three, all of you will be shot on the spot. The fourth man was called in and instead of talking he began to throw punches, kick, and butt me with his rifle; they all joined in, it was like a pig covered by wild hunting dogs. They continued until a voice told them to stop. They all stopped and the commander walked in and inspected me. However, I had my left eyebrow cut two inches deep, four of my left ribs were fractured, while three on my right were dislocated, and my left jaw was fractured. I hear them pulling their guns but, with the sound of the trigger, no bullet was fired. After beating me, I can remember the commander ordered his men to go and search my home.

After that, I was ordered to be taken to the Weather Coast on the other end of this island to be executed. They chose five men to escort me to the Weather Coast. Of these five men, four of them were armed with rifles and the fifth one was holding a machete. Both my hands were tied and the one with the machete pulled and dragged me along the way as a cattleman pulling a cow by the neck to be slaughtered. The commander gave orders to the five men who were escorting me, if I made any attempt to escape, shoot him at the spot; if I asked for food, give him wild taro; and the third order was not to give me any medical treatment. On our way, I asked these five men where are they taking me, and they replied,

“Weather Coast.” As we went, the first village we reached was Achuwa, and there the militants asked for transport; the truck owner asked if they could take me to the clinic first, but along the way a militant directed him not to stop but to go to the next camp. As we reached that camp, one of the GRA members came and I could tell that his spirit was high, ready to kill; as he approached me, the same powerful voice I heard at Kunu spoke again telling him not to harm or kill me. When I heard the voice, it reminded me of the verse in the Bible in Psalm 50:15, “Call on me in the days of trouble and I will deliver you”. All along I knew that my God had listened to my prayer and will come to my rescue.

Leaving the first camp and going to the second was quite far, and along the way I prayed to God, and the militants who came did not touch me; the same thing happened when we reached the third camp; at the fourth camp, we spent the night there. I was questioned there and they asked if I was from Malaita. I told them that I am part-Guadalcanal and Malaita. They told me that I was lucky, if I was full-Malaita, they will chop my neck off; there I felt as if I wanted to pass out quickly since I could not bear the pain and aches in my body. I could not drink or eat anything, or even swallow my saliva, and was not able to move. I told them that I wanted to pray but they did not allow anyone to pray to God in their camp. They escorted me outside and I prayed to God, seeking him that if I was to be killed here, “Remember me in your Kingdom.” After the short prayer, they took me back into the camp.

I spent the night there; about 4 a.m., I could not bear the pain anymore, I almost passed out. I prayed to my God in his mercy and I spat out blood. About 8 a.m. I was commanded by their boss to go to the next camp. However, a militant mashed some potatoes and cassava for me with a hot cup of Milo. After I took two cups of Milo without the mashed potatoes, the commander came and put his gun on to chest and asked me, “Who told you to eat?” I replied and said I don’t know which one of them gave me tea. He ordered me to stand up. I told him I couldn’t because I have broken ribs; so they used a stretcher to carry me. As we reached one of the steep mountains, I was put down to walk, supported by two militants. After sometime, we could not go further but to spend a night there on the side of the mountain near Bokokimbo River. Not long after, the militants from the next camp had arrived and the commando asked the militants if they could give him my heart for supper.

However, the commander who was in charge of me did not allow this to happen, and if they did, he will burn down their village and kill everyone there.

The next day was the 14th and we proceeded on with our journey, up to the higher lands of Guadalcanal and down to the valley and up to the mountains again, and I reached the peak where I could not walk any longer. I asked the commando if we could stop for a moment to rest and that I wanted to pray to my God. I asked God and said, “Enough is enough, it is better for me to die than stay alive.” After saying the prayer, I gave the commando two options: either they took me to a clinic to be treated or they should just kill me straightaway. The commander sent two of his men to go and radio their overall commando. While we were there, Pastor Joel Kavora sent two boys to look for the spy Pastor Ben Sam; the two bosses caught up with us and told the commander-in-charge that I was innocent.

After a couple of minutes’ rest, we returned back to where we came from, that was on Monday; we spent a night at Kolosulu, then down to Numbu, on Tuesday and later to Nguvu clinic where I was only treated with septrin; I could not believe that it really helped me. There at Nguvu one of the overall commandoes heard that I was there and he came to pay me a visit on Thursday morning. When he came, he saw me and I asked him three questions: “From here, where will you take me?” He assured me that they will return me to my family; secondly I asked him if my family can come and visit me; he said, “It’s okay.” On Friday morning, another commander came and visited me, and assured me that nothing will happen to me, and I was to remain at the clinic until I recovered; and he will arrange for a transport to take me home.

On July 14th I was transported home, not knowing at home my family had prepared a feast to welcome me back from death to life. After the feasting was over, I can well remember the commander warned me not to go to town until the conflict was over; my family and relatives can go to town, except for me. The commander also warned all the militants not to come and harass and demand compensation from me; if they do, they will face some consequences. The next day I discovered that all my household goods had been looted by militants; my taxi and bus were also damaged; my poultry was also stolen and the equipment was damaged. The total cost of lost and damaged properties amounted to \$133,000. That was the first incident that happened to me during the tension.

The second incident was quite similar; some of the militants saw my wife going to town. They were angry and came to me. When I came out, they asked me, “Who told me to send my wife to town?” I tried to explain but they demanded \$200 from me so I told them to wait until my wife returned from town. In the evening when my wife returned, she was harassed at the bank of the Mbarande River. They forced her to give them \$200; to which demand my wife said she would give the money directly to the overall commander, Andrew Te’e. When she arrived, she told me of the incident and I asked the \$200 from her and gave it to the militants. Andrew heard of the demand and came the next day and enquired of the demand. I told him of the demand and he was furious and told his right-hand commander to go and burn down their houses and shoot them all. I encouraged and convinced them to refrain from creating more terror. He listened to me and left.

Ms Rhoda Tarava’s story:

I am a woman from Urahai but live in Tamanu. We heard the patrol boats that were sent over by our Government. They were all armed, they came and some of them went ashore at Marasa. News came around that the patrol boat will carry out its operation starting from the evening. We stayed until evening and it started its operation at Komate; it started shelling the areas along the coast. My husband came and told us to wait. He went down to the coast. That day he could not return; he managed to flee further inland to a safer area. We continued to hide there until others came and told us to move down to Urahai village. We moved down willingly to Urahai village. One evening the Joint Operation came to our village; they came in a big group accompanied by some local boys. They had a large gun; I can remember the gun, they called it a “launcher.” They came and told me that I will have to go to the next village with the other women whose husbands had joined the GRA; we left as instructed with some of our very young children. It was raining at that time and we were all soaking wet. I was carrying my little baby girl and her body was shaking, I sent for a boy to go to my sister to get us an umbrella. My sister came and took my little girl; we reached the next village and they took us to the catechist’s house. When we arrived there, the priest felt so sorry for us; he told them to take us to another place not in his house. Another woman came and offered for us to go to her house; there we were kept as prisoners. Later at night, they called us out and they questioned us about our husbands, if

they normally came and visited us often. We told them that after joining the GRA group, they did not come back to live with us.

At the same time, a doctor was touring around our area, so I asked them, if I could take my baby daughter to see the doctor. I was allowed and took my daughter to see the doctor. After we saw the doctor, my brother in-law would not allow me to go back to the place where we were kept as prisoners. Another day, someone came to me after seeing some unusual activities on the top of a hill; they came to me and asked if I can volunteer to go up the hill and check if it was a spot the GRA militants were hiding. I decided not to go because I was so scared and worried about my children in case something bad happens to me; they insisted that if I went and located their hiding place, the Government will pay me \$20,000. However, I turned the offer down.

I continued to stay and look after my children and decided to go and help an elderly woman whom I was living with. I told her to look after my children and I was to go and plant and collect some food from her garden. I left the area for the garden, carrying an empty bag and a hoe. As I was going up the road, I heard some people playing music from a tape. They were also armed with guns. I was scared but decided to walk past them. Reaching the spot where they were sitting, they called for me to go and sit with them. I told them that I am going to the garden but they insisted; one of the officers open fired in the air. I stood still and could not move. He told me that they knew that my husband visited us yesterday, after the patrol boat attack. I told them that I haven't seen him, but they continued accusing me, that he had visited us on Thursday. I continued to tell them that I haven't seen him and one of them punched me on the left side of my eyes. I cried and they continued assaulting me, kicking, punching and butting me with their rifle.

I cried bitterly and they ordered me to stand and return back to the village; they told me to go and get my brother-in-law. As I walked away, one of them shouted from behind, saying I won't return if I escape. I told them that I cannot run [away]; I will do whatever you instructed me to do. I went and told my brother in-law; he came but could not do anything. The officers followed us and took me to their senior officer in charge, and he questioned us. My brother in-law defended me but one of them wanted to shoot me; he accused me of lying. My sister in-law and I agreed that they should shoot me, and I offered myself to be

shot; however, the person who wanted to shoot me pulled back his rifle. The senior officer took his rifle and opened fire into the sky. Later, my brother-in-law told his daughter to cook some rice to feed the Joint Operation; his daughters refused at the first but later agreed and cooked for the Joint Operation. After eating they left. My story ends there.

Mr. Charlie Kennedy's story:

I am married and have five children, four girls and a son. I work for the Government and travel around the provinces. I was posted back to Marau in 1998 when the tension actually started. I was not worried because my wife is part-Guadalcanal and Malaita. We continued to live there until April 1999 when we realized that the tension had reached a heated stage. I told my family that we will have to return to our home village; we continued to observe the situation until April 2000. The tension was worst in our area at Marau, especially between three groups: the first group was the Marau Eagle Force, the second were the Guadalcanal Liberation Fighters and the third were the Rapid Response Unit.

The group RRU warned us that they would come and do their operation on Marau. All the community members sat down and decided that we all should move further inland on a much safer ground. When we fled the area, shooting occurred on Marau between the RRU and the GLF and after the situation quieted down and after we returned to our village, that was a couple of weeks later, the Marau Eagle Force was formed. All the people in the village were afraid and did not want to be caught in the crossfire. To avoid been mistaken for affiliating with any of the two groups, we fled again in the bush and settled at a hiding spot. We remained there from June to August and felt the situation was very tense. We tried to refrain from being a part of the two groups since most of us were related to both sides of the warring parties.

I encountered an experience that nearly killed me. On 20 August, which was a Sunday, a man visited us and informed us on the outcome of a meeting. After he had left, I went around and warned everyone in the four makeshift huts that we used to hide in, that we must move further inland the next day. The next day on the 21st of August 2000, between 5 a.m. to 6 a.m., we were on top of a hill and the sun was already shining brightly. An adopted son said, "Dad, I want to go to the toilet." While I was waiting for him I heard

gunshot. I came out and tried to look further down; then another shot was fired just next to the hut where my sons were resting. At that time my wife and her daughters started screaming and crying. I calmed them down and stopped them from crying. I advised them to stay together. At the back of our hut we had dug a hole for my mother in-law who was very old and she used it as her toilet. I told them to go and stand around that area. I went to the old lady and covered her with her mattress and told her to remain calm. As we stood and watched out to see if anyone was coming, I saw a young tall person coming towards us; he came with a high-powered gun. I knew that person very well; his father was a close relative and a very good friend; and also knew him very well, we all came from the same denomination. He came up to where we were standing and he pointed his gun to my head; he pulled the trigger three times but the gun did not fire. Another person came and advised him to put his gun down; a few Sundays before, both of them and I were in church praying together.

I told my wife to take her daughters to the kitchen and rest there. I will talk to the men. They asked us where we have hidden the Guadalcanal militants. I went with them; we went for less than five minutes and I told them that there are no GLF militants here. I explained and told them everything about the huts and all the different people who were in the different huts, and there are no militants with us. That person went close to one of the huts and gave a warning shot. One of the men inside was not aware of the first warning shot and he jumped up and came out of the hut; as soon as they saw him, they grabbed him and told him that he was one of the men they were looking for, since he refused to join them in the first place. They put a knife to his throat and told him that he has to give them \$500 or they will kill him. His daughter came and asked me for the amount to compensate on behalf of her father. At the same time another man came, and they pointed their guns at him and demanded \$180. I also gave the money on his behalf; they claimed that he also refused to join them. He was the nephew of the first person they had demanded \$500 from. Five minutes later they came and they told me of the stories, that they had killed many of the GLF members since they were only using homemade guns, and that they had cut off their heads and taken them to the islands. When I heard this, I knew they must have killed some of my boys and I hinted this to my wife. They sat down they demanded food, asked for smokes and betel nut; they even asked to take my pet parrot, but did not allow them to.

When they finished and were about to go, they and told me that they will return in the night. I spoke to them in a polite way and they left. On their way, when they reached the main village where we use to live, they burnt down all the houses there. I told my wife to go and check the house where my sons were hiding. When we reached the house – it was a high floor house – we saw my in-law lying there, but was not moving. I looked over and saw one of my adopted sons; he was asking for water. My wife took a piece of cloth, dipped it into a glass of water, and put it in his mouth. I soaked another piece of cloth and covered it over his body. After that my son requested that I should pray with him. I told him to pray after me, “God forgive my sins and take my life.” He followed and as soon as he mentioned the word Amen, he passed away.

We went to my in-law. He was lying on his bed and his head was in two halves; some part of his head was lying two meters away; there was nothing we could do since he had died already. We moved to the next. He was shot on his left hand and was shot two times to his chest. We collected their bodies and dug graves to bury them. Fearing their warning that they would return in the night, we fled that area about 3 a.m. in the morning; using kerosene lamps, we continued our journey and we reached a riverbank and it was dawn; we were on the northern part of Guadalcanal. Everyone was hungry, so we decided to rest and cook something to eat. Luckily we saw a leaf hut built in the bush area by people making gardens and found some cooking pots inside. After finishing our food and were about to move, we heard gunshots from the coastal areas, so we pressed on forward. At that time the river was also flooding; we caught up with some people who had also fled the fight and they helped us to cross the river. On the other side [of the river], night fell on us and we rested there for the night. At 12 midnight, my mother in-law passed away and we buried her in the bush.

I will leave my story there. Looking back at the tension and my children who died, it concerns me a lot. Personally for me, I had nothing to do with Guadalcanal militants, Marau militants or the Malaitan militants. Whatever happened to me, was done in a deliberate manner. If anyone has any grudges against me, I wish to kindly call on him to come to me, thus we can settle it. Whatever happened to me during the tension was like a scar and if we could not sort it out in properly it will remain forever. I would like to

illustrate this with a story. Two week ago, I helped women to come to Central Hospital to see the doctor. She had an operation over an old scar. The woman had “transverse”, which means the baby had been positioned wrongly in the mother’s womb. She had to go through and operation to give birth to the baby. After the delivery she was stitched up and everything looked normal and the wound had healed. After a few months, she felt pain where she was operated; she went back to the hospital and the doctors said that nothing was wrong. Somehow the Cuban doctors did a scan and they found out the she has an infection on the operated area. What happened was a scar on my life. My sons had died and they were my security and my resources and are our country’s resource. Their lives had been lost for no good reasons. In 2002 I wrote a letter to the people who did this asking them to come so we can reconcile; unfortunately, no one came forward. We did a lot of plans to do reconciliation and nothing eventuates. The scar has been always in my heart and I had been asking myself what the Government should do to help me over my losses, my scar.

Ms Jerolyn Kere’s story:

During that time we lived in a village called Suboko. There were eight of us in the family. My brother was married to a woman from the Weather Coast. At that time of the fighting, he decided to go to her family; my mother told him not to go but he insisted and in the end he left for the Weather Coast. He arrived and after a week the militants saw him and said to his wife, that he looks suspicious (a spy). His wife told them clearly that he came to visit them; despite her explanation, they had set a plan to kill him. One evening they had their dinner and were sitting at their house when a group of young boys came, and were sitting outside their house. One of them came and told my brother’s wife that she must take her children and go to her parents. She told them she cannot leave without her husband. They insisted that she must leave; they will take her husband back to his family on Suboko. His wife argued with them and they started assaulting him. They punched, kicked and butted her with their rifles; they even cut her back with a machete. Whenever the woman wanted to talk, they threatened that they will kill her with all her children, and ordered her to shut her mouth, and leave with all her children.

The militants took my brother and led him away from his wife; some of them escorted her to where her parents were. The militants led my brother away and continued to assault him

along the way. They cut his back open with a knife; he was covered with blood. They led him away to place where there was a huge tree and they ordered him to dig his own grave. After digging the grave, they ordered him to stand and a militant shot him with his gun. He fell into the hole and was still alive, but they covered and buried him. After this killing, all the militants left and returned to their village; they told his wife that they had returned her husband back to his home village, but his wife knew from other people that they had killed her husband.

When he went over to Weather Coast, he told us that he would return a week later with his family. However, it was almost a month now and there was no sign of him or his family and we started to believe that he was killed. We gathered together and prayed for him. Later a militant came and my mother asked him about my brother. He told her that my brother had told him that he will go to work on one of the logging companies on Isabel. My mother told us but we did not believe in her story; we feel and know that he had already been killed.

We continued to remain on where we were, and one day we heard from a militant that they had planned to come and burn our houses down, and that we must leave by tomorrow. My mother told us to pray and we were all worried. We decided to move out to a safer ground but my sisters decided not to leave their houses, so I left with my mother and fled to the area of one my aunties at Mamasa and lived with her there. The militants did not arrive on the day they planned to come and burn our houses, so my sister had more time to get their things out. Two days later my sisters and my father came after us later and we lived with my aunty. A week later, someone came and told us that the militants had burnt all our houses and all our belongings. There was nothing we could do but remain with my aunty on Mamasa.

Two weeks later, the militants came and told my parents that one of my brothers must join with them to go and fight on the Weather Coast. If my brother did not join up with them, they will kill everyone in our family. My brother was left with not much option but to join the group. When he was about to go with the militants, he cried to my mother, and said he did not know what lay in front of him, or if he will ever return or not. He went over to Weather Coast and lived with them at their camp; he was killed when the Joint Operation

shelled the Weather Coast area with the patrol boat *Lata*. We heard stories that they were cooking at that time when he was shot and killed by the Joint Operation. From the time my two brothers were killed up until today, we have not collected their bodies for proper burial. I think that is my story.

Sr. Domitila Kauhiri's story:

In 2002 I was here on Visale with other Sisters teaching at the DIVIT Center. We heard that the tension was out of control so we decided to send all the students home. Some of us remained, some of the teachers went to Malaita for the ordination of a priest, and others went to Honiara. I remained with the principal and after he left I worked with a Sister who was a teacher at the Visale primary school. We were active but the other retired sisters at the station were too old to move around. The community novices were at the other end of the station when a ship arrived one morning. We froze with fear when they fired their high-powered guns. We could not wait or think of our old retired sisters as we ran for our lives along with our nurse and some of the patients at the clinic.

Further inland, the nurse returned to help others who were still at the station. We were so scared of the sound of the guns and continued further inland. We waited until things had quieted down before we returned in the evening. That morning the Guadalcanal militants were also there but could not do anything since they feared that if they exchanged fire there would be more bloodshed and innocent casualties. After shooting, the MEF left on the ship. We returned and heard stories that they had killed two men from the Visale area. The body of one had been removed for burial and another still remained on the site he was shot.

The other Sister and I decided that we should not stay at the station but to go and live with one of her sisters further inland. During the day we would return to the station and in the evening we would return and spend the night back in the village inland. We did this for several days and the other Sister returned to live on the station. I was still afraid and continued to spend the night in the village. A senior Sister in the Society came to celebrate her 90 years and we told her to come and live with us in the village.

We heard that the MEF group would return to burn every house down. They arrived on Monday and the most senior Sister among us met them on the beach and told them not to

spoil the Catholic Mission houses. They took heed of her request and burned other village houses and all the houses close to the station. They met some resistance from the Guadalcanal militants and exchanged fire. Gunshots were heard the whole day. Before they arrived we had sighted the ship along the Visale Point and we were frightened every time we saw the ship. I just wondered why the militants chose to come and fight in a church mission area. I kept thinking how we all have our culture and that traditionally fighting happens between tribes. Yet, during the tension it happened between provinces and the whole nation. Today we are trying to bring peace back into our nation. Peace will never come unless we open our heart for peace and accept peace.

6. MAKIRA

Anglican Diocese Cathedral, Kira Kira, 27-29 October 2010

Mr. Peter Maru's story:

On the 10th Dec 1998 at 2:30 a.m., I was on duty at the Yandina Police Station not knowing that the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (GRA) was around the Yandina area. While there, a group of people led by Harold Keke arrived. I recognized Harold Keke as he has a tattoo on his left arm. He was the person who led this group of 14 people in a boat with high-powered outboard motor engines; one is 30 hp. and the other one a 40 hp. engine. They came ashore in front of the Police Station at Yandina, right into the canoe and petrol shed of the Police. I was on duty by myself as we had a shortage of manpower. I went outside and I saw many people there and I wondered what these people were doing. I went to them and said, "This place is not a place to throw rubbish," but none of them responded. On my way back, right in front of the in-charge office, where the flag pole was, they pointed a .22 gun to my head. There were four guns. I don't know whether it had live ammunition or just to threaten the people: one here and two here and the other here. They pointed at me with the guns and they ordered me to shut my mouth. I asked them, "What have done wrong?"

The moon started to get bright a little so I could see that there were more of them, up to eight people. The two boats contained 15 people: one had seven and the other had eight people. I continued to insist, "What did I do wrong?" and the spokesperson ordered me to shut up. They led me to the police barracks to where the kitchen is. Two people were already hiding in the police station jail. I was afraid they might smash my hands as I was holding onto the corner of the counter. I asked them, "What are you thinking of doing?" and the spokesperson who is now serving his sentence in Rove asked me for the keys. They were now asking for the keys and I said no one is allowed to get hold of the keys according to Police Force orders. For stations like this in the provinces, only the officer-in-charge should hold keys. For other stations like Kira Kira, only the Provincial Police Commander (PPC). I then went on to pursue them by questioning what are they going to do, and the person responded by saying, "We will fight for our freedom and land." At the

same time I asked them, “What actually interested you to break into the police Armory, as it is not proper and there are ways in Melanesian [culture] to solve problems.” He ordered me to shut up. I turned to him and said, “If you want to get your hands on those weapons to use against people, at the end of day you would have 55 years imprisonment.” At that time they pointed the gun just like a child; I later realized I had a cross around my neck and I prayed, “Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.”

We came to the barracks at the end of the square, and there was a visitor inside by the name Albert with two expatriates from Australia. The police officer was fully aware of what was going to happen but did not tell us. This officer married Harold Keke’s sister and he is from Visale and part Savo. They pushed me down to sit on the bed with Michael Hammond from Australia, still pointing guns at me. Michael is a millionaire and came to an island called Karimalon, a beautiful Island. He first came to build a resort on Karimalon. He bought it from my *wantok* who he was the General Manger of RIPEL Plantation, Davidson Fekau. He [Michael] woke and saw me sitting and the militants pointing guns at me. He then gave me a cigarette and swore at them and told them he fought in the Gulf War between Saddam Hussein and the Americans and “the gun you are holding is a toy one.” He was ready at the time to help if they fired at me. They continued to struggle to open the police armory; there was no key so they used a huge *vasa* log to smash against the armory door and went inside.

Prior to the raid, my officer-in-charge of the station (OCS) asked me the day before to go and clean the armory in preparation for the visit of the Police Commissioner, Mr. Frank Short, to Yandina Police Station. When I cleaned it I found a box containing 300 ammunitions from World War 2. Fortunately these people overlooked these; they only picked a .303 and other .22 rifles belonging to people with expired licenses. It was past three o’clock in the morning. As they carried [out the raid], one of them was talking and I could hear Harold Keke saying, “Dou” and “Eo.” They got up and, still pointing guns at me, went on to the boats and left. Michael, a friend of mine from Australia, then told me to go after them but I refused as they fired at us. I came back and got my torch and found eight live .22 rifle bullets, a green shirt with “GRA” written on the front and at the back of it, and an axe. The only room that had lights on was the radio room; otherwise, the power

was off in all the places. Fortunately, they did not get the radio, so I tried my best to get through to COMPOL, but I did manage to reach radio stations like the Shortlands and the Choiseul.

It was somewhere around 5:00 a.m. when I got through to a woman radio operator. I asked her where she was and I told her that the Yandina Police Station had been raided. I went on to ask if she could contact the Police Commissioner and the Director of the Police Field Force (PFF). Five police speed craft [then] arrived [but did not pursue them]; the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (GRA) had not yet passed [across to Guadalcanal]; actually they were just hiding at a point at Louna in the Russell Islands. It was believed they [the GRA] had cast a spell made of human heart so that whatever action you intend at that moment will be stopped; it was 10:00 a.m. and everybody witnesses it [that is, the GRA put a spell on the police to prevent them from following them]..

I handed over to the next shift and went to my house and had a sleep. While still in bed, they came and knocked on my door. I got up and saw the responsible people I requested were outside. I told them that it was not the right time to come as now it was afternoon. I was so thankful I did identify three of them right on the spot; we used to school at Najilangu a junior primary school of the mission schools, and we had been together and ended up in Maravovo. The investigation was so quick after they came to me. A speed craft came to pick me up as I decide not to come in a plane as arranged.

In the same months, I decide to come to Honiara for safety reasons. [The GRA] went to Tamea and got a speed craft which belonged to Tommy Chan. There was a second attempt to raid the Tulagi Police Station and the group was fully armed. Warlord Mr. Harold Keke was the one who used to do maintenance in all the police station armories and he knew them very well. They went to raid the Tulagi Police Station armory but were unsuccessful. So they came to a nearby island called Bungana and there one of the policemen shot one of the men who was a Form 6 student at King George Sixth School. When they raided the Tulagi Police Station, I insisted that I leave Yandina Police Station; the bosses did not manage to get me through [to a new posting] but somehow I did come to Honiara. When due to arrive in Honiara, my officer-in-charge at Yandina did call the police headquarters and told them that I was coming to Honiara.

I came and worked with the Guadalcanal police where we often argued. The [Malaita] Eagle Force burned the Guadalcanal Province headquarters and those of us who were loyal to our work could not do anything because the militants were armed. While in Honiara, they raided the police armory and I must reiterate here that the police armory is the safety of our country, Solomon Islands. A question I really would like to ask is, how come the armory was open and who distributed the keys? I believe it involved the police themselves. About 2,000 firearms were taken and later 34 .303 rifles was taken. I went to see the director of the [police] Very Important People (VIP) unit, as I wanted to be attached with the Governor General, Fr. John Ini Lapli.

The armory was raided on the 5th June 2000. When I worked with the VIP unit, a lawyer threw a can beer at me from his car and said, "Open the gate, don't you know me?" and I told him that I did not know him and told him about the rules of the gate. Before independence we used to look after the gate and that should not change. He then raised his gun, an SLAR. A Special Constable then went on and opened the gate; the lawyer was his *wantok*; and he went to the Prime Minister's residence. I called the Prime Minister, Mr. Allan Kemakeza, now the current speaker of the Parliament, and told him the gate had no rules and people can go in and out. All the VIP guarding officers had to transfer to guard the Governor General, Sir Father John Ini Lapli at Kola Ridge. We continued to guard the Governor General until the arrival of the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands' (RAMSI).

In the beginning of 2004, we all were made redundant, just like sacking us from work with no proper document and package. Each one of us, 119 police officers, did not receive long-service benefits or other public service entitlements; all of us are family men and some of us died waiting and some of us are still waiting for all the entitlements. Is the Government going to pay the wives of our colleagues that had died already? Some of us have been working for 33, 34, 35, 37 years in service. We are bald-headed, our teeth have fallen out, and we are finished from our work; they were sad moments for us. If only the 11 rounds of the .303 rifle were with me, I could have resisted these culprit militants. I was trained and could handle the weapon very well and during colonial times we used to go around the country.

The involvement of the officers in the ethnic tension [shows that] the Government did not screen the officers well who left the Police Force and who were not supposed to leave. We were just asked to leave the Force and those of us do not have houses in Honiara had to leave as well; for those of us who were sent home, we had to struggle as there was no LPO and nothing else as well. At that we had to wait and it was one month before we got paid; at that time the Government was only paying militant groups; and now they deny everything – in the eyes of man but not in the eyes of God. Since then the Government has not done us any good, until now, 2010, I came to attend the public hearing here in Kira Kira, which is combined with Temotu Province from which all the victims came.

[There was] the time where I was almost being killed while finishing work. I had my bag and my uniform inside; I was going to Burns Creek and at that time two special constables were being attacked and badly hurt. One of the special constables worked in the early hours and I came in the afternoon shift at the Governor General's residence. He finished work and came to the Hatsoa bottle shop at King George Sixth School and there they bashed him up. I came by and they shouted and pointed at me and said something about coming after me. I had nothing with me; a friend of mine came in his car and gave me a lift to Burns Creek. The next day I did not go to work and the following day I went to see the Director about it.

My life during those days was so bad; if I were to go to work, I had to walk through Tanuli area on any shift night, or afternoon or morning. I just walked as all the vehicles were being used by the militants, even the motorbike; and who authorized it was not to my knowledge. No one talks; if you talk out on this you could or may be bashed up later. We even got into arguments at the Rove Police Club; and here I am [arguing with] people who actually are still involved in the Police Force and that's one thing I felt so hurt about. These people are still wearing Royal Solomon Islands Police Force uniforms and belts and they work and yet they are the ones involved. Are we going to ignore the fact uncovered and just let them work like that? How many s Minister and Governments would allow it? . . . The situation is like the national leader of Malaita pushed it to the national leader of Guadalcanal. They went on back to back just to make it hard to uncover the truth. The roots of the ethnic tension are still out there and I as an individual believe in this St. Peter

Cathedral that another tension may arise and it may be bigger than the one in 1998. And in 1998 people start killing each other, I know, this came about; it was just a small demand of the Guadalcanal people, \$2.5 million, and the Prime Minister at that time did not properly address it and since then the spilled [blood] of the ethnic tension came about and it covers our citizens. It is bad and if they address this issue, it probably won't go this bad as experienced [before].

I was one of the men who lifted a man who was killed at St. Joseph Roman Catholic School, Tenaru. I was the one who drove that Land Rover; it smelled bad but I had to do it as it's part of my work. They just put it inside a copra sack and place it as a dead cat. There was also a killing in 1985 at Mount Austin and in 1978 the killing of Mr. Ben Dika and I was the one who picked him up. This entire thing must be addressed, whether I am dead at that time [or not], for the sake of our children and grand children.

Mr. George Lugu's story:

From 1998 to 2003 I was in Honiara. I was not involved in the ethnic tension. I could see during the ethnic tension when the civilians were being armed and called Malaita Eagle Force (MEF); the situation in Honiara city was not good at that time. When I saw shoot-outs at White River, I saw women and children crying, as it was their first time to see such happenings. I found it to be a sad experience. At one time I was staying with my uncle; my uncle returned from work with another person who told him to get out of his Hilux [and drove it away]. The man was member of the member of the MEF. During those days I was afraid and my heart did not feel safe. I had bad feelings towards the people who had done that to my uncle.

One incident that happened was I had an affair with a girl. I was also afraid and people were armed and they came and asked compensation which my Uncle settled with them. I was so pleased with my uncle for what he did for me and without him I might have been killed already. God blessed me. I am proud to be here as a victim from Temotu; and through counseling I feel much better that ever. I want to talk to my people in Temotu, especially my uncle if you are listening out, and I want to thank you for saving my life.

Mr. Polycarp Haora's story:

I am a Police Officer and an Intelligence Officer and during those days a lot of people and incidences happened to me. I walked in front of armed people and it could be back dated to 1998 to 2003. In the course of my work, I was fully dedicated to my work as a police officer and I worked for the people of Solomon Islands. Makira was not part of the ethnic tension. One morning the militant came into my home and ordered me to evacuate my home; I was at Kakabona. People took it so lightly; at last they came and chased us out from our house. I had three kids with me; we walked down the ladder and stood just about 15 meters away from our house as it was burning. I walked out with one trouser and a shirt and the same for my family members. We were not allowed to take anything with us. However, we moved and relocated to Naha but my commitment with the Police Force was not very strong and orders were given to me to return to work. I did take it lightly. Once it was about 1:00 a.m. and a Police Hilux came purposely to get me back to work. I had advised my boys at home not to open the door to anybody and here one comes to wake me as the security situation is not safe. The police officers came in with guns. I was shocked and when I realized there were armed men in the house and they are my work mates who came to pick me up; but the actions they took were not good and professional and I am not happy.

However, I made up my mind to move my family to Makira Province and when the situation became worse; I took my family and sent to Ulawa where I believed it would be much safer than Honiara. I then worked at the Kira Kira Police Station and when I worked here in Kira Kira, one incident occurred in Ulawa and then was reported to the Police, that armed people were now in Ulawa and they were causing disturbance and these arms were high-power ones. As a person who came from Ulawa, I felt so sympathetic about my people I had to go; and there were armed people with camouflaged uniform disturbing the communities at home. I begged them to understand my coming is to make the situation better and asked them not to disturb the communities. I asked them to put the guns away, they fired gunshots and that caused fear amongst people within the village and surrounding communities. This man with the rifle put the two high-powered weapons and cried in front of me; one SLAR and the other one is a SR88 weapon. I told him that I am here to solve

the problem. I did calm this person down and proceeded to liaise with the other party who was also armed and waiting for the Police to arrive: and I also took my uncle with me so that whatever happened to me he, might live to tell. I moved them to Kira Kira and then let the peace prevail in the Island. No disturbances in the communities and that's what I want to see.

I have recommendation to make, that I want the Government and relevant stakeholders to know: the first one is, my properties were lost and damaged. I had a big loan from the Solomon Islands National Provident Fund (SINPF). For the six years in Honiara I had nothing; my coming here as a victim is also to make recommendation to the Government. At that time, there were certain things available to the Government. People claimed for compensation and I also put forward my side of the story to be heard and [for the Government to] take on board my recommendations. Those victims who are here in support of the Government's Truth and Reconciliation process: we have been through stages and procedures of trauma counseling and reconciliation as highlighted by my Premier. But the lost property claims must be met. And do not leave [the victim] after you have given him the counseling he needs; he must be provided with something to get busy and start a new beginning. I also would like to tell the Commissioners that I want a Minister for Central Makira and to show his support to the people and the program.

Mr. Enly Lifu's story:

Thank you, Chairperson and the Commissioners for this opportunity. I am very grateful to come before the public and the Commissioners to share my stories and experiences during the ethnic tension. I worked as a court driver and I drove for Justice Palmer at that time he is our chief justice. It was in May and we were settled at Tenaru and I used to go to work during working days. I had witnessed a lot of the situation of panic and fear as I could see it in the people's eyes. At the time, the Solomon Islands Plantation Limited (SIPL) huge and long trailers were used to load people fleeing from the Guadalcanal Plains. I then asked myself about the ethnic tension that is now just right before us. So during that time I did not work with a free mind but a mind that worried a lot about my families at Tenaru-Mala. That place is our place as a family and it's about 171 hectares of land and it is filled with coconut and cocoa.

It happened on the 11th May 1999; we had heard stories but at that time it was the actual situation we were in. We had just finished our dinner and were just sitting down and chatting with each. We suddenly heard gunshots and we knew they were just near us. Mr. Chairperson, the situation was painful as we watched our families cry and panic and fear raged across our community; it was really a painful experience. Now we had tried our best to get ourselves organized and get prepared to move our families; during discussions we had a planned to move to Honiara. We had only got one truck and it had to take many loads of people as we were 30 to 40 families. We did manage to get on with our planning and the problems are with our wives; we continued for another morning and we were being sent a vehicles and then we moved our families together and got them together at one spot. We were planning, should the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (GRA) come, if they intended to kill us, let them do it. We talked with our wives not to cause us panic. I can tell you the stories but it was so painful. We left the place on the 12th in the early morning of Oct 1999 to Lungga; that was the place where we used to pack our ready copra and cocoa that was ready and we only had our children at that shed.

At times, we the men and our sons had to sleep outside on the grass for six months and luckily it did not rain. When there was a little shower, some had to go under the tents and others had to get underneath the truck; and to make it worse, there were old people as well. In the first week we had, settled we lost one of our relatives, an aunty of mine; she was so sick, not because of natural illness but she hurt so much as it was the first time she experienced such a situation where fear and panic came into our lives. We rushed her to the hospital but she died on the way; that was right at the Solomon Islands Tobacco Company when I realized that she was dead; and I told the driver that we had lost her already and then we turned back; and it was about 9 o'clock to 10 o'clock in the evening. We had a problem where to bury her and later got a space and we did bury her.

Food was also our problem we had tried to go back to our gardens at Tenaru Mala, but there was no way as the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (GRA) was on the other side of Alligator Bridge. We prayed for God's grace as we came to face the situation. To make the situation worse, I had kids and I didn't have a job at that time and the survival of my children and their school fees are of paramount importance to me. And they are all in

secondary education, one at Pawa, one at Pamua and the other one is with me here and I had a big problem with these things. . . . I lost my job and our kids are in high school and we had a really big problem. Even our children, we had to pay only half of their school fees. They did manage to get done with their studies as I had a discussion with the school principals. Some of us did return to Malaita on the scheme the government did and some of us who did not have land on Malaita remained. I was born in Guadalcanal and grew up in Guadalcanal until I fled to Makira and started a new beginning. So in our life, we called ourselves people of Guadalcanal; after some time I told my father that I had to go to Makira, my wife's home, where my brothers-in-law and my wife's people might have something to feed my family, instead of going to Malaita where we do not own anything.

One thing I have to say concerning the place where we lived at Tenaru-Mala. It is not a place we just decided to live as others did. We bought it from Levers and they gave us that piece of land. We had contributed to the economy of this country. . . . What are some forms of development we did? The best we could do was to export cocoa and copra. Our properties were lost and we never got anything. When the Government fund was available – I do not want to comment where it was being used and for what purpose. I am so thankful for the Government of the day, despite what I did as my very best to try to help my family after these long years and trying to forget all that happened to me and move on in life. To the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, I am so thankful on behalf of my people.

I also wish to extend my sincere appreciation to some tribes [for all] we had been through, the Malango and Belaha [tribes]; during our time we had all witnessed the cordial relationship we had; how we used to look after ourselves during those times when nothing of such reckless actions occurred. Only the ethnic tension divided us. I was so thankful for your kindness; thank you chiefs and elders for the understanding we had once shared and good relationship we also had shared since we'd been there for almost 30 years. On behalf of my relatives I would like to thank the chiefs of Malango and Belaha for your hospitality and kindness throughout our time there.

Mr. Johnson Teava's story:

Thank you, Commissioners, for availing me of this opportunity to share my story and experiences on the course of the ethnic tension. In 1998 I was employed in charge security for Solomon Islands Tobacco Company where I looked after the night shift. In that company we had a rule that all the employees' bags and baskets have to be checked after working hours and we are looking and making sure no one has tobaccos hid inside his or her bag. I was one of the officers who was so concerned and who strictly observed the rules; I used to do this [search] and I do not favor anybody. It was going towards the ethnic tension as it reached the end of the year; I used to report it after finding someone who is in possession of tobacco in his bags. Some of the employees I had found hiding tobacco in their bags took advantage of the situation and did retaliation. They threatened me and even came into the compound of the company with knives with the intention to kill me. I started to have fear all those days.

I was married to a Malaitan woman and we had two kids. Most of the time, particularly on our pay days, these people came in and threatened me. I know they knew it was my pay day and I remember some of my pay days, I had to go behind the company fence and climb the fence and jump outside of the fence and get a cab and go home. At that time the ethnic tension grew stronger and we lost one of our employees; he was beheaded and thrown into the Central Market. I was so fearful at that time and I went to Malaita to my wife's home. One night I was sleeping and it was somewhere around three o'clock in the morning my mother-in-law called me and let me know that there is somebody outside and my wife woke up. The moon was shining and I could possibly see there were people outside and these people were armed. I thought they were thinking, I am going to escape.

Before I went to Malaita, there was an incident that had happened when we were being harassed by a man at the Chinatown area when I was with the Christmas Carol group; this group consists of my family and relatives. We went to Koloale area for singing and when we returned we walked through the Chinatown area and suddenly a car pulled over next to us. This police officer came and got out his gun and told us to be quiet and not to talk back. At that time there was a police truck going past us and I stopped it and when the police officer in the truck came out of the truck, the person in the car gave him a cigarette; I was

trying to explain to him what the other person was doing and he told me nothing. The officers did not want to do anything about it and they went in the truck and took off and the person in the car came and told us he was not afraid to shoot all of us. I went to the *Solomon Star* and the *Solomon Star* did not mention in the paper the names of the officers and some of the words the officer was saying to us when he approached us.

Now back to Auki. I saw three vehicles and as I have said, I knew these were police officers and I recognized the voice of one of them when he called me. I came out and he told me that we had to go the police station. I then asked him what is going on and he replied that he was just following orders; this was the other police officers; operation and we have to go the police station in Auki. When in Auki, I had tried to ask them what was going on and they did not reply to me; on that day the MV *Ramos* was scheduled for Honiara and they told me that I was to be transferred to Honiara. I then asked them, I want to see my wife and children. At that time the Provincial Police Commander was a *wantok* and he was the one who got the vehicle and went to get my family. After talking to my family, I was then taken to the MV *Ramos* and was escorted by two militants and when we arrived in Honiara, I was taken to one of their bases called Guadalcanal Province (GP).

After that they moved me to the Central Police Station and they told the police officers there to put me inside police custody. I was placed inside the jail and even asked the officer-in-charge for medicine; I was thinking of committing suicide. I really could not think of anything. When they gave me food I did not eat it. I even told the officers there it is better they put a bullet into my head, and I do not want to remain in the jail without an explanation. I was in custody the next day and I heard that someone had killed one of the militants and the person was being kept at the Central Police Station. This was the information they got. So the militants came to the Central Police Station. Instead I was the one inside the police custody. They were harassing me and insulted and using a lot of swearing words. I was fortunate one of the people who came, his name was Sina - and we used to play in the same football club and he knew me very well. He asked them about the situation, why they put me in jail and the other militants responded in the local language. He then asked me, "Did you kill anyone today?" "No," I replied. "I was taken from Auki and transferred to Honiara and do not know what actually was the reason behind it; I came

from Auki yesterday.” He told them I am not the man they were looking for and I told them to ask the front desk officer and he could tell the truth about my being here. Sina took me with him and that was when I was discharged and it was really a bad feeling within me, no clothing and no food. As I understand it, the officers can get the prisoners’ food that the relatives and families bring. To make it worse, the officers in the Central Police Station were militants as well.

I went out at that time. I went to a friend who worked as a security at the Solbrew Company and he was married to a woman from Temotu. At that time I walked on the street there were people asking about me; they mentioned something about a person who once worked at the Tobacco Company and there were a lot of people looking for me and even the people in the car I mentioned were looking for me. I stayed with a friend at the King George Sixth [school] farm but on the other side of the farm was a Malaitan settlement; and a man from Tikopia had married to a Malaitan and they were also staying next to the house that I am staying. One evening I came home late – it was somewhere around eight o’clock – a man from Tikopia told me that there were vehicles looking for me and he was thinking my friend did not know that people were looking for me, and he might have told them that you are residing here with him. I told him I would go and get my bag and I would get it later from him at his home. I left him and went to the office of the Ready Mix Concrete Company. One of the securities there was my best friend and I told him to come with me so that we could go and get my bag. On our way we hid when a vehicle came; when it went past us, we came out from the bush and walked again on the main road. We went and got my bag and I told my *wantok* from Tikopia that I was going with a friend of mine from Reef Islands; this is because I did not want any trouble to his family, otherwise they could have brought the family trouble just to come after me.

We left him and we walked down the road – once there was a road which led from Burns Creek to the Burns Creek School; we followed that road. I told my friend (Patrick Tolei) to get my bag and go to the company’s area. I did this as again I did not want him be in trouble, and if they came after me, anything they wished to do, they might have done only to me. He got my bag and left. I timed him to arrive at the Ready Mix Company’s area; at that time the moon was shining, I sat down so that I could see further and I came to realize

there was a car parking very close to me. I thought I had no way to escape; I then walked to the main road. Before coming to the main road there is a culvert. I then went past the culvert and turned down to the culvert. I had also noticed there was a car parked at the King George Sixth market area and there were also other cars parking by. I thought these people might have me surrounded. I walked down to the culvert and there was grass everywhere. I walked down the culvert's grassy area and then I walked up again and tried to make the grasses go down so that when they came they probably thought I had already gone down to the Culvert. I went through the culvert and came up on the other side of the road. I then saw a car arrive and parked on the other side where I went down, and they had started to search the area. I was on the other side and I heard them speaking in language and I was so surprised they did not find me. On the side of the culvert, the side I came to, there was a tree, the kind they used to make grass skirts from, and tried to get hold of one of the branches but it broke and it made a little sound but they did not hear it. It was so quiet and I thought they had noticed me. I was on the other side and I watched them searching and then open fire towards the other side of the bush. If only I had a gun, I could have shot them all as I was on the other side and one could see them clearly as it also moonlight.

I was very wet and sitting there and fell asleep; somewhere around three to four o'clock in the morning, I was so cold and I woke up and went to the main road and ran to the Ready Mix Company where a friend of mine was working. I told my friend Thomas to go and get a taxi and I advised him to look for a red cab, and make sure the cab must be not the red one I knew the people were using who were looking for me; and also I advised him what to say when he came with the cab. He must say that I am a son of one of the company's employees and I arrived but my father had already left. The same words I would use when getting in the same cab and he understood. I was waiting for the cab in the company's compound and Thomas came and told me that there was cab he had stopped. I got in to the cab and told the driver the same story I had advised my friend Thomas. I told the driver that I wanted to be dropped off at the Kola Ridge area. On our way up to Kola Ridge, I told the taxi driver to stop at St. Barnabas' Cathedral as I did not have enough money to pay him; I only had \$25. Then we stopped and I got out with my bag. There was a big *abalolo* tree on the other side of the St. Barnabas Cathedral. After the car drove away and when it disappeared, I came after and went to a friend of mine; he is from Lord Howe Island and

married to a Tobaitan woman from Malaita. And this man was working at the hospital. I told them everything and this woman was so concerned and they were very sad to hear my story.

The martial arts club that we were members of would be hosting a grading in Gizo. I wanted to go to Gizo and I told them. They advised me not to go out from the house and at that time the MV *Tomoko* would be making a trip to Gizo. This couple told me to stay at home, so I spent the night there and on the next day, somewhere around three o'clock, the woman called her brother to come and pick me up; she gave me \$400. She told me the money was for my fare and buying food whilst travelling. She told her brother to take me with him to the ship and he can only leave me when the ship was ready to leave. So her brother took me and we went to the ship and he told me not to worry. I felt the situation was different. I felt so hungry and it was a bad feelings. The ship was about to leave for Gizo and the taxi driver left me and advised me not to worry.

I went to the Western Province and worked at the police station in Gizo as a Special Constable (SC). While in Gizo I joined a martial arts club. It happened there was killing in Kolombangara at Ringi where the General Manger for Kolombangara Forestry Limited was killed. And there was also a new manager for the same company whose name was Simon. And those who were suspected of the killing were taken to Gizo for custody. Later they escaped; there were seven of them. The company had some fear and someone had advised them to look for anybody with a [reputation for security] and that was me. At that time the personnel manager came and picked me up in Gizo. I was happy and I lived with them; there they also had a process which one had to go through, casual [employment] for a month, then issued with an identification card, and then becoming a permanent employee of the company. I was in Kolombangara and I was given a task to look after the security shift; the rumors were that the escapees from the prison would be back to set fire to the company.

At that time the Government had also deployed the Police Field Force (PFF) and they were assigned to look after Ringi to try to capture the escapees and also to assist in the security as well. According to the company's rules, all the vehicles are to be recorded whenever they are taken or assigned to go out. It happened some of them of the third reinforcement or deployment of the Police Field Force (PFF) came and took one of the company's

vehicles and the used it that night and they were very drunk. So I came in the morning and I asked one of the security officers where the other vehicle was and what was it being used for and why he did not record it. And he told me that some of the Police Field Force officers had used it while they were drinking. I then recorded it in the security record book and mentioned something about the officers' using the vehicle, that they were not on duty and they were drinking at that time. Then I went back to my house. While at my house I was then recalled back to the office by a telephone call from the PFF officer-in-charge. He accused me about the recording I made about how they had used the vehicle when they were on liquor. I told him that everyone knew they were using that vehicle and they were drinking as well. The officer went on to say, "You think you own the company"; and then he went on saying something bad to me. He fired a gun at that time and one of the police officers by the name of Roko came in and stopped him. I swore at him and I told him that he failed to accomplish his mission and I went on to challenge him. I went out to the security gate and stood there waiting for him and this police officer by the name of Roko came and led me back and tried to calm things down. The Assistant General Manger came to me and advised me and gave me a day off.

The same day all of them were drinking and they came and their intention was to shoot me. I was with my wife at the company's house; she was from Western Province as well. I had no fear at that time and I had advised my wife that she must sleep at the far end of the room in case these people fired shots at us, so they would probably landed on me and not her. My intention was that anything happened to me, it must be me and not my wife. I was waiting outside and the officers were just drinking on the other side of the building and so everything they said I could hear. I felt bad and could not sleep at that time and anything could happen and I could have killed one of them. I woke up the whole night and then my wife came and went outside. While sleeping, I heard someone knocking on the door. I went outside and saw it was one of the people drinking outside and he told me that the incident that happened yesterday was my problem with their boss and not him. He went on to say, "But I am not afraid of you." This police officer is from north Malaita and is now no longer working in the Police Force. I kicked him and he fell down and when he was trying to stand up I got a punch on his back and then he tore my shirt and then I challenged them. One of the police officers came and tried to calm me down; he was the only one who

seemed to help me. I was so sad to hear that he was hit by a car in Honiara at the Tropicana Resort that same year. He came and calmed me and led me to my house.

On that same day the General Manager called me and advised me that I am not going to work that day. He told me to have a rest and he was going to send the PFF back to Honiara. I went to my house and got my fishing gear and went to the wharf to fish. While there I could see one of the canoes and then came a truck loaded with the PFF officers; they were being transported to Munda to board the plane there. That was my experience and it may occur to some that several times it involved police officers.

To make it worse, it happened that I was called to the police office at the Point Cruz. I went there and talked with a RAMSI officer [about the above case] and they referred me to one of the Guadalcanal woman [officers]. I went about six times and until now nothing has happened and the police officer is still working and still enjoying his salaries. Nothing happened to him and some of the officers who knew this case came forward and asked me to report the case. In Lata I saw one of the posters and he was there with other police officers and he was involved in the” Children and Youth in conflict with the Law” [program]. I landed and tore that poster, I was so angry with this police officer; he was one who also supposed to get out of the Police Force.

I want to tell the militants, whenever they meet in and around the city, they must come and apologize to me; I do not want compensation, and its over from me. Now I am healed through this process. For the Government, please be reminded that we were the ones who got you inside and because of your involvement in it made this recent tension worse and even worse. And that was because the Government of that day failed to address the problem and get rid of the police officers who were involved in the ethnic tension. The public at large do not trust the newly recruited officers and the officers involved in the ethnic tension.

I want to ask the Chairperson and the Commissioners if there is a chance for me to see my children; despite their being very far from me, they are still my children. Although I have married another woman, I am ready to support them and I cannot understand the hardship they went through. And I never had any quarrel with the woman and we never argued; only

the ethnic tension caused our separation. I feel so sad and appeal to the national Truth and Reconciliation Commission, if there is a chance, I want to see my children. They are there as if they have no father; I am ready to support them. I am so thankful for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for facilitating this public hearing and the chance to share with you my experience. Thank you.

Mr. Martin Meaneva' story:

Thank you, Chairperson, Commissioners, and media group. In year 2000 our relatives were planning to make a remembrance service and it involved erection of tombstones. Our relatives died on a plane crash on Guadalcanal Plain and everyone in the community helped us and we had a successful preparation; everything went smoothly. It was going to be the end month of November 2000 and we the relatives of the dead couple had set plans to fix the date to set up the tombstones. Two officers – who claimed to be Malaitan Eagle Force – came into our community. At that time cooperation could be seen evident in our community and the people. I am not sure if they were influence by their in-laws but these two people intentionally wished to threaten us. During those times gunshots could be heard every hour. This threatened and frightened the other villages who wished to come to the preparation of the ceremony. And most of the people who came at that time returned to their respective villages as they were afraid.

My parents were very old and we had built them a house at the coast since if one walks it could take them three and half kilometers. The men gave us a deadline, that we had to remove the house and my parents and if we failed they would burn it all. So I told my brothers and sisters and we went to the coast to get my parents out. We took them to another place and on that night they burnt two sleeping houses and a kitchen; they went along the coast and burnt our six [copra] driers. I was at home and I was thinking on how I could be able to deal with the case, as I was the one responsible to solve the case and do preparation for the tombstone ceremony. It was so good one of the elders at home worked between us. When he asked the other party, he later realized that they demanded that we pay compensation for a letter an elder brother of mine had written to them, and I accepted their demand. My younger brother and I took two shell money and we were thinking, they wished to do anything that might have hurt us they might have done too, about the land.

Intentionally we went to finish or solve this matter with them, and they agreed with us and they took us with them to their house and they told us the reason why they did that; we told them that we came to them to pay compensation about the letter. After we had settled this problem, they worked closely with us to erect the tombstone.

Nevertheless, still we were not comfortable or satisfied with what they did to us. According to our tradition, this disturbance they had caused us is one thing or problem. It is just the same as what they had done to us. And I believe things happened for a reason and that's why it's brewing to the extent of burning houses. So, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, I want to make a recommendation: please check with your files. It's a good program but cannot heal people's minds only but if you do not look into the physical needs of the people affected, they cannot be completely healed. I believe that some victims have submitted their recommendations and as far as I am concerned your program will only lapse at the beginning of next year. If the program lapses without doing anything, who then who will do it? Another thing, you have learned that things might happen again. I could see people who were mentally ill were the ones that caused this thing and even making it worse. And another thing was the police; they had guns and when a decision is reached between two parties, nothing could be done. Please, police officers, keep out of things like that; just keep the peace. That's all I have to say. Thank you.

Mr. Luke Taula's story:

I was posted to Guadalcanal Province in 1995 and worked until 1998. Everything happened because I worked with the Guadalcanal Province. They came and shot at us at the old building next to the big road. People threw stones at us and my office was the room facing the main road where stones were thrown at. I had to run to the other side of the building. There were two occasions they stoned our office. When they took over our office, that morning I was still at Rifle Range where the staff quarters were. That morning I heard from Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC) that our office was being taken over and occupied by the militants. I was just listening for what we were going to do. I even did not know where the [Guadalcanal] executive office was moved to and later realized it was moved to Balasuna area at the east side of Guadalcanal. There were few officers from different provinces who moved to the Anthony Saru building at the fifth floor

and I used to go there and listen to them and then returned home, not knowing that one day my life would be threatened.

One morning at somewhere around 5:00 a.m. there was a shoot-out at Rifle Range; that area is now called Con Valley and that was the place the shoot-out was took place. Someone from the Reefs was there and he was not working and he was shot in his leg. We rushed him down to the hospital and I was thinking we were not involved. I woke my family and rushed them to St. Alban's church. I was just trying to make sure we got our things and someone told me not to waste our time and we had to move. I then saw the man who had been shot in the leg was there. Everyone had fled and no one wanted to rescue him and luckily a *wantok* from Tikopia sympathized with me and we rushed him to the hospital. We spent time at St. Alban's until we were told to return to the area again. I was then called by a sister of mine to take my family to her house at Vavaya Ridge area. While we were there, one of the police officers from Reef Islands as well, told me that I should move around because someone who was a commander of the militants had asked him [about me]. He told him that I was in my home but I was around and my family was already at home. So he told me not to go out of the house; suddenly things had started to become worse. It was the staff quarters of Ports, people who captained ships; my family was accommodated there and they left and I was still there. My superiors knew the situation and they had advised me not to move around while waiting for the ship to go home.

One morning I had decided to go down to the shop where they sold musical instruments. One officer of the Ministry of Fisheries saw me and he was so surprised to see me there. He did not expect to see me go around anywhere. He came and took me and led me between Smart Shop and ITA Shop and we went up to the old clinic. He was a captain of a small ship called *Daula*. He then asked me whether I cared about my life; and I asked him why he asked and he went on to say, "Well, I am from Malaita and they hanged [tortured] me despite my being from Malaita." He told me his engineer was injured and can hardly be recognized. . . . They bashed him while questioning.

Actually I was never confronted and threatened personally. I decided to return to Honiara. In January 2001 my two sons were being accommodated at a house at Mbokonavera. The

Ministry understood that I was supposed not to return to work [but] they continued to make arrangements. For a few days we spent [in Honiara] we had seen shoot-outs and when they burnt the night club next to the Anthony Saru Building. We saw it going up in flames and it was a spectacular show to see at night. After that, there was another shoot-out and my two boys went out and to see the flames. I was advised again to return to Temotu and work there for our Fisheries Division. In actual fact, I was not being directly confronted. We might have understood that the Government is a very important organization of the country – now I am talking about the Parliament. I think we need to really treat every family member equally and the groups [provinces] are not treating each other properly. They still cannot satisfy each other. I think we still have room to rethink and there are people around who could be very helpful to manage us. When things arose and they did not address it properly, that's where the failure is. If the Government of that time could look after the matter properly, nothing could come this far. The organization has to be filled up with people who have [good] qualities. Again, it comes to us electors – we really need to make sure the people we elect have the right quality and we need to learn the lessons. . . . The moment they start to play with the laws we will definitely become suffer. I think this is what happened with the very people who make sure about the law and order.

Well, this process is still continuing and there comes another idea called the “Forgiveness Bill.” It [would be] better to finish off [complete] this [TRC] program which might be very helpful to us; otherwise, what is the use of getting another bill and then another bill and nothing is going to work. So again, it has to be good leaders and we have to elect good ones; they might be pretending and if they were elected it would very difficult. It is a right to exercise to choose our leaders, but who and who is the question. Thank you very much for you time and this opportunity.

Father Arthur Abui's story:

Thank you, Chairperson and your team, counselors, and support staff. I was at Bishop Patteson Theological College (BPTC) from 1998 to 2001. I had a good friend who was working for the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education and his job was to look after the farm and he could also feed students of the College. He had a good relationship with the settlers; because of that they [the militants] hated him and he also fled during the height

of the ethnic tension. He came to Kohimarama and my house was the house he came to. The ethnic tension continued and it ruined the farm; at times we went and fed 600 broilers, 600 layers, and 15 pigs, and crops and vegetables. We used to go and do feeding and several times while doing it they open fired at us. We used to chat and one time I told him that was it possible we could eat some of the chickens and pigs. Well, he stayed with me during the height of the tension; as I had mentioned, I am just a sideline victim and the perpetrators came after him and not me. One time after class, I went to the single students' quarters, telling stories, chewing betel nut and enjoying myself. A friend of mine came and told me that five gunmen were looking for me and I started to t panic. I trembled a lot, I felt like I was walking on the air. I was panicking and not knowing what to say should the people show up. I saw them coming towards me; my fellow colleagues were also helpless and they did not know what to do. Well, I was accompanied by a friend of mine from Vanuatu and we walked towards the mango tree where the College garage is and I could see them pointing their guns downwards. I felt much better; I knew they were looking for that person. They asked me, "Arthur, is the person staying with you." I answered, "Yes." Suddenly my thoughts rushed I do not want them to enter my house; I did not want my family to see gunmen enter into my house. I asked them politely that I want to go and get him; they replied "no" and they marched me to my house; my wife fled and my children had also escaped somewhere, and the only person in my house was the person they were looking for. On our way towards my house, I shouted his name purposely to make them aware that we are coming. When we arrived, he had prepared and was ready for us. We then approached him, they pointed their guns at him and bashed him up. I was with them when they talked with that person, and after he gave them \$250 which I got from the College canteen. They left us and one experience I had was when I heard they told me that five gunmen were looking for me, I thought I was going to be killed. When I saw them, I was thinking of running away, my family had fled our home; from that time and after I had completed my studies, I felt bad and had fear.

That person was with us and my wife told me to send him away as we argued. I told my wife if the person was to be sent away, where would he go? If he walked on the road, the people might kill him and if he goes to Honiara there are people there as well. I asked my wife, where are we going to send him. The longer he stays, we might have experience of

threat and, to make matters worse, they knew my house and they knew me that I am the one who is accommodating him. For several months, food become tasteless, water becomes tasteless; nights were sleepless and too short. For several months, I made myself a routine, from house to garden, church to house, house to library. I had to make sure I did not see anyone outside the College compound. I became paranoid. I felt hurt and, if I went to the church, I had to make sure I sat at the center of the students and if I travelled to Honiara, I must sit in the cab of the truck. My family was being living with fear until 2006. This was evident and there were several experiences of fear, especially when I am out on tour. That's about the experience and this is bad, as we live with fear amongst the people.

I want to make few comments on my experience. The Government was not listening. If it was listening, the problem might have been avoided. Our leaders in the government must learn to listen to the people and to the marginalized. Listen to the voiceless. This is the real problem. The Government should do more and listen more and talk less. For the perpetrators, we should meet to discuss so that I might come to reconciliation with you.

Mr. Henry Teti's story:

Thank you everyone, for the chance you have provided me to share my experiences and stories with you and the country as a whole. On 5th May 1999, I was working for the Solomon Islands Plantation Limited (SIPL) as a clerk. On that Saturday the 5th, it was in the afternoon when I returned to the office. I saw children running on the road to the next division and they were naked; I asked them what had happened and they told me there was a shooting at Mberande. And later on I saw a man from Are'Are running towards me and I could see that one of his shoulders had a problem. I asked what had happened and he told me that he was shot in the shoulder. While we were still having our conversation, another came and I asked him what had happened and he told me that he was cut on the hand. They told me that there were two people confirmed dead and one of them had his head chopped off and the other one had his head cut into two halves.

I went back to the office and I contacted the boss through the two-way radio about what had happened. After I reported the incident to the field manager and the General Manager, then I reported it to the police, asking if they could send us a helicopter at that time. I

thought it might be wrong but it was important to do it. I actually acted outside my job description; later, in about five minute, the helicopter was at Mberande area. The police went to Mberande and got the children. I was at the roadside and I could see it happen. It was hard to control and there was no senior company officer there. The drivers of the company came and started to organize themselves with the pickup; there were about 200 families there. I was there and saw a police truck come and stop before me; they told me that the dead bodies are at the back of the truck. I went and I saw one of the two, one who had his head chopped off and the other one-half. The police then took off and every family in the company's area fled to sleep at the Tetera Police Station football field. Others were picked up and taken to Honiara in the company's truck. And that's what I experienced during the ethnic tension.

I questioned myself why human beings had been brutally killed and the treatment was so harsh, when he or she does not deserve it. The corpses I saw had not been involved in the ethnic tension. During the ethnic tension, there were other staff of the company who were also taken. One was from Makira and his wife was one of the victims as well and the other one was a friend of mine and he was brutally tortured, a slow kind of death. They cut off his hands and then followed by other parts of his body. A friend of mine from Makira returned after a week and I asked him what he was given to eat and he told me that they fed him giant wild taro. I could hardly see him when he first came back after a week.

I want to say something, as one of the families who are victims of the ethnic tension. For instance, I had worked 20 years and I am just like a woman who got married and her husband got rid of her. When we worked and the situation came, we did not take anything with us and the company and the Government did not bother about us. Some of us lost properties and even some lost their land. We were in good health and a good workforce and when we were troubled, they did nothing for us. I want the Government to compensate us, those of us who lost our properties. This ethnic tension really troubled us. I now could say I came here through this process of healing and something I had discussed with the counselors, that there were a lot of people who are like me; and I feel better and healing really takes its course within me. That's all I want to say.

Mr. Richard Metangi's story:

I was at the Foxwood Timber Company from 1987 to 1999. The ethnic tension happened at about five o'clock in the morning while we were at home, ready to go to work at the workshop. The Malaita Eagle Force had a shoot-out at that area and everyone panicked and I told my family to run to take cover inside the drain. We had to wait for the Malaita Eagle Force to go back, then see what we could do. I went to the house and got few clothes and we fled to CDC 3, to one of the villages called Kolona; we hid in one of the houses. We stayed there until the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army and Isatabu Freedom Fighters and the Malaitan Eagle Force went to Townsville in Australia to sign the peace agreement. We went to Honiara and were accommodated at the Panatina Campus. So stayed there and waited for the ship; and the company did charter the ship and we went home. Well, I stayed home until today and when this program of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission came, I decided to come and share my story as well. That's all I want to say.

Mr. Monty Taro's story:

Thank you, Commissioners and staff. I shall now start. In early 1999 I witnessed one incident that had happened in Honiara; one man was stoned at the Central Market and these were not militants [who did it] but the displaced ones, women, children; they stoned this man and chased him until they reached the old Guadalcanal provincial headquarters; that time the police were there. I could see him badly hurt and everybody was throwing stones at him and that was the first incident I came across.

Another incident was in the year 2000, the month of July. One night all the ships' alarms signaled and all the vessels had to return to Noro base as one of our vessels, *Soltai 68*, had been hijacked. So we returned to the base. And they told us we were going to have a early holiday – I was working in *Soltai 5* While in Noro I also witnessed one incident where the Black Sharks – they were comprised of the Bougainvilleans and some from Western Province – they bashed one man from Makira and I will not mention his name. The office in Noro was thinking of sending one of the vessels to Honiara to bring all the things in the head office in Honiara to Noro, if things started to get worse. They sent *Soltai 3* and inside *Soltai 3* there was one boy from Guadalcanal and I had to replace him. So we went to

Honiara and spent a week and we were not allowed to berth at a wharf side. During the night it would go out and anchor outside and returned when day broke. One time there was a huge cargo boat berthing at the main wharf and it did not give us space to move out in the evening and we decide to continue berthing. A gunman walked into the ship and I knew him and he knew me as well. He demanded food and the boys gave it; and then some disciplined members of the Malaita Eagle Force came and took him away.

After that incident, a Hilux pulled over the next day and told us that the ship would be on mission to the west end of Guadalcanal. They took the captain of the ship and they went to the houses of the bosses in and around Honiara. At the same night, one of the bosses came and told us to follow whatever instruction they (the Malaitan Eagle Force) gave us. They loaded the ship with tons of rice and noodles; early in the morning, the arrangement was changed and the group was transported in a vehicle and we could see the west end of Guadalcanal covered with thick smoke. All the ships at Point Cruz saw it happen. We had to wait and the troop that went to do the raid returned and on board we had women, men and children. The militants came and asked for engine grease to clean their rifles. At that time I was the only one who was like a kid on board and the militants could send me to do anything they liked; actually I felt bad about it.

It was evening and we were at the last point before we approach Marau and they ordered us to lock all the children, women and older men inside the cabins. All of us were to take cover outside; they feared that point as they thought the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (GRA) might have attacked us. We arrived at New Island in Marau; at that time on the mainland of Marau there was nobody and people were staying on New Island and Marapa. We arrived at New Island and we offloaded the cargo and then the militants gave us three rifles. The next morning, the Noro base gave us a radio call and they told us to take precautions and if the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army militants found us, they could have shot us. We spent the morning part carrying water for the people. We went to Marapa and got water and we went back and distributed it to the people. After that, we went back to Honiara; two militants were responsible for the escort and were with us. During that time, if one turned on the radio, one could hear bad words, insulting words. The head office was really worried and they sent us back to Noro and we followed another route, Honiara,

Tulagi, Isabel and then Noro. There the Black Sharks came after us. What we experienced was more what we can say and I really want to make a recommendation; if the Government of the day could support and extend the [TRC] project's timeframe. There are many people like us still living with the trauma. I have a strong feeling that things might happen in the future.

Mr. Isaac Menima's additional story:

Thank you for this opportunity to share my story. I have given my story and it was taped but just to add on. I want to ask a question: how the Government would address our issues as victims? Secondly, what timeframe are we looking for? Also I am not supposed to be here in Makira. Not the least, the problem is what you read about in the paper and, just to add on: I am worried about the young people; I am not really worried about me as I have been through the problem but the younger ones is who actually matter. This all I have to say, thank you.

Mr. Moses Wakwolly's story:

I came across several incidents during the ethnic tension. Before the ethnic tension started, the Rapid Response Unit (RRU) was the first unit the Police Force sent to rescue people and protect properties. We were the first unit; we were in the beginning and we were at its end. The shooting at Gold Ridge was done very early on the morning of 9 August 1999. Another night shift of our unit went to Alligator Creek to escort the expatriates who were working at Gold Ridge. Every morning we had to escort them to their work and back. That day another shift escorting people to Gold Ridge was just about to approach Gold Ridge area when the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (GRA) approached them. They shot one of our boys and he was hit in the eye but did not die. His name is Charles Luiramo and he is part Santa Cruz and Malaita. The report of the incident reached our camp and we were on standby waiting for orders from the Commissioner of Police. The Commissioner told us to be quiet and await our Commander who would be arriving by chopper. The chopper arrived at Gold Ridge and our Commander came and talked with the bosses of the company. The conversation was about the possibility of removing the company staff residing at the old camp, an operation camp they left to move to a new site. There were many expatriates and about 20 vehicles. The bosses of the company asked the Commander

if he could escort all the staff from the old camp. The Commander agreed and he came and ordered us to get into two vehicles and we drove down. The road had many roadblocks but we managed to reach them at the mining site. The expatriates were in a vehicle at the front and at the center and at the back was one of our vehicles. We went through many roadblocks but we never saw any person. We came to a place, I have since forgotten its name. The vehicle in front of us reported to us that the militants were in front and they shot at them and at the back were sounds of gunfire. All the vehicles of the expatriates pulled over and we drove quickly to the front to help our team. I could see there were many of them; I think the whole tribe of Guadalcanal was there at that spot. They wore *kabilato* and they were armed with .22 homemade guns and scrap iron. We gave them warning shots to disperse them but they continued to move towards us. I understand a former Police Field Force officer was with them and he was the one who might have been advising them to walk forward as we were not going to shoot at them. We fired shots and they continued to move toward us. I believe the person who shot me was advised by the former Police Field Force officer. They ambushed us and he told them the position and he must have positioned himself just before we arrived. We continued to exchange fire and the machine gun jammed and the person operating it ran to me to fix it. When the gunner shouted, "Obstruct!" I ran to him and knelt down and while fixing it I could hear the sound of the bullet hitting my helmet. They were firing at me and I could feel the blood but not the pain. One of the expatriates from Papua New Guinea was a former military person and he picked me up and rushed me to the hospital. What happened next I do not know.

Before I tell you about another incident I want to say here that I am really thankful to one person who saved my life. Without him on the 9th August 1999, I might be back to dust today. I am here because he saved my life and that person's name is Kelesi, a Malaitan member of our unit. An incident happened at Ngalibiu where the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army broke the bridge. When the report came, our Rapid Response Unit (RRU) was at Gold Ridge and the Police Field Force (PFF) came as well. The officers at Teterere came as well, and after clearing the bridge, PFF decided to return to Honiara. I was posted at the west end of the bridge; PFF were in their Hilux as they were ready to return to the Honiara. Kelesi was at the back of the truck and shouted at me, "Lax, have you got a bullet proof vest?" and I responded "No." "Take this one," he said and threw me the vest.

I put it on while at Gold Ridge and a week after, that bullet proof vest saved my life. Well, this wound I have is a mark of the gunshot and it was fired at me at close range. I have tears coming down from my eyes, not because I am angry but happy about what Kelesi had done to me; and that's what saved me until today. I guess God might have inspired him to give the bulletproof vest as things might have gone bad the following week.

Another incident happened 22nd November 1999. I am just going to be brief. After recovering from a gunshot at the National Referral Hospital, I was then to report to duty at the Gold Ridge at 2:00 a.m., as our officers at the front gate received a report and at that time I was in charge of the night shift. A security officer from Australia hired by Gold Ridge came and picked up me and an officer of mine. He told other officers to wait while we scouted the situation. We drove down and came to a hill called Custom Hill and they thought it had a round shape and they dug around it. We drove to the other end and another group of GRA were there and they pointed their guns at us; this Australian Security Officer drove and tried to drive zigzag, as he was trying to miss the bullets; the truck overturned and rolled and I was at the back as the two officers who were at the front they jumped out. I rolled with the truck; it was a steep hill. The Hilux rolled easily and there was a little stone that was lying there and it halted the Hilux for awhile. I tried to see them but could not see them and when I looked on the other side it was very steep; one could have died if it fell. I climbed out of the window and left. I had a cut on my knee and when arriving at the hospital they had to chip off my skin from other parts and they covered it.

The other incident was when I was walking with some of my *wantoks* on the roadside at King George Sixth National Secondary School. The man was at the other side of the road near Hatsoa Bottle Shop that was formerly owned by the Malaita Eagle Force Leader. He used foul swearing words and we just bowed our heads and kept walking. The words he used to us, personally it's not acceptable but he had a gun with him; since then, then it still remain in my head.

The fourth incident: the shooting. The other [incidents] I don't really think of them as heavy, for example, the third one. The fourth one is more serious to me. The perpetrator gave me a punch and I missed it and he is still a prison officer and still in town. After the ethnic tension, he met me and tried to smile at me; when I saw him wearing a uniform and

it has star on it, I felt hurt and really wanted to get the star and place it on his forehead. The star of promotion was given by the Government and he is now became an inspector, which is not good. Anyway, I am just angry as he personally came directly to me and intentionally meant to kill me and I had done nothing wrong but carry out my duties. The duties the Government and the police [were] to protect the lives and properties of the people in Honiara. While still at work, I thought the two warring parties would respect us but they did not and we were to protect their lives as well. The Malaitans, the Guadalcanal [people] and we worked amongst people who were armed; instead, they shot me.

My experiences during the ethnic tension [was that] we worked in most parts of the conflicted affected areas in around the country. We went to the other side of Guadalcanal, Russell Islands, and Temotu where an incident happened where a man was shot to death. And that's why I said we started to work at the beginning to the end. We were also the ones who welcomed the arrival of the Regional Assistance to the Solomon Islands and we provided security. And that are some of the experiences that I went through during the ethnic tension.

I have a few recommendations to make. Since I went through the trauma counseling, I feel my heart is burning and I am a victim of all these things. I felt bad to be involve [but it was] my duty as requested by the government. The points are: I am still angry how the Government treated me; when I was shot and wounded, the Government paid me less than what I should receive. During the time of Prime Minister Ulufa'alu, he changed the death and injury benefit. During Solomon Mamaloni's time, when a person died of his duty, he could have a death benefit of \$100,000. A person who lost some of his body parts could have a benefit of \$75,000. A person who got injured could have \$50,000. I was wounded before they had changed the benefits. They paid on the new scheme of benefits though I was injured before the law was changed. I am still concerned about the injury benefit. For instance, I approached Manasseh Sogavare and I told him you have treated us like dogs; you sent them to catch pigs and when they caught them, you got the meat part of the pig and give the dogs the bones. Sogavare was just standing and could not do anything and we were at his office. The police constables were working very hard and the bosses just sit back and waited for their rank.

Another example is the proposed Forgiveness bill. It's not being passed. I am not happy with the proposed idea. I think the Forgiveness Bill is not good [for this] time. The first time I heard of reconciliation, killing of pigs, shell money and cash, it just a waste of time and money. The Truth and Reconciliation [Commission] is the best way forward. It heals people's hearts and minds. I can show you my picture while in the hospital. Thank you, Chairperson, Commissioners, and supporting staff. Thank you.

Ms Monica Katakume's story:

Before I tell you my story, I am a woman and a victim. My family were very happy before the ethnic tension and my family lived at CDC, working for the Solomon Islands Plantation Limited (SIPL). CDC was really a good place before the ethnic tension happened and we came from different provinces and we were involved in other activities like youth and mothers' groups and used to go out to other areas near CDC. As you know, I was not employed and my work was to do all the household work and my husband was the one who worked. He worked as an ambulance driver; he worked for six years from 1986 to 1991; and he asked to resign and they refused and they posted him to drive the heavy vehicle, particularly the excavator.

I will now tell you the story about my life since 1998; my husband died and I will tell you the story so that I may be free. The stories are in my mind and heart and it's hurtful. It was May 5th when my husband went to work and the fighting was at Mberande; it was on Saturday and that was the time they took my husband. I have to tell the story as he told me the story and when people came I am the one who told the story and if he told them, it might have reminded him of the bad things they did to him. One Saturday 5th May, he went to work; he was supposed to take day off and his boss told him to report to work and along with his workmate, a man from Malaita. The Malaitan man worked in the morning up to 12 o'clock and then he clocked off and my husband worked in the afternoon commencing from 1 o'clock to 4 o'clock. My husband told me the militants were hiding at that time in the oil palm trees and they came and pointed their guns at them. My husband came off from the digger and he and his workmate both of them walked towards them and they tied their hands at the back and they took off their shirts, watches, hats and shoes. They led them to the creek and it was deep and they blindfolded them and they made them to guess

where the sun rises and where it goes down. They fired guns at them but it missed and they ordered them to jump into the swamp and they forced them to swim across and they tried to climb on to the other side of the riverbank. They led them to another place and there they were separated. They led my husband to another side of the road and his friend was also taken to the other road. My husband looked back trying to see his friend and they bashed his friend; he was so sad and he cried.

They asked him where he came from and my husband told them he came from Makira. They bashed him all along and they took him to two women who had got married to Guadalcanal men. The first woman was from Arosi on the west end of Makira. She spoke to him in Makira language and my husband could only understand little about the language. The little part of the language he understood he replied. The boss of the group did not believe that he really was from Makira and they took him to the other woman and that woman was from the eastern side of Makira. They arrived and they called her to come and she came and talked with him and the group told her to feed him. He was given food but ate little and then they took him to another place called Komikama School. They stayed there in the morning he wrote me a note and I read it; in the letter he advised me to tell all our *wantoks* to move to Honiara and he said that the group was planning to advance toward the company's area. At that time we were hesitant to go and we thought we would wait for him if he returned.

After a week he returned. At that time, he looked much different; he couldn't eat, not normally. The group camped at Komikama School and it was morning when one of the *Tasiu* came around that area; he was from Makira and the militants told him that they had hostage a man from Makira. He told them to bring him to his area. They decided to take him to Honiara and they walked to the main road and during that time there were many militants at the main road. They returned to the *Tasiu's* area and the next day they went to the main road and they took him to Honiara and they left him in the All Saints area; he was afraid so the Central Police Station officers brought him to the Skyline area.

His bosses heard that he had returned and they came and took him with them to the office. Well, they took him into their office. The bosses asked him what had happened and he told him little bit about it. In the evening, he used to stay in the room and never stayed with us

outside. The next day his boss came and asked him whether he wanted to go home and he told them he wanted to go home. He first went home and we were the ones remaining and we took a little of his payment and we came after him.

We came home and he had started to feel sick; *kastom* medicine or any other medicine could not cure him and he stayed with us until December 2008 when he died. I was left alone with our children. I really want to tell the story so that I may feel better. It's been with me for some time and I have found it quite hard to sleep. From the fighting in Guadalcanal he was sick and he was just a young person. I think this all I have to say. I now appeal to all the women in Makira, please come before the Commission and share your story so that you might be free.

Mr. Vagi Basi's story:

Thank Chairperson and supporting staff. I will tell you about the experiences I came across whilst in Guadalcanal. I worked for the Seventh Day Adventist Mission and they posted me to Kuma. It's not only I but there were other pastors under whose supervision I worked. I went there in 1998 in Kuma and my supervisor was a pastor from Malaita. Things had happened on the other sides, at the west and the east. We heard the story and the pastors from Malaita came to be afraid, their children and their wives. They asked me what to do and I told them I would have to transport them back to Honiara. They left with a few things and we went through Marau side and we had to leave very early morning. We travelled on board a 15 horsepower engine and it took us 12 hours to get to Honiara. I left them and returned to the Weather Coast. I had tried to get their things over to this side and it was really hard. And from Weather Coast to Kopiu, the militants were there and they tried to secure the things. I came to the place and talked with the church members to try as much as possible to get the things prepared. The church members were afraid and no one was willing to help me and when the ship that belongs to the province came, I sent the things home. I have told my story and it was being taped and I think that's all I have, otherwise I might have repeating the same story.

7. YOUTH

United Church of Solomon Islands, Honiara, 22-26 November, 2010

Mr. Joseph Mae, Jr.'s story:

My story is based on what happened to me during ethnic tension at Kogulae village. At this time we were not expecting that MEF would come and do this to us in the village. One day members of the MEF came in and started burning down all our houses and we ran away into the bush. This was the first time I was shot. I had to be taken to Visale Clinic for medical attention. My father and I stayed at Visale Clinic for four days. Members of the MEF came one morning and went into the clinic; I tried my very best to escape from the clinic. So my dad and I went and hid behind the clinic. MEF members came and took my dad and went back to the Clinic. I tried my best to escape so I went and hid behind the area where the Visale School is situated now. I did not know what actually happened to my dad. I managed to get to the bush and I told the people who were also hiding about my dad. I told some boys who were in the area if they could go and check for my dad, whether he was still alive or already killed by the MEF Members. I went up to the bush with the help of some of the Visale people. They carried out a lot of shooting out there and two boys were shot and killed that time. All the people at the Visale areas ran away and hid in the bush. After the shooting calmed down, I was again carried down close to the village. My Dad was released and I was very happy that he was not killed. He just told me that they did not do anything to him but just let him go. I told him that there were lots of things taking place at Visale and it's better for us to go back. The next morning we arranged for a truck to come and pick us up to come back but we were dropped at Vura village. All the houses along the seaside at Visale were burnt down by the MEF.

All the problems related to the ethnic tension affected lots of innocent people in the Solomon Islands. Education of children was affected, employees of Government and private sectors were also affected; they did not continue as they should have. At that time, we found it very difficult to cope with our daily living. There was not enough food in the gardens, because we did not have time to replant our gardens due to fear of being attacked by the MEF. So this resulted in not having enough food to eat during those times.

After leaving the clinic and coming back to Vura Village, I had to dress my own wounds sustained during the shootout at Kogulae. I was then moved to Tamboko to be under the care of the nurses there. That is the end of my story. After the ethnic tension, I filled in a form to claim compensation for injuries sustained during the ethnic tension. So far I still have not received any compensation on that, but I heard that others who had filled up the same form received their claims in respect of their injuries. I do not really know what happened with my claim for injuries.

Ms Tracy Okaiburi's story:

My name is Tracy and I am part-Malaita and part-Guadalcanal and I am still a student. In 1980, my parents settled at Langa Langa Lagoon, Malaita Province. One of the ships from Guadalcanal came straight to my parents' home at Langa Langa Lagoon to ask my parents to go back to Guadalcanal. My father's grandmother was from Guadalcanal and by birth she had the land rights. So my grandmother's people would like us to go back and settle on my father's grandmother's land. So in 1980 my family at Langa Langa agreed to return to that land belonging to their grandmother to settle there. So they left Langa Langa Lagoon and came to settle on Guadalcanal. They did not come to Guadalcanal as strangers; they did not even have to pay for that land. They came to Guadalcanal through blood because on Guadalcanal, it's the women who are more respected than the men and they have the land rights. Before they got to the shore at Tangarare, they performed a customary ceremony called *chupu*. After performing this ceremony, then my parents could step on the shores of Tangarare; this was to show that the land belonging to my dad's grandmother was well looked after until my parents' arrival to reunite with them.

We stayed peacefully until 1998. During this time we started to hear rumors that something was going to happen. Some of my brothers and sisters who attended Tangarare School also heard the same story and even I heard that when I was in Standard II in 1988. Even in small arguments between my brothers and sisters and the children from Tangarare area, [the latter] would say to them that they should go back to Langa Langa, they are not from Tangarare. When we mentioned these rumors to our parents, they told us that we were blood-related to that area and we should not worry. When these rumors were brought to the

attention of the chiefs, they also told us that we should not worry because we were not strangers.

We lived a normal life up until 1999 then the rumors began to become a reality. We started sighting men wearing *kabilatos* and going around our villages. We were also advised to wear *kabilatos* but we could not do that because we were not brought up like that, so we refused to wear them. One day in 1999, my elder sister and her girl friend went for a swim at the Tangarare River near the school. While they were in the river, a militant came and called to my sister's friend. The militant asked my sister's friend if she could do a favor for him; then my sister's friend asked the militant what the favor was all about. The militant asked my sister's friend to go and mark all the Malaita girls' beds and leave the door unlocked. My sister heard what the militant was saying to her friend, but when they got back they did not carry out what the other girl was supposed to do. They held a local court case on this but the two girls won this case

After two weeks, on Easter Sunday on 19th April 1999, between 9:00 and 0:00 in the evening, we invited our uncle to come and have an evening story. During this time we made rolls of tobacco to sell in our canteen. This canteen also sustained our living at that time. While we were sitting down, one of those men from that area came; he came to tell us that our place was going to be raided by the militants the same night. Not long after he arrived, my mother could see some people moving from the reflection of another light. My mum told my dad to shut the door so that if anyone would like to come and buy beer, he could stand outside. While dad was trying to shut the door, the first militant came and hit the door. All of us were just sitting down and watching what was going to happen. When my dad said this, the militant answered him and said, "who wants to be your brother?" When he said this, the second man jumped in the house. When he jumped in, he was already armed and wearing a *kabilato*. As soon as he jumped, he destroyed the three lamps that were hanging outside our verandah, leaving only one light. A militant shouted, "Don't move!" My parents and my uncle were now threatened at gunpoint. At that time we did not have any choice of where to go or what to do. That man from the village was still around the house so he pushed my elder sister through the window and he did the same to me. We ran to our cousin's house and woke up our niece and told her that we should run away because the militants are here. When we were ready to come out from the door to run

away, the militants arrived too, so that village man managed to help us to run away and hide in the bush during the night.

While we were on our way to the bush, we could hear gunshots back at the village. During that night, we slept in the bush under the rain because there was no proper shelter. While we were in the bush, I could hear gunshots; that time I was frightened and also thought of my parents because I thought of how they pointed the guns at them. I thought I was going to lose them; I thought that would be the end of their lives because there was no choice. We came back together but the militants demanded things from my parents. They went into our house and took any valuable things from themselves. They demanded the takings [from the canteen] which they raised during that weekend. My dad and mum gave all the money, leaving us not even a cent. The militants went and raided my uncle's house. The main aim of doing this to my uncle's house was to take the two-way radio in his house. When the militant was kicking the table where radio-wireless was located, one miraculous incident took place, which saved our lives. A picture of Mary was hanging on the wall and when the militant kept on kicking the table, the picture fell on top of the radio-wireless and the militant could not see it. He did not even know that the radio-wireless was right in front of him. Instead, he turned around and pulled down the aerial of the AM Radio.

That man from the village assisted us run away to the bush and stayed during the night. My parents were last to leave the house; they came and joined us and remained in the bush for the rest of the night. We tried to use the radio-wireless to contact others but we could not because the militants were all around the area. Some of the boys from the Tangarare area managed to put up the aerial of the radio-wireless but when we made contacts with the responsible authorities in Honiara, they could not receive our message. The boys from the area kept on trying to contact Honiara and each time they tried the militants would come around and they would tell us to run away to the bush. What the militants said was they did not want to see any Malaita people around; if they came back the next day and we were still around, there they would kill us. While we were in the bush, the paramount chief heard about what had happened and sent some of the boys to come and get us. So we went to his house and he kept us there. My mum and the rest of my brothers and sisters were kept in the room while my and dad and others were outside with the chief. He closed the door of

the house and sat with his knife outside. He said that if the militants came, they should kill him first with his own knife before killing the rest of us.

By Monday morning, we back to our house and packed up all our properties and carried them to the seaside. We waited but the patrol boat did not come that day so we left our belongings on the beach. All through the ordeal we did not eat anything. Early Tuesday morning the patrol boat came to rescue us. As we were ready to board the patrol boat, we were surprised that the Malaitan students at Tangarare Secondary School were also on their way to the patrol boat. They were threatened and beaten by the militants. Some of them had swollen eyes and blood was still running down on the faces of some of them. They were asked to board the patrol boat first, seeing that they were badly wounded. The Police Field Force Officers had to look for one of the Malaita boys who was abducted and taken away by the militants. He was severely beaten, his clothes stripped off, and left to die but he managed to jump into a creek which was full of crocodiles. He was found and taken to Tangarare School. My dad said that the rest of the Malaita students should leave the school and board the patrol boat to come to Honiara. The sisters did not allow these students to leave but my dad said that it would be better for them to go back to Honiara when the situation was still under control.

We were taken to Honiara and we were accommodated at the Holy Cross Hall for about three months. During our stay at the Holy Cross Hall, we were assisted by the Red Cross. After that period of three months, the late Hon. Bart Ulufa'alu made arrangements to repatriate us back to Malaita. When we got to Malaita, we thought we arrived in our home land, but when we got there, we were like strangers; we did not have any house or even gardens, One question I would like to pursue is, why other Malaitans tried to threaten other Malaitans? I thought the ethnic crisis was between Malaita and Guadalcanal but in fact Malaitans too tried to fight back Malaitans. We managed to fit in with our people again but we were not as we should be. My parents started to make gardens where they used to before going over to Tangarare. When they did that, they were questioned by our Malaita relatives, that the land did not belong to them but in fact that was where they used to make their gardens. We were treated the same as the Guadalcanal people at Tangarare treated us. We attended school in Auki but still we lived in fear because the trauma we went through was still in our minds.

When we settled down, my parents started to set up a bottle shop at the village just to sustain our family, but this did not work out, so he went to Auki and set it up there. When this was set up, the militants went and threatened him there. There were rumors that a new militia group was formed. This group was called the “Seagulls” and it was formed by the Langa Langa people; they thought my dad was one of the members of the Seagulls. When they did this to him, he had no choice but to come back home. Our education was really affected; the expectation of the first-born children to continue with their education to a higher level to get qualified and assisted the smaller ones was affected. My parents did not have the financial support to help us. My uncles tried to support each other but this too did not work out for us. In some cases, the parents only assisted the elder children to go to school and the smaller ones remained at home. Some of them did not attend school for two years. When my dad tried to set up something to sustain our family, still we were threatened by militants. Some of my uncle’s children tried to complete their education after two years but due to lack of financial assistance, they could not continue. They had to stop and do other things to earn enough money to meet their school expenses but in the end this did not work out.

For us who went through a lot of trauma could not concentrate with our learning because we had a lot of disturbances during ethnic tension. When I attended Tenaru Secondary School, I only had \$50 but as a girl this was not sufficient for my needs. What could I do, I did not have any financial support from the family because we did not have any means of sustainability. Even though I was like this, I just had to accept the fact of life. Sometimes at school I went hungry but there was nobody I could depend on because the rest of my brothers and sisters did not have any good education so as to enable them to earn money. When we appealed to the Members of Parliament to assist us, they would promise but in the end there was no financial assistance forthcoming from them. When we checked at the school there was nothing, but, in fact, there was an entitlement under their benefits for school fees etc. In most cases, the parents would have to raise money to meet the school fees. We struggled hard to earn our living but could achieve it in the end. As youths, we found it hard because there was no financial help even to attend church activities; we cannot do that because we had to have something to assist us with. Instead some of the youths just roamed around drinking *kwaso* and smoking marijuana and there is no law and

order in the community. The youths just went their way and they would not listen to anybody. It is very hard for us the youths who went through the ethnic tension to cope with the life today.

Ms Cynthia Samani's story:

In 1995 my dad bought a piece of land at Okea. My dad developed that piece of land and stayed there since 1995. In 1998 we started to hear stories that there was an uprising which started on the other side, northwest Guadalcanal. In 1998 I was in Form III. We heard that the militants chased the Malaitans out from where they were. My parents thought that we should move out from our place, but the landowner whom my dad bought the land from said that we should not leave. That fight was only for the people residing on the northwest of Guadalcanal. I was in Form III and our school attendance started to be affected. The story was that the militants were going to chase the illegal settlers back to Malaita. We stayed up until 1999 when the ethnic tension was getting worse. Our house was situated only meters away from the main road and we could hear guns being fired along the road. We started to get frightened and also we were advised by the landowners and friends that we should not roam around too much and when we go to town we should come straight back to the house. By then we started seeing full truckloads of people leaving CDC III to come down to town due to the threats of the GRA militants. When we saw this, we started to get worried because this was a new move to us.

I can remember one evening when my mother was doing her cooking in her kitchen and the rest of us were in the house, we heard gunfire just beside the road. When my mum heard this, she left her pot and ran back to the house. This made me very frightened indeed.

Solomon Telekom started to evacuate its workers residing around the CDC area to town. The militants told us the last truck to go across the bunker was the Telekom truck and no more. We were taken from our area and were left at the Solomons Telekom recreation area at Ranadi. This was a students' hostel but we were accommodated there. After dropping off some of the families, my brother and I went back with the Guadalcanal man who was the driver of our bus. On our way back, when we got to Tenaru bridge, a militant came out to the road and stopped the bus. The militants asked the driver, "who owns the bus?", but he said that the bus belonged to him and his family. The driver asked us to hide in the bus;

the driver himself was one of the chief's sons. After talking with the militants, we took off to our area.

The driver went to my dad and told him that it's better that everyone should leave the place before anything else could happen to our family. My dad had to go and look for the boys because they went to buy betel nut at the Ngalibiu market. My dad picked the boys from the market and came back so all of us boarded the bus and came down to town. I knew my father was not a fast driver but that time he was really driving at a very high speed. When we got to Alligator Creek, then we felt safe because we were within the town area. When we got to the Telekom recreational area, my dad told us that we just have to forget about our properties back at Okea; these included our house, domestic animals and other belongings – what did matter was our lives. Telekom did not allocate any house in town to my dad so he was thinking of resigning and go home. I was in Form IV during that time and if he was to resign this would affect his children's education. So, my dad had made up his mind to resign and we had to go back home.

When we got home with only a few belongings, and to make matters worse, we did not have any house and had to live with relatives. My dad sent me back to Honiara to continue with my education but this time I had to live with relatives which I did not get used to. I did not get much financial assistance from my parents, as stated earlier, my dad was already out of job. I did not have time to do my studies and my education was affected because I was aiming high and I expected myself to achieve better results at the end of my schooling. At that time I did not care because I could not help myself in terms of doing my studies; all I had in my mind was to get a Certificate. During the June holidays, I went home and at the end of the holidays I did not come back to complete the last semester of the year, but I came back to sit my last exams. We went through a very hard time because we had to share the house with my uncle. What I used to enjoy when my dad was still in employment was no longer there. I had to go through a different stage of my life. The rest of my brothers and sisters could not attend school because there was no money for school fees. We had to start a new life at home and it was just like a new beginning to us.

Ms Christina Harisimae's story:

My name is Christina Harisimae and I am from West Are 'Are, a region of Malaita Province. On a Sunday afternoon in March 1999, a classmate from Malaita went up to a canteen close to Ruavatu Secondary School to buy some stationery. On the way, a villager ran towards him to pass the news to the school principal and the students, not to leave the school compound. The villager could tell the student was from Malaita because of the tattoos on his face. He told him not to go beyond the bridge as the GRA militants were there – “You go back right now and inform the principal and students about this, especially the Malaita students.” This student went back and informed the principal what the villager told him. The principal, a Guadalcanal person, called all the students together to assemble at the school dining hall. He advised the Malaita students to remain in the dining hall and not to go outside of the school compound. All the Malaitan students did not go anywhere but remained in the dining hall. The principal then made arrangements to transport the Malaita students to town. While he was still talking we could see the armed militants coming through the gate of the school and marching towards the dining hall of the school. Some of them wore *kabilato* and were also in possession of homemade guns. By then we were surrounded by the militants and they said the Malaita students should leave the school immediately. We female Malaitan students were so frightened, we crawled under the table as militants fired shots into the air. We did not go back to the dormitories but had to sleep in the classrooms and in the dining hall like animals.

Mr. Presley Vii, Jr.'s story:

My name is Presley Vii, Junior. I am from south Guadalcanal and my home village is at Horabau. I would like to start off my story at Horabau, our new settlement at Aruligo. In 1999 I was 14 years old and attended St. John's School. During my school days I would hear stories and rumors that Guadalcanal would fight against Malaita. I did not worry about this but continued my education until class six. I decided to go back to the Weather Coast when our elders told us to come back. When I went over to the Weather Coast the militia group had just been formed and a rule was for men to wear *kabilato* and women to wear grass-skirts. Some of us were not use to wearing that sort of wear but if we did not follow what they said, we were liable to pay compensation. For safety reasons, I had to

wear the *kabilato* and was advised not to laugh at those who wore *kabilato* and grass-skirts. If anybody did, they would pay a fine of red-money. That was one of the unusual things I came across during that period of time.

The other thing too was that they would send us to feed the militants who camped in the bush, sometimes late in the evening. The journey would take about two hours and by the time we got to the place, it would be late so we had to sleep in the bush and return the next morning. During the uprising, the young boys on the Weather Coast would just follow instructions to do things for the militants. The militants asked us to wear *kabilato* and go down to the seaside with our bows and arrows and shoot in case there is an enemy. When I went over to the Weather Coast, I also attended Babanakira School but did not concentrate with my education because of my involvement in the ethnic tension as a soldier boy, so I just came back and stayed at home. In 2003 I wanted to continue with my education so enquired at Tangarare to do Form I but I was advised that the intake for that year was already full so I decided to do Form II. I could not get through because something was wrong at the beginning so I came back and stayed at home. A year later Ruavatu reopened so I continued my education there and completed Form VI. Then my dad's cousin went down to work in the Western Province so I went with him and he arranged for me to continue Form VI and I completed it. When I came back home, I wanted to do Form VII but my mum could not support me financially so I agreed and just stayed home. My dad died long before the uprising so my mum had no financial means to support me and my other brothers.

Ms Maria Papari's story:

My name is Maria Papari from Mbarande, northeast Guadalcanal. In 1998 I was at Kulu Primary School where I lived with my aunty. One day, coming back from school with my aunty, we saw a police truck. They told us they were looking for the militants who chased the Malaitans out. We went home and during the night the members of the Police [Field] Force came and fired gunshots at our village. We were frightened so we went and hid in the bush. We did not bring any mats to sleep on so we used bush leaves instead. We lived for about three months; we were frightened because we did not come across anything like that before. My education was affected during that time. I was a bright student but my

education was affected because of the gunshots and threats we received from the militants. In 1999 a group of men from our village came and demanded compensation from my dad. He was told that if he did not give any compensation he was to be killed so my sister gave them what they demanded and they left my dad. In 2000 we came back to the village but did not come to town because the ethnic tension was still strong. We could not come to town because we did not have any money at that time. There was no way to make money. I went back to school again but due to the first shooting incidents, I was still traumatized and did not do well at school. I could not write the proper answers so this made my academic results low and I had to repeat more than once. I did not do well at school and I had to repeat twice; I felt ashamed about this. So because of my education being affected, I did not continue but just stayed at home and helped out in the community and maybe later on will continue with my education.

Mr. George Hilly's story:

In 1998 I resided in Honiara and I was employed by BJS Agencies Ltd. My wife was part Choiseul and Malaita, so we stayed with my wife's family in one of the settlements at the back of Honiara. It happened that in 1998 a shoot-out took place at Bungana and one of the members of the GRA was shot and killed by police officers. By then the ethnic tension was strong in Honiara and also at the surrounding areas. In fear of my safety, I decided I should not stay at the Malaitan settlement but to go back to my village at Aruligo, Northwest Guadalcanal. By then the GRA had formed up and mobilized themselves all around the island of Guadalcanal. In late 1999 the militants made a roadblock at Kakabona. Members of the Police Field Force asked them to open the roadblock but they refused. The GRA militants' intention was to enter Honiara, then the Police Field Force gave out messages through their loudspeaker that they should clear that roadblock, otherwise they would shoot them. They did not listen but forced their way towards town. As a result of this, a major shoot-out took place at Kakabona. That time three boys got shot and wounded but we managed to drag them out and escaped with them to Visale Clinic to get medical treatment. That was the first encounter I came through.

The second one was in 1999; I also witnessed another shoot-out at Aruligo. One morning when the women and children came to the market to sell their produce to buy other things,

a ship loaded with members of MEF and PFF went and shot at these people. The third experience was I went through a hard labor in year 2000. I went home to Aruligo with another Malaita man who used to live there. He wanted to take back his potted plants which he left behind when they were chased out; because of this I was labeled as a spy for the MEF. I was abducted, detained and tied up for three days. After that detention I was given hard labor; this was done so that I would tell the truth whether I was a spy for MEF. After proving I was innocent I was released.

Ms Hazyline Gelema's story:

My name is Hazyline Gelema. I come from Choiseul Province. In 1998 my dad worked at Tenavatu Farm. I went to school at Choiseul Bay and in June of that year I came back for holidays with my parents. One morning we were in the house and a militant came to my mum and asked for my dad. She told him that he went down to Alligator Creek with some cattle to graze. The militant said to my mum, "When your husband comes back, you tell him to allow me to harvest those cocoa; if he does not allow me I will chop his neck off with this long knife." My mum and I could not do anything but just sat in the house with fear wishing for my dad to return. By late evening that day my dad returned from work and we told him what happened while he was away.

During that period we could see the militants going up and down in the area holding guns and weapons. This made us frightened but my dad told us to stay put because God is with us and for sure we will be safe. By July I had to go back to Choiseul to resume my classes and my mum too came with me to Choiseul. When I got to school I did not concentrate with my education because my mum and I thought of my dad who was still at Honiara. We did not know what would happen to him because he was living outside of Honiara and that was where the GRA's stronghold was. Our neighbours had already gone back to their various provinces, leaving only my dad at the workplace. I told my mum [that it would be good] if we could come and live with my dad so that whatever happened we would just have to face the consequences. My mum did not agree for us to go back to Honiara but asked my dad to come home. At first he refused to come home because he thought of the Government property which was left under his care but later agreed and we settled back at home. That is the end of my story.

Mr. Rolly Cheka's story:

My name is Rolly Cheka. I am part Guadalcanal and Shortlands. I was only four years old when my father was harassed and beaten by the GRA. When they did that to my father, my mother and my sister were very frightened and they took me and we ran away to the bush. We managed to find our way and came to another village. This took place one evening at our village on the Weather Coast.

Mr. Tony Checka's story:

My name is Tony Checka. My father was from Malaita and my mother from Guadalcanal. I am married to a Shortlands woman. I was a police officer but left the Police Force. During that time we just got back from Honiara from a marriage counseling session. One evening I was trying to light our kerosene lamp when the GRA militants arrived. They ordered me to put away whatever I was doing and go down to the beach. They suspected that I was a spy for the MEF because I just got back from Honiara and I was part Malaitan. When we got to the beach, they punched me and kicked me and pointed their guns at me. I was really in great pain, the worst pain I ever experienced in my whole life. I was tied to a coconut tree and I thought I was going to die at any time. I was in that position for two hours and the leader was trying to smash the gun on my head. I managed to get myself free after the militants went away. I ran away as fast as I could and I jumped into the river. I felt unconscious and stayed in the river for a while. I swam across the river and came to dry land; I realized I was full of blood. It was dark so I did not really know where I was. I could see somewhere in the distance a flame of fire was burning and I knew straight away it was my house. I struggled with blood streaming down my face and managed to make my way to my house. It was a sad affair that my house was burnt down, including all our properties. I thought my family also got burnt in the house but as I thoroughly searched through there was no sign of them so I knew they must have run away to another village.

I went and looked for them and after eight hours searching, I came to another village and they were there. During this time the GRA militants were chasing the Malaitan settlers at Tangarare even if you were blood-related to that area. As my wife was from the Shortlands, she was not familiar with the area but somehow she managed to find her way through to another village with our two children. We made our way all the way to

Tangarare and the next day we boarded the patrol boat to Honiara. We did not bring anything with us because all our properties were burnt down in our house. When we got to Honiara, all the displaced people from Tangarare were put at the Holy Cross Hall and my family was also included in there. The Red Cross came and assisted us with the other necessary items. I was then admitted at the National Referral Hospital for the wounds sustained during the abduction by the GRA militants. I found it very hard to cope with life because I was part Malaita and Guadalcanal, so my wife asked me if we could go back to the Shortlands to settle there. While we were at Shortlands, my parents asked us to come back to Guadalcanal. My family came but I stayed in Shortlands for while until the arrival of RAMSI.

Mr. Hizi Tebabaki's story:

My name is Hizi Tebabaki. I am part Kiribati and part Shortlands. Thank you Chairman, Deputy Chairperson, counselors, victims and people of Solomon Islands. In 1998 I attended Bishop Epalle Primary School. There were rumors that there was going to be an uprising between Guadalcanal and Malaita. We attended school but we did not concentrate with our classes because the ethnic tension was increasing. Sometimes we missed classes because of fear. Teachers from Guadalcanal and Malaita started to leave classes or the school to go back to their respective homes, especially the Guadalcanal teachers. The Government was then getting slack, the police force started to break down, there was no law and order in place. At that time the ethnic tension was at its height and the national Parliament Member for Shortlands chartered the MV *Isabella* to take the people of Shortlands back to their province. In today's society, when urbanization takes place, people move about to get better education and employment. So that is why the rest of the people come to Honiara to work and when such thing as the ethnic tension took place, we were all affected. Children's education was affected, all other services were affected.

Mr. Andrew Kaloa's story:

During the ethnic tension I was here in Honiara and I was a student at Selwyn College; what went on in our country at time, I will focus on that. In the history of Solomon Islands and if you read what some historians wrote about the period of pacification, actually missionaries were involved in it, in fact that they got rid of head hunting. They formed a

culture where peace came, if you could observe clearly up to when the ethnic tension came, that was in 1998. History then reversed back where people started to kill each other but in a commercial war. This time guns were used, this was different from before where people used only spears. Ethnic tension, as I observed it, happened in a commercial world where people depended very much on foodstuffs from the store or overseas, where they were imported into the country. It affected the structures in our society today. In all societies in the world, they have three fundamental structures where they are laid down: politics, cultures and economics. If we talk about politics, it is something to do with decision-making; in the decision, we talk about economics, we talk about the distribution of wealth or livelihood in our society and then we talk about culture, living practices, also religion is involved in that. These three pillars in the society uphold the society. Then, during the ethnic crisis, what happened was, these three pillars were totally destroyed. Firstly, the political structure in the society, decisions did not follow the normal structure in our society; the normal practice in our society is that the decision comes from leaders, dad or elders in the society. But a young person can think of anything and do it. A young person can make his own decision by his own choice. I think in decision-making at that time from 1998 to the end of the ethnic tension, any young person could make his own decision because he had the power and because he had a gun; he had a weapon to fight with or use so the decision was not in order.

Then when we talk about the economics in our society that is the distributions of wealth as well. That was a problem at that time, where bribery was a major issue; people were hungry because the distribution of wealth was not evenly done because of the height of the ethnic tension. In other words, there was an economic downturn in the society and in the country that occurred during that time. That was my observation during that time. Then we come to the cultural structure in our society. There were lots of violation in our cultural values, our values in the churches, also the moral values in our society; these did not exist during that time.

The young people at that time followed their own ways, from my experience when I was at Selwyn College during the height of the ethnic tension; the students had to be evacuated because the situation was getting out of hand. The principal at that time, now the current Archbishop [of Melanesia], had given instructions to evacuate the whole school and to be

relocated at St. Nicholas. This affected the young people at that time. One of the funny things was that during that time, almost of the male students wanted to become militants. They dressed up in camouflage uniforms, not interested in wearing the school uniforms anymore. To me, this portrayed a kind of mentality where young people wanted to gain power, they wanted to become somebody. They did not abide with school regulations, they wanted to go their own way and to following school regulations was getting difficult. I observed it during that time, that all the young people wanted to become militants. In actual fact they were not militants but because of that thing interpreted in their minds, they accepted that kind of life style. That was my observation at that time; and in the nation as a whole, those effects are still in the mind of people today. The life style of young people is quite different from the past. There are lots of criminal activities committed by young people; this is the end result of the ethnic tension which occurred in 1998 to 2003. So my talk was based only on the three structures which I mentioned earlier and which were totally destroyed.

Mr. Dalcy Belapitu's story:

On behalf of youth with expertise, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Chairman, Commissioners and everyone who is here to express my feelings and what I saw during the ethnic tension and its aftermath. If you look at the effects of the ethnic tension, it's the youth who are most victimized. We know the Government sometimes talks about the youth issue but in what way do they assist you? When we talk about youths, I see youths in three types: (1) school leavers; (2) church youths; and (3) street youths. The Government concentrates more to assist the youths who join up with sports clubs but it do not pay attention to the church and street youths. The ethnic tension affected the youths in the sense that affected their education. So when we talk about economic downfall, what is the result of economic downfall, it was mainly unemployment; students came from out from school; there was no education because of the ethnic tension. There was no financial assistance forthcoming, so they had to go out from school.

The other factor is the value of our culture in our society. During the ethnic tension, there were lots of criminal activities that took place. This brought our values in our community and society down. This also caused most of our youths to go out from our respective

churches. The elders of our church shared their opinions with me that it is wise to call the youths who went astray to come. This is to keep them away from drinking *kwaso* and smoking marijuana. Youths should be counseled so that they can come back closer to God. When we tried to go out and reach out to them, they have fear in them and this fear isolates them from coming closer to God and they still remain in their old ways and habits. The ethnic tension also affected the youths and their God-given talents. Instead, they misused these talents, like committing criminal activities which made forget their goals. As we know, when we attend schools we have our goals and we aim for the future. When the ethnic tension took place, they lost their self-esteem. They saw that they could not achieve their aims and goals because they came to destruction with their education. They were let down; the Government did not support them. When the Government does not support them, then their morale goes down, but one must know that youths are the leaders for tomorrow. In such circumstances, youths should be encouraged to come up in the society, to keep them away from bad influences. Youths need to go out to do community activities, but there is no financial support from the Government to make their work easy. Youths tried their best to assist other youths through their own financial means. For the unemployed youths, nobody seems to address this issue, even the Government talks about unemployment but it does not help in any way at all to address the issue.

I now appeal to the Government of Solomon Islands to address these issues; as Christians, we should possess good values in our country. I must stress here that the leaders are our role models, especially our Members of Parliament. We are watching them, if they do good deeds for the people, then they set good examples to their people, especially the youths of today. I appeal to the Government and the responsibility authorities to address the issue of reducing unemployment and bringing [youth] up to attend church programs. This, I believe, will bring back the unemployed youths to engage in church activities. I think that is all. Thank you very much.

Mr. Kevin Molex's story:

My name is Kevin Molex, originally from Malaita but I work in Honiara under the church ministry called "Apostolic of Christ under the Catholic Church". Before I put my needs and concerns to the Government, I would like to talk about my experiences before the

ethnic tension and after the ethnic tension. During the ethnic tension, I did not go back home but continued to do my work as a youth missionary. As a youth missionary, I worked with young people before this tension took place. I did my work around Guadalcanal, Malaita, Makira and also other provinces. My work involved mainly young people, to develop their talents and to know who they are and to know and respect their elders in their community and also for the church. My work also involved building up their spiritual growth to know the role of the church and also their roles in the community. This is my field and I have been doing this since 1997, before the ethnic tension. When the ethnic tension took place, I did not give up my work but went out to the militants from both groups. I carried out my work around this island and went as far as Harold Keke's place, where I was confronted with guns. They asked me for the reason of my going but I told them that I came with God's mission to bring his people closer to him. When I said this, I was allowed to go through.

In the year 2000, our youth group was represented at Selwyn College for Youth Convention where we were fortunate to meet with Harold Keke. We talked with him and shared with him, even the Government was trying to get him to sign a peace deal but he did not accept that. He only accepted the request of youths to go and see him; that's what I experienced during the Ethnic Tension. As I have mentioned in the first place, my work is to bring young people to come back: to take them out from influences that they are involved in so that they become good citizens of Solomon Islands. That is what I would like to do to the young people of Solomon Islands. I know I am a really citizen of Solomon Islands; I have a heart for the people of Solomon Islands and also for my country with due respect.

My experiences after the ethnic tension, when I went back to visit them, most were affected with fear. Most felt that they were homeless and aimless because of the effects of the ethnic tension. Even though they were like that, we managed to take them back and placed them where they were before, as they were real young people of this country, really young men and women of this country and they are the future leaders of this community. This was what we did to them so they realized how important they are and in their community and as Solomon Islanders.

Now I would like the Government to address this, most of the time; we regard them as “Youths of today are leaders of tomorrow.” This saying makes the youths lift up their morale and yet you do not address and respect that saying. You do not recognize their well being and you do not understand how important they are. The second thing is, when you talk about youths, it covers every young people; but when you categorize it, within the church they have youth groups, from schools they have youth groups, and also the unemployed youths. I think the population of youths who are involved in criminal activities, like *kwaso* and marijuana, plus activities which the elders do not welcome, are committed by unemployed youths. When we talk about the youths from the church, they are the ones who know more about the needs of the unemployed youths. They counsel them and talk to them so that they forget about their bad habits like drinking and smoking marijuana and even involvement in robbery and stealing. For example, if you look at the Central Market, there is lots of pickpocketing taking place; this is committed by unemployed youths, it is not the adult people who do this. This is where the church youths do counseling them, directing them to come out from their bad habits. Why I refer to the unemployed youths because I look after them, I don’t look after them by means of supporting them financially, or providing them with employment but assist them in a way so that they forget the character or attitude they are involved in. When we say, “The youths of today are leaders of tomorrow,” – for the Government: what do you think of this? You as leaders of this nation, we have to look at them and have concern for them as important as leaders of this nation.

The third thing as we [must] look at the submission across to the Government; sometimes when we put forward to request for financial assistance, especially for sports organizations. When they are sent overseas to participate in sports or other activities, they do not achieve anything. We forget to recognize the youths’ spiritual growth in the society. Surely Solomon Islands is a Christian country; but this is the important [issue] the Government should address: the spiritual side of youths’ growth in our country. When submissions came through the Ministry of Youth, Women and Children’s Affairs, where is the assistance given by the Government to the church youths to assist in their programs to go out to do evangelization and also to work with young people? There is nothing. Whenever we talk about sports, especially for the South Pacific Mini Games, the Government spent

millions of dollars to send to participate for the sake of developing their talents physically but spiritually the Government forgets all about it. This is the main factor we should look at, because when youths are involved in the church activities they are taught to have respect for their leaders and their communities; but they need financial back up from the Government to run their programs. Most of the time, the Government got donors to assist the country but unfortunately they do not develop the country. They might develop the country physically but not spiritually. Some times when youths participated in sports funded by the Government and they did not participate in youth programs, they would fall back to bad habits. So we need the Government to assist financially the church youths so that they go out and assist other youths in God's work. As we always say, "the youths of today are leaders of tomorrow."

If you look at the three points I have just mentioned and you include them in your policy and structure, surely this country will live in peace. One more thing I would like to highlight here is that when you talk about young people, they are powerful just like nature, the power of nature we [cannot] go against it. It is the same with the young people; they have the power of nature. When young people decide to do things, they can do it without anyone stopping them. This is what I am putting across so our leaders can take note of.

Ms Patricia Tona's story:

The Government should mandate for the expectations of young people of Solomon Islands in the future. Solomon Islands has now recorded a total of 515,870 persons as of November 2009. This means there is an increase of 106,828 persons which is 26 percent compared with a population size of 409,042 reported in the Census of November of 1999. In the record, young people have a higher percentage which means in the future the population will grow rapidly. In every community or village and in urban areas you can find young people, whether they are engaged in schools, employment; running a formal or informal business or have no job opportunities. Youths can always be identified in all places and villages or communities, urban areas, institutions or schools, homes, streets, night clubs and prison. The Government should provide for youths' expectations. These are the recommendations young people expect from the Government to build a better Solomon Islands:

1. Village or community sponsors, for example, the Government to provide allocation for reforestation of trees that have been devastated by large-scale logging by companies; this is a possible avenue for job opportunities to engage in community participation.
2. Provide micro-projects, priorities to for rural communities which are often forgotten; with these projects, young people will remain back at their respective communities and become engaged with community's participation.
3. The need to recognize youths as very special and unique in their talents and capabilities. Create job opportunities; establish more vocational or rural training centers that will be affordable. To provide more skilled training; our country needs more skilled young people to balance our growth and development. Work in partnership with communities and churches. Many young people are absent in communities and churches; they must reach in their situation and address their expectations. Provide short term training and workshops on skills and trade programs as follows: Small motor engines, joinery, agriculture skills etc.

Mr. Samani John's story:

My name is Samani John. I am from Malaita Province. I'm a young youth leader representing the tip of Malaita. I am part Langa Langa, North and South [Malaita]. As you know and you have heard from our previous speakers, the most affected people in our country during the ethnic tension were the young people. We found it very hard with our lives. We were affected in many areas, as you already heard; it affected the education of the young people. Secondly it affected our social problems; financial support was also affected too and even most young people were stressed in their lives. They searched for what they could do. Today I appeal to the Government to do something to try and heal the wounds in order to make our future lives become better. I also appeal to the Government to draw up some sort of educational programs so that the young youths can learn to change their future lives to become better than now. I would also appeal to the provincial governments, especially the Malaita provincial government. What are your plans for these young people who are affected? I appeal to you to recognize us. And what are your plans for the young people? Because we are leaders for tomorrow, and if you the responsible authorities do not have any concern for us, we will be worse off than now. Therefore I ask

you to prioritize us in your future plans and programs so that it will help us to do something better for us and the country as a whole in the future.

I would like also appeal to our Parliamentarians who represent us in the National Parliament. During your campaigns, you promised lots of things to us and we accepted your promises and voted for you. When you got Parliament, you forgot about us. We are the resources of Solomon Islands. I appeal to you to play your role in assisting the youths of today. I heard that sometimes the Government budget had been spent somewhere else which did not benefit the country. If you could allocate one percent to the young youths, that would be better to assist us in our programs and through this we would assist those unemployed youths back at our villages and communities. This will give them something to be involved in to be keep them occupied so that they do not involved in criminal activities.

I would appeal to the young people to think wisely for our future because we are the ones we are going to face the future. We have to think wisely, forget what had happened during the ethnic tension and face what is in the future. We will be the victims if we don't address the future properly; we can depend on our leaders but we too have to contribute to do our part so that we build better lives in the future. I appeal to those of you who are in the process of learning, concentrate on what will benefit the country. We ask money from our leaders if they support us; utilize this wisely and it will come successful.

Once again, leaders of this country, we the youths depend on you to show good examples; commit yourselves to what you do and make sure to go to church and you must remain faithful to your people and then our country will be prosperous in the future. Lastly to build a bright future, I ask you, national leaders, provincial Government and young people, to work together from now to build a better future so that we can enjoy life to the fullest. Before I conclude, I would like to put across a short phrase; "A papaw tree, if it is planted on infertile land, we will not harvest it; but if we plant it on fertile land it will bear fruit over and over again when its replanted." Once again, Chairman, Commissioners, thank you for this wonderful opportunity to share ideas and the crisis where our young people are in now. Thank you.

Mr. Stalin Kwainao's story:

My name is Stalin Luitolo Kwainanao and I am from Malaita province. I am humbled and honored to be here this afternoon for this historical event and I am also honored to represent the South Seas Evangelical Church as a Youth Representative. After this, I will just highlight some of the needs of our youths today and for tomorrow too. As a leader with a vision, what do I see for Solomon Islands youths in five years' time or in ten years' time, identifying some problems and possible solutions. I will also do some recommendations. So before I do that, I would like to take this opportunity to apologize on behalf of the Youth Development of the South Seas Evangelical Church for our youths who were involved in the past ethnic tension, whether they be from Malaita or Guadalcanal side; any from our church who were involved during that time, on behalf of the Youth Department of the Church, I would like to say, sorry; may God alone who put that [work] according to his plan and his purpose.

What do you think Solomon Islands will be like in five years time? I have been pondering of what to say this afternoon. You can see the current situation that we as young people are facing after the ethnic tension is a big challenge and it's a big hill we are going to climb. We see a high rise of unemployment, drug abuse, prostitution, broken homes and dysfunctional families. All these things are going around in our families, in our communities, in our churches. It is a sign that there is a problem. What makes a major problem is that 75 percent of the population of Solomon Island is just youths. We will come to this later when we deal with youth issues. As a youth worker, youth development is our priority. How we are going to develop our youths; we know youths, the definition of youths, the condition of when you are young between the ages of 18 to 35 years because it is the appreciation of our freshness, our vigor and the spirit that we have. We can do anything whatever mountain is there, what road there, we can jump and we can climb because that is the spirit of being young. Development is the act of improving by expanding or enlarging or refining.

This is what youth development is all about. It is a broad topic but I will just talk on a method that just has been used all around the world. It is called a "Cycle of Courage." This is where I am going to measure up on how we are going to deal with this. If you look

at the Cycle of Courage it has four areas that you can measure a young man or a young woman to that method. We are all human beings with a sense of belonging, also sense of mastery, sense of independence and generosity. Belonging: we all belong to a place, we all have a place, Solomon Islands is our home. Mastery is something you are good at, you are good singing, you are good at dancing, you are good at building, etc. When you look at the first aspect of a youth is belonging, after the ethnic tension or during the ethnic tension, one major problem is home; we were chased out from where we used to be. There is no place to settle, so when you do not have a sense of belonging to a place, you do not have a sense of belonging as a young man or as a young woman, we become rebellious at times. Why do we do that, because we do not have a sense of belonging to a place. Youths just want to mess up with their lives; to them they think they do not have a place to stay. This is what you saw with our youths after the ethnic tension. You see just youths walking about aimless; there is no sense of security; there is no sense of direction, which way you should go. We all have a purpose in life but as you can see today, many youths just live a reckless life. This is what is happening which is a major problem in our societies today.

As a youth worker, is there is a possible solution to this. This will come to our churches, our Government and our communities. To tackle all these problems we need to work together. stop pointing fingers at the Government, stop pointing fingers at church leaders; we need to look at ourselves and ask questions, “What I can do for my community?” , , , “What can I do for my young people? What can I do for my church?” These are the individual questions every youth in Solomon Islands should ask themselves. When you look in the mirror in the morning, these are the questions you should yourself. What can I do for my community today?

There are some ideas that came up when we were discussing this issue. The first one is resettlement; and this already took place. There are resettlements that happened in our communities, like people are settled in various areas. If resettlements have not taken place, I recommend that the Government should be looking at the issue of resettling the displaced families, including the young people. There is a classic example of one of the victims telling us yesterday that her family was chased out of Tangarare and when they went back to Langa Langa, they were not welcomed there anymore. She did not know where to fit in that type of circumstance. The responsibility of the Government and church leaders is to

resettle those families. If we do not do this, who is going to do it? It is up to the Government, the church leaders and the community to do that. We should provide shelter to the homeless that are roaming around. We should lift them up with our youth groups. We should have an integration program for these youths so that we should bring them back to fit into the community life style. The Government or churches should provide tools for gardening, materials for house construction, and provide seeds for planting, and provide a plot of land to do gardening.

This is a practical way; for me I do not believe in big scale assistance. I am very practical in the way we should do things, something achievable in a short period of time. One of the very important things that were addressed was the issue of education. During the ethnic tension, the education system was affected; almost all of the schools were closed down. We can always do something after the Government of this nation or the church we can still do something. One recommendation is; can the Government of this nation or the Ministry of Education and Human Resources set up a special privilege for those whose education had been interrupted? It does not have to follow the school calendar but a program should be basically for them to bring them back into the education system. I don't think there is anything hard about that; we have been doing it and surely we can do it again.

Another recommendation is, can the Government set up a scholarship for those young people being chased out from Guadalcanal? A special selection criteria should be used to award [scholarships] only to those young people who were affected by the ethnic tension. Give evidence and recommendations, then you could be offered a special scholarship to avoid parents' paying school fees, due to the effects of the ethnic tension. It was not what we chose; it was something that we were not ready for.

Another thing is the sense of belonging that we can see [when] youths go as peers. These young people are interested in the same sport, in the same music, they like reggae music, heavy metal music, you can see the way they dress and the way they do things. Even in the sports they seem to do things together. This means that it limits the potential of these young people and also narrows their decision-making opportunities. Their decision-making will mainly focus on the peer group's interest. I would like to recommend that we introduce youth development programs down at the community level. We should have

youth workers in every community so that they assist with community activities. This happens in other countries. What is so hard about this happening in Solomon Islands? We can easily do that. Train them up to be involved with the youth development workers, to live with them in their villages, become mentors for them. If this type of program is in place it will create employment opportunities for youths.

We should engage in youth exchange programs; youths from other provinces go to visit other provinces: youths from Malaita to go to Isabel and vice versa. Schools have these exchange programs with overseas student. We can do the same; it is not a very expensive exercise. By going, we will come to understand other cultures; we will appreciate other people; we learn from them and have some impact from their livelihoods etc. This is how we should look at other brothers and sisters from other provinces and this is how we should understand each other. It is all about empowering young people. Another thing is about culture: culture is known by the language we speak and the food we eat. If we refer back to one of the speakers, she was so confused whether she was from Malaita or Guadalcanal because when they were chased out from Guadalcanal and went back to Malaita, they did not recognize them there, maybe because they were brought up in Guadalcanal culture. This was what was experienced with other provinces after the ethnic tension.

The recommendations now come to the churches and the communities. They should be reintroduced into the communities and churches, the other point is on mastery, it is something that you good at. As we see after the ethnic tension, there is a lot of unemployment in Solomon Islands. It is now a problem and we cannot do anything about it. The only thing is to fight the unemployment. Our support should be emphasized more on the informal sector because most of the young people who stay unemployed at this time have to go back into the education system. After the ethnic tension, there was no financial assistance, everyone was broke, everything was gone. In this regard we should support more the informal sector and provide marketing opportunities, like the shell money making, lavalava dying, basket weaving, etc. The Government should put more emphasis on these things to assist people at what they are good at.

The other thing here in Solomon Islands is music, art and sports; for myself, I am a full-time musician; for some it is really hard to make a living out of what you are good at. I

have been touring around the Pacific and touring other countries outside. I saw musicians make a living of what they are good at but in Solomon Islands it is hard to do that. Our population is just small compared to other countries'. I think the Government can do something about the music industry. The other problem too is the talent is not protected; you compose your song everyone can copy it, etc. This is a major problem, and the recommendation here is: the Government needs to review the current legislation on the music industry on the copyright law, that is what I am emphasizing. This is only the beginning; we Solomon Islanders are so talented in music and art, compared to other countries in the South Pacific. I know the legislation is in place and only needs to be reviewed.

For the youths it's time that we need to voice out our concerns. We need to come out with new initiatives and stop pointing fingers at the Government, stop pointing fingers at our leaders. We are men and women and we can do something; now it's time we should come together and put things together; [if] we do this, other respective authorities would be more than happy to assist the youths. We should do something for ourselves, rather than pressurizing our leaders to do something for us. When we keep nagging them, our leaders will end up committing something outside what the law allows. They have to go and find money somewhere; they will become involved in corruption and other criminal activities. We as the community, we keep on pressurizing and poking them. We should be the one helping them, in our churches, in our communities and in our youth programs. By doing this, we will help our leaders to focus more on planning better things for us.

Independence: Youths need to be independent, but now after the current situation, after the ethnic tension, we are not independent as youths. To become a better Solomon Islands for tomorrow, we better change our mentality, on depending on aid from outside, depending on hand outs, depending on charity and Government organization to support us. Young people of today need to be independent. What I mean is that we should be responsible for what we are. We need to work and work; lots of our young people are so lazy, just put on the iPod and mp3 and sleep all day. They can sit at the market place until night. We need to do planning, preparing and working; we must be kept busy in these three areas. If you have nothing to do, you must be busy preparing what you have planned. If you have already something to do, you must be working now. It is not fair that you say you do not have

something to do. You are very talented and have lot things to do. You are talented in your own area in your own life as a young man and its time that we must work. It's time to emphasize to this generation that we must work; the population is growing, Solomon Islands is getting smaller, demands for living are is on the rise. It's time to work; if we are lazy the future of Solomon Islands will be affected. To raise up the economy of this country, to raise up the living standard of this country, young people of today, leaders of tomorrow, young people we need to work, start to work now. In whatever small things you do, do it with your heart, do it faithfully and God will reward with good things in life. Nothing is impossible for a willing mind; if you are willing to do something you will do it. The hardest part is doing it, but nothing is impossible to do. I appeal to the youths here, because too many times we make too many excuses. I do not want my fellow brothers and sisters to have their noses being pulled around and manipulated by things that do not have bases.

The other recommendation is for the Government to create more employment opportunities. The Government needs to be flexible on the criteria on starting our own business. This time the starting our own business becomes difficult because of its selection criteria. [But it should be] that even though you do not have any working capital to start with, but as long as you got the idea and the plan, you can start your business. The other thing is we must be responsible; one example: I was at Panatina living with my aunty after the ethnic tension and during that time the people who lost their properties were being paid with the lost properties money; this father got the money, about \$20,000, and went out the whole week end when he came he only gave \$5 to his wife. That was very irresponsible of that particular father. That was very wrong. Be responsible to yourself, use your common sense. You are given the money to compensate for your lost properties and yet you as father just used it recklessly or you as a mother just misused the money. Stop blaming the Government for not supporting you. The responsibilities lie on us when we are given things by the Government, use them wisely. The Government too is trying to collect revenues to meet its expenses. I do not want us to make the same mistake again, let us learn from our mistakes. We must be responsible young people of this country, Solomon Islands.

Generosity: One of the biggest problems after the ethnic tension is the *wantok* system. We did not learn to appreciate each other after the ethnic tension: Malaita people are on their own, Guadalcanal people are their own and so with every other Province. We would like developments to take place in our own areas and provinces. I totally disagree with this mentality, this causes disunity. Today it is who you know, which is not fair. Jobs should be given to those who deserve it. Do not practice the *wantok* system. We do not appreciate each other's contributions; this came about after the ethnic tension. This also goes for the distribution of projects. Funded projects established in Malaita, only Malaitans are allowed to work there. Malaitans are not allowed to work at Gold Ridge or GPPOL, only the Guadalcanal people can take up jobs there. For the future of this nation, we are not defined by the color of our skin, the language we speak, which island we come from, or unique cultures or which church that we attend. We are defined as Solomon Islanders, one nation under God. That would be through peace and reconciliation. I should see a brother from Guadalcanal as a Solomon Islander; I should see a brother from Western Province as a Solomon Islander. What I can see now there is no sense of appreciating each other. You may prove me wrong but this is how I see it. I believe here we are not defined by our languages, by geographical locations, by cultures or by the church you attend or by the color of our skin. After this program I would want to see the vision for the youths of this nation that we should see ourselves as Solomon Islanders. Let the national flag define who you are, that is what we want to see and if we are going to move on. To break this type of mentality, I think it's time we should link communities together. We do not need the Government to do this for us. Our communities and churches can do this, link communities together. For example, young people at Kaibia can go up to Malango and help them to brush their gardens and those people at Malango can come to Kaibia to assist us with our flower planting. We do this together to prove we appreciate each other. We will soon find out from each other that we face the same struggle in life to discourage isolation and favoritism.

We come down to youth development work. We should appreciate the youths' achievements in our communities, in our churches, in the youth groups and in our families. Lots of times, youths come up with very good proposals in our churches and, communities but we do not seem to appreciate their contribution. They should be given some sort of

token of appreciation to say thank you to them. This is the Cycle of Courage mentioned earlier in my talk. To conclude, to the young people of this nation after the ethnic tension and looking ahead for the future in five years or in ten years time, in order for us to create a better Solomon Islands for tomorrow, we need each other ever than before. This starts from the ordinary housewives up to the members of the National Parliament, Whatever sector you are in, what churches you serve, whatever villages you are in, we need each other's support. Change from our way before, change from the mentality of "I am from Malaita, Isabel, Western, Guadalcanal etc." To make a better Solomons, only you and I will make it better and in order to achieve it we need to work together. In conclusion I appeal to my fellow youths and citizens of this nation, that we are not who we are, we are defined how well we rise after this problem that we went through. So remember let's not show our weakness through revenge, hatred and violence because we are strong; if you want to go back to abovementioned, it means that you are weak. We are stronger than what have been labeled as before, yesterday and today. I would appeal to the people of this nation that we will show the world that we are strong. We put our differences behind us and build our nation to peace and reconciliation. God bless Solomon Islands.

8. WOMEN VICTIMS

United Church of Solomon Islands, Honiara, 25 November 2010

Mrs. Mary Kesaia's story:

I am now going to tell you my story. On 14 May, 1999, I left Nguvia and caught a truck to go to our village at Talaura. I have gardens there and that was our home, my husband worked at Nguvia as a teacher. I stayed there until in the evening and then we had our meal. We were already in our respective beds ready to sleep; I went to sleep in my son's house in another village. All of sudden my uncle rushed to my son's house and knocked on the door calling my sister, saying, Anna run away. Our brother has been attacked by the GRA militants. When I heard this I got up from bed carrying my baby. We went outside, but it was raining heavily. We knew it was our uncle who came to the house but soon after he also disappeared in the night fighting for his life. All of my family members who were in the house stood at the verandah of the house, we could not go outside due to the heavy rain. From where we were standing, I could hear someone crying along the road. I could tell that it was brother who was crying. He was saying, "Mummy, I am dying". I told my sister to hold my baby but not long after that I could see my brother being held by the hair and dragged along the road. It was raining very heavily and the whole village and the road were very muddy. I jumped out from the verandah and ran towards my brother who was being held by the GRA militants. I asked them why they are doing that to my brother. All of a sudden I was slapped on the left side of face by a militant. When they did that to me I could see lots of stars but I still held on to my brother. I asked them again why they were doing this to my brother. He had not done anything wrong. They told me to shut up, but they kept on dragging my brother. He was dragged to my uncle's house and when we got there, my sister was already there. We tried to assist our brother but I kept on asking the militants why they are doing that to my brother. They told me to shut up; they said to me that they had nothing do to me but my brother. By then my uncle ran all the way from his house to come to the militants. He came and handed the militants one red-money and asked them not to kill the boy. The boy was his nephew. The militants said to my brother, keep your red-money to pay bride price for your son. My brother was suffering from deep cuts sustained from beating with the butt of guns. While this was going on, a militant ran

up to the house and kicked the hurricane lamp so that we could not recognize them. My uncle's wife came down and talked to some of the militants, they said they did not know what was going on because they came down from the bush. They shouted and said, look, they then dragged my brother along the road. My aunty and others went back to the house but my sister and I had to follow my brother. He was still dragged along the road and crying. I told him not to cry but be brave. They kept on dragging my brother to another location, by then my sister and I could not go with our brother but stood holding each other. A militant came and slapped me on the face and I fell down on the ground. The militants kept on pulling and dragging my brother along the road and I shouted at them if you kill him, do not hide him or throw him away but take him to my mother's house.

They took my brother to my mother's house. My sister and I then followed them until we got to my mother's house. I tried the door but it was locked but then I called out my brother's name. We could hear him groaning, his legs and hands were tied up. We tried to open the door but it was tightly locked so we got a piece of iron and hit the door hard and then we managed to open it. The door was swung open and hit my brother because he was lying just behind the door. I held his legs and asked whether he was all right but he could not speak. I then touched him from his legs up to his head, but his mouth was tied up and he could not speak. I asked him if he was all right but he said he could not see because his eyes were very badly injured. I asked him if there was any knife around but he managed to say, the knife was behind the door, so I got the knife and cut off the ropes from his hands and legs and the calico from his mouth. He told us to check for my brother in-law and his brother, of course they were in the other room also tied up. My brother in-law's brother was hit on his back with the butt of the rifle and his back was also injured, he could not walk properly; and had to be assisted, my brother too had to be assisted because he could not see. My brother in-law too had to be assisted because he was also wounded. My sister and I had to assist the three of them back to my uncle's village. When we got to my uncle's house, my aunty boiled some water washed my brother's body. We did not sleep but had to wait until morning, because we were frightened of the GRA militants. My mum too disappeared during the night and we did not know where she went.

Early in the morning my sister had to run to another village to get transport to take my brother to the hospital. On 15 May, 1999 we rushed my brother to the hospital but I had to

drop at Nguvia because my children were there. I came and told my children that we were attacked by the militants and that my brother was rushed to the hospital and I had to follow him to the hospital. I thought everything was going to end there. I went to the hospital to see my brother. He was admitted and had to be stitched due to severe cuts on his body. My brother in-law and his brother were also treated with injuries. Back at Talaura my mother's house was also burnt down and all her belongings were destroyed. We were then settled down for a while but some people had already run away, and my whole family too had to run away for our safety.

One of the problems we went through was when we were evacuated to Multipurpose Hall, the Malaitans who were also victims, did not want us to be there. My mother, sister and I were frightened, because the Malaitans were not friendly with us at that time. We could not face the Malaitans because of the way they looked at us and treated us. One of the men from Malaita talked out to the rest of the Malaitans who were at the Hall at that time that, these are just people like us, they are part Malaita and Guadalcanal, if you want to hurt them, then hurt me first before hurting them. We felt better when we heard this. When we left our place we did not have any extra clothes with us except the clothes we were wearing. We did not have any cooking pots, plates or spoons, etc. After a few days, the Red Cross came and supplied us with clothes, pots and spoons. Even though they supplied these to us they were not enough for us to go around. In the end I did not know where to go, even though I am part Malaita, I was born and brought up on Guadalcanal and do not regard myself as a Malaitan. My mother is from Guadalcanal and I do not want to go to Malaita. I went there and spent only one week and came back leaving the children. After a while I went back to Malaita and collected my children and we returned to Honiara. We came back and remained at Multipurpose Hall because we had nowhere else to go. After leaving the Multipurpose Hall we went to Mbaranaba to live there in a Home Finance House until today.

Mrs. Abigail Abaisato's story:

On Saturday 12th June 1999, my husband and a man from Makira went to work at Mbarande with a digger. Before my husband went, he asked us to make cassava pudding and that he was to bring leaves for the pudding. I asked him what time will he be expected back, he replied that he would be back by 12:00 noon. He said that there was not much to complete and it would not take them too long to complete the job. We waited until 12:00 p.m. but he had not turned up. We then waited until 3:00 p.m. and still he did not turn up. I told the children that our dad has not turned up. By 4:30 p.m. all of the workers who were working at Mbarande had to come back early because of the presence of the GRA militants. I sent two of my children to go and wait for their dad on the road, but when the trucks came back and dropped off all the workers, they did not see their father. The children came and told me that they did not see their father, but I said to them, I think he must have driven some people down to town. The two children then ran to the fleet of trucks that were parked under the tanks but there was no sign of their father. I just told my children that it could be your father and the man from Makira have been taken away by the GRA militants.

We waited and waited but there was no sign of our dad turning up, the pudding was there, so I started to make the *motu* [oven] for the pudding and gathered few leaves behind the house. By nightfall we were still waiting, we cooked some food and I asked the children to eat, I did not feel like eating. By Sunday morning, we were still at CDC I and some of our *wantoks* came and stayed with us. That Sunday one of my *wantoks* brought his family to stay with us and then he went back to their house because there was no one there. His family stayed with us until Monday morning. By that time most of the people who were living at Ngalibiu area started to leave the place and find their way to town. Being only a woman I did not know what to do with my three children. On Monday we waited but there was no sign of our dad, but by nine o'clock that evening we received a piece of note from the Makira man that he was tied on the legs and hands and tied to a stick at the entrance of the GRA camp. I then asked about my husband, did anybody know what had happened to him. Some of those people replied that they did not know anything about the Malaita man. Most of the people had already left to town except me and few others. I just sat down and cried not knowing of what to do with my three children. By Monday night the father of the

family who came and stayed with us came and took them to town. He told us that we should go with them to town, but I refused.

We then heard the news that the GRA militants are on their way and they are approaching the Society building. When I heard that, I decided to leave the place without my husband. They told us to take just some clothes but the rest of your belongings to remain in your respective houses. One of my *wantoks* told us to go and stay with them at Koa Hill. When we were there, we heard that the man from Makira had come back safely; unfortunately our dad did not come back with him. So, members of GRA, where did you leave him? Where did you throw him? Please tell us where you left him, you just threw him away like a rat, he is not a rat, he was the father of my three children. We respected him, please tell us so that we can go and collect his remains [*she is crying*]. GRA militants please show us where you hid our father; we want to see where his remains are. If we see his remains then we should be at least happy, please show us where you buried him.

Mrs. Elsie Talei's story:

In 1998 there were rumors that the Guadalcanal people were going to fight the Malaita people. My immediate family then sat down together and discussed what we should do in case there was a war between the two islands. My brother advised that we should not worry because we are part Guadalcanal and in our culture the women own the land. On 14 May 1999, in the evening and after meal, we were just sitting around in kitchen telling stories when six GRA militants entered. As soon as they entered they asked for the two Malaita men who were living in the village. This time they asked the same question and my husband said, "I am one of them." At the same time a militant kicked him from the back and he fell down to the ground. I then pulled our two-year-old baby from him and my brother told the militants not to harm him because he would not stand it. At the same time a militant took a big aluminum dish and hit it on my brother's head, he fell down to the ground. I looked around for my six-year-old son and my mum but they were all gone, they ran away to the bush. The militants then took my brother and marched him along the road. I took my daughter and went after my brother and the militants. While along the road the militants ordered my brother to swear at his mother and his sisters. My brother replied them and said, "I cannot do that." The second time they said the same thing to him, by

then, for his own safety he swore at his mother and sisters. We got to another village and saw my sister there, I asked my sister to take care of my daughter while I follow my brother and the militants. At that I was eight-months pregnant and despite that I followed my brother. When we got to my uncle's house, they told my uncle that they were going to kill his nephew. My uncle's wife, a woman from Duffs came out from the house and told the militants not to kill the young man. My uncle's wife took one *tafuliae* [shell money] and gave it to the militants but they refused and threw the *tafuliae* back to the woman. My brother then stood up and put his hands on my shoulder and said that the militants were going to kill me. They pushed the butt of the gun into his mouth and hit him on his back with the gun and swore at him.

We left my uncle's house and went along the road; the militants were still with us. He told us to let go off him so that the militants could take away and kill somewhere, but we refused. I shouted to the militants that if you kill him, take him back to his house but do not bury him where we cannot see him. Anyway we did not stop following our brother until we got to our village and we stood under a tree to watch what was going to happen. They took my husband and his brother, pushed them into the house and then tied them up. They then took my brother and sat him on the verandah of the house and the militants took out all his musical instruments. My brother was a Youth Coordinator. The three of us eye witnessed when they removed my brother's musical instruments. The militants took my brother back to his house, tied both hands and legs and mouth and threw him into his own house and locked the door. After locking the house, a militant poured petrol around the house. Somehow one of the militants advised them not to burn the house but to take all his instruments away. At the time my brother was full of blood. When the militants left the house and went away some hundred meters, my sister pushed the door open, she looked for a knife. Fortunately she found a knife and cut the ropes on his legs and hands and also his mouth. After our brother was freed, my sister did the same to my brother-in-law and my husband. My brother could not walk due to the injuries caused to his back by the militants. We decided to take my husband and his brother down to a cocoa plantation to hide them there until the next morning. By early morning my sister had to go to another village to ask my cousin for her car to transport my brother-in-law to the hospital. They took my brother-in-law to the hospital while the others went to Tetera Police Station and reported what had

happened. A team of police officers went to investigate what had happened during the night.

After returning from Tetera and before reaching our village we could see smoke from far and we knew that our houses were burnt to the ground. When we actually got to the village all our houses were burnt down including all the contents inside. A team of police officers came in a 3 ton truck and took us to Tetera Police Station. We stayed at Tetera up until June 1999 when I came to the hospital to have my baby and he was named Ethnic Tension. After leaving the hospital I took my baby and went to live with some relatives at Lengakiki for three days. The rest of my family went and lived with some people at Kola Ridge. After three days at Lengakiki and Kola Ridge, I met up with the rest of my family and we came down to the Multipurpose Hall. When we got there, the Malaitans who were already there did not welcome us and made bad comments about us and even wanted to hurt us. One of the elder men warned them that we too were victims of the ethnic tension from east Guadalcanal just like the rest of them. While we were there, we did not feel safe, all through the time we lived in fear. We were offered food from the Red Cross but for some of us we did not feel like eating because we were frightened of being attacked by the Malaitans. My family spoke in Guadalcanal language but some of the Malaitans did not agree with us when we spoke in Guadalcanal language. We stayed there for some time and after we moved to Mbaranaba.

After the arrival of RAMSI and on 13th August, 2003, RAMSI Officers and SI Police Officers came to Mbaranaba and searched for guns. They came and started to destroy most of the things supplied to us by the SI Red Cross. We did not know their motives of doing this, but they must have suspected that my brother was in possession of guns. My brother too was a signatory to the Townsville Peace Agreement and some of the things he got from Townsville during the signing of the Peace Agreement were also taken away and destroyed by RAMSI and SI Police Officers. During the first search, we discovered that some cash kept in our suit case was also missing. On 23rd March, 2005, my mum, brother, my handicapped sister and myself were sitting in our kitchen, when two RAMSI officers accompanied by one CID SI Police Officer came to our house at Mbaranaba. The purpose of their coming was to arrest my brother. I questioned them, why are you arresting my brother? They replied that they wanted to question him on certain things. I asked them,

what sort of things. I told them that you have not taken any action on what had been reported to you and yet you want to take more stories from my brother? By then the two RAMSI officers took out their guns and pointed them at us. Our mum then told us to be patient but my brother warned her not to say a word. When they took my brother away I also followed them to RAMSI office at Point Cruz. My brother was taken to the Magistrates Court and I also followed him there. After the court case, they came out and my brother told me to go back and tell my mother and other relatives that I was going to be put in prison.

Mrs. Catherine Bugotu's story:

On December 22nd 1999 I left my village to come to town. I walked all the way down to CDC I where I was picked by a senior member of staff of the then SIPL. When we got to town he dropped me off at the old G [Guadalcanal] Province area. I went into the provincial area and called in at the Police Office. After a while I went to do my Christmas shopping. When I got back to the provincial area, the SIPL truck already left, so I was still sitting around there and one of the police officers came to me and told that they were going to drop me off at home. At 4:30 pm I got into one of the police van and they drove me to SIPL II. As soon as we were dropped off, the police officer came forward and hit my sister with his gun and then came and hit me on the shoulder with the same gun and accused us, that we should not go town.

We then travelled to Binu Camp and a militant told the others to tie us up and commented that we should not have gone to town. The militants made us sit and started harassing us and swearing at us. They took a spade and put it in front us and told us to go and dig our own graves. You are going to die today; we did not say a word because we were frightened. We were asked to stand up and they swore at us again. It was about 8:00 p.m. in the evening and they told us to go and dig our own graves. By 10:00 p.m. my nephew came up and the militants said, "Look at those pig headed women, they are spying, they went to town." My nephew told the militants to untie us and said that we were respectable women and should not be treated that way. He told them that he was going to take us to his father to be cared for and we should not be treated that way at all. They untied us and my nephew took us to his father his house; they gave us food but we did not eat because of

what we had gone through. The boy told us to go to sleep, so we went in the room but we could not go to sleep.

The Commander of GRA who was based at Koleasi came down and he went to the house where we were sleeping. He asked for us to come out of the house during the night; I came out first but my sister was still frightened. The Commander told us that he was taking to the bush, that is, to Koleasi. I then said to my sister, that is the end of us, we are going to die. We got in the Hilux and went straight to his house. He advised us not to be afraid; he said, "I am going to look after you and do not worry." Those boys should not have treated that way. You are women and they should not treat you like that. The women in the house boiled some hot water to put on my sister's wound. I did not tell them about my shoulder because I was frightened so I just sat quickly. We stayed at Koleasi on 22nd - 25th December. Our relatives were trying to track us down, so they sent a village chief and a policeman to come and get us from Koleasi. When they got there, the Commander did not allow us to go in their truck. He told them that he was going to drop us off, so we boarded the Commander's Hilux and came down. The militants still demanded that we pay compensation so I gave them \$2,000.

Sometime later, I was taken to court, where five chiefs questioned me, as to why I went to town and why you wrote a letter to your brother. I told them, can you have a good look at the letter; it was not me who wrote that letter. I do not know how to read and write; you expect me to do that? The Weather Coast Commander then intervened and said, "Forget about that paper, we are fighting the Malaitans and not just playing around." The Weather Coast Commander then told me to stand up and go, so the court was dismissed. When I got back to my house, I heard that my brother was arrested at Ruavatu and beaten up and later taken to hospital. This happened on the same date, 22nd December 1999. I was fortunate that the Weather Coast Commander and Chief were present during the village court hearing and I was able to be released; otherwise I should also pay some compensation because I came down to town.

My concern here is that, the police took me to SIPL II but they later beat me and my sister. My appeal here is for the Government to investigate the policemen who did criminal activities. They too did criminal acts which the Government or the Police Force did not

know about. It is time that the Government or Police Force should look at this issue and address it. It was not the militants who carried out criminal acts but the police officers. So please have a look at the system and try to correct it because it's not only criminals who did this but also police officers. That is the end of my story.

Ms Priscilla Kate's story:

In 1998 I worked in town as a teacher. I heard rumors that Malaita and Guadalcanal people were going to attack each other. When I heard this, I did not feel free to move about, especially coming into town. I then told my brothers that to be safe we had to move to the Weather Coast. I took my children and went over to the Weather Coast to stay there. While we were there, we heard that there would be something serious going to happen. So at the height of the ethnic tension, the Government then sent the Joint Operation comprising the members of Police Force and MEF. By late afternoon that day, we could hear the engine of the patrol boat. We knew there was an operation to hunt down Harold Keke and his men. We were advised by the chiefs that we should not just run all over the place. We had to stay together and do not panic. By seven o'clock in the evening the rest of the people of the village escaped into the bush. We ran into the bush without any lights or torch. We went up right into the mountains without food and other necessities. The children were restless and cried all night because there was no proper place for us to sleep. We stayed in the open and until the next morning. There was an announcement from the patrol boat saying that there will be a clearance at 6:00 a.m. in the morning. The patrol boat then started shooting; luckily the rest of us already left for the bush. We did not know what to do but to pray for God's assistance and guidance. That same day three police officers came to where we were staying; when they got there, they told me that I should go down to the seaside. I had no choice but to follow if I did not I would be shot. All through the ordeal my two children were with me all the time. I followed the police officers down to the sea coast. We walked for about six miles and when we got to their base they did not say anything to us but sent us back. The next day they came back and told us to come back to their base again. They selected another two women to accompany me down to the sea coast. The Officers led us to a house and told us to stay there because someone was coming to interview us. At about 3:00 am in the morning, the police officers asked me to

go up to another house. There were lots of Field Force officers surrounding the area. I was led into a room and these officers were all equipped with guns. In the same room there was another man, he was tortured and was crying. I sat down and they started asking questions, some of them I termed as silly questions and I did not answer them. I told them how dare you take us at this time of the night and bombarded us with silly questions which we did not have any answers to them. The Field Force officers took me back to the house where we were asked to stay.

The next morning, another three Field Force officers came up to the same house and gun pointed at the three of us and asked us to come out from the house. This time they asked us to move to the seaside. The three of us with our children, all went to the seaside. At that time too I was expecting another baby I was five months pregnant. They marched us down towards the seaside, one officer at the front, the other in the middle and the other one was at the back. At that time we had all thoughts in our minds we might be all killed. During those times ordinary people could not speak out their minds because the next thing they would expect was to be shot. We travelled along and the Officers told us to rest for a few seconds. The other person who was being held by the Police Officers was also with us. They ordered us to sing and shout as we travelled along. They asked that person who was with us to get a poisonous tree and rub it against his body; the poor man did it to avoid being shot at. The Police officers told us that they would take us right to patrol boat to be kept in custody. The children started to cry when they heard this; I told them not to cry but kept on going. I asked the injured man to walk behind me because the police officer was poking me with his gun and even shooting in the air.

When we got to the seaside we went to another village. By this time we got tired of their game and then I asked for their overall boss. They told us that we were going to sleep in that house but I told them in our custom it is forbidden for men and women to sleep in an open space like this. We should be kept separate from the men, so their supervisor seemed to understand and kept the women in a separate house. The police officers did not allow us to have light of any sort, but the children preferred lights but we were not allowed to use any lights. After a day, we questioned the police officers why they were asking us to move to and fro without any good reasons. We were led down to Mbiti where the Joint Operations were based. The Police Officers asked whether we had any *wantoks* in town. I

told them I did not have any *wantoks* in town because if they were there they would be killed by the MEF. Some of the women with their children came with the members of police officers and MEF in the patrol boat to Honiara. I remained on the Weather Coast with my children until we were ready to come to another village, when we saw the police officers setting fire on our house. So I told them that we should follow another road. We went and stood on a hilltop and watched our house set alight. So I said to my children, it's a sad affair all our belongings are lost in the fire and we have no means of retrieving anything.

So, Mr. Chairman, what I would like to say now, is we have suffered as victims of the ethnic tension, we need your assistance, it is more than ten years, we were asked to fill in forms almost six times, but still we have received nothing. Those forms may have been thrown in the rubbish bins. It was on the order of the Government that the patrol boat went to Weather Coast to shoot innocent men, women and children. The women and children of Malaita and Guadalcanal suffered and would request that the Government do something about our lost properties. It's my request as a woman who suffered during the ethnic tension that the Government should address our claims of lost properties. What time will the Government address our demands, the demands of the women and children? How long are we going to wait, some of the people are already dead? It's more than ten years, and people are still waiting. I would like to express my concern in language to the Provincial Government of Guadalcanal. You know very well the women and children have suffered so long, what time will the Province and the Government address our issue of lost properties? Are you going to enjoy your own lives and neglect us? You better come back to the rural areas and see how the women and children struggle to make ends meet. This is our request, Mr. Chairman, please look at the issue of our lost properties. For those women of Guadalcanal who were unfortunate and could not come to the hearing, my heart also goes to you. Thank you very much one and all.

Mrs. Everlyn Tugua Hila's story:

My name is Everlyn Tugua Hila, my place of residence is at Aruligo. My husband died in 1986 and I had to bring up my six children on my own. One day before the ethnic tension, after I came to the market and was at home preparing my children's evening meal and after

my children had their meal and were ready to go to sleep, the GRA militants came to my house and demanded me to come out. They accused me of being a spy for the MEF but I told them that was not true and that I am loyal to my province and my people. They pointed the gun at me and told me that if I did not come out from my house they would shoot me. I told them that I should go in and lock my children's doors and then I would come out. I walked down the valley and up to the other side of the village. They tied my hands and asked me to stand up from 8:00-10:30 pm. I started praying in my heart for protection for both me and my children because if I die no one would look after my children. The people of our village saw what was going on but could not do anything because if they did they would be shot. I did not know what to do but somebody came around and told me that I was going to be released. By 10:30 p.m. the militants released me and I went back to the house. When I opened the house I was very surprised that my children were all safe and thanked God for this.

We then saw a ship going ashore at Aruligo. We thought it was bringing relief supply but it was a militant ship loaded with bulldozers mounted with machine guns meant to destroy that area, especially Aruligo. The barge landed and the bulldozers and other heavy equipment were released and were driven along the road towards the ICLAM area. The MEF started to shoot and burnt the ICLAM compound plus nearby buildings. One of the settlers of Aruligo was taken away and shot dead. We later realized this was not a rescue ship so all the people in the village ran to take shelter in the bush. During the Kakabona Operation a boy was also shot and while mourning him, this occurred so we ran away and left his body in our church. When we ran away to the bush a lot of things took place, like women giving birth to babies and so I had to assist them. Despite all the hardships I went through I managed to overcome them through God's guidance. That is the end of my story.

Mrs. Mary Hilly's story:

I am going to relay to you what happened to me and my family in 2003 one early morning. On Tuesday morning, about 4:00 a.m., I woke up and went to the kitchen with our house girl to cook breakfast for the family. While we were still cooking I could hear noises coming from the house. It was still dark and I could hear my mum calling my name. On my way to the house where my mum was, the militants grabbed my hands and tied them

behind my back. I was led to our house and at the same time, because it was getting clearer, I could see lots people moving around our house and my parents being tied up near the house. As far as I could see those militants who were there started to destroy most of the fruit trees plus other trees around our house. It was like a cyclone hit our place. I was brought to my parents and we were tied together standing up. One of the Commanders said that they were going to take us to a village where they supported us. My father at time was a provincial member for Duidui Ward. They questioned my Dad with questions like, “How is the Government?,” “What do they talk about?,” “What is the latest development on our Demands?” My Dad managed to answer their questions but while he was trying to answer their questions they bashed him, kicked him and he fell down several times. They were doing all these to him, while my mum and I watched. They asked him about the rest of the people of the village. My Dad told them that this village was his and that there are other villages nearby – “you can go and bring them to here because I am their leader.” They then went and took my grandmother, my aunty, my uncle and my small brothers and brought them to where we were. They told us that they would take us to another village. My Dad said to them that was okay but while we were still standing there the militants went into the house and destroyed all our belongings and burnt the house down. The only thing we had at that the time were the clothes we were wearing. We had another six villages besides my father’s village in our community. Some of the people in the other villages were also taken to my father’s village where we stayed together. Others managed to run away in the bush.

They took us to another village where they accused us of supporting the Government. It was not broad daylight. When the militants led us away, my father found it hard to walk because of the way they tied him, he struggled very hard and even fell down, he was then kicked on the back but he kept going. We came to a cocoa plantation and they asked him to stand up against a cocoa tree which was full of ants. The ants started to bite him but he could not do anything because he was tightly tied up. When we got to the next village we were asked to rest for while. While we were there I saw two young boys being led towards us. They were badly beaten and their faces were beyond recognition, one of them did not have any clothes except a pair of pants. Not long after that another group came up with some people: an old man, two old women, two young girls and one young boy. These people were also tied up. The militants asked my mum and me to sit at the verandah while

my dad was still coming up. My mum and I watched my dad being tortured. The boys were asked to dance and perform silly actions. It was unbearable to watch those horrible scenes. The militants asked me, "Are you feeling sorry for your dad?" I did not reply but I wondered how they could ask me that question, that is my dad, I felt sorry for him but could not say anything.

We stayed there and they kept on talking to my dad, they even put the barrel of gun in his mouth and took the money in his basket, tore them into pieces and put the pieces in his mouth. The militants told my dad and the other two boys that they were going to take them to their boss: "You and your mum will have to take this letter to the police officers," but I said to my dad that I did not want to go. My dad said that I must go and I refused and told him I wanted to monitor him. Before we left for the police my dad requested that he would like to talk to us but the militants wanted to know what my dad was going to say to us so we came to him and he said, "if you go, don't go to another place, you have to wait for me on Friday; if I do not turn up by Friday then you should know I am killed." So my mum and I left for the police post. We had to follow rivers and jungle. When we got there I could see them on the lookout for enemies. I asked them, "What are you doing? You came especially to hunt down your enemy so how come they came and destroyed us and our place?" I told them that my dad was captured by the militants and may be killed. We left for Mbiti on Tuesday and reached there on Wednesday but hid in the bush. We could not go to the village because all of our people had gone to the bush due to villages being burnt down by Harold Keke's men. Early on Wednesday I saw some of the people from our village coming out from the bush. Unfortunately, some of the small children were caught in the loea-cane stalks and could not be released so their mothers had to come and ask some of the strong boys to go and get them out. We just wondered if anyone could go to Honiara to tell the Government to come and rescue us. My mum and I were escorted to Marasa to catch a boat to Honiara. We caught a boat and came to Honiara. We stayed in town and by Monday I saw some of the people from our village walk across the island to Titinge. During that time we suffered a lot.

Mrs. Anna Kikini' story:

My name is Anna Kikini; my mother is from Guadalcanal and my father is from north Malaita. I was born and brought up on Guadalcanal until the ethnic tension started. I do not want to live in Malaita because I was not born there; I want to live on Guadalcanal more than on Malaita. On 14 May 1999, between 8:00 and 9:00 p.m., I was ready to go to bed when I heard someone shout: "Anna, get out from the house. Anna get out from the house. The GRA militants are attacking your brother." The voice I heard was my uncle's. As soon as I heard my uncle's voice I got hold of my son and we ran out of the house. When we got out from the house I could see my brother being dragged along the road. The militants pointed their guns at him; I could not do anything because I was too frightened and I could not say much because I just had a very big operation. I remained quiet because if I said something I would have been killed. All the militants who were there had guns. They took my brother to my uncle's house. The other members of my family were all at my uncle's house. My uncle asked the militants if he could give some red-money as compensation for my brother but they did not accept that. I went to my uncle's house and got my sister's children and my own children. I could not do anything further because my operation was not completely healed. At that time the militants did not give a damn about anybody, they did whatever they wanted.

The militants took away my brother and my two sisters; I had to remain in the house due to my operation. Early on Saturday morning 15 May, 1999, I had to run to the next village to ask for my cousin's car to take my brother plus another man from Malaita to the hospital. I came with them to the hospital and then went back to the village and stayed there. Sometime later, the police officers at Teterere came and picked some people in a truck to go and live at Teterere. I remained in the village in my uncle's house where I could see my house being burnt down with all its contents. After the house was burnt down the militants came and said to me, "see your house has been burnt." I did not say anything. On the third day one of the boys who joined the GRA came and said to me, "you better go now, if you are still here tonight the militants will rape you." When I heard the word rape I was afraid but could not do anything because it was broad daylight. When the night fell my uncle tried his best to hide us. He took us to another village and hid us in one of our relative's house.

We could not hide anymore because I had ‘flu and coughed a lot. He took us to a policeman and asked him if he could hide us but the policeman refused. He said, “I am on standby, if policemen came around I will sweep them with sixty rounds.” I saw that gun with my own eyes. My uncle then took us back and hid us in an empty house. We wished for daybreak so we could go to another place.

After that the policeman and his brother who was an ex-policeman came and harassed us. I would like to ask the Government, what do you think about this type of attitude? I know that this particular policeman has been promoted to a CID Officer position. He is still working in the RSIPF, why does the Government not recognize that this particular policeman harassed us and wanted to hurt us? To us he should be the one protecting us and yet he and his brother wanted to kill us. This case was reported to the Tetere Police Station but we have not received any positive feedback regarding the harsh treatment we received from this policeman and his brother. The story may be shut but the suffering we experienced is more than words can express. God did not want us to die as yet; otherwise we should have died in the hands of our own policeman. These people had killed a lot of victims and the Government should investigate them properly. Some of the people from my home had killed others but no one faced any punishment at Rove; no one faced the law for what they did. Only the Malaitans and others from the Weather Coast are facing punishment, but what about the Tasiboko side? This time they are enjoying life, nothing has happened to them. Some of the ex-militants had been recruited in the Police Force, they are from my home village. Does the Government know that these were former militants? What is the work of the police? Is it to save people or to destroy them? Some of these Malaitans who had been put in prison did not commit any crime or murder; those who really commit real crimes are still not caught. They have not been put to trial at the Magistrate’s or the High Court, what is the Government’s opinion on this?

One more thing, when we were evacuated to the Multipurpose Hall, the Malaitans who were also there, did not like us. They did not want us to speak the Guadalcanal language. Each time we had to tell our children to shut up and not speak the Guadalcanal language. During our stay at the Multipurpose Hall we were living in fear because the Malaitans did not want us to be there but we had no choice. While we were there, the Red Cross came to our rescue: they supplied us with clothes, pots, plates and eating utensils plus other things.

After a month or so we left the Multipurpose Hall and we went and lived at Mbaranaba. The place where we are settling now belongs to the Home Finance, we have been asked to move out from that area but my brother has made negotiations with Home Finance to purchase that piece of land. We are yet to find money to buy it from the Home Finance. The rest of us do not work, we find it hard to survive in town, whereas at home we depend on our gardens, we do not spend a lot of money like we do in town. While we were at Mbaranaba, RAMSI went and destroyed us too. They went to the house where we were and took our boxes, cut them open and looked for guns. They even pointed pistols at my brother and sister. They then took away my brother. What did RAMSI come for? When they first arrived their Mission Statement was “Helpem Fren”. Where is “Helpem Fren”? *Helpem Fren*, or you deny some people to go through the court of law and be punished?

I appeal to the Government to investigate some of the people who were involved in the Ethnic Tension. They too must be brought to justice and face the rule of law. I am very sad, because when you hear the story, it might be small but the actions the militants took was too great and the way we suffered was also too much to bear up until this time. I could not forget when we went through suffering, like not drinking water, or eating for some. These are too much for us to forget, and maybe we will not forget these until we die. I will not forgive what my mother’s people did to us, I hate them, whenever I see them, I just walk away from them. I thought that different people would reject us but instead it was my mum’s people, especially the policeman, the Government should look at this and investigate it properly. Anna appealed to the Women of Guadalcanal and Malaita in her parents languages. I appealed to the women in both languages so that if any women who were the victims of the ethnic tension should come forward to the TRC to tell her story. That is the end of my story.

Mrs. Salome Saefoa’s story:

My name is Salomea Saefoa and I come from Nafinafi Village, West Kwaio, Malaita Province. In 1998 my family was already in Honiara, my husband and I were employed and worked in town. We lived in the outskirts of town at Gilbert Camp. During 1998, rumors had it that there was going to be an Ethnic Tension between Malaita and Guadalcanal. We could not believe that because we were living a normal life and did not expect such tension

to happen. In 1999 the Ethnic Tension was getting worse and the life in town was getting harder. Even to leave the children on their own was not safe, or even going to the wharf to catch a boat to go home was not safe as well. Life at that time was unsecure; something could happen when you did not expect it. During that same year we found life was hard and we tried to make decision whether to go home to Malaita or to remain in town and face the hard life. We found it hard to decide because we had properties in town, our jobs and the education of our children. As time went on and in June 1999, we found that things became really difficult. While we were trying to come up with our decision, a best friend from Guadalcanal came and advised that things were going to get worse and it's better that we go back home to Malaita. He and his family decided to go back home to the village somewhere on Guadalcanal. We came to a final decision that we should go back home to Malaita. We did not encounter any harassment or being attacked but we made up our mind to go back home and should not be involved in anything to do with the ethnic tension. I did not want my husband to involve in any criminal activities and even life was tough, we decided to go back home. We left everything and went home, jobs, properties and education. When we got home we found it real hard because we did not have any house, we did not have any food gardens and looked as though we fell from the sky. We went home empty handed and we found life was real tough; whereas in town, there was enough to survive on because my husband and I both worked and we managed to live within our means even with our children and their education.

Ms Sharon Pesi's story:

I would like to introduce myself, my name is Sharon Pesi, my village is Purakiki, Marau, East Guadalcanal. In 1998, there were stories that Malaita and Guadalcanal were going to fight each other. When we heard this, we did not bother to do anything but to go about our daily errands. So in the year 2000, the militants went around Guadalcanal to advise everyone both males and females to wear *kabilotos* and grass skirts. We talked about this and said that we told them since we were brought up we did not use this sort of wear like that. The leaders of our community told them that women do not accept that sort of wear. Then some of the men went to the bush and took out the bark of a special tree called *koga*. They brought them home and started to dry them and make them into a *kabilato*. The

women stood on their rights that they were not going to wear grass skirts. We saw militants travelling by outboard motors and even travelling on foot. We heard a lot of shootings being carried out, so we told our husbands that we do not want to stay in the village seeing a lot of activities were going on. The men went and built small houses in bush, so the women and children moved from the villages by the sea and moved into the bush. On 21st July, 2000, early in the morning I came from the bush to the village to call my husband to come with me so that he could have his breakfast. While we were there, one of the boys came and told us that the Marau Eagle Force would come and look for their boys who were living with the mainland villagers. My husband told me that I should go back to the house and he would follow after. So I got up and went back to the bush house, and not long after my husband came. While he was having his food, we could hear shooting; the Marau Eagle Force was now checking on their people. We did not expect that they would do anything to us, because the sounds of guns could be heard from a far away distance and so we thought they had left the place. My husband said that we should go down to our original village and check our house, so we both went down. I told him that I had fear within me that some people were still around and we should not go down to the coast. When we came down and were just behind our village, a militant fired the first shot at my husband. He tried to run in front of me but he was already wounded and only few meters from I was he fell down and when I looked back my niece also fell to the ground. My husband was shot on the leg. I panicked and I fell down close to my husband and closed my eyes with my hands not knowing what to do. I could hear them “saying” pusi, they went through the village, shooting and shouting. When I looked behind me I could see men with army uniforms and wearing masks and I could not recognize any of them. When they went through the village, I told my niece that we should go but then I heard my husband groaning. I thought twice whether I should stay with him or go back to the house and check our 13-year-old daughter.

When I got to the village, most of the people had already run away to the bush. We did not follow the usual road but had to find our way through the bush. We came across some people but did not talk to them, and as we ran along we came across my nephew. I told him that his uncle was being shot and dying. I explained to him how he should go to find his uncle. He found the body of his uncle and we alerted others and then they carried his body

with us to the bush and the next day, we took him to the next village and buried him there. After burying him, we travelled to the next village and spent the night there and the next day we went to next village and then we stayed there. In 2003 after the arrival RAMSI people started to come back to their respective villages and started to build their houses again. I should say the life now is not as good as before the tension.

Mrs. Fiona Ratenisiwa's story:

Thank you Chairman, Deputy Chairperson, Commissioners, Counselors and people of Solomon Islands. On the eve of 14/6/2000, I was at our home in Are Are. My husband came home that day and told me that he would be working late and needed some food for him to take back to the Camp. I then started to prepare some food for him in the kitchen when three militants came up to me and asked about my husband. They came to us and said to my husband, you are one of those Guadalcanal men who joined the GRA. He told them he did not join that Militant Group. They insisted that he was one of them and told the wife they were going to take him away. My husband and I stood outside the kitchen. They wanted to take him away but I told them that he should go and dress up properly before you can take him away. He was only wearing a towel at that time. We went up to the house with our 11-year old daughter and our eight-year old son. He got changed and said to me, Mum, I do not know what will happen to me, so while we were in the room, a militant with a knife came up and said, why are taking so long, come out at once. We then came outside and our dad talked with our daughter but the boy ran away because he was frightened of the militants. They asked for \$300 and said that we will take your husband away for questioning but will bring him back. At that time I did not have \$300 with me so I went and asked my elder brother Ishmael Hoahania; so his wife gave me \$300 and I went back to them. I told the militants that we would give them any amount of money and leave my husband alone, but they said that they only needed \$300. When they took my husband away I was five months pregnant. By then the militants took my husband and I wanted to follow him but he said no, I should stay and look after his children. My 11-year-old daughter and me stood and watched while our dad was being led away. Before he was led away he wanted to see his son, but I went to look for him but he went and hid under a coffee table in his uncle's bed room, he was too frightened to come out. I went back to his

dad and told him that he was too frightened to come out and his father said okay, and the last time we saw our dad.

My husband was escorted up to the Land cruiser and was taken to Auki. I went back to the house and my children and I thought of our dad and began crying but we could not say anything, he was already taken by MEF members. After a week we heard that he was taken to Honiara on board the MV *Ramos III*. We waited and waited to see our dad's return but in vain. Then after three weeks, we heard that he disappeared without any trace.

Ms Gloria Maesiu's story:

During the ethnic tension I lived at Belaga village, Malango, Central Guadalcanal. We were told that Malaitans should go back to their island because the Guadalcanal people would fight them. At that time the Malaitans settling around that area started to move out of their respective places. The tension started, and then I saw Malaita people being transported down to town. I asked my husband, what about me? He said to me that I am married to a Guadalcanal man and there is nothing to worry about. After some time, we moved up to the Gold Ridge Relocation site. Then one evening a boy from our village came up and told us that the militants had shot dead somebody. In fact that somebody had not been identified. This was a Malaitan man but his name was still to be released. The boy said that I had to go because I am Malaitan women. We stayed there, but there was fierce shooting between the two groups so we decided to move to another place. We stayed there for sometime but due to the heavy shooting again we had to move to another village. In fact some people were killed but it was not like a normal death where relatives had to mourn for them, in this case, when someone was killed, they were just buried in shallow graves, there was no time for proper burial.

We then moved back to Foxwood, but it was still the same, there was still fierce shooting. I was restless during the night and could not go to sleep, I was frightened too. By early the next morning I woke my children because there was fierce fighting and there was light everywhere on tree tops, etc. I thought that Jesus was returning at that time to take his people home. When I looked outside I could see men in army uniforms, I got up and grabbed my two children and ran outside but the other one was missing. I had to go and look for him. I found him and then we had to cross a stream to go to another village. None

of us could swim but we managed to find a shallow place to cross. I had to assist my children crossing the stream because as I said none of us could swim including myself. We were so frightened but we kept on going until we came to another village. I do not know the name of the village, but there was nobody around, everyone had escaped to the bush, so my children had to hide in a church. I could hear the shooting taking place at the village where we just left. There was still shooting, I got my three daughters and ran to hide under the dead oil palm branches. We could see lots of people travelling up and down, but when they got to where the militants were shooting, they had to turn back to Gold Ridge. I stopped one of the trucks and three of the men in the truck came and took my daughters to go on the truck.

When we got to Ngalibiu, we were surprised that we were not hurt. We remained at CDC area for sometime even when there were shoot-outs. We decided to go back to Gold Ridge, so we went there and stayed but still leave in fear. There was not enough food, because there was no time to look for food but too busy to run away and find save places to hide. By then I felt brave so I wanted to come down to town to look for some food so I asked my husband at that time and he said, it's up to you. When I got to the bunker, the militants were not happy with me but one of them said, your life rests with yourself. As I walked across I was felt unsecured so I came to a *Tasiu* and I told him that I wanted to go down to town to get food for my children. I kept on walking down and when I looked around two members of MEF pointed their guns at me. However, I managed to get to town and get some food for my children and then I came back. My family went back to Gold Ridge and stayed there during the ethnic tension days. When there was proclamation for peace I came down to town and joined the peace march.

Mrs. Grace Bana's story:

My family bought a piece of land from the landowners at Mberande. We regarded this place as our home since the place was bought. During the ethnic tension we were there. In 1998 we heard stories that the Guadalcanal militants were going to chase the Malaitans who settled illegally in around Guadalcanal. We heard that the militants started to chase some of the people out. During could not much but our lives were in danger. We could not eat or sleep properly and during the nights we left our house and hid in the bush for fear of

being attacked. One day, it was a Wednesday, we were all in the house, and someone from Malaita came to the house and told us that the GRA militants were on their way to kill you. When he said this, we sent one of our boys to go down to Tetera Police Station and ring Kingdom Hall, Jehovah Witness for a truck to come and pick us up. The rest of our family gathered together under the house waiting for the truck to arrive. While we were still there, these militants were heading towards us, but one of the elders went up to the house and collected his box and his basket so that we could run away. When he came out from the house and saw these militants he was shocked, fell down and died instantly. We did not know what to do so we covered him up and stayed with him. We made the decision to stay with the dead old man even if we got killed. The landowner whom we bought the land from came and said, "You stay put, I will tell the militants not to harm you." He ran to the militants and told them not to kill us because the elder man had already collapsed and died of fright. We waited and the truck arrived and we managed to put the dead man in the truck. The driver did not allow us to take any of our belongings because there would be no space in the truck, so we left our houses, belongings, domestic animals plus other things and came to town. We came and stayed at Kingdom Hall but before we did, we had to bury the old man at Kola Ridge Cemetery.

After a few days, my family was sent home to Malaita. Due to the effect of the ethnic tension, my children's education was disrupted. They did not go to school as they should. When we got to Malaita, I experienced the same thing as on Guadalcanal. My people did not welcome me and my family I suffered as I did on Guadalcanal. My husband left me and my five children, so I had to struggle to look after their welfare. The house which was built at home was not even complete and the sad thing was my husband left us for someone else. Two of my children only got to Form II and there was no money for their school fees they had to quit and came back home. One of them is in Form III, I am not sure whether he would make it to four next year. I just told my children; because we are on our own, I do not know what the future may hold for us. To many of us, children are our future, it is the same with me in respect of my children, because if they are well educated, then they will assist me in the future when they hold good jobs either with the Government or the private sector. That is the end of my story.

Mrs. Rachel Mitini's story:

Once during the ethnic tension, we were at our house at the CDC area. We heard that the militants were coming our way. We left our house and ran away to the bush. We had crossed Balasuna River. When we left no one knew about us, so we went across the river and came to my brother's settlement. We stayed for some time with my brother and then we were told to move out from that place. We all ran away but did not take anything with us; all our houses were burnt down by the GRA militants. We had about a thousand dollars in our house that time but could not save it because if we wanted to go back the militants would kill us. We came down to Ngalibiu and stayed there, early in the morning, we came down by bus and we stayed in my sister-in-law's house. We left my sister in-law's house and went to live with the rest of SIPL workers at SICHE, Panatina Campus. SIPL then chartered boats to take its workers to the provinces. I went with my husband to Malaita but sadly I lost all my belongings; I did not even take anything with me. During the tension I also had my baby at the National Referral Hospital, but I did not have any thing for my baby but luckily the Dorcas women assisted me with clothes and other things. That is the end of my story.

9. WOMEN EXPERTS

United Church of Solomon Islands, Honiara, 22-26 November 2010

Mrs. Anna Rohia's story:²

I would like to take this opportunity to share my experiences during the ethnic tension. I lived at Lungga and my husband happened to be the head of Lungga Primary School. At the beginning of 1999, lots of people were chased out of SIPL and other areas of east Guadalcanal; they had nowhere to go, so RIPEL management was kind enough and allocated some houses for these displaced people. It seemed that the influx of people from SIPL was too much for the RIPEL management to handle, so my late husband allocated the classrooms and even the church for the people to occupy. When I saw these people kept on coming I felt sorry for them; then I said to myself, I saw similar incidences in movies but now the really thing is happening in Solomon Islands. When some of the relatives heard that these people were displaced they went up and took them to town to live with them. I thought to myself, this is real life, the life I have not gone through before and I felt very emotional for them. When the MEF militants set up their bunker at Alligator Creek, it was the first time that our children heard the continuous sound of gun firing; they were so frightened that they started to run all over the place. They started to run up the road leading to Alligator Creek when they were turned back by police officers. The children were advised not go as far as Henderson but to stay put at the school. My experiences and fear did not allow me to eat. I did not know what to do. I could not go to sleep peacefully, any gunshots would make me sit and wonder what would happen next. Being a mother it was very hard to cope with life during those times. Mothers do have concern for their children; other mothers would support me on this. Accessibility to the market was not easy too; sometimes there would be road blocks so we had to come back and find our own way to our destinations.

Next one is my participation on the SI Women for Peace. There would be meetings held in town but I sometimes did not attend due to transport difficulties, but still I could make it. Some times when I attended meetings, the meeting venue would be crowded

² She is from Tikopia and married to a Malaita man. She was teaching at Lungga School when the tension broke out.

because there were too many of us. We feel as though the love of mothers goes out to everyone, to those who were involved the fighting. We collected some food, betel nuts and cigarettes and we went and distributed to the militants on both sides, that is, Malaita and Guadalcanal. When mothers or women distributed these to them, they felt very emotional that they began to cry. That meant a lot to them because they knew that the love of mothers reached them. Sometimes when they were approached they could be harsh or aggressive but after a while they understood the situation they came and hugged you.

Mrs. Betty Linah story:³

Before putting my recommendation to the Government on behalf of women, I would like to salute few people and organizations who very actively participated during the ethnic tension. One I cannot forget is SICAFW, a women's organization; a mutual organization which participated actively during that time. These women slaved behind the scene and were not seen. This is my very strong recommendation: that the Government acknowledges or makes recommendations for training or whatever that would recognize their role in the frontline. I would like to particularly salute all five desk officers had it not for them; no women would come close to the frontline. SICAFW created the Women for Peace and for some time they remained silent after peace was restored.

I was part of the team that represented Asia Pacific in 2002 in Dublin to tell the story of how Solomon Islands women felt during the ethnic tension. I was able to represent Solomon Islands through the support and assistance from Amnesty International. In 2003 I was in Australia representing Solomon Islands purposely to tell the stories of women in Solomon Islands. That was where I met the Chairman [of TRC] and we had a fundraising and I took back what we raised through SICAFW too. I represented our country because of the conflict in Dublin, in London, and I also negotiated for a lawyer because of the breakdown of law and order in Solomon Islands. I also participated in the negotiation for the recruitment of Mr. Ken Avere in Solomon Islands I should not have said that but I was behind the scenes through Amnesty International. Besides those I have mentioned, I also did other things which I cannot mention now.

³ Betty is from Guadalcanal and lives at New Koleula, North Guadalcanal.

This is what I would like to say. Being Peace and Gender Advocate in Solomon Islands, I would like to begin talk with the UN Resolution 1325, "Peace and Security". The involvement of women in the peace negotiation in Solomon Islands; which we heard from other women, this was negotiated by the women themselves. It was not started from the Government or anywhere. As Solomon Islands is a sovereign nation, it is also party to the UN Resolution 1325: "Women have to be self represented in participation in whatever".

My second recommendation is: the Convention on Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which the Solomon Islands Government has ratified. This I would like to say: when the Government ordered the patrol boat as the property of the government, as a nation it went against the civilians; these were the Government's own people. I would like the Government to look at this carefully, and it is one of the recommendations that I noted in my write-up. Also when RAMSI came in Solomon Islands in 2003, they destroyed all the guns. What about the machine gun in the patrol boat, that .75 caliber, they did destroy that too? That is my question! Also that patrol boat gun destroyed the Guadalcanal people and also destroyed other properties as we have heard. What is the SIG going to do about this, is it going to keep it or destroy it as other guns? That is my question!

The other recommendation I would like to put across is: all the militants who joined the illegal Operation during the ethnic tension should reconcile; I strongly recommend that they should reconcile with the victims who were really affected with their immediately families. Those concerned should not be promoted to the level which they are in now. These officers should be investigated thoroughly and be penalized so that they should feel the same way the victims went through during the ethnic tension. Let me put across some of the points: RSIPF was involved in Gold Ridge; they were paid \$20,000 each for some unknown reasons. Some of the RSIPF members were involved in criminal cases in which a rape case was reported on the Weather Coast, as well as looting. Amnesty International has reported those cases happening under the RSIP Joint Operation. I would like to put this recommendation across to the Commissioner of Police concerning ranks and files of the police: please carry out a proper investigation so those police officers who were involved in the ethnic tension are terminated because the public will no longer have confidence in them. I recommend that police officers who were involved in the Joint Operations should be terminated immediately.

The other recommendation I would like to put across is: a mechanism needs to be in place to identify victims of the ethnic tension. What I see here, is a neutral body needs to look after the reconciliation. This is to make it neutral; because when it is under the Ministry, it's being politicized by politicians, for example, on the Weather Coast, in the constituency where I come from, reconciliation took place in three wards, that is, Talise, Vatukulau and Duidui. The provincial election will be next week, what do you think of this; is it neutral, did really touch and heal the hearts of those victims? These are some the questions I would like to ask. To me this was not neutral; it was politicized.

I would like to put another recommendation to TRC: engage more counselors to assist Martha Horiwapu and Francis Kairi; especially other counselors should be from Guadalcanal and Malaita; so that sensitive issues can be raised through the respective provinces. This issue was raised during my discussions with the victims and I would like the Commission to take note of this; we need more than just two counselors. Training should be undertaken if some counselors are recruited. I am not talking the two current ones, they are already well trained. If we think that counseling is important, please train some more so that they are well equipped. We also heard victims highlighting their views, opinions on what had happened to them during the Ethnic Tension. What I can see now that donors focus more on Honiara than the other urban areas; training should be conducted in the urban areas and then to rural areas, because the victims are there.

The other recommendation is: the flexibility of finding criteria needs to be established by the donors so that victims can access funding from them. The donors' criteria are too restrictive and the level of education of our people is low and there is should be flexibility to accommodate this.

Also another recommendation is: the Guadalcanal Provincial Government to assist the West Side Women for Peace negotiated to take back their plot of land for the market. Also to negotiate for a market place at Henderson for the Women for Peace on the east side; I would like the Guadalcanal Provincial Government to address these issues. Also, a site to be allocated so that Women for Peace may build a memorial place for the women to remember when they first shed tears and when peace was pronounced after the ethnic

tension. This was a request from the Women for Peace and women of Solomon Islands as a whole.

The eighth point on MDGs [Millennium Development Goals], the funds allocated for women, please, I would like to appeal to the Parliamentarians that it must be given to the women because it touches the eighth point of the MDGs. None of these women could access financial assistance. I know the money is there, because I was also involved in the discussion and negotiation about this MDG. At least one woman should benefit from this funding.

Another recommendation I would like to put across is: through the Government and from the Government through to the Ministry of Education, give allowances to the youths and women victims; because especially for youths, because during the ethnic tension they lost their education and their future was affected. The Ministry of Education should give allowances so that the youths could access education because they were left out during the tension.

If you look on the impact on young women: I must also say that I was one of the volunteers on the Constitutional work, where I saw a lot of our young women or even married women in nightclubs; and to put food on the table they had to become prostitutes. Some of the women we met had been encouraged by their husbands to go to nightclubs in order to provide food on the table; they had no choice but to do that. I would put this across to the Government as how to address this type of issue because this is an impact of the ethnic conflict. The impact of the ethnic tension has not been addressed by the Government and whatever reconciliation is to be carried out, it will never last long.

One of the reasons why the reconciliation will not last long is because the Bona Fide Demands of the Guadalcanal have not been fully addressed. Whatever the technical aspect the Ministry has started to address: the people of Guadalcanal need to know the level of the demands have got so far; for example; like the Ministry of Lands and Housing, the Law Reform Commission, whatever Ministry the work comes under as rehabilitation, I would like you to make an awareness to reflect the level you have reached. Even my colleagues from the Ministry of Reconciliation and Peace, you need to do more so that the people of

Guadalcanal need to know how far you've got to. This is to prevent them from speculating that nothing has been done so far.

I would like now to salute the women of Malaita, Guadalcanal and Solomon Islands; you were heroes during the ethnic tension. You were not frightened of guns during the ethnic tension and yet you took another step forward to negotiate for peace I would like to say, "Thank you very much," to these women; you had never been paid but you achieved your aims and objectives. That is all, I would like to put across to the nation and also to the TRC.

Mrs. Ernie Ivupitu's story:⁴

Thank you, Chairman, Fr. Sam Ata, Commissioners, Counselors, victims from Malaita and Guadalcanal, youths, women and others who are present at this time. Good morning, people of Solomon Islands; good morning, everybody on the street; on the islands or wherever you are listening from. This is the time for women to tell the nation, how rural women feel during the ethnic tension. By listening to the stories from some of the women yesterday, we know many of us were touched. By staying with those women, as I am from the West and I stay amongst the women victims from Guadalcanal and Malaita; we did not feel that we are different from other women, we feel as we are from the Solomon Islands. When we shared our stories, we all shed tears. Sometimes when we share stories, we have been touched and this made us feel like not eating, even there is lots of food available. Thank you, TRC, for providing for us and thank you for this opportunity to tell the nation the views of the women out in the rural areas. I was here during the ethnic tension. I was working for Telekom as a technician; but because of the ethnic tension I lost my job and everything and went home. My children had to be pulled out from school which affected their level of education. Somehow I managed to put them in a reasonable school to continue to their education. We would like to thank the churches for providing schools for our children for those of us who came home. As a mother, I could feel that other women who do not have the chance to come and I sympathize with them. Even we who live out in the rural areas we too are affected by the spill-over of the ethnic tension. We found it hard

⁴ Ernie is from the Western Province and lives at her home village.

too in the rural areas; there were shortages of basic things like sugar because sea transportation was also affected; and it was just like the world had stopped at one point.

I will now come to my recommendations. I heard women saying that they were homeless; there was no security; there was no identity; our own people did not recognize us, as we heard from some of our speakers yesterday. If your mum's side does not recognize you; why not your dad's side receive you; but in this case both sides rejected you. This is a very sad affair and I think it is a new thing that happened during the tension. There was no food; women felt left out; even back in the rural areas; Government services do not reach us. There were only limited services provided; a lot of these services were concentrated only in urban areas, especially in Honiara. The Honiara residents benefit from a lot from services provided by the Government while back in the provinces, as far as the Shortlands; Temotu and maybe Tikopia, the Government services are only limited, it may be there but it is not enough. I attended a workshop which addressed violence; lots of women got pregnant but could not get to the clinic; it might be only one clinic and women could not get there because it's too far from their village. It turned out that some of these mothers probably had their babies in the canoe or on the road, so you can imagine how difficult it was for the women of the rural areas. Security Police Station: There is only one at Seghe. How on earth this police station would serve the whole of the Marovo Lagoon, where it is regarded as the biggest Lagoon in the world which Solomon Islands take pride of it. You think one police station is enough? I do not think so! What about north New Georgia? Not even one police station. Even the Munda or Noro police stations were insufficient to service the whole of the Roviana Lagoon. There were lots of cases reported but were not taken up; I do not know how because I am not a police officer. I think it's time the Government should dig deep to see the nature of the cases those women reported in the past, as some of those women said there were cases reported but there was no response from the Police.

As you know women are vulnerable; and high ranking women should come down and be level with the women in the villages. I think you should come down and wear the shoes of the rural women; to feel the pain; to feel the struggles of women down in the provinces. If we talk about poverty in the MDGs, it is rated as number one. It is now on our shore; it is happening throughout Solomon Islands; women are struggling what are we going to eat

tomorrow? They have their market products; where are they going to sell them? There are no market outlets to sell their vegetables or potatoes or whatever.

What I would like to put across as my first recommendation: the Government needs to improve the living standards of the women down there in the rural areas. If water is close, shelter is provided and food is there, then it will be easier for the mother to prepare food for the whole family. You educate men, you educate one person; you educate a woman, you educate a nation. I don't mean to discriminate against my male colleagues, but as a mother I feel as though I am a teacher and a nurse at the same time. My friends from Malaita and Guadalcanal, I feel the pain that you went through. One has to come home to experience the same feeling; if you are in town you won't feel it. You need to come home, do not wait for another four years to come for your campaign. We need to see you, we need to know you and talk to you, and it's good to go hungry sometime.

Another recommendation I would like to make is: that the Government and the churches work together with the TRC. You need to work hand in hand in training counselors and they should go out in the provinces. I know the two counselors do a lot work, thank you Counselors. You do your job not for yourself, not for your province, but you do it for the nation. We need training for resource women, so together we build a better family, a better community and a better Solomon Islands. *Tangio tumas!*

Mrs. Joyce Murray's story:⁵

I am honored, very honored, to be invited to this very important program, being a rural women in a village of Makira, this program is being highly commended and for me to come and participate. It's an honor for me. I am very happy. At first I thought that it was a sort of holiday for me. In fact, I thought it was just a day off from my ordinary village life, while waiting for grannies to come home. Commissioners, TRC staff, it touches my heart to spend time with the women in the United Church Rest House, morning till late at night, listening to their stories, listening to their experiences, sharing tears with them. I was happy to join in with them representing the women of Makira to share our one shoulder with very sorrowful women. Because of all this, I think I was blessed. They asked where I

⁵ Mrs. Joyce is from Makira Province and lives at Kira Kira.

came from and I told that I was from Makira. In Makira we did not know too much about the ethnic tension which took place on Guadalcanal. I only heard about MEF and GRA; I did not know that those women and children were really affected. During the tension I came across children who were displaced in schools in town; apart from few friends whom I knew, I received telephone calls from unknown people or families begging and crying, that I could find spaces for their children in schools in Makira. I still have not met the parents of those children whom I assisted in finding spaces for them. I took them on board without knowing their parents. When these children completed their education and during the graduation day, I was there as a mother; then after receiving their certificates, they walked down to me and thanked me and we shed tears. Prior arrangements had been made by their parents to travel to Honiara. They just had to accept it. I just told that them I am happy for them to be part of my family. So each time they hugged me they just told me, you are our mother because you are always there for us while the real mother is somewhere else relaxing; but as I said, I happy to fill in their mother's places. So that is my experience I saw and shared it with the children. Today they are grown up and whenever I am in Honiara and I see them they greet me as their real mother and they even wished me Happy Mother's Day.

Before I can make some recommendations for the TRC to take on board, I would like to appeal to the women in Honiara: we go out and advocate to the women who suffered; they are just another human being; why can't we take a day off from work and share with these women, the victims of the ethnic tension. I would like to say if I have thousands of dollars, I would not be satisfied; but when I shared my tears with other women, it blesses my heart. Today when I am present here I feel very sad because none of the women in town come up and say hello to us or even visited us. Today is the last day of the program; no one comes and visits us or just says, "How are you all doing?" No, there is no sign of young girls or women visiting us just to share our feelings, etc. To Martha, I thank for your patience and for sharing with the victimized mothers and for the overall understanding extended to these women. Thank you for the families of the Commissioners who come and listen to the hearing. Ratu Joni, thank you for coming down to be part of us.

I was listening to the youths and almost everyone mentioned about the legal system in the Solomon Islands. The people who work in the Ministry of Police and Justice, they must be

professional officers, not those who do not perform duties in a professional manner. They must be professional officers so that they implement the law in the Solomon Islands. Secondly the women in the Solomon Islands have been struggling; we think women should be involved in decision making. I salute those women who have made way up and are holding top positions in the Government and private sector. I salute you women for your achievement. We women in the grassroots are very proud of you, but one thing, we need someone up there in the decision-making; we need women to be legislators. A woman who speaks the heart of a woman. If PNG could make reservations for women in their government system, why not Solomon Islands? We should do likewise. Some of our women tried to be in Parliament but could not get in. Why not reserve seats for them? If Australian and New Zealand elected women Prime Ministers, why not Solomon Islands women? I have been hearing for the last four years or so that we wanted women to be in Parliament, and had to reserve seats for them, but still there is no legislation in place for this. If we can take the straight initiative I think we could make it, because no matter how hard we tried, we did not get through. I as far as I could remember the only woman Parliamentarian was Mrs. Hilda Kari and nobody else. I believe that we can make reserved seats for women, for those women who tried before and did get through; I encourage you not to give up but to try again during the next election. To me we need women to be involved in the legislature.

I support the other two women's comments that if Parliamentarians would like to have another term, then come down and be level with us in the villages. The power is in the hands of the villages, we are the ones who will vote for you. So let us start thinking about the 2014 elections; as the last speaker said, come down and be like us in the villages. I think by 2014, I believe that women could do it; they should have a representative in Parliament.

My third recommendation is: the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children should include in the program to the rural areas, awareness on what women can do when elected into Parliament. If the Ministry could draw up some sort of information concerning how women could get to Parliament, I am sure most women would vote for women candidates so that you could achieve your aim; that is what I believe. If the decision-makers could look at my recommendations, Mr. Chairman, I would be very happy. If the decision-

makers cannot look at it, good and fine, she is another Makira women, but one has to understand that half of the population of Solomon Islands are women and children. To the Parliamentarians, you are our masters, the women, we are the mothers of this nation, the youths, the husbands we the women do take care of them. So I would like to say make available resources for us, like funds; so that when funds are available, then start implementing the targeted projects starting in Honiara then on to the urban areas. Sometimes when youths or women's group enquire for financial assistance, the answer will always be, the funds have been exhausted. No, the Government should allocate enough funds for the youths and women of this country.

Another issue I would like to raise is on education. It is the backbone of any country as well as for Solomon Islands, it produces manpower. How would it be first with these policies; how to draw up policies and how this country could manage all sectors of life in our country, a person has to be educated. All schools should be well equipped; scholarships should be equally distributed to all provinces. I do not want the nepotism system; award scholarships to a son or daughter who deserves it. I don't support decisions of awarding scholarships to your friend's child or your own child or a big man's child. Our children should well equipped so that when they complete their education, they become leaders of tomorrow. Even some friends commented that their children have completed school and had good marks but could not get scholarships because they did not know anybody at the Scholarships Unit. We lost our dad sometime back; it's a sad thing when one hears this sort of statement. All our children should be fairly treated in getting scholarships for further education. After these students are qualified and come home they take up jobs in their own provinces. As a Makira woman, I say that our province is the last one compared to other provinces in Solomon Islands; we don't have any manpower. We wanted to have state government, who is going to be our spokesman? This is one of the things I wanted to share with everyone.

I now come to the last recommendation. I now appeal to all our MPs, whatever funding they have, these people should have the right to give it to anyone, a voter or a supporter or what, make it fair, the mothers need this financial assistance. If you give the money to the men, they would finish it before arriving at their respective villages. Sometimes if there is any sewing project, they would only get one sewing machine, or one roll of calico. If there

was a water supply project to make the livelihood in the village improved, the blame would go to another person that he was the one who received the money. In all, the women are more reliable than men and in my opinion; in any project initiated by women, they deserve to be assisted financially.

Another matter I would like to raise is, sometime back when I was in Kira Kira, I heard about the Forgiveness Bill; this makes me worried, if this bill comes up, its legal implications must be fair. Thank you very much, Chairman and Commissioners, for giving me this opportunity to give contributions.

Mrs. Mervalyn Mavakana's story:⁶

Thank you, Chairman, Fr. Sam Ata, Deputy Chairlady, Commissioners, counselors, victims from Malaita and Guadalcanal, youths, women and others who are present at this time. Good morning, people of Solomon Islands; good morning, everybody on the street; on the islands or wherever you are listening from. It is an honor for me to join this TRC Program as I am from the grassroots level. My name is Mervalyn Mavakana and I am from Choiseul Province. Currently I am the President of the Choiseul Council of Women. I am glad to be part of this Program and so I have heard what the victims had said so far. In Choiseul too we went through the same experiences, we had the spill-over effect of the Bougainville Crisis and the tsunami. We felt the same sentiments as women from Malaita and Guadalcanal had. I would like to contribute on the some of the things that affected women in Choiseul and possibly other parts of Solomon Islands. There are a lot of things we still respect in our Province. In Choiseul men are still the head of the family, even though the women have the rights in other ways; the men start to understand the women's situation. On the religion side, we still maintain our stand as Christians. On the health issue, that is one of the things that affected us, especially on STI cases, poverty too is present within our Province, because we had lots of logging companies operating in our island, but not many of the people benefit from these logging operations. The rest of the people got nothing out of these logging companies operating in our land. We also experienced unfair distributions of resources too; livelihood funds, maybe from the MPs or

⁶ Mrs. Mervalyn is from the Choiseul Province and a woman leader in her community.

projects, do not reach us, especially to women and children; women in decision-making and leadership – most decisions are made by men both on both the provincial and national level. We experienced family breakups, climate change, teenage pregnancies and violence against women. These issues are still on the rise in our villages and within the province and maybe throughout the nation.

I will now make some recommendations: (1) Good health facilities. (2) Good education for both males and females that must achieve a good outcome and remain a priority for our nation; this will help to reduce maternal mortality and impact on STI. These are our priorities. (3) Improve the economic status of women through their own resources in town and in the provinces. When I travelled around Lauru I came across lots of women coming to Honiara to purchase their own cargo for their small businesses *at home*. The captain of the ship made a statement that those women are the ones who generate income for the ship. These women could understand how to operate small business so that they have money to keep their small businesses going. So I appeal to the Government to recognize women and assist the women of Solomon Islands in their small businesses.

Another issue is the equal participation of men and women in decision-making; women are well represented in public offices in Solomon Islands, only one woman has been elected into Parliament since Independence in 1978. So this is another issue: that women need to be recognized in decision-making. I can give a classic example: in the family or kitchen, it takes two to make decision. It takes a man and a woman to make a decision on what to have at dinner and this happens. I do not see the reason why women should not share decisions in Parliament or at the provincial level. I would like to give an example: if a plane tries to take off with one wing, it cannot make it. If it takes off with two wings it will reach its destination. I would like to support now that women should participate both in national and provincial levels.

Violence against women still remains the biggest problem in our country. My last recommendation: seeing that we a Christian country, all Christian women around the Solomon Islands should strengthen the gospel of Love and Forgiveness in our country. Money is not the answer; it is the condition of the heart that can change our country and to remain in unity. Thank you very much.

Mrs. Georgina Sogotee's story:⁷

I am honored and privileged to come and talk on behalf of women and I think I am one of those few selected ones to talk on behalf of women in Solomon Islands. The main thing I am going to talk on is especially an organization which was established during the ethnic tension and that organization is the Women of Peace. As we know this organization was established and progressed in our country; in fact it was established in Solomon Islands and did not branch out from another country. First of all, I would like to introduce myself. My name is Georgina Sogotee. I am a teacher by profession and unionist in the teaching field. I am currently doing pastoral counseling in our Catholic Church at Holy Cross. I also would like to thank Archbishop Adrian Smith and all the clergy in our Church, especially on the training conducted for us to be counselors to deal with stress and trauma. I am glad that this work that we carry out helps a lot of people. I would like to share my experiences on the work we have done so far but I will tell you later on. Part of my work too is to help especially young people and families who were traumatized. I would like to thank all counselors within the TRC for all the hard work; for without your support and assistance work cannot progress as expected. This type of work when it is conducted it must touch the heart of all human beings. I would like to say thank you to other churches and SICA and SIFGA because the representatives from these organizations supported me very much, especially when we have meetings together; I would be only the woman amongst lots of men, especially on decision-making on that level. I would like to thank them especially on the issue of women.

I would like to continue on with my story. I would like to start, based on the social unrest and how the Women for Peace was involved. As we have heard during the social unrest, we heard how the victims told their stories on what actually happen to them. This morning you also heard some of the women who participated during the social unrest. I also participated and sometimes. I went to Mt. Austin where at times I found it hard to find my way back to town. I sometimes stayed with the people at the village and we conducted prayer meetings with the MEF at their bunker. We advised them that they had to think very

⁷⁷ Mrs. Georgina is from the Western Province and married to a Malaita man. She lives in Honiara and a Catholic Women Leader.

carefully before taking further steps in their actions. During those days things were not easy for men, women and children, especially the old people. During my stay at the village at that time, each evening we would be asked to get together at Okola village, while others kept watch during the night. At one time, I got the courage and told my husband that I was getting tired of all that was going on. So I said, it's better to stay at our respective houses and if the militants want to kill us, let it be. Since that, we all remained in our houses where we continued to pray; so that we could get the courage and strength to stay in that situation. Through our prayers we got the courage to continue and I was the one who rang the bell at 4:00 p.m. each day. It was then we got all the courage to move about in that area.

At that time I had to find time to come to town to find out from the Holy Cross Church administration on what would be organized and to carry out. In 1998 and 1999 I was not in the country but in 2000-2003 was when I was, I was able to join up and became one of Holy Cross Coordinators. After the social unrest the movement of people was too much and I used to come down to the Holy Cross Church Hall to share stories with people there; how the social unrest started and how it was started and how they were chased out. One of the stories they told me was the issue on land; they told me that even though some of the victims bought land and was in accordance to the custom of Guadalcanal; yet they were still chased out. So I went on to encourage them; but according to some of them all they wanted was to get out of Honiara and go back to their respective provinces. The Women for Peace had organized their meetings and arranged their own programs. They had meetings at YWCA, SSEC Church Hall, St. Barnabas Cathedral Hall and even at the United Church Hall. The Women for Peace did not belong to one church only, but it was an inter-denomination organization. During the period 2000-2003, the Women for Peace had meetings and discussed what could be done to assist the victims of the social unrest; and one of their decisions was to introduce barter system. So the representative of the Catholic women would have meetings and come and advise us on what to do next. She would advise us to prepare something to take to the victims and if the women themselves could not go and then she could go on their behalf. The Holy Cross women bought goods from the shops and gave them to the Desk Officer and then she took them to the victims with other women.

In 2003-2004 women gathered together, especially women from the Government; they gathered together and decided to form a Forum, and in 2004 we had that Forum. Before that Forum, 50 women were selected and those 50 women represented the 50 constituencies so that they could be sent out to conduct interviews with those women in the affected areas. After the interviews they would come back with their stories so that we could use this information as data during that Forum. In 2004 we had this Forum at the Forum Fisheries Conference Hall. It was based on the input organized by the Women for Peace. Women from Malaita and Guadalcanal came out and shared their stories. The sharing of stories to look forward to the future was one of the important things discussed at that time. It was true we had events of the past, but let us look forward what the future may bring us. This particular Forum went on for about a week. There were lots of interesting stories that came about during this Forum. A report was compiled after that Forum and a copy should be given to the Government; and the Government should extract some of the data concerning women at that time.

I became involved with the Women for Peace in 2004; and during that year we had a different organization for Women for Peace. We wanted to develop that organization so that it would create something especially to help women. We then had the continuation of prayer sessions on Wednesdays and after the prayer session, would sit down and have meetings on women's issues to help other women. During our visits to other specified areas, we had to wear scarves; by wearing these scarves we showed that we are Women for Peace and the color of the scarves reflects the national flag. We also made visits to families who had problems within Honiara and outside of Honiara town. Each province had a representative during the Forum so that when they went back to their respective provinces they should also form a "Women for Peace" group. If and when the women are to form these groups in their respective provinces, each group should be attached to the churches; if and when a group is formed it is wise to have it attached to their respective churches so that the group could have more strength in its activities and each time they go to visit all the people, men, women and children should be touched when they are visited.

We also had an early plan to outline our main focuses. In 2004-2005 our main focus was to gather information so that we could include this information in projects which the women would look at and discuss. In 2006 we focused mainly on family issues; we had to do this

because most of our women were affected on the family issues. We focused this from 2006-2010 and during that time we introduced small financing micro-projects. For those women who were involved in the small micro-financing, most of them are successful business women now. Since the establishment of the Women for Peace and despite what had been done so far, the Government or even the NGOs do not recognize our work to assistance us financially. The work we did so far was mainly from our own efforts, by fundraising and registration and in this way we made enough money to assist other women. The Women for Peace for the west side were really active between 2004 and 2005. This Group was involved in market produce, they acquired a piece of land at White River and they established a market house to assist women from West Guadalcanal so that they did not have to come all the way to the Central Market. Somehow something happened during a Government reshuffling when the Minister of Lands and Housing allocated that particular plot of land to another person and the market was closed. During the operation of that market the Women for Peace were able to assist the White River Clinic and the Vatukola Clinic; also the Women assisted in training a malaria technician for the White River Clinic. Despite of this the Women for Peace further developed and we elected a new executive comprising of a chairlady, a deputy chairlady, a secretary and treasurer and I am a coordinator of the organization. Our plan at that time was to help women to have self-help projects. So these are some of the initiatives undertaken by the Women for Peace to assist women to generate income for their families: We assisted the women with a shell money making project, sewing, flower arrangements, coconut oil selling project, bakery, making local stoves, poultry farming and baking demonstrations. We also tried to include women in conferences or seminar on women's issues where possible in Honiara.

Just recently in October, 2010 we assisted some women to get support from the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development to start off their poultry projects. We assisted them to help their families to generate some income for themselves. We have representatives throughout Solomon Islands; we have a representative in Central Province, Malaita Province, where we assisted women on a project, "Women and Sanitation". I think that this one of the areas we want to explore further. Although the Ministry of Health and Medical Services tried to assist in the past but somehow it did not develop further. What we want to do now is to bring the women from the rural areas, introduce them to the

Ministry and the Ministry to support them. In some areas on Malaita this was how it was done and on Guadalcanal we also assisted women to present themselves to the Ministry of Forestry and Research so that the Ministry knew them and included them in their decision making. We also have groups in Temotu, Isabel, Makira, in Western Province, in Shortlands at Famao. Women for Peace also assisted them, especially on HIV/AIDS awareness when it is a big issue in the world today. We know that Shortlands is close to the PNG border and that country is contaminated with HIV/AIDS. So in 2007, Famao Women for Peace conducted a workshop funded by Oxfam International. We also have a representative in Renbel Province. Despite of our efforts shown and our efforts to assist women, what we need now is office space and office equipment like a computer to ease our work to reach out to women. The Women for Peace is based in the Bible; if you look in John 14:27, Jesus said, "Peace is what I leave with you; it is my own peace that I give you. I will not give it as the world does." Thank you.

Mrs. Margaret Maelanga's story:⁸

In 1999 my family lived at White River and we are still there to this day. We heard that Malaita and Guadalcanal were going to fight each other because of tension between the two groups. We heard that most people from Malaita were going to board ships and go back to Malaita. My family discussed what steps to take so we agreed that we should go back to Malaita. We wanted to down to the wharf so that we could check if there were ships going to Malaita. On Friday my daughter went to wharf, unfortunately the *Ramos* I was already full and we could not make it during that trip. We checked if there was any available space but the officers told us, sorry, there are no empty spaces. We came to the bus stop and waited for the White River bus, and then we heard that the fighting has now reached Rove, so we went in a Chinese shop and the owner locked us up. After sometime we got out and we learned that nothing really happened. So my daughter and I went back to White River. On Saturday 10th we boarded a ship and went to Malaita. When we got to Malaita, we lived with my sister, we did not have any house, we had no gardens, no money so we had to struggle to cope with life at that time.

⁸ Mrs. Margaret is a member of Women for Peace from West-side of Guadalcanal.

We decided to come to back to Honiara because we own a house at White River. We then tried to settle down at White River and each day I had to listen to the radio because through radio we could hear what was happening. I heard a message from the radio announcing that all women should attend a meeting at YWCA. During that meeting we discussed and decided that a women's group should be formed and it should be called Solomon Islands Women for Peace. The women came and discussed and decided that they should go out and preach peace to the militants. Usually in any country where there is ethnic conflict women always take leading role to bring about peace. We made arrangements to visit the MEF bunkers both east and west of Honiara but could not go further than the MEF bunkers. We took food and some other necessary things with us and told them that we are group made up of women from everywhere in Solomon Islands. We come here to urge you to lay down your guns and let the Government address whatever your demands are.

We kept on doing this and one day we made an appointment to go to see PM Sogavare. We went and approached him if he could seek assistance from abroad to come and help the Solomon Islands because everyone in the country is suffering due to the effect of the ethnic tension. The Prime Minister said that he heard our cry and would take note of it. All of a sudden the Sogavare-led Government collapsed and the new Sir Allen Kemakeza Government came into power. During the reign of Allen Kemakeza's Government, RAMSI was arranged to come to Solomon Islands. So we were happy when RAMSI arrived in 2003. When RAMSI came in they brought with them lots of guns and were in army uniforms which made the local children feel frightened. These were the things that Women for Peace were doing during the period of the ethnic tension.

At one time we wanted to visit the Isatabu Freedom Movement but we had to make prior arrangements before getting to them. So our leader arranged with their Commander and then we made our way to their bunker. When we got to Alligator Creek Bridge, there were barricades from MEF on the west side of the bridge and IMF on the east side of the bridge. We got to the MEF bunker and asked them if we could get to the IFM Militants; they allowed us to pass through and then we gave the MEF Militants some food. We took a big cake with us and when we got to Alligator Creek, we cut the cake in half and shared it between the two warring parties. When we got to the other side, we thought we were going to die, but I said to the others, "put our trust in God," because through Him all things are

possible. The militants were hungry too that time, but before we distributed food to them, one of the women from Guadalcanal prayed in her language and shared God's word in her language as well. After the service most of the militants came out from hiding wearing *kabilatos*. After they had their meal they said, "Thank you, to the SI Women for Peace," and assured us that their intention was not to undermine the women of Solomon Islands but that the Government did not address some of their demands; that was why the ethnic tension ignited. Our leader thanked them for accepting us to come and visit them.

When we returned to town, we arranged another meeting at the YWCA to discuss the possibility of buying and supplying food to the disadvantaged women and children. What we decided was to prepare baskets of store goods and take them to the women and then in return they gave us garden goods. This would supplement the women and children with basic goods from the town, such as tinned food, salt, sugar, kerosene, soap and other items. When we did this, the warring parties started to cool down. We kept on preaching peace until 2004 when peace prevailed in Solomon Islands but we keep on praying at Holy Cross and sometimes at YWCA up until now. That is the end of my story.

Mrs. Claudetta Liliau's story:⁹

I would like to introduce myself. My name is Claudetta Liliau and I come from Lubu village, which is within the Kakabona area. My story is about my leadership role within the Tanaghai Parish. My leadership role with the Tanaghai Parish started in 1984. It was during that year I took up the role of chairwoman in the parish. Within the Tanaghai Parish, and in the respective churches we also have some women leaders that I work closely with. During those years, I worked with women with lots of activities through church programs, especially on physical and spiritual areas. My work was also involved with the Women's Desk Officer at Holy Cross. By 1999, we knew that there was going to be an ethnic tension between Malaita and Guadalcanal. I could not believe this when the rumors spread throughout our village and even Guadalcanal. Through my work with the women, we came together and discussed the ethnic tension, as to how we could assist. During the same year, shooting took place at Kakabona and people started to run away to the bush, especially the front line community at Kakabona already fled to the bush. Even as our

⁹ Mrs. Claudetta is a Catholic Women Coordinator. She comes from Lubu village at Kakabona.

people ran away to the bush, I continued with my role as Women's Coordinator for the Tanaghai Parish. I called for women within the parish to come and discuss ways and means to get to those women who had already fled to the bush.

In 1999 at the height of the ethnic tension, everything stopped, workers could not get to work, and children could not attend schools. Seeing that Kakabona is almost at the center of the ethnic tension zone, we could hear guns day and night. Despite all of this in 1999, the women of Kakabona could still come to the market and town to buy basic goods for our families. I thanked the Women Desk Officer at Holy Cross who did prior arrangements for our movements.

In the year 2000 the ethnic tension was getting worse and access to town was getting quite hard. By this time, we had to make new approaches with the GRA and MEF Commanders at the both bunkers. Because GRA was at the other end of the Kakabona we went to them first to ask for permission. We were allowed to get through their bunker but we were advised to go in a group and come and in a group. The militants asked whether we were frightened of guns but we said to them, yes of course, but we have to go. We then came to the next bunker, the MEF one, we asked them and they gave us the Okay to go through but you must do not buy any petrol. We really found hard times during the year 2000. Fortunately we were lucky to have worked closely with the Holy Cross Women's Desk Officer who helped us a lot, and we owed her a lot. Sometimes women found it hard to get through the bunkers and the Women's Desk Officer at Holy Cross had to intervene and women got through. Sometimes when things became very hard and those women could not go through they had to spend the night at Holy Cross and the Desk Officer had to arrange transport for them to get through the bunkers the next day, and through God's power it was done. Sometimes the Desk Officer had to arrange transport for the women to go to Koqulai and then they went through the jungle until they got to Veraboli. Sometimes the Desk Officer arranged transport for the women to go and drop them off at White River bunker and they walked across. It was through our faith that things worked out for the affected women of Kakabona area. During the year of 2000 I performed my work as a leader along with other women that we continued to pray for God's guidance. With the women in our community we managed to continue with our praying and other local churches also did the same. During those hard times when we came to town, our children would be wondering of

what would happen to us. So we had to tell them that God would be on our side and he would protect us and in fact we really saw God's guidance through those hard times.

In the same year 2000, we came across two times for prayers with the members of the Malaita Eagle Force and two times we came across for bartering. During that time Fr. Arkwright was also really helpful to us Catholic women. He encouraged us to talk with other women's groups to make peace and that was why we did not have any fear in us. Our belief was that there would be peace after all. Fr. Arkwright called me to come to him and asked me to contact the women in the Tanaghai Parish so that we could go up the hill at Tanaghai. I told Father, we could not do that, because MEF militants are up the hill and they shoot down the field every day. He then insisted that we must go, so we went up. We went up and when we looked on both sides there were lots of MEF militants. We were received in good faith and we had prayer meeting with the members of the Malaita Eagle Force. After we had prayers with MEF militants, we came down to the Parish. Father Arkwright went to Tamboko; it is within and the last place of the Tanaghai Parish. He gathered the women from Tamboko and asked them to be prepared. The women then prepared themselves and went to a Prayer Mountain. They were there for three days praying and fasting. After three days, they came back to Tamboko and prepared themselves again to come to Tanaghai Parish. They left Tamboko at 12:00 midnight and walked all the way to Kakabona; the women of Kakabona joined with the Tamboko women and we made our way to Tanaghai Parish. This was on 6th June 2000, we came together at Tanaghai and prayed and then we went up to the Tanaghai hill. Fr. Arkwright said even if you are pregnant you got to come to the hill to pray with the militants. When we came up there were shootings but we just went up. When we got to the bunker, one of the Commanders asked the militants to put their guns down, so the militants did and we prayed and shared God's word together. After the prayer, the Commander thanked us and then we shook hands and we were all very emotional and cried. One of their Commanders said, "Thank you very much to you all mums for the sharing". One of the things the Commander said was to pray for the GRA militants, but we said to them we already did on our way to you and of course we will always pray for both groups. The MEF militants assured that we could come to town to do our shopping and even going to the market. We went back to our respective places.

Then on 22nd June, 2000, we came back to Tanaghai and Fr. Arkwright asked me to accompany him to the Malaita Eagle Force. I told Father, that I was still in fear and I don't want to die from my children, but Father said we had to go, so Fr. Arkwright, myself and my cousin sister left for the MEF bunker. When we got to the White River bunker we were questioned by the MEF militants and then we told them that we were on our way to the White River SSEC Church. When we got there we asked the SSEC pastor if we could conduct a prayer meeting there, and then he gave us his okay. We went back to Tanaghai and got ready to come back to the SSEC Church at White River for a prayer meeting. We conducted a prayer meeting with the MEF militants with some of the women at White River. When these women saw us they too were emotional and started crying, so we all cried. After the prayer meeting we went back to Kakabona and some of the women had to walk to Tamboko. At that time there were no trucks along the road because MEF militants did not allow any petrol to pass through these bunkers. It was just hard to say anything but as I could say we really proved God's presence during those difficult times. It was through God's power that we could get through during those times. I would like to commend highly to the Holy Cross Desk Officer who tirelessly worked during day and night to welcome anyone called in their during those times.

On 15th July, 2000, there were two major shoot-outs that took place at Kakabona. By then everyone at Kakabona left the place and ran away to the bush. I left for village at Tamboko, and even while I was there, I still carried out my work as Catholic Women Coordinator. I gathered the women of Tamboko and prayed together and talked about how we were going to carry out our next mission. Due to the heavy shooting at Kakabona we decided to rest awhile because we were frightened of those high-powered weapons used by the members of Malaita Eagle Force. When we stopped to come to town we then went to Aruligo to conduct our market. The people of Aruligo came down and the people along the road as far as Tamboko went down and we did the marketing there. On 9th August, 2000 I was still at Tamboko when my brother told me that my house at Kakabona was burnt down including all the houses at Kakabona. Another brother also came and told me that I should forget about everything because the house was burnt down with all its contents. I told him, never mind, let God have his way. Even though I was at Tamboko, I still managed to come to Kakabona. Towards the end of 2000, the MEF militants told us that our husbands and our

young boys could come to town. We went back and told our men what the MEF militants said and then I started to notice that peace was slowly taking place. By then our men too started to come to town, and the women started to bring their market products to the Central Market and barter system between women from other Provinces continued until December right through to first part of 2001.

In 2003, our Catholic Women Desk Officer, arranged that we should visit our Catholic Sisters from Malaita. She arranged a meeting with all our Coordinators from all Parishes to discuss the visit. She made arrangements on transport and food and informed women on the receiving end. On September 9th, 2003, the Catholic Women of Honiara and other Parishes left Honiara for North Malaita. When we got to Malaita, we were surprised that everyone was waiting to welcome us. There were canoes waiting to take us to the shore and people were ready to accept us on arrival. When we saw this, we did not know what to do, but we were very emotional and started crying. There were 14 boats that came to take us to take ashore. When we got to the shore, our sisters from Malaita come and greeted us and then we began to cry. We did not know what to do, but shook hands and cried. We spent one week on Malaita and during that time the Catholic Women of Malaita with our Holy Cross Desk Officer made arrangements that we should reconcile. A big reconciliation program between the Catholic women of Malaita and Catholic women of Guadalcanal took place. For us the Guadalcanal women, there were only 80 of us but I could not say the number of the Malaita women. There were lots of people including, men, women and children who gathered at Takwa School in the Takwa Parish to witness the occasion. Even the men when they shook hands with us they also cried with us. At the end of the program at Takwa we came back to Honiara and then dispersed to our respective homes.

In 2005, the Westside Women for Peace was formed. During that year, the west side Women for Peace came together and decided to build the White River Market for women on the west side to sell their products. At that time I was still not a member of that group. The market was operating very well and it helped a lot of women from the west side but somehow thing went wrong. The market broke down and the women of that group dispersed. We later learnt that the land was allocated to someone else. I was elected to be the chairperson for the West Side Women for Peace. I was asked to try and resolve the problem about the piece of land which was first allocated to the West Side Women for

Peace. If not I will try and get another piece of land somewhere else for them. That is the end of my story.

10. GUADALCANAL EX-COMBATANTS

Holy Cross Cathedral, Honiara, 11-12 May 2011

Mr. John Tavosi's story:

Thank you, Chairman of the TRC, Commissioners, Minister of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace, and the Premier of Guadalcanal Province and to all listeners and good citizens of Solomon Islands. I would like to thank the TRC once again for inviting us to participate in this important public gathering and to express my feelings about what led to the sufferings that occurred during the ethnic tension. Mr. Chairman, my involvement in the conflict was simply because leaders failed to address the issues that affect the indigenous people of Guadalcanal – our inspiration had been oppressed and suppressed by previous consecutive governments. This is seen a contravention to the Preamble of the Solomon Islands [Constitution], of what it wants us to be and this contributes to the ethnic tension. We have been left sitting there for so long and it built up in aggressive manners – what I see is the suffering of our people; and we decided to battle for national liberation, justice, and freedom. I believe we have suffered greatly in bringing out peace, love, and honesty to our society today. The frustration that came out from the people of Guadalcanal was recorded in 1988 when the people of Guadalcanal engaged in a peaceful demonstration to the honorable Prime Minister and his Cabinet and the Opposition leader; at that time, the Guadalcanal people submitted issues of their concern. This frustration then developed in the hearts and minds of Guadalcanal people, that our children will grow up in this same environment and it continued to develop and in 1998 it exploded. All this frustration was built on the issues we presented to the national Government in 1988. I believe Malaitans are innocent of the causes of the crisis. Looking back on the past time when our people first saw white people, I would like to tell my good people from Guadalcanal that some causes of the tension started during those days, when our forefathers were surprised to see what we call bottles and they traded them for our lands; they sold these lands according to their own decisions, without consulting their tribe and others who were alive at that time. When time went on, people started to claim back the lands because they knew of their right over these areas and it caused a lot of misunderstanding among the people concerned; I believe the causes of the land issues are a problem made by ourselves; since we forgot to

embrace that land is our mother. Land is our source and land is our future. The land should be protected for our children – and we must not give away land unless the transaction is right and proper with proper consultation with tribe, families and everyone as a whole. I would like to stress here that some of the causes of the ethnic tension was not caused by Malaitans but ourselves [Guadalcanal people].

I would like to take this time to apologize to this nation and ask for your forgiveness especially the people from Malaita. Before I finish, I would like to acknowledge my brothers from Malaita, for giving your hearts and minds to look after this Honiara town – without you the town would not be like what it is today. I highly commend your bravery. I would also like to say sorry to my brothers and sisters from Malaita who had settled around the outskirts of Guadalcanal who were victims during the time of the tension; and I would like to say sorry and ask for your forgiveness. Thank you and may God bless us all.

Mr. Jeffrey Kala's story:

Thank you, Chairman, Commissioners, TRC staff and the Ministry of Peace and Reconciliation. I would like to apologize to families and people who were victimized during the tension. We the people of Guadalcanal have been struggling 20 years to submit our demands to the Government. Since 1988 we submitted our demands to the Government and we were involved in a peaceful protest but the Government failed to listen to our demands. I would like to talk on one of the main aspects inside the Bona Fide Demands, which is the land. Our land had been taken by the Government without a proper consultation with the rightful tribes from Guadalcanal – especially the Crown land where Honiara city is located. As development comes, changes occur and the town boundary expands; our leaders continue to make changes without proper consultation with our people. Lands were sold for sticks of tobacco and tools. As the town expanded, more people came in and settled on Guadalcanal and they showed disrespect for our cultures and our people. I would like to appeal to the people of Guale – the people who were selling land were doing it for their own interest, without consulting the rightful people concerned; in the end, something bad happened. Before I conclude I would like to say sorry for all that happened – all that happened was a result of our frustration; besides, if we remained quiet,

our land will not be returned – so we feel that we must stand up for our children’s right and take back our land. Thank you.

Mr. Patrick Tuna’s story:

Chairman of the TRC and Commissioners, ladies and gentlemen, Malaita Province delegation, the Minister of Reconciliation and Peace, Premier of Guadalcanal Province and this nation Solomon Islands: Thank you for giving me this opportunity to come and share with you all my experiences and account of the ethnic unrest. Before the tension, I was an employee for the Gold Ridge Mining Company in the logistics department in delivering cargoes; while carrying out my work, the fighting started to escalate, and we were forced to stop from working. I returned back to my village and community and settled and an incident happened in my village; after that incident I realized that we will be affected. I then decided to organize my community in providing some kind of strategy to provide security for us. The police officers that were posted close to our area had left as well. I engaged our youths and men to vest upon themselves the responsibility to protect ourselves. We used simple weapons such as sticks, spears, sticks, knives, and homemade guns. Throughout the period of the tension, the two rival groups tried to create dialogue to negotiate for peace.

I was also influential in trying to establish peace and in the end we all agreed to attend the TPA. While attending the TPA in Queensland, we had a very hard time to try to come up with a resolution; luckily the Government officials were there and they worked around the clock to try to establish a common understanding between us the combatants. I am happy and would like to commend the work of the TRC to try to establish lasting peace after the TPA, which merged us together. The clauses inside the TPA belong to our country as well, not only for us the former militants. We then reached a resolution and we signed for peace; we are still abiding with the conditions of the TPA to today.

Commissioners, today in this public hearing as part of the peace building which our country needs, from my personal view, Commissioners – the significant part of this whole process is for the two rival groups to come together. Today I am here with a good heart to share with you all, that we all must achieve peace; peace doesn’t belong to us former militants; it belongs to this nation. We must all look forward to a brighter future and to achieve peace

through reconciliation. I believe, standing here, I feel confident that we will achieve peace in our country. I am very sorry for all that had happened in the past – and it affects all of us not only the militants. We are willing to put ourselves in the Government program for peace; personally for me, Commissioners, we must always maintain peace and to ensure that our Government puts peace and reconciliation as a priority in our country; whatever happens does not only affect Malaita and Guadalcanal alone but the whole country.

With these few remarks, I would like to apologize to the people of Guadalcanal and my own community if I have done anything wrong to anyone and would like to apologize and ask for your forgiveness; and to the people from Malaita who were victimized during the tension by the Guadalcanal militants, I would like to say with a good heart that I apologize to you all, my good people from Malaita, I would like you to please forgive me. I would also like to share with you all and the nation that we really need peace; peace must prevail back into our country and we must go back to the normal and once peaceful environment we used to experience in the past; thus our children and their children will live in peace and harmony. Finally, before I finish on behalf of my family and myself, I want to say I love you all. Thank you and God Bless.

Mr. Jerol Kikolo's story:

Chairman of TRC, Solomon Islands, Rev Sam Ata, Commissioners, Minister for Peace and Reconciliation, PS, Premiers of Guadalcanal and Malaita Provinces, officials, ladies and gentlemen, and my fellow countrymen, women and children of Solomon Islands.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you very much for the arrangements which the current Solomon Island Government and the TRC made for facilitating for me to come and speak to the nation on what I know about the ethnic tension. Chairman, before the ethnic tension, I was a normal person in the village like everyone else and was a church deacon at our local church and was also a community leader. I always worked hard and had no plans to be part of the uprising or to hurt anyone. I lived peacefully and continued serving the church and my community. Chairman, in 1999, some of the RSIPF officers sent in by the Government came to my community and shot in my village. Their action caused fear inside of every individual in our community and we had to move out to a safe area, and that was my turning point – because I saw that my life was not secure. The Government was

not there to provide security for me anymore; as a church leader who was supposed to lead his congregation has to take some drastic measures to provide security for his people. We no longer had any trust for the Government; instead of securing us its citizens, it came around to threaten us with guns. However, Chairman, as mentioned earlier, that was my turning point.

I cannot go further more in detail; the message I want to put out is if you were a Government leader at that time and you are listening out this very moment – if the gunmen you sent over to our village that time found anyone in my village at that time he would be killed on the spot without any warning and their blood will be spilled on your hands; but today, standing here, I want to tell you that I have forgiven you. I knew very well of the two officers who entered our village that day and other civilians who helped the police officers at that time I would like to say that I have forgiven you as well. Before I close, I would like to give my apologies to my dear people on Marau especially the Are'Are speakers – wherever you are and listening out today if you heard the name Jerol Taramata Kikolo during the ethnic crisis and if any of my actions had caused harm or hurt anyone I want to say I am sorry indeed; to all the youths I am sorry, to my dear children I am sorry, my good people of Malaitan Province wherever you are today, if you heard of my name Jerol Taramata Kikolo during the tension and you think I did something bad against you, I am here and would like to say I am sorry to the children and youths I would like to apologize and ask for your forgiveness. To all the citizens of this country, I would like to reiterate that our country is a Christian and a peace-loving country – we must let go of our bad past and look forward for a better future; as Christian people let us change from our old ways and turn unto the Lord – May God bless Solomon Islands.

Mr. Robert Kennedy's story:

Before we start, I would like us to pay a minute of silence in respect to the people who were killed during the tension on both sides of the parties involved. (*Pause, one minute silence.*) Thank you. Before I start, I would like to thank the TRC for giving me this opportunity to be a part of this very important program which is the public hearing for the ex- combatants. In this public hearing I would like to express some of my feelings and to share some of my resentments of the horrific events that occurred during the period of the ethnic tension.

Chairman, today I am willing and humble myself to come forward and to tell the nation and the public at large why the people of Guadalcanal fought and I was forced to join in with the illegal activities that happened more than ten years ago. Speaking today, I would like to put a very big question on everyone who is listening and present here today especially to our leaders; the question is, “Why did the *malahai* of Guadalcanal stand up and decide to fight?” To answer this question, one has to refresh his or her memories on the issues of concern for the indigenous people of Guadalcanal that were left unresolved prior to the ethnic tension. We are not criminals or well trained fighters or rapists as some had mentioned in the public hearings or as others may think; we were civilians just like anybody else. However, we were left in an awkward position and had to stand and fight for the right of the indigenous people of Guadalcanal. Our involvement in the uprising was inevitable because our leaders failed to address the issues affecting the people of Guadalcanal. Chairman, the tension was a direct result of less commitment by our national leaders on issues of concern, honesty, and unfair distribution of development. The people of Guadalcanal are not aggressive, are not killers, or claiming to be superior in strength, but we are friendly, simple, kind, generous and loving kinds of people. It was the Governments’ failure to address our concerns that made us do what we did; Guadalcanal has its own culture and *kastom* and traditional norms which the Guadalcanal people anticipated that people coming into our land should respect; likewise we will be expected to abide by the same principle if we visit other provinces [audio cut]

Mr. Charles Vangere’s story:

I would like to apologize to everyone who were affected during the tension – if you are listening out – I would like to apologize to all of you. My name is Charles Vangere. On behalf of Guadalcanal *malahai* and the Guadalcanal people, I would like to say I am sorry and ask for your forgiveness. I call on the investors and foreigners who had also fled back to their country because of the security problems that were inevitable at that time, I would like to call on you to return and rebuild our country, Solomon Islands. I would like to say that this problem which we all experienced on Guadalcanal built out of our frustration, since we have been ignored, sidelined and left out. We saw that several vital issues of our concern which had been overlooked and ignored before and since we attained our independence were unfair to us, the indigenous people of this land. One of the issues that

caused a lot of grave concern was land. Land which I am referring to is that land which our colonial master had acquired with the price of empty bottles, smoking pipes, and tools which are not worth the value of the land they acquired here on Guadalcanal. We the indigenous people witnessed a lot of development on our land; more lands were then acquired and laborers brought in from other islands. The link that was missing in the process which our government adopted at that time was they failed to identify who were the rightful customary land owners – they went on with the so-called development, without anticipating what lies ahead.

Apart from that, people from other province came to work in these plantations. While they were here, they showed no respect for us the indigenous people; as a result several indigenous people were killed. Another thing here, Commissioners, that concerns us the Guadalcanal people is the freedom of movement within our own communities; these issues caused a lot of problem to us Guadalcanal people; our people were killed and land had been sold without proper arrangements. The lands that were bought with the price of bottles during the colonial days were repossessed by our Government, and without the concern of us the indigenous people, it resold it to other people and investors. What the indigenous people of this land wanted is when these lands were repossessed [the Government] should go around and find who were the rightful customary owners according to our history; instead the national Government did the opposite, which angers us the indigenous people. I would also like to talk to my own people as well – especially within the Tanghai constituency. If you are one of the so called landowners who was selling out land without proper arrangements, please I want you to listen out carefully – you are one of the contributing factors to this ethnic crisis; you sold land to these people and when they came and settled among us, they showed no respect for us the indigenous people and eventually it led to the ethnic tension. I believe if you had refrain from selling out inconsiderable lands, the ethnic tension, which we all experienced and suffered from, would not have come about. I would like to put it out to the Guadalcanal people how and why we gave and sold our birthright, especially inside the Northwest Guadalcanal Constituency, since the town is located close to us. I call on you the people responsible and those within the constituency to try and look ahead into the future before jumping in to sell lands out to anyone, simply to avoid repetition of the ethnic tension.

Mr. Chairman, prior to the tension the problem of land, respect and dishonesty continued to take its toll; as a result we become frustrated and angry. In year 1988, when my own relative and brother the right Honorable Ezekiel Alebua [was Prime Minister], we resubmitted our demands that were submitted sometime ago, over our concerns and on what we wanted as the indigenous people of this island. Unfortunately, our Government failed to respond to our demands positively. We continued to stay but the frustration and anger boiled continually inside of us; besides, we were faced with another problem: we were not free to move around in our own home, village and land; there is no freedom of movement for us the indigenous people. For instance; people from other provinces go wherever they want or wish without having any concern for us or to seek our consent and permission before entering our land or to fish in our waters or to use any of the things in our lands. It is our island's common culture to ask the owners before taking what we want; we must seek the consent and the permission of the chiefs, elders and leaders before taking what we want. However, as far as we, the indigenous people of this island are concerned, this did not apply. It was one of the concerns inside our demands we submitted to the Government to try and address this growing problem – which is the issue of disrespect other people had towards us. Moreover, one of the grave concern of the indigenous people is we continued to die and the toll started to increase drastically; we did not die from sickness but through brutal murders. These were some of the issues we gave to the Government in a peaceful marching protest to the Prime Minister at that time; unfortunately, they set a deaf ear to us – thinking we are too small and cause no threat to them.

I must tell you, Commissioners: the people from Guadalcanal are good people, loving and friendly, after that peaceful march it took another ten years but still no change – people continued to die and there was no freedom of movement for us the indigenous people of this island; there was still no change. Guadalcanal people in 1998 submitted our demands again to the national Government; they are called the Bona Fide Demands; at that time, it was the late Ulufa'alu in power. Inside the demands the urgent one was for the Government to compensate for the lives of those killed at the hands of Malaitans. That was our sole demand; unfortunately our Prime Minister at that time thought and saw the indigenous people as too small to cause any threat to his Government. After that recent

attempt we were left in the dark – we had run out of patience and did not know the next approach to take; since we have undertaken the peaceful way, the lawful way, the understandable way, our cultural way and all the best approach anyone could ever take, simply to request the government to consider and address our concern and grievances.

It was from then, my good brothers and sister of Solomon Islands, we have been caught up – since the peaceful and the lawful way did not work and we were caught up inside the phenomenon and the fighting started. Standing here today, I once again ask for the forgiveness of everyone through the whole Solomon Islands – since we are not fighting against any province or island, but against the national Government of Solomon Islands for not addressing the issues of concern and the Bona Fide Demands of the Guadalcanal people. Whoever you are, especially the people of Malaita province who have been caught between. The fighting and struggle incited was meant for the Government, not the innocent civilians; it was from there that things got out of hand; people's properties were damaged and burnt, people were killed and people lost their jobs. I want the good people of Solomon Islands, even our friends from overseas, to understand the action of the indigenous people of this island. This is simply how the tension came up; we were trying to get our message through to the national Government – hoping that by doing so the Government would grant our wishes. When the ethnic tension came about, all the people in the Solomons did not feel safe. Why? Because the very institute mandated to provide security and up hold law collapsed as well, and things become worse [*audio cut*].

Commissioners, the Townsville Peace Agreement is the road to peace for our country, Solomon Islands. It was because of the TPA that we were able to sit down and listen to me speak in this public hearing, students resumed their studies and people returned back to work and inside their gardens. This should be a signal to the national leaders and the Government of Solomon Islands to focus and address the issues of concerns people have, It is a chance for the Government to try to change or amend the necessary policies that will suit our lifestyles and our attitudes. The signing of the TPA brought peace back to our country but it is still fragile; people were still killed after the TPA, arguments and fights still occurred after the TPA; the freedom of movement was still limited to us the indigenous people; and then our Government invited RAMSI to come in, trying to help us sort our

differences and to understand each other; to pave way for our government to look after us once again and to try and bring back our country's economy.

I would also like to thank you, all the Commissioners, on behalf of the Guadalcanal people, for the intervention of RAMSI, for its coming to our country to restore peace and law on our shores until today. I would like to commend RAMSI for this – without your presence I do not think I will be able to stand here and voice out what is the truth about the ethnic tension. Commissioners, the Guadalcanal people are very much concerned about the rehabilitation program promised by the Government, and even to this country as a whole. I say this simply because in my constituency Northwest Guadalcanal, the whole area from Kavuoare up to Poha was burnt down during the tension. To my good people from the area mentioned, namely Kakabona, I, on behalf of your people, I would like to tell the Government publicly: What time will you rehabilitate us and to help us rebuilt our homes? Nothing was left after the tension. I, on behalf of this community, would also like to say that I have forgiven those who had burnt down our houses, wherever you are listening throughout the country. We will forget about the past but will be waiting and looking on what the Government will do about this. It has been ten years so far, but nothing happened.

Before I conclude, Commissioners, I would like to put a recommendation to the national Government: the Government must resolve the Bona Fide Demands of the Guadalcanal people, in order for us to have lasting peace and freedom of movement for our people. It is only if the Government addresses our demands we will be able to stay peacefully. I plead once again to the national government, *Plis sore lo mifala* [Please have mercy on us]. I think that is my message. Commissioners, and the people of Solomon Islands, thank you.

Mr. Francis Kennedy's story:

The Chairman of Truth and Reconciliation, Fr. Sam Ata, the Deputy Chairperson, Commissioners: I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you, particularly the TRC and other stake holders who have facilitated this program for us to come and tell this nation our side of the story. My sincere apology is most appropriate before I move on. I would like to say sorry to my fellow countrymen: my brothers and sisters from Malaita, those from the brother island for what we did during the course of the crises; we did it and I admit it. But I would like you to know of the pain we experienced that drove us to do what

we did. We did out of insecurity. We actually felt like there was no future for us and our kids, at least in the hands of our government and in the name of development.

First, I would like to pause and ask two questions: Why does this nation want to listen to our story today? Why did the Solomon Islands Government want to know our displeasure and pain? I will answer these questions as I move on in this presentation. As my fellow comrades presented yesterday, there are reasons why we took up arms during these years – it would be so stupid for humans like you and me to just come out of the blue and take up arms and stand in front of the Government or even to slaughter a fellow brother, that is not our way of life – it is not a Guadalcanal or a Malaitan way of life, not even in Melanesia. The important question here today is why the crisis started. Well, according to my fellow Guadalcanal militants, this crisis started in 1998 but I want to bring to our understanding that this phenomenon started way back in the colonial days. Why? It is simply because it was those first days when our land which is our mother, our life and future, was first stolen. It was illegally stolen from us by the colonial master. It took us some time, through years of development, to really understand these lands, the so-called title over the alienated land and the Crown land by the Government is still illegal to us the indigenous people. Many of us who are listening will have little concern over these issues, thinking that it was acquired legally. It was the earliest of the land transaction that raises and proves a lot of inconsistencies in the way it was acquired. Those who ignored our call for a proper enquiry over these said lands showed no respect over the concerns of the indigenous and rightful owners of these lands. They were blinded by their own legal explanations. They designed these laws to give them the right over these lands but to us it is our life.

I want to tell the Commissioners and the whole country that the Honiara land which our government owns started from Mbokona to Rove; our Colonial master bought the said area for only three pounds. Now tell me, where is the current town boundary? It has expanded more than ten times from the actual land acquired. Where is the God-given right we have over these lands; we live not for tomorrow but also for today. This, to me, is the first point where I felt deceived and I was forced to take up arms against the Government. You may be asking why this fool from Tangarare owns land in Honiara, but I must tell you that Guadalcanal people originated only from four main tribes and all exist as one. A threat to one is a threat to all. The temporary occupied land (TOL) was a totally liar and a direct

insult to our people; it is seen only as a strategy to steal more land from us and displacing us more every day. This was not done by the British Protectorate; it was done by our local politicians who were so blind by their own lust and greed. See why the Commissioner of Land has all the authority over land; it is entirely a political office to destroy us. Go around Honiara and you will see that some names had been changed from the customary name to a different name, and it will have an impact on our customary right over these lands. For instance Feraladoa – how can our original customary land, name and laws survive to live for our future generation, when the original names were erased. Now, from these days up until today, tell me how much did I receive as rent over the lands occupied by settlers from other provinces. Nothing! How much does the airline receive for operating the international airport? Millions! But giving zero dollar to me or to Guadalcanal – this is absurd and a total injustice. The RAMSI base at Lungga (GBR) – the person who receives hundred of thousand dollars from RAMSI as rent is not even close to being a land owner; just last year a Guadalcanal man was forced to move out of land at Lungga, although he is not a direct land owner; his removal from that area is an insult to us. Could you believe the fact that land owners do not receive rental and lease money from their land? Has there been anything such as that? How much does the Government who owns nothing and receives millions of dollars but there is nothing for an old man from Guadalcanal. This is total injustice and a daylight robbery. It is indeed hard for me to understand why the Queen in England owns land on Guadalcanal; how on earth was our land called “Crown land”, seeing this bad trend in our history. In year 1978, the year of our beloved nation’s independence from Britain, our first letter as a form of demand was submitted to our national leaders at that time, but was shelved away, assuming that it will not cause us any problem. I beg the current leaders not to repeat that mistake since it will cause us more problems; we want the total return of alienated land and we call on the Commissioner of Lands not to lease our land. We demand state government, compensation for the lives of Guadalcanal people murdered, equal sharing of resources, and the respect for the indigenous people. These were the attempts we made to protect our livelihood and future, so that we may not be bullied and we want to benefit from our land and to be respected.

It must be noticed that as lands opened up and development expanded, not by us but those who stole from us, internal migration becomes a cancer to our nation, settlements

mushroomed everywhere and so as the rate of crime – as a result a total of 25 lives of the indigenous people of Guadalcanal were brutally killed by year 1998. Since these settlements are within the events that happened, there was lack of respect to our culture and tradition, even our kids who should walk upon their land freely have fear. The sentiment was again submitted in 1988. Again the document was shelved and forgotten. Remember, as years went on, insecurity increased and also our frustration with the national Government.

Now, in 1998, we again submitted our demands to the beloved late Prime Minister; but by that time the crisis was already inevitable. I must say here that the uprising was incited drastically after the death of a female from Guadalcanal, raped and left at Tasahe drain; she was the number 25 on our list; to me, her death literally pulled me to stand and say “Enough is enough!” So what do you think about that? The question therefore was, “Is the Government serious to protect our people when our demands were not met? Seeing that view, we can now understand that the crisis was not entirely between Guadalcanal and Malaita; to say that, it would be misleading. It was not only Malaitans who become victims; all of us were victims, to me; the perpetrator was none other than the Solomon Islands Government. Malaitans were caught within the crisis over certain reasons.

Before I go on, I must say my words of apologies again to my brothers and sisters from Malaita. It was not all Malaitans who had caused problems towards us the indigenous. Since we were pursued, many of the accused and those who committed the crimes were Malaitans, we tend to generalize all of you, and for that please forgive us. I must say this today because our tomorrow must be better and in order to achieve that we must learn from our past mistakes. To my Guadalcanal people, we must also change our attitude and work hard in life. Life is not earned with fast cash, especially selling our lands, trees and our resources. Land is owned by tribes not by individuals; we must refrain from selling land because it will cause problem. To my fellow [Malaitan] brothers: please do not intend again today or tomorrow to take away another life of your brother or sister from Guadalcanal; please respect our customary lands and our culture, see our kids as one of yours and do not look down on us as we learn to live together, because we are all created equally in the eyes of God; these are part of the problems we have in our country. We stated this in the TPA and I would like to reiterate it again here.

Before I finish, I want to say here that crises like the tension do not only happen here but everywhere in the world, especially when the Government fails to address issues of concern to the people concerned. It happened in South Africa and, to be close, Bougainville. One thing that is common is there is always an establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to facilitate reconciliation; that is why I asked the question in the beginning – why did the Government of Solomon Islands want to know our displeasure and pain today; why did we establish an avenue for a poor, uneducated person and a grassroots person like me to share my story and feeling when I have already destroyed this country? Why? Can we write a better story for our children than this evil past? Why couldn't the Government listen to us in 1978 when there were no militants in this country, why not in 1978 or in 1998? Thus we could avoid all this; if the government listened to our cries during these years, we would have not carried arms, since the problem could have easily been solved. Listening and trying to understand each other is so important in a society like ours where there are different cultures, views, feelings and rights so forth; that is why such avenue like this should be a normal happening in our society not only after the crisis

Before I leave for my village, I would like to say that there are huge challenges lying in front of us. We must take this fragile peace as a fire one would attempt to ignite; all the demands of the Guadalcanal people are not even close to being tabled in Parliament; not even this current Government had attempted it. Please, our leaders and TRC, it is now 11 years since the tension; I can guarantee you peace as long as I live with what I am saying now from the bottom of my heart. I do not have the right to guarantee you peace tomorrow because I will be dead by that time and today it is my duty to offer peace to you. The only guarantee of peace in this country like anywhere in the world is just the spirit of love, and patience to learn and respect one another. Thank you.

Mr. Ernest Francis' story:

The Chairman of TRC and the Commissioners: First of all, I would like to share why I decided to join the Guadalcanal Freedom Movement. I come from an area outside of central Guadalcanal in the Gold Ridge area; and today I am pleased to come and speak on behalf of my people from Gold Ridge. At first, we did not want to take part in any of the militant activities; we remained neutral. At that time I was employed for the Gold Ridge

Company. When the tension started, we stayed and watched as the militant activities started. One day while at our workplace, the Solomon Islands Government invited the Rapid Response Unit and the paramilitary to come and be based at the company site on Gold Ridge; they stayed with us for three weeks. During their stay, they did something that insulted our culture; while there they engaged in “girl business” and harassed our women and showed no respect for us.

One day I was taking my day shift and was working at the mining area on the plant site. We heard the sounds of warning fire. I rushed out from my office and stood outside; my supervisor came and told me that there was a shoot-out at my uncle’s village. I quickly jumped into one of the company’s vehicles and drove down towards the area of the shoot-out. When I arrived there, I stopped the truck and could see that my family was lying on the ground along the road – my father, mother and my brothers and sister. The scene depicted what I use to see in the movies, and I cannot forget that day. I stood and watched everyone in our village ordered to lay flat on their stomachs along the road; it was about midday and the sun was very hot. There were very elderly people as well. I stood from a distance and watched, tears dropped from my eyes. They also arrested most of my brothers and uncle, forced them inside their truck and took them over to Rove Police headquarters.

Two weeks later, I was doing my night shift and arrived home early in the morning and went to have my rest. While I was sleeping, I was suddenly awoken by the sounds of guns. I came out of my house carrying one of my nephews and discovered that the paramilitary group had surrounded my house on that day. They ordered me to put the child I was carrying down on the floor. I refused and carried the child and gave it to my elder sister. After handing over the child, the RRU and the paramilitary group started to assault me physically. They took me over to their vehicle, as I was forced into their truck. I discovered that my two brothers were already inside the truck, along with my father. Arriving at Rove in front of the CID office, I was hauled out of the truck in a harsh manner; they grabbed my two brothers and our father, pulling them towards where I was standing. They stripped us of our clothes and told us to stand in the sun for three hours in front of the CID office; later they took my two elder brothers in for questioning and I was told to remain standing for another 45 minutes. The actions of the police officers were unbearable

since we were totally innocent at that time; after there, I was taken over to Central Police station, and was remanded there, until our company came and bailed us out.

After that incident, I returned back to my village and found it hard to comprehend why we were arrested. It was a very sad thing; we were treated as criminals by the very people we expected to protect us. It was from then that I decided to do something to provide security for my family and village on Gold Ridge and then we joined in with the movement. It was simply to provide security for ourselves. Once again, Chairman and Commissioners, I think that is what I want to share with you all today. Thank you.

Mr. Joseph Sangu's story:

The Chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Fr. Sam Ata, the Deputy Chairperson, and your fellow Commissioners: The former combatants, *malahai*, would like to thank the TRC for inviting us to participate and in telling our story in the so-called ethnic tension, how it came about and occurred on Solomon Islands, especially in Guadalcanal province between the period of 1998 to 2003. First of all, I would like to go back into history – starting with pre-history, history, the political crisis, issues, petitions, state government issue, ethnic tension, Weather Coast crisis, acknowledgment, recommendations and conclusions.

After the Second World War, Guadalcanal became the center of focus as more developments were concentrated on Guadalcanal, including the establishment of Honiara. These developments encouraged the influx of more migrant workers who then later settled on Guadalcanal; these migrant workers also brought with them their own cultures and traditions. Due to the differences in the cultural and customary practices of the new migrants and the Guadalcanal people, disagreements between them emerged and sometimes ended up in chaotic and brutal situations. Thus, such problems and others, including land disputes, economic disparity and lack of the confidence in the successful ability to address the Bona Fide Demands of the indigenous people of Guadalcanal contributed to what we know as the ethnic tension. The ethnic tension actually started as a political struggle by the people of Guadalcanal province which was pursued through a non-violent method, since pre-independence. In fact, it was not the intention of the leaders and the people of Guadalcanal to use violence as a means to support these political struggles. During that

period leading to Solomon Islands attaining independence from Great Britain in 1978, there was already consensus or whispering across the island whereby our people desired to have the state government system rather than the unitary system of governance (provincial system). The people of Guadalcanal were mistreated and had become victims in our own land. This was caused by the socio-economic, political and cultural implication of various emerging development activities on Guadalcanal. The following issues were some of the main socio- economic, political, and cultural events or happenings that have caused dissatisfaction and resentment to the indigenous Guadalcanal people over the years since the 1960's and the 1970's; these issues then generated and contributed to the number of grievance that were contained in the various demands submitted to the Solomon Islands Government:

Forced alienation of land and dispossession of land for agriculture development, including cocoa, palm oil plantation and the establishment of Honiara.

With the increasing of labor and migration on our land during the white plantation days and after the Second World War, we the indigenous people felt threatened over our resources and territorial boundaries – this is very important, Chairman and Commissioners – and it is really hurting within the hearts and minds of the indigenous Guadalcanal people. The centralized approach to national development policy by the Solomon Islands Government: for example, more land was acquired for large economic developments on the plains of north Guadalcanal, northwest Guadalcanal and later central Guala and other parts around Guala. The indigenous people who were resource land owners were hoping to achieve positive developments and outcomes for our livelihood, but instead we were socially and economically alienated and deprived from these very developments

The Guadalcanal people suffered from criminal and other anti-social activities in the hands of the new immigrants as a result of the new development activities over the years. It is vital to note that some of these migrants were regarded as aggressive and rough, compared to Guadalcanal people who were non-aggressive, friendly and passive. Employment opportunity for Guadalcanal people on major development projects on Guadalcanal like the Solomon Islands Plantation Limited and Levers, among others, became scarce, as people from other provinces took up supervisory roles and recommended employment and

recruited their own *wantoks* and relatives. Commissioners, this is talking the truth. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission wants to know and find out the all issues that gives rise to the conflict on Guadalcanal. So here I am standing here today to contribute in the process.

Education opportunity for the people of Guadalcanal and children become scarce. For example, our provincial secondary schools were filled with students from other provinces or even getting into tertiary, which was really difficult for the Guadalcanal people. The other major concern of the Guadalcanal people was with the Honiara land boundary and the illegal squatter settlements on our customary lands. Squatter settlements increased at an alarming rate simultaneously with the rapid growing population of Honiara, due to the increasing internal migration; in fact, according to the Guadalcanal culture, encroachment upon land owners' land and properties are did non conform to the rules that govern the landowners' custom, and are not acceptable. The new settlers and workers refused to accept and respect the customs and cultures of Guadalcanal. In fact, they become more dominating over the indigenous people and enforced their culture and customs as more superior than the Guadalcanal culture and customary practices. The number of indigenous people murdered in cold blood increased over the years since the early 1960's. For instance, there were murders which involved the whole family killed while sleeping in their home or while working in their gardens. The Solomon Islands Government continued to ignore the grievances of the people that were submitted through the Guadalcanal indigenous people's Bona Fide Demands at various occasions and attempts. Instead of acknowledging and addressing the issues raised in the Bona Fide Demands, the Government of the day continued to appeal for more land and development on the island. These are the reasons.

This impolite behavior continued bred anger and frustrations in the hearts and minds of the Guadalcanal people; it's like a worm eating the flesh; all the peaceful venues and channels we could think of had been exhausted. It is important to note that the political struggle of the Guadalcanal indigenous people then built into the ethnic tension. I would like to reiterate here, Commissioners, it is a political struggle; in the beginning, it carries no intention to destroy this country; it is the wishes and the aspiration of our people and was initially pursued through non-violent means without arms; specifically in the form of a

petition where children and women were involved. The following is the chronological order in which the petitions containing the Guadalcanal people's grievances were peacefully submitted to the Solomon Islands Government to address:

The petition was submitted to the new Solomon Islands Government in 1978 after independence. The petition contained the wishes of the people of Guadalcanal, especially their wishes to have a state government system among other demands. That was in 1978.

The first *bona fide* demand of the Guadalcanal indigenous people that contained their socio-economical, political and cultural grievances was submitted to the Solomon Islands Government in 1988. In fact, a crowd of Guadalcanal people peacefully and calmly demonstrated through the main street of Honiara, before submitting their *bona fide* demands to the Prime Minister at that time; it was a very peaceful demonstration. Unfortunately, there was no positive response after that time to these very *bona fide* demands, and the Solomon Islands Government decided to shelve these demands away ignorantly. That was the second time the leadership or the legitimate government of the people of Guadalcanal submitted the *bona fide* issue.

After a period of ten years, the Guadalcanal people, through their provincial government, submitted their second Bona Fide Demands to the Solomon Islands Government in 1998. Like in 1988, the Solomon Islands Government decided to play down the significance of the Guadalcanal people's demands and did not have any proper response. It is a period where history tells us that it was a period of ten years, Commissioners, from 1978, when we attained our independence from Great Britain, to 1988, that was the period of ten years at stake. After 1988 to 1998, there was another span of ten years and this is different, Commissioners. In 1987, almost ten years after Solomon Islands attained its political independence from Great Britain in 1978, the then Solomon Islands Government under the leadership of the late Honorable Solomon Mamaloni undertook a nationwide constitutional review and established a Constitutional Review Committee, to get the views of the people of Solomon Islands if they wanted a change from the provincial system of government that was adopted in the Constitution. The findings should be compiled and submitted to the Government to act upon. The review work was compiled in three volumes,

Commissioners: volume 1, *Evidence*; volume 2, *Background and Overview*, and volume 3, *Recommendations*.

The Constitutional Review Committee report was completed for the then Government and, interestingly, the report shows that almost 80 percent of the Solomon Islands was in favor of the federal system or the state government system. Unfortunately, for reasons unknown, the then United Party Government failed to table the report in Parliament to discuss its findings.

On the 21st of February 1988, the Guadalcanal people submitted their Bona Fide Demands to Solomon Islands Government and they questioned why the Solomon Islands Government failed to table the 1987 Constitutional Review Committee report in Parliament during the submission of the bona fide demands and – this is serious – in 1997, the then Prime Minister set up another committee to review the provincial government system and was trying to devise a new system which directly opposed the 1987 Constitutional Committee report.

A report was released and was known as the Milner Tozaka Provincial Government Review report. However in 1998 the Guadalcanal people through their provincial government submitted their demand to SIG for the second time. The Bona Fide Demands still contain the Guadalcanal people's wishes to attain a statehood system among other previous and new issues. As in 1988, the then Government did not make any attempts to properly address the issues raised in the Bona Fide Demands, and here comes the problem: the ethnic tension. It is vital to know that around late 1998 the youths of Guadalcanal that had grown up in the midst of the political struggle over a period of two to three decades were getting impatient and frustrated over the Solomon Islands Government's negative and non-response to the Guadalcanal Bona Fide Demands. When things grow in the heart of a person, it will hurt and will come out somehow. It was generally noticed by the Guadalcanal youths that nothing will be done by the relevant authority, especially by the legitimate Government of this very country to address our grievances and the increasing social problems that our people have endured under the hands of the new brothers and sisters who migrated into our land and into our homes.

The Guadalcanal youths then decided to take up arms and remove all the migrant settlers on the island around late 1998. In addition, the state of emergency that was declared around mid-1998 over Guadalcanal by the then Governor General advised the RSIPF and its Rapid Response Unit to counterattack the Guadalcanal militias. In fact, under the state of emergency, there were lots of discrimination and harassment of innocent Guadalcanal people in Honiara and around Guadalcanal. The Government should have not chosen to use force to address issues of its people; in addition, innocent Guadalcanal people experienced destruction of their homes and properties and the killing of our innocent loved ones or family members by the police during that time. These police operations and unlawful actions took place under the period of the declared state of emergency; they murdered innocent Guadalcanal people, thus making them to feel insecure and have no confidence in the RSIPF. It was at that point that the Guadalcanal people realize that all individuals including innocent women, children, youths, men, and older people were enemies of the RSIPF and would be easily branded as militias; thus it is vital to highlight that the unlawful execution by RSIPF officers on duty during that state of the emergency period intensified the scale of the ethnic tension, as more Guadalcanal innocent youths and men decided to join the militancy in order to defend their families as well as their people and land.

Furthermore, the conflict that was known as the ethnic tension came about when the Malaitan people started retaliating and confronting the Guale people and the militias. In fact the Malaita people were caught in the ethnic tension because of the non-response from our very own respective Government, the SIG – to readdress the Guadalcanal people's grievances. And I would like to salute the *ramo* [warriors] of Malaita who took up arms to protect the people of Malaita because of not having confidence in the RSIPF. During that time, and it is their darkest moment in the history of the tension, and only the *ramos* of Malaita can be commended, in protecting their people, and I salute them. Importantly, if the Solomon Islands Government had properly addressed the Bona Fide Demands of the Guadalcanal people in year 1988 or 1998, there would not be a social unrest called "ethnic tension" in Solomon Islands. It should be acknowledged that the affected Malaitan and Guadalcanal people were both innocent victims of the ethnic tension that erupted from the ignorance and stubbornness of the past Solomon Islands Government administrations.

The Weather Coast crisis was a spilt over effects of the ethnic tension. Interestingly, after the TPA was signed, there was no attempt to hold dialogue with the former Guadalcanal Liberation front (GLF), despite initial antisocial activities committed by the GLF on the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal; there was no killing at the first at that time. However, the SIG then decided to send a Joint Operation group by the former Isatabu Freedom Fighters and the RSIPF; special constabulary who were armed with the patrol boat to attack GLF, at the same time indiscriminately bombarding innocent homes and villages. In fact, all the former Isatabu Freedom Movement and the Special Constabulary that participated in the Weather Coast crises were paid by the SIG to undertake the operations. It was at that point that the Weather Coast crisis intensified and became more violent and atrocious. This crisis caused massive destruction to lives, homes and properties of the Weather Coast people. Although the Weather Coast crisis might be seen as a separate conflict, it cannot be ignored as it was part of the ethnic tension; we later realized that the Government then had played a divide-and-rule tactic to divert our focus by this crisis. This is very sad, Commissioners, a lot of killing in the Weather Coast, far more than the ethnic crisis, more far than anyone could imagine, you can talk to the women in the villages they will tell you so much, so much. [*he cries . . . pause*]

At this juncture the Guadalcanal former combatants – *malaha* who were involved in the so-called ethnic tension, would like to say sorry to the innocent people of Malaita and other provinces and the Marau Are'Are speakers who had become victims of this crisis. Although the Solomon Islands Government is yet to facilitate and organize a reconciliation ceremony between Guadalcanal, Malaita and other provinces; we would like to seek your forgiveness for the wrongs that we have done to you. However, it should also be noted and acknowledged our people, including ourselves, our resources and lands have also become victims of injustice caused by modern development and the colonial masters and the post-independence political systems. We adopted a system that is not applicable in this nation. We should have adopted our own; we have our tradition and everything that God gave us. These injustices inflicted social, economic, political and cultural implications on our people's livelihood and welfare, and consequently gave rise to the Guadalcanal political struggle that was then built upon on to the ethnic tension, and these are the very issues.

Commissioners, here are some of the recommendations that we the former combatants *malahai* of Guadalcanal would like to make to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the current Government of Solomon Islands:

1. Solomon Islands Government to ensure that relevant sections in the draft Federal Constitution safeguard and protects the rights of the indigenous resource and land owners from outside immigrants on our land. For example, give illegal squatters, settlements and intruders who illegally trespass in our people's customary land, "territorial boundaries." I want to say this, Commissioners, I want you to wear my shoes, you need to wear my shoes in order to understand the situation, the feelings and the emotions that we have.

2. Government and other relevant authorities to control illegal squatter settlements that are rapidly growing around Honiara and are encroaching into customary and alienated land that we still have traditional and customary rights over. For example, Lungga-Tenaru land. Now this land is owned by foreigners who have nothing to do with our culture; it is how the Government legitimized in alienating this land; this would be very disturbing if this land were in other provinces; you will have this pattern of thinking like us.

3. All alienated land on Guadalcanal that had been taken from our forefathers by the colonial administrators and white plantation owners like Levers and others in the past must be unconditionally returned to the rightful landowners by the Solomon Islands Government. This includes the following lands: Lungga Tenaru, Mamara, Mavo, Tasivarango, Lavuro among others. The same should also be done in other provinces of this country; all lands that had been taken by all means that were unacceptable should be returned to the original landowners in other provinces as well.

4. We acknowledge the Solomon Islands Government for currently addressing some of our fundamental issues covered in the Bona Fide Demands of the indigenous people of Guadalcanal; for instance, the issue of state government. However, we feel that there are outstanding issues and grievances covered by our two Bona Fide Demands that our Government should revisit and appropriately address in dialogue with our leaders.

5. The issue of Marau wanting to be a constituency of its own should be left to the Electoral Commission, based on the merit set down by the relevant authorities. We feel that demarcating Marau into a separate constituency for reasons relating to the ethnic

tension will be a gross mistake for the purpose of peace- building and future development of our people and country. Such a proposal encourages and further deepens division of people along ethnic lines; it symbolizes the notion of disintegration and is not in the best interest of lasting peace in Guadalcanal and Solomon Islands. It should be noted that Marau was, is and will always be an integral part of Guadalcanal and so, as our good people of Marau including the Are'Are speakers, it's not time to say that they are from Malaita or Are' Are; just forget about the misunderstanding in the past. They are Guadalcanal people and the people of this country and, if they want to, they should be talking to authorities. Commissioners, to rebuild this country, we need guidance and guidance comes from God alone.

6. The Solomon Islands Government should and enact the Forgiveness Bill as a means to fast track the healing process that our country is now embarking on. This will also enable more people to come forward and assist in peace and reconciliation and healing processes. A lot of people who were caught up and were labeled by the law as perpetrators or ex-militants – a lot of them want to come forward, but not until this piece of legislation; there must be a Forgiveness Bill if this country is to go forward.

7. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission should conduct another public hearing, for the community leaders, including our women and elders around Guadalcanal, to testify of the sufferings and struggles they faced as a result of development and from the new migrants on our land prior to the ethnic tension period.

8. The SIG to fast track the facilitation of reconciliation processes, within Guadalcanal and between Guadalcanal and Malaita and other provinces and the SIG including the RSIPF.

9. The SIG to properly rehabilitate the Guadalcanal and Malaita former militias that includes Marau. The rehabilitation package should not only be written in government policies, but should materialize. The last ten successive governments have made promises of rehabilitating the former militants, but nothing as promised eventuates. I think we have done our part; it is us who take the lead in bringing peace back to our country. We decided to sign a ceasefire agreement and we followed up leading to the Townsville Peace Agreement. And it was when nobody can come to Honiara that the two groups decided to

come and mingle; this was a sign that the world will know that we have our means of coming together; what else are we looking for, we cannot look elsewhere, and all the former combatants should be commended for this in this country – your courage, leaving the war behind to going forward to make peace.

10. The Solomon Islands Government should revisit the Townsville Peace Agreement and to ensure that the infrastructure development marked for both Guadalcanal and Malaita be facilitated and implemented.

11. The Guadalcanal victims of the ethnic tension and the Weather Coast crisis, who lost their homes and properties, must be properly compensated and rehabilitated. This should also include trauma counseling for the victims and the people affected in Guadalcanal, Malaita and other provinces throughout the Solomons.

12. The Solomon Islands Government and the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force to hold proper reconciliation with communities and people of Weather Coast and Guadalcanal over the spill-over effects of the tension and also on the provinces affected and concerned as well, since it is the failure of the Government and the RSIPF to protect them during the course of the police Operation. This is very important and it was from this that the MEF group emerged because they too lost confidence in the RSIPF, and the Government should also reconcile with the Malaita people.

13. The Solomon Islands Government to ensure that the Parole Board release some of the former militants who are currently behind bars at Rove Prison; they might be listening as the precedent has already been set by the current Government. This is the only means of bringing peace back to this country. I reiterate that the Solomon Islands Government to ensure that the Parole board ensure that some of the former militants behind bars. The Government is legitimizing the process to prosecute these people. This [recommendation] means the restorative justice; that one is the prosecuting part and this one is the truth seeking.

The truth-seeking must keep the balance because of the failures of past leadership to address issues that gave rise to this conflict, which led to the destruction of our country. To conclude, on behalf of all the Guadalcanal former combatants, I would like to thank the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Solomon Islands, for this opportunity where we

could testify to you, Commissioners, the Government and all our fellow Solomon Islands citizens on our involvement in the ethnic tension. We would like, once again, to ask our Malaitan victims, brothers and sisters and others throughout the country, whom we have hurt in whatever ways during the course of the ethnic unrest, to forgive us; we are sorry for all our wrongs during the ethnic tension. Finally, the history and relations of the ethnic tension should be the guiding principle to our current and future leaders and Governments, not to ignore the wishes and grievances of any indigenous groups of peoples within Solomon Islands; people's power should not be undermined by any current or future leaders of Solomon Islands in order to sustain and maintain lasting peace and harmony in our beloved country, Solomon Islands. "God Bless Solomon Islands from Shore to Shore."

Mr. Edward Choningolo's story:

TRC Chairman, Commissioners, Honorable Minister for National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace, Honorable Premier of Guadalcanal province, the Honorable Premier of Malaita province, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

I just dropped out from school that time. During that period, I was trying to pursue my educational dreams and goals; I wanted to find a decent life and future. I was in my village at that time and heard when the Government declared the state of emergency because of the Guadalcanal militia group. The second event was the declaration of war against the Guadalcanal people; for that reason automatically I felt obliged to join since I am a Guadalcanal man. Without any reasonable doubt, if I am in Honiara at that very moment, someone will label me as an Guadalcanal militant; in actual fact I am not a militant but a *malahai*. For those who do not know, according to the Guadalcanal people, *malahai* means a warrior; every village in the past had their own *malahai* to provide security and protect their people from any forms of threat that may come about. As far as I can see, being someone who attended school, it was the Guadalcanal people who had gone through a lot of abuse and injustices. Guadalcanal people were murdered for a long period of time; the killing continued and nothing was done by the responsible bodies and the Government to address the problem. In 1988, the Guadalcanal people gave their concerns and grievances to the national Government but unfortunately it failed to address the problem; and as time went on another report was submitted to the Government again; this time it is now called

the Bona Fide Demands of the Guadalcanal people, and it was shelved away. The ignorant attitude of the Government caused this social upheaval; according to my understanding, our brothers from Malaita and ourselves were caught up; it is not of our making and we do not enjoy it one single bit. And today, on behalf of other militants who are back in the village, I highly commend my brothers from Malaita in securing the town during that period. I salute you for it. There are some issues here I want the Government to look more on closely on:

1. Rehabilitation – the Government must set up small income-generating projects to help them [ex-combatants] in rebuilding their lives and to keep them busy. As I have mentioned earlier, I was pursuing for a better education; unfortunately, because of the tension I was caught up. I want the Government to rehabilitate us; I want the Commissioners to recommend us, those who were unable to further their studies because of the ethnic tension and still interested; [I want to] to further my studies and I want the Commissioners to consider this.

2. The demands of the Guadalcanal people: I want the Commissioners to recommend to the Government the demands of the Guadalcanal people, and we want them to address them accordingly to our wishes.

I am indeed very happy to be a part of this process in working towards lasting peace. Before I finish, I would like to say on behalf of myself and all the *malahai* who are not here today; I want to convey our sincere apologies to those who were affected during the tension, especially to the Malaitan victims. I want to say sorry and ask for your forgiveness. I believe not only Malaitans were affected, but our own people from Guadalcanal as well, at the hands of the Guadalcanal *malahai*.

Once again, the Chairman of TRC, Commissioners, the Premiers from the two provinces, Guadalcanal and Malaita, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you very much. May God bless Solomon Islands.

Mr. Clement Tovorua's story:

The TRC Chairman, Deputy Chairlady, Commissioners, ladies and gentlemen: Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to appear before all the Commissioners with regard to the social unrest starting in year 1998 to 2003. Firstly, I would like to say, I was

an ordinary citizen of this country and was a civilian. After I finished school, I was employed at Gold Ridge. During my youth days, I heard of several peaceful demonstrations carried out by the Guadalcanal people and their leaders simply to submit their concerns and wishes to the Government of that day, demanding an immediate answer. Unfortunately, the Government failed to address their demands. It then took another ten years for the process to be carried out again by the Guadalcanal people, in resubmitting their demands to the Government of that day again. During that period of ten years until year 1998, things started to get worse; our frustration had mounted and we ran out of patience.

Now I would like openly tell everyone and the Commissioners why I was involved in the area. Since the national Government failed to recognize us the indigenous people of this island. Most of the major companies were operating on north Guadalcanal, for instance, SIPL and the likes of Gold Ridge Mining; besides these companies we have several stakeholders basing here in the area of north Guadalcanal, for instance, the police station, prison facility, clinics, schools, high schools, vocational schools and even theological colleges. Unfortunately, when we submitted our demands, concerns and wishes to the Government they failed to listen to us. We were very pleased with the companies operating in our land and Malaitans along with other people in our provinces came and worked in these companies, to earn income and to contribute with their labor force in helping our country to move forward economically. I acknowledge and salute you for your labor efforts.

Secondly, one of the main concerns I would also like to talk about is the alienated land. We want the Government to give us back our alienated land. The land does not belong to the Government; it belongs to the landowners and must be returned to them. We have been trying so long to repossess the lands but the Government refuses to surrender them back to us, the indigenous people of this island. We tried for so long, after the different successive governments with their different plans; we would like to beg the Government to return back these lands to us; in doing this I believe there will be lasting peace here on Guadalcanal. I believe this is the only way forward.

These are some of the reason which caused us to join in with the militant activities. I would like to tell you the Commissioners, please forward my recommendations to the Government – I want actions and not words. We have been hearing a lot of assurance from the Government but it did not eventuate into action and it causes us the indigenous people to become unhappy and the tension came about. It is like a father buying fish from the market and refusing to share it with his children; it shows that the father is greedy and selfish when it comes to his own children. After all, our struggle is not for the things that are in other provinces but for the things that are here on Guadalcanal, our own island, and for our own freedom. I think this is what I want to bring forward to you all the Commissioners. Thank you for the invitation in allowing me to come forward and share my concerns and to tell you why I was involved in the tension. Lastly, I would like to share my sincere apologies to any brothers and sisters from other provinces; if I may have shown any disrespect to you, I ask you for your forgiveness – and would like to ask you to accept me as your brother and sister in our nation Solomon Islands. I would like to appeal to our Government and would like to apologize if our actions may have caused any feelings or grievances and hurt during the period of 1998 to 2003. We would like the Government to listen and address our demands. Thank you.

Mr. Adrian Ronia's story:

Before I start in trying to identify the root causes of the ethnic tension, thank you very much for allowing me to take part in this very important public hearing this afternoon, in inviting us the former ex-combatants to come out and openly share our stories and why we joined in with the social upheaval. I am indeed happy to tell my story. First of all, I would like to say ten years has lapsed and the talk in the media, courtroom, streets, villages, mountains, valleys and islands and oceans is still peace and reconciliation. Why has all this been prolonged for another ten years without addressing our demands, without any answers or results? The blame can no longer be put on the *ex-ramos* and *ex-malahai* of Guadalcanal, Malaita and Marau. My involvement inside the crisis is all about the national issue; our Government should have considered this in the first place – for instance, when you work inside your garden, when weeds and grasses start to grow, we should be able to pull and weed them out. Unfortunately, nothing was done so far; our demands had been shelved away inside the Government houses without be addressed. The conflict we saw on

the Weather Coast is a result of the Townsville Peace Agreement. We joined in with the police special constables; what we saw was our Government failed to fulfill its promises; and after the Weather Coast Operation we were later arrested and put behind bars. I was also a victim and was remanded for four years inside custody.

I would like to thank the Government for changing my life while in custody; now I am a new person. I would also like to thank my brothers from Malaita, especially the Malaita *ramos* who were helping and defending the Honiara city from us and to the Malaita leaders who lived in Honiara. I would like to congratulate those who supported the Malaitans to provide security in town during that period. I would also like to congratulate all the major companies and investors that are here in the Solomons to help our economy grow.

Before I conclude, I would like to put across to the Commissioners to take note of everything that we the former combatants of Guadalcanal have said. In order for lasting peace to prevail inside our country, we need to work together, both provincial governments of Malaita and Guadalcanal, and the national Government. Lastly, I would like to apologize to every brother and sister from Malaita for anything that I have done wrong in the past; and I ask for your forgiveness and to forget about the past, not forgetting my brothers and sisters from other provinces and from within Guadalcanal itself. I ask and beg you all for your forgiveness. Thank you one and all.

Mr. John Collin's story:

Chairman of the TRC, Father Sam Ata; Commissioners of the TRC; and Solomon Islands people: Thank you for inviting me to come and tell of the reasons why I was involved in the recent ethnic unrest in 1998. Firstly, I would also like to say that I myself was a victim of the government system. Governments had come and go but everything remained the same. The leaders had their corrupt and selfish attitude; as a result of their ignorance and selfishness, the country of Solomon Islands reaped the consequences of the leaders' ignorance. Because of their, ignorance it caused the leaders to make poor decisions. One of the examples of the poor decision-making was to shelve away the *bona fide* demands of the Guadalcanal people, issued through by the Guadalcanal province in a peaceful manner. The continuous ignorant attitude caused me to take up arms to try and push us forward,

since their failure to address our demands was an insult and sign of disrespect to our people.

We were often regarded as stupid and wicked-minded for being kind and loving creatures. . . . Since we have been showing great kindness and love to other people, in return people gave us all sorts of injustice and ill-treatment and disrespect, which resulted in the murder of the indigenous people for no good reasons. Our call to the national Government was not taken into good consideration; it caused us to become hopeless and useless. During the submission of our Bona Fide Demands, we were disorientated when they were turned down again; by this time, the whole province came together and struggled to make the Government realize our wishes and grievances and we took the law into our owns. . . . I joined the militia group to show the national Government that I have heart and blood and emotions, just like anyone else in the world. I joined the militancy to show my frustration and fight for my right as an indigenous person which was objectively ignored by our deaf leaders . . . [*pause*] In year 2001, the British Protectorate of Solomon Islands . . . [*starts to cry*] . . . our British Protectorate gave me the right, it is the right of the Solomon Island Government . . . to help the Solomon Islands Government establish peace in our country, but the SIG ignored our effort . . . [*pause*] I submitted a letter to the national Government with no intention to hurt anyone, as a peace-loving person from Guadalcanal. Unfortunately, there was no response from the Solomon Islands Government to this cordial understanding that I wanted to work with the Solomon Islands Government.

On the 23rd October 2000, I submitted my second concern to the Solomon Islands Government as a peace-loving person from Guadalcanal. Some of these issues raised still remain outstanding until today, for example, I would like to make mention of illegal settlements on customary lands, squatting on these lands. These are the very issues that caused problems that were experienced in the past years, caused by young people from other provinces such as Renbel, Temotu, Malaita, on us Guadalcanal people; again these issues had been put to the deaf ears of our past national leaders. I hope that our current leaders are not that deaf and ignorant as those leaders of two decades ago. I therefore call on the national Government not to underestimate the power of the people, even the most vulnerable ones; the past social unrest should be the one we should learn from. We should

learn to listen; in doing this, we will prevent any more innocent lives being taken, as peace-loving people of Guadalcanal.

Mr. Reginald Billy's story:

The Chairman of TRC, the Deputy Chairlady, Commissioners, and Solomon Islands citizens, distinguished guests, and ladies and gentlemen: I am very pleased indeed on this very morning to appear before the Commission to tell my story on what happened during the course of the social unrest that ended in the year 2002 when I was a part of the Joint Operation on the Weather Coast. Before I go into my story, first of all, I would like to publicly declare, admit and confess that before I joined in with the JOP, I was a member of the so-called IFM group. It was after the TPA was signed; I returned back to my village and tried to live a normal life in running a small business. I had a reason why I took part in the tension when it first started; it has nothing to do with lands or other issues. I came in to join because inside the bona fide demands of the Guadalcanal people is the \$2.5 million compensation claim; out of that claim, I had three members of my immediate family killed during that time period; if you could remember a mother and her children were killed at the SIPL area. It was from this that I wanted to join.

After the signing of the TPA, in 2001, my family received compensation for their lives and we returned back to try and live our normal life; we were satisfied although we did not receive full payment but only part of it, since the other half of it was misused by some people. We returned back to our village and tried to live normally as I used to do in the past. However, I would like to apologize to everyone, families and the people of the Solomon Islands for being part of the tension.

The second part of my story was that during the course of the TPA, a day before the signing of the TPA by all the former combatants, one of the IFM leaders did not take part in the peace conference, as mentioned earlier; the Guale leaders who attended the peace conference and had word from that particular IFM leader stating that he will not take part or recognize any peace agreement signed at that time. After receiving that message, the leaders representing Guadalcanal province and the former militants who attended the TPA in Townsville agreed that, after returning from Townsville, they will try to talk him into being part of the TPA. Somehow, with all their efforts to try and talk to him to lay down

his arms, our efforts failed since he sternly refused, although the Government had set up the Ministry of Peace, Unity and Reconciliation. The Ministry appointed a Weather Coast peace envoy and a Guadalcanal peace coordinator but all of these efforts failed to consult with and convince him. Anyway, the life on the Weather Coast at that time was different; people there faced a lot of difficulties, and I myself become a victim of the activities that occurred on the Weather Coast.

After the signing of the TPA, we all know that peace slowly returned to our country. Law and order slowly returned and I tried to live normally as everyone else; during that time I was a chairman of a school in our community. In June 2001, I came over to Honiara to follow up with the school projects that I had applied for; it took me four months after arriving in Honiara and I discovered that all my projects were approved. I was busy with the coordinators and the people within the AusAID office, collecting quotations and pro forma invoices and trying to arrange ships to take the school materials back to the Weather Coast. It took me almost four months to make all the arrangements. On the 15th of October 2001, we managed to find a ship and started loading all the materials for schools, clinics, churches and some general cargoes that belonged to the Weather Coast people and we set out for Weather Coast on 6:45 p.m. in the evening.

The next day, we arrived back at my home around 8 a.m. It was there that the group unlawfully detained me from the ship; the first thing they did to me that morning was they started beating me up. They asked me a lot of questions and I was interrogated abusively. They suspected that the four months I remained in town, I was involved with the MEF group and the Government to make plans to capture Keke and his men. I tried to explain myself and give all my reasons and protest my innocence. Instead, I was beaten up for two hours; both my arms and feet were tied with a rope against a coconut tree. I stood there the whole day in the hot sun along the beach. I stayed there the whole day until late evening someone came and released me and led me away into a small hut and I was kept there. I stayed there for the whole week from Monday to Saturday. On the midnight on Saturday a group of eight came and told me that I will be taken over to their camp to be executed; they told me openly that they will slaughter me as a pig and I will not be able to see my family and relatives. I remained quiet and waited for the worst to happen. I was escorted there and upon arrival I was then tied against a coconut again and they went to report to their

boss that I had arrived. Fortunately, their boss had fallen asleep so they told me that I will be executed in the morning. Anyway, during that night they continued to torture and beat me up and they stopped around 3 or 4 a.m. Later they went to have their rest. It was that very time I started to think about the pains and sufferings that I went through that week. I recalled all the things that happened to me and my mind was then focused on God Almighty and I started to pray to God, asking him if it is my time, then let it be; but if it is not my time, I asked God to intervene and save me in whatever way possible.

Towards 6 a.m. the ropes tied around my hands were released unexpectedly and I escaped. It took me three days and nights to travel to my village; I spent another three days in my village before I walked across over to Honiara. After that incident, I spent almost a year in Honiara until August 2002, when the militants murdered the late Father Augustine Geve. It was that time the police decided to go over and arrest the radical leader. I was in Honiara and somebody came and requested me to attend a meeting at the former Guadalcanal premier's residence. It was during that meeting that the Premier of Guadalcanal province informed us that the RSIPF is planning to carry out an operation on the Weather Coast to capture Keke. He then requested the ex-combatants and the police special constables if we agreed to hunt Keke; all of us agreed and wanted to carry out the operation. It was also during that time the Premier on behalf of the Police Commissioner requested our assistance to carry out the operation; it was at that time I came in. I did not join in because of my hatred towards that group or because I wanted to retaliate. I tagged along because I knew that so many people on the Weather Coast had suffered so much under the rule of Keke; and some were also killed and others had suffered the same way that I did. I had concern for the people on the Weather Coast.

When carrying out the operation, I become a victim. Again some of the people of the Weather Coast blamed and labeled me as the initiator of the operation and was the commander; it was after receiving these allegations, that the feeling and thought of my being an spy still remains until today; but I want to say, I am not the initiator of the operation. It was an operation initiated by the Government and it was the Government who provided all the logistics, rations and weapons we used. Unfortunately, the operation was unsuccessful. On December 2002 the Government deployed police officers from other provinces on the Weather Coast and letting our local boys, and former officers and ex-

combatants provide security for the officers from other provinces. On May 27th, Keke and his men retaliated and raided our villages and burnt down approximately 20 villages and more than 300 hundred houses; nine people were killed, most of them members of my own family. So that is how I came in and worked with the Government to help out with the Weather Coast operation. This whole thing happened because of the Government, because the Government failed to consult Keke and in appointing the right people to try and approach or lure him; the Government failed on its part.

In the first place, the Government arranged and promised a time and venue to meet with him but the Government failed and was not committed to its promises. The problem on the Weather Coast escalated and we ended up fighting each other. We see that the tension was caused by the Government and they should be blamed for all that had happened. We the former police officers, ex-combatants and the civilians who were involved in the Joint Operation become victims ourselves; we lost almost all our properties and belongings; all our houses were burnt down by Keke and his men. Innocent civilians were displaced for seven months some fled over and took refuge at Tintinge; and others fled to other provinces. After the seven months, people started returning back to the Weather Coast when Keke was arrested. However, today my people on the Weather Coast still suffer; the Government failed to recognize and address our problems; there hasn't been any rehabilitation and compensation. There is still yet to be a proper reconciliation ceremony among the people on the Weather Coast. In conclusion, on behalf of us the people on Weather Coast, both the former GLF and the victims that were involved in the operations, we have some recommendations that we would like to put forward to the national Government and we highly plea that TRC must take note of them and forward them to the responsible authorities concerned:

1. The compensation of lives – we lost a lot of people during the Weather Coast operations. I do not have the records of lives lost in other wards on the Weather Coast; however, for us in the Duidui ward, we lost about 19 lives during that crisis. We also have people who were injured at that time and the relationship among us is broken since their houses were burnt down as well. We want the Government to compensate for the lives of people killed in the different wards on Guadalcanal: Duidui, Vatokula and Talise wards.

2. We want the government to compensate us for the properties lost during the Weather Coast operation.

3. I want the Government to rehabilitate the families of those killed during the Weather Coast operation. Most of those killed had left their wives and children behind and they should be recognized and supported by sending their children to school or assisting them with small income-generating projects.

4. We want the Government to rehabilitate all the victims of the Weather Coast operation, including those who were not involved in the operation but had lost their belongings and properties during that time.

5. We want the Government to pay the outstanding allowances promised, entitled and due to us the civilians and special constables who helped out in the Weather Coast operation.

6. Another thing I would like recommend here is trauma counseling for us the people on the Weather Coast who were affected. A lot of our people especially; the elderly are still traumatized, stressed and unfortunately some died during the Weather Coast operation, since what happened was new to them.

7. Lastly, I would like the Government quickly to reconcile us the people of south Guadalcanal, especially the former GLF, IFM, JOP and the civilians on the Weather Coast. With this, I think that is what I want to put forward and the concerns I would like the TRC to take note of. Once again, thank you and may God bless us all.

Mr. Lionel Lapu's story:

The Chairman of TRC, Commissioners: First of all, I would like to acknowledge your invitation for me to come and share with you all my feelings during the height of the ethnic tension up until now. I would like to begin by saying that ten years is over now; the stories inside the media, courtrooms, streets, offices, villages, provinces, mountains, valleys, and rivers is still on reconciliation and peace. The biggest question that is on my mind today is, "What time will we end this problem once and for all?" We are still waiting patiently, for as the years go by with all the empty promises given to us by the successive governments, we are still waiting for the time they will fulfill their promises. The blame

now is on the former combatants on Guadalcanal and Malaita and I believe that is one of the reasons why I was invited to come here today. I was invited here to tell nothing but the truth, and I will be honest with all of you. I do not know what type of truth I will publicly tell to you, since the truth we are seeking does not really practically live with our politicians and the leaders of our country. Therefore, today I will in brief take us back so that we will see for ourselves the real cause of the ethnic tension. For to me, I call these the players behind the curtain and I would like to unmask them all. I will start by going in brief detail into our country's history of all the plans, timelines and the dates on how Solomon Islands come to develop until now, politically, socially, spiritually and physically.

Solomon Island was first settled at least 4000 years ago by Melanesian people, and it is in our history; probably we originate from the Austronesian language group. Solomon Islands was visited and given its present name in 1568 by Alvaro de Mendana. The north coast islands of the group were explored in 1768 by Captain Bougainville and you can find it in history; these islands were named after these explorers and the ship captains; they are now part of Papua New Guinea. Germans established control over the northern Solomons in 1885, but in 1900 all except Bougainville and the Buka were transferred to Britain. A protectorate was declared over the central and southern side of the Solomons in 1893. Between 1870 and 1910, about 30,000 Solomon Islanders, mostly from Guadalcanal and Malaita, were taken involuntarily to work as indentured slave laborers – this was commonly known as “blackbirding” – inside sugarcane plantation on Queensland and Fiji and other destinations. Some returned and others were unable until today; it was a great loss and disrespect for human rights. In 1914, at the start of World War I, Australians occupied the remaining German Solomons and in 1919 the League of Nations granted the area to Australia as a mandate.

During these periods, people enjoyed the great plantation era, however, two great cataclysms of the mid-twentieth century decimated the peaceful side of the promises of the plantation era. The first was the depression that pushed the copra price down to seven percent of their 1926 prices. I would like to elaborate on this, since it is the leading factor that drove me to support the so-called Isatabu Freedom Movement during the height of the ethnic tension. All this research in history drove me to join in with the IFM. The second was the savage fighting between Japanese and American imperial armies that destroyed

plantation infrastructure, making it uneconomic to be re-established after the war. Most of the Solomons were occupied by Japan during World War II and heavy fighting occurred in the region, especially in and around Guadalcanal; the last Japanese troops left the Island group in 1945. These unusual and intensive afflictions of guns, germs and viruses in the 1940's, especially epidemics, contracted the Solomons' population as well as its economy. The collapse of the plantation economy is one major reason for the other development that saw Solomon Islands ranked 128 out of 177 countries on the United Nations human development scale in the late 2000's, even after some years of the impressive post-war growth. In 1976 the Australian-administered Solomons become independent as part of Papua New Guinea. The British Solomons gained independence as Solomon Islands on July 7th 1978 and that was when the first Parliament was introduced.

Solomon Islands today is physically fragmented into 900 islands and atolls and are now home to more than 500,000 people; the majority of them still live in some 400 villages or hamlets. Cultural diversity is rich as one travels from island to island, from the pitch black people of Western province who are related to neighbours in Bougainville to a much lighter-skinned Melanesian and Polynesian indigenous people. At least 60 living languages and many dialects are spoken in Solomon Islands. This is a brief history of how Solomon Islands developed.

Now I would like to take us on the political conspiracy of Solomon Islands. Though Solomon Islands gained independence from Britain in 1978, the state today is not central to most of the day-to-day existence of the overwhelming majority of the population who live in villages distant from towns. Most villages continue to meet most of their needs for food, water and materials for shelter from their tribal land; and so their communal lifestyle is based in their Christian behavior and their style of kinship based on social system of governance, in contrast to national and international markets or by state taxation or state service provisions. Each village does not go without food and shelter for the want of state welfare; the system that still cares for them predates the state; a few villages fell through gaps in this system for provision, compared to the [large] numbers that fell through the gaps in western state welfare systems. In short, the majority of us Solomon islanders are self sufficient.

The political system of governance of Solomon Islands is adopted from the Westminster system of Great Britain, drawn up in the seventh century, where the elected minority who legislated the law of the land was to represent the majority in an honest and respectable manner. Since independence in 1978, no one particular party ever ruled the country as a majority but coalition of governance between political parties was established. This caused many upheavals and failures in our country because of the conflicts of policies and ideologies between different political party members. No Government has ever since ruled for one full term except for the Government during the period of the ethnic tension. This Westminster minister system has also some conflicting policies in comparison to our tribal and cultural laws and values, especially concerning tribal land rights and other resources. Usually it is common practice in our country that when the politicians are in power, they nearly always forget the people; that is why I mentioned earlier that truth has never been put into good practice among our political leaders; they always forget the very people who voted them into Parliament. Whenever they amend laws they never consult their constituencies; they sat in their chairs and forgot completely about the people who voted for them; they tend to apply their own ideas not those of their people. They make their own laws without the people. We were left out in the dark and have no say in their so-called amendments or any decision-making. Simply, they are no longer serving their country but were working for themselves, serving their own interest and greed.

This is political conspiracy to the people and the Constitution of Solomon Islands. Politicians' ignorance the majority of the populace will affect the majority's values and this will cause disturbance in our country. Politicians must, therefore, first honestly meet and address the needs of their people before listening to their political tycoons or any foreign ideas. This political system that continues to run and rule the country by dishonest politicians will never help this nation prosper and, therefore, political chaos is a possibility and the nationwide uprisings will be a probability. How many millions of dollars do we think will help us solve our problems? It will not work since the money will only be utilized by those who rule and their provinces because of this selfishness; social injustice and unrest will continue as far as we envision. We Guadalcanal indigenous people believe that the chaos of this political system can be dated back since the beginning of the British colonial rule in our country Solomon Islands; from independence up to now; it has caused

the latest so-called ethnic unrest. This system of governance makes all ruling Governments so stubborn and obstinate; these political systems and the harsh stance of the politicians intentionally and deliberately refuse to address the Bona Fide Demands of the Guadalcanal people up to now. So we are questioning, “Who are these politicians serving?” I want you to get me with a clear conscience. I have talked about this history because of the changes and these are the reasons why I stood up and joined this so-called group, IFM.

This question still remain with us the indigenous people and I will tell you later when this question started to emerged from us the Guadalcanal people of this land. When we pose the question, they never understood that we were one of the major provinces and one of the largest ethnic groupings in our nation, including our land which is used more than any province for the advancement of this nation. We today ask you now to listen to us and answer our Bona Fide Demands before our next generation arises, for the sake of peace and unity in our nation. Politicians should now act and work generally with togetherness by now listening and addressing the issues affecting us, as we are one of the major ethnic groupings in our country. Think of peace as the goal of our country, as the millions of dollars injected into our country disappears tomorrow. We ask the politicians generally not to politicize this peace- building process for their own gain and fame. The Western political system damaged us so much when it controlled and used our lands and resources without proper consultation and fair agreement; they were enjoyed by the minority of few of the non-resource owners. We therefore ask humbly for the political respect and also change to satisfy the needs of the indigenous people of Guadalcanal: now, to our children, and our children’s children and forever. Politicians should now stop marginalizing the Guadalcanal people but start treating them fairly and honestly as citizens of this country. Give the children priority to enjoy their household goods before sharing the excess with the neighbors. It is very important here, my good people, we should feed the children in our own homes first before giving the surplus to our neighbors. That is why I came about with this purposely for us to take note and see it for ourselves – we have been trying find the root cause of the tension so I think we should look revisit our history.

Now I would like to go in brief into the ethnic unrest. The ethnic unrest between Malaita immigrants and the Guadalcanal militants began on the island of Guadalcanal in late 1998; a state of emergency was declared following a serious of killings and escalating

harassment. In June 1999, the IFM and the representatives of the provincial and national governments consented to a peace agreement which had been brokered by the former Prime Minister of Fiji, Sitiveni Rabuka. Soon after, the Prime Minister announced that there will be a review of the Constitution and the system of governance in the Solomon Islands. A group of multi-national peace monitors arrived in Honiara on Guadalcanal in October to oversee the handover of weapons by militants. The Prime Minister of the Parliament in year 2000, after being captured by the former Malaita Eagle Force group, was then replaced by another Prime Minister that was in year June 2000. At that time the Temotu [Provincial] Assembly wanted to break away from Solomon Islands; I believe this concept and ideology of adopting the state government or being independent does not only come from Guadalcanal people but I believe other provinces in the Solomons as well. It is evident if you look back into history. The unrest between the two rival militia groups, the former IFM and the MEF continued, however. The Australia-brokered peace deal was signed in October year 2000, paving way for elections in the following year. After the December 2001 elections, the leader of the People's Alliance Party (PAP) was nominated by the fellow Parliamentarians as a new Prime Minister, since the election ended in no overall majority for any single party; he was previously the deputy PM but had been dismissed in the month of August over allegations of misuse of funds. Throughout 2002 and 2003, lawlessness increased. In June 2003, the so-called PM was requested by Australia to fly to Canberra in the Australian Prime Minister's jet to discuss the International Facilitation Act, which was drawn up in the [Australia] National University in Canberra by a university professor, as part of the] fight against global terrorism as the result of the 2001 September 11 twin towers attack in New York. The Facilitation Act was drawn up by the Australians since they were scared of terrorist activities, seeing Solomon Islands as a haven for possible terrorist networks and attacks on Australians. The "International Facilitation Act" was not designed by any Solomon Islanders. So, for whose interest is this act for? The Australian-led peace-keeping force arrived in August with the task to keep law and order and to disarm the militants, as well as keeping Solomon Islands safe and clean from any terrorist activities, the organizations and the strategic base to attack Australia. So, to be more precise, Australia is here for its own security and safety. If you could look back into our

history, we have never had any contacts with terrorist cells or organizations; we neither associated with nor affiliated with any world terrorist organization.

However, we surrendered our arms and so, as former MEF members, because our aim was for peace and restoration to this nation. We the former Guadalcanal militants only were blamed for incurring this so-called ethnic unrest by impoverished journalists, lawyers, historians and politicians without proper investigation. The idea for our proper control of our land and resources started some decades ago in the public Solomon Islands political arena by our forefathers not by us. We were just caught along the way, and I will let you know when it actually started.

In September 1968, chiefs of Guadalcanal gathered together on the Weather Coast and requested the British High Commissioner of the Western Pacific for independence or for an autonomous state, but this was not granted. Our late leader Sethuel Kelly asked the newly formed independent government of 1978 in the first Parliament for some autonomy for our people but was turned down. In 1998, the Guadalcanal people again presented this same request to the Government, but it was turned down as well. In 1998, it was the grassroots that rose to ask for this autonomy. "People's Power" is the majority's power – it was the people who rose up, not only the Guadalcanal militants who stood up; the island of Guadalcanal was united, men, women, and children worked together for our majority power, simply for the same issue that was presented way back in 1968.

I would like to quote here Achebe Chinuwa, an African writer, on his experience as a journalist during the TRC process in South Africa, when he explicitly cited the failure to deal with the earlier injustice and sufferings that led to the later injustice and sufferings. The movement that causes you and I to sit here today for us to present our true and brief side of the story is exactly the same as what Mr. Chinuwa mentioned. Therefore, we believe that after this sitting, the gist of the indigenous people of Guadalcanal will be no doubt understood fully and generally by the respective authorities in power. We first humbly and gently asked the seventh Parliament in 1998 to address our issues, which are known as the bona fide demands, but they failed to address them accordingly; this then triggered us to close all investments in our province and the escalating of the crisis which resulted in the mass exodus of workers in those respective companies. Our movement and

struggle is not against any ethnic groupings in the Solomon Islands; rather, the long delay [in answering our] request for “Autonomy and Respect”,

We believed the only way for the Government to listen to our long- delayed grievances was we must close down all investments in our province. That eventuated during the course of the ethnic unrest – we closed two major investments on Guadalcanal, SIPL and the Ross Mining Company. We decided to close down these two companies because huge money was given to the Government [by these companies] but it had failed to address our issues while it was benefiting from our very own resources; it also applied to job opportunities. Two of these major developments were located on Guadalcanal but still our youths were jobless since priority went to other people, not us. We rose up only to see that our demands are being answered; we surely believed that our rising up with arms was of our own architecture and interest as ordinary citizens with no previous criminal records; but because of the Government’s stubbornness and ignorance, it caused us to behave in that manner. Our rising up during those days can be compared with the rising up of Nelson Mandela and ANC (African National Congress), though in a smaller scale; but is of the same literal struggle in some ways.

The large-scale of migration by other provinces to Guadalcanal also caused a lot of crimes against the indigenous people; this we see as a crime against humanity, innocent human beings, and we believe that this must also be stopped. The only way to stop or minimize crimes against our people is we must be granted some political autonomy to care for our own people. We feel and believe that the national Government since 1968 does not fully respect the people of Guadalcanal, which is evident in our demands and the extraction of our resources and the brutal inhuman killing of our people which goes down through their throats without proper notification and analysis; and we have been regarded as second-class citizens in our own land, Today I want to make it clear and briefly that it is not we the former combatants of Guadalcanal who started this so-called ethnic unrest. It was the national Government and its present Westminster system that caused us to arise and carry arms in fighting for our rights and respect as one of the major ethnic groups and resource owners of this country. Our stand for respect of our people and land proves that we are not mere criminals as termed by some politicians [and that we were fighting for] the fair distribution of our wealth and resources. Now if any criminal activity arises on the

outskirts, the Government will blame it on us. We are genuine citizens who longed for true justice and the fair distribution of our wealth and resources; therefore, it is genuine to say that the deaths inflicted in this so-called unrest can be indirectly blamed on the national leaders of this nation, for their failures and ignorance and stubbornness in not addressing quickly the issues of the indigenous people of Guadalcanal for the last three decades. Malaita and Guadalcanal combatants were only caught up in the national leaders' cycle of booby-traps, which were planted on Guadalcanal many years back; we are tangled and caught up in the politicians' booby-traps which were planted since 1968. So we ask the national Government to be honest enough to come forward to the public and announce the white collar crimes committed against the people of Guadalcanal and Malaita and including other provinces.

Now I want to make it clear the instigator of this crisis was not we the Guale militants and the indigenous people but the minority national leaders of this nation, who got the power in their hands and tossed it the way it suited them, ignoring our cries and the sentiments for the last 30 years. This we see as an act of treason committed by the national Government itself against our citizens. Britain and Australia are also to be blamed for laying the foundation which triggered this so-called ethnic unrest, because of their lack of understanding of our cultural backgrounds and our Melanesian tribal structures and our ways of life. I believe according to history, it will be much clear to everyone, otherwise we will be pointing fingers at each other endlessly.

Now I will go in briefly on the peace agreements signed. Some inclusive peace negotiations were held on the Australian Navy ship, HMSS *Tobruk* in July 2000 and the NZ Navy ship HMSS *Tekaha* on the 25th and 27th on August 2000. Further talks were held on September on board HMSS *Tekaha* paving and proposing a peace talk in Australia. About 143 people attended the peace talks; there were approximately equal numbers of MEF, Joint Paramilitary Force, IFM and Government delegates. Australia imposed an undecidedly non-Melanesian deadline of three days for the peace talks to be completed. I called this "negotiation suicide", since we were only given three days. We surely believe Australia had a different agenda behind our problem which now come to light with her invading force of soldiers, police, advisors, investors and diplomats ravaging our nation now. The TPA asked the Parliament to pass an umbrella Amnesty Act, once all weapons

and ammunition were surrendered within 30 days under the supervision of the International Peace Monitoring Team and local peace-monitoring councils

The Amnesty Act was passed on the 18th of December 2000 and was assented to on the 9th of February 2001. This amnesty was supposed to give immunity on both sides of the conflict for all the so-called human violation and injustices during the course of the ethnic unrest from January 1998 to December 2001. However, this was not tolerated; most ex-combatants from both sides who upheld the TPA were later arrested by RAMSI, the Australian-led invasion force, and were later thrown into jail. We do not know why, because the so called Amnesty Act that we know of had become conditional, in contrast to the first umbrella amnesty. A citizen who upholds the peace accord was thrown in jail. And is this the process we should follow. The national leaders who were the legislators of the laws of this nation are the ones who broke the TPA, because they did not address many of the issues agreed upon in this Peace accord; all the peace agreements have not been implemented until now. However, the leaders who failed to uphold this peace accord should be investigated and thrown into jail too, simply for breaking an act passed by the Parliament of Solomon Islands. Moreover, Australia should not come and mix around with the Amnesty Act since it belongs to us Solomon Islanders; this is the very act and agreement that brokered peace and harmony to our nation not the millions of dollars from the “boomerang aid”.

The TPA was greeted by joy and jubilation in Honiara and around the country as combatants from both sides left their bunkers and walked across the lines to shake hands and hug each other, crack jokes. This shocked the world as such episodes never happen in any part of the world in our modern-day recorded history of any conflict. This Melanesian ways of solving problems shows our identities and cultural ties to one another. We the former IFM never broke the TPA, so the arrest and the chaining of our comrades we see as a grave mistake and the continuation of harassment by the state against the indigenous people of Guadalcanal. If the TPA and the Marau Peace Agreement are not honored, then tell me where are we now, or what am I doing here speaking in front of you all. To be judicious, those that do not honor these agreements and the acts of Parliament are the ones that should be arrested and thrown into jail – some of the national leaders who continue to jeopardize and criticize this Agreement, where were you in the past? We believe the

Australian government played a major role in rejecting the Amnesty Act. Whatever, their agendas or interest in this sovereign nation, it has manipulated many of our leaders to dishonor the agreement and the Amnesty Act, so that the truth may be buried forever.

The truth in our long journey for peace, we believe, is hindered by the Australian region in order to mastermind all our local and national and international affairs, to uproot our resources and to make us poorer and depending on aid donating during all the days of our existence. You come and ask us for peace and we honor the agreement and I think it is best for us to come back and ask those who are dishonest, we do not want to play awkward legal or not legal [means to] find out who broke the peace agreement. It was the state who did not fulfill the promises according to the Agreement since she was influenced by her foreign masters. No rehabilitation was given to ex- militants – this led some to commit crimes and be involved in crimes after the TPA because the agreements in the TPA were not implemented. So the state is responsible for breaking this agreement and they should be investigated and brought before justice; our *bona fide* demands were never addressed. WHY?! Really, if the TPA is a fake agreement and a draft against the genuine peace makers and seekers on both sides of the factions, then the state and Australia must apologize to the militants who wholeheartedly work to end this conflict, and afterwards worked tirelessly to bring back law and order to this political conspiracy fabricated by the State

We believe our national leaders are the true obstacles of peace in our nation because they listen and are manipulated by their Australian masters, basically for Australian's interest in the region. Peace, we believe, should not be prolonged, that is our belief. Ten years is too much for us to work for peace; we haven't achieved any meaningful reconciliation after this period; so far the so-called negotiations for reconciliations are still currently going underway. The peace we believe in should not be prolonged and delayed but should be conducted amongst the right people; those involved should be the ones to come together and reconcile, not the government. Politicians are not involved in the issues; when there is reconciliation, it is something between victims and perpetrators, not leaders.

Once again we plea, please release the ex-militants of Guadalcanal, Malaita and Marau unconditionally. Stop all arrest of any ex-combatants for the sake of peace, reconciliation,

restoration and unity of our nation. I would like to go briefly inside the Guadalcanal Bona Fide Demands not introduced in 1998 to 2000, over the recent uprising by Guale youths and grassroots indigenous people of Guadalcanal; nor it is an inside request by few people only; it is the collective feeling and grievances of every Guadalcanal person..

This Bona Fide Demands is a public property of the indigenous people of Guadalcanal, calling on the national leaders to address the indigenous people of Guadalcanal who do not hide their dissatisfaction with the present system of governance. That is why we have called call for the change and the reform of the system for three decades now. The national Government and other provincial leaders should understand and recognize the burdens we have carried for the past 30 years or more; these burdens were imposed on our people and land by the national Government and other provincial ethnic groups in our own home and land; [it] is unbearable and needs to be lightened; we cannot carry these burdens on for another mile, so please lets share it; can we share the burdens of our Bona Fide Demands. We want to share it with other provinces – we want a change of investment agreements concerning our resources so that we and our children may enjoy the fruit of our land. We have never benefited from CDC Oil Palm plantation and the Australian Ross mining company at Gold Ridge. We stand watched as millions of dollars were extracted from our lands into the hands of the very rich foreigners; and the ashes were thrown to us as if we have never owned these resources.

I think enough of what happened when the tension came about. The indigenous demand of the Guadalcanal people can be back dated as far as September 1968 or even couple of decades back. I believe I have gone through it already earlier. The demand is not new – it is dated way back in 1968 and it raises a lot of questions, being a Guadalcanal person, why the Government failed to address our demands. I believe this is one of the major reasons why we joined in with the militants activities. As dated way back, according to history, our Guadalcanal leaders held consecutive meetings over this same issue, the Bona Fide Demands but it was never addressed by the so- called responsible bodies concerned.

The Chairman of the TRC, with my brief history, I hope I have brought up several vital points that will make things clear to about the whole phenomenon and I hope the Government of this nation will also identify the root cause of the tension; otherwise, we

will be pointing fingers at each other endlessly. With this, Mr. Chairman and Commissioners, I will conclude by saying these are the reasons which made up and built into the ethnic unrest. I would like to apologize for what ever happened during the height of the tension and ask for your forgiveness – please forgive me. Even up until today, I am still questioning myself on why I was involved in the ethnic tension; it is a big question, which I cannot answer completely. However, I believe the brief history which I have shared with you earlier will give my answer on why I joined in with the tension. With these few remarks, may God bless Solomon Islands. Thank you.

11. MALAITA EX-COMBATANTS

Buma village, West Kwara'ae, Malaita, 2-3 May 2011

Mr. Robert Madeo' story:

Thank you very much, Chairman, Commissioners of the TRC, officials and the Solomon Islands public. I am very happy this morning to sit down at the front to share what I thought was proper and right for the country while we are still looking for the causes of the ethnic tension which we went through. Thank you, Chairman for inviting me.

Yes, as I said earlier on, I was one of the serving officers of the Royal Solomon Island Police Force (RSIPF) during the time of the social unrest which we could say were the darkest moments of our time. I am happy to come and share part of my story. My heart is for the country and that's why you see me here today. Yes, Mr. Chairman, I was a long time serving officer of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force. I was in Honiara that time and the situation affected me. When I looked back since 1998 and onwards I want to say to the country that this problem or situation where we went through was not caused by our brothers from Guadalcanal or Malaita or whoever as you might think. We blamed the leaders or the Government of that time. From 1998 I could see the Government was in a bad state. Today too I would like to commend the former Commissioner of Police, Mr. Frank Short who served as the Commissioner of Police at that time. Mr. Frank Short was trying his very best to address or combat the uprising so that it could not escalate to what it has been. Therefore, Mr. Frank Short, I congratulate you. As you all know, the only security in the country is the police force. I for one I saw during those times it was slack; it was slack because it started at the top. It affected the Executive at that time and it put the police work in an awkward situation.

Mr. Chairman, soon after Mr. Frank Short left, that was late in 1999, he did not leave because he wanted to go but he was forced to leave. He was forced to leave not by any militants or whatsoever but forced by leaders of this country, the Government at that time. I believe his departure paved the way for the leaders to full fill their own agenda. That's why the country should know that I was also a victim of that situation. I was a loyal and dedicated officer and I signed the Oaths of Allegiance which a policeman made and trusted by, until I finished from the police force. This is why I want to say to the country, it's not

the former militants, GRA and MEF, that caused the crisis; it's not us that caused this. It was the Government, our leaders; don't look too far, just look near you and admit it. As we see today and as victims of the situation at that time.

Mr. Chairman, I also share with other brothers, and like me too, today they are still at Rove Prison. It is not because of our actions but the actions of the leaders of the country. Solomon Island is one nation and that which happened within the police force during 1999 after Frank Short left caused a lot of division within the police force. If you are policeman from Malaita, then you from Malaita; and if you are from Guadalcanal, you are from Guadalcanal, and so other provinces. This caused a division within the Force and there were three groups, one was an ethnic group, Malaita and Guadalcanal police officers; the second group was neutral officers from other provinces and the third group was the coward police officers. We used to live as police officers at that time. We could have stopped the crisis at that time. I was also surprised some of those police officers were never charged or put behind bars or disciplined.

As we all know, the situation at that time was very tough and dangerous and I don't know how to express it, as I was there and I personally witnessed it. The situation was out of control. Law and order was at a halt. I would like to say thank you to the loyal police officers, even if you are already retired or finished and just staying at home. I am proud of you being loyal police officers. We abided by our police oaths until we finished. The Government should also look at this for any recognition to be given to them. Some of them served in the Force for more than 20 years. The situation which made everyone suffer: this is what I would like to share and I ask the Government of the day to make a good and firm decision to achieve peace and reconciliation. Set some sort of process which will fit in with our culture and the norms of our country, Solomon Islands. The most important thing is for us to be rehabilitated. We need to reconcile for the good of the people of Solomon Islands. At this time I would like the people of Solomon Islands, communities, individuals, old man, old woman and children where you are, you may in village or elsewhere, I want to say sorry that the situation caused me to fall inside. I also fell inside and maybe I did something which made you not feel happy. I ask you to forgive me. Let's make Solomon Islands a happy nation as before to live in. Mr. Chairman, that's my story. May God bless Solomon Islands. Thank you very much.

Mr. James Kili's story:

Thank you, Chairman, Commissioners, Staff of TRC, Honorable Minister, the Permanent Secretary, Malaita Premier, all people of Malaita and Solomon Islands. Yes, the introduction was said by the Chairman. I was a former police officer. I was in the Force from 1998 to 2007. My story is like this: basically, the people who told us the story spoiled the country and brought it down to its knees. The real fact was it was all politics. Since 1998, if I can remember, the Prime Minister at that time asked for assistance from Australia to come and help this nation. That country said that it's your internal matter. So we were left with our bosses. What I did, I tried to inform the former Commissioner of Police Frank Short at that time to search for assistance. It also affected our senior officers; there were too many *wantok* systems and other things going on. I took my oath of allegiance when I was recruited and kept to my oath and executed my work as a police officer at that time.

In 1999 the tension started to escalate. I, for one, that time, I was posted in almost every place in the Solomon Islands because I was in the Operational Section. I had been everywhere in the Solomon Islands, from the border, Gold Ridge, Tambea; I was kicked around just like a ball. Most of those of the officers that time should be charged with "Act of Cowardice", As far as we could remember at that time, those of who took our oaths had a very hard time. I could also remember that some of our officers were shot while on duties by our brothers on the Weather Coast. I am sorry to say this. We went as far as [there] in 2000 and then we came in to help because there was no help. We were forced into the situation at the time so we joined in that group with all our *wantoks*. The situation was that the Malaitan police officers were forced in that situation, which was hard to avoid. So at that time, people took us wrong, and they called us militants or rebels. As far as we were concerned, we were police officers but we were forced into the situation and we had to continue to work as police officers.

This went on and we went to Townsville to sign the Townsville Peace Agreement. We came back and the Amnesty Bill was passed but might not yet be applicable because some of the militants are still behind bars at Rove Prison. Some of them were victims too but were thrown in prison. I would like the TRC to seriously look at the amnesty. This law

was passed by Parliament and gazetted, but some of our brothers are still behind bars until today.

Now we have to ask, what caused the tension? The reason is very simple. Our leaders who at that time were in the Government before 1998 caused the ethnic tension. It was for power, simple as that. Also the Bona Fide Demands of our brothers from Guadalcanal. They forwarded to the Government their Bona Fide Demands since 1988 but they fell on deaf years. The Government did not listen. I am sorry but I have a heart for my brothers from Guadalcanal for that one. That was the cause, and power is for power, it's political power. We can see it happening, like political lobbying; these are some of the things that are happening today. These are the things that caused what had happened during the ethnic tension. Some of them are still behind bars; they are only victims, the brothers in the Prison, they were only players. The real people behind these were the politicians at that time.

I just put forward my recommendations. It is more than ten years now, after the signing of the TPA. I believe there should be rehabilitation. The responsible Ministry should address our rehabilitation program. I did not want to come to attend this public hearing program but I have a heart for the nation, to come say the cause and my involvement in the ethnic tension. The answers are there, the political power. I would also recommend if the Government could pass a law, a very hard law for those leaders, that kind that they should be charged for it, just like some of them had served in prison and had come out. There should be a law for the leaders so that they could be more careful in their decisions. As it we look at it now, we the ex-militants have been blamed for bringing down our country. Our brothers from Guadalcanal and Malaita were only victims. The leaders at that time were to be blamed. We have facts with us and we could produce these facts. These are legal documents. We could give these to the TRC so that you could recommend these to the Government so that next time we don't have to go through the same thing.

I must say sorry that ethnic tension took place. I would like to say to the former police officers that at the moment you are disciplined and I was once a disciplined officer too, until the ethnic tension; then I was a victim and I was dismissed. I was a very active officer and along with the others until we were affected and dismissed. I would like if the Police

Force could reintroduce the United Kingdom police system. I would like the TRC to recommend to go back into the British system of policing, to adopt the UK System. That should be the system that the Solomons should follow. If we adopt other systems from other countries, it will not work. Some of those officers who were with the MEF went back into the Force; some of them were also dismissed. With me, I am sorry to say that they were dedicated officers during that time. I think my story will end there and I would like to say to the nation, Solomon Islands, whatever I did that time, I would like to say sorry and ask you to forgive me. I believe that the true Love of Jesus that will set us free from our differences. I thank you, Commissioners of the TRC.

I would like the Government to extend the timeframe of the Commission. I think you need more time to work on this program. The period of one year is not enough. I think if it is extended to January you might have enough time. Once again, I would like to say sorry for whatever I did wrong to this nation. I must say sorry and ask you to forgive me as well. May God's blessing continue to serve our country and I will continue to assist in whatever way I can after my past mistakes. Once again, Chairman and Commissioners, thank you very much for this opportunity to share my story. May God Bless you.

Mr. Andrew Fioga's story:

Chairman, Deputy Chairperson, Commissioners, Honorable Ministers, Honorable Premier of Malaita Province, officials, people of Malaita, distinguished guests, church leaders, people of Solomon Islands, TRC Staff, ladies and gentlemen:

Thank you so much to give me this great opportunity to share what the country had experienced during the darkest hours from 1998 to 2003 after the TPA was signed. At that time I was employed by RSIPF. During 1998, originally I was from Malaita and settled on Guadalcanal. My family left Malaita in 1952 because of the Gospel. My father was working for the South Seas Evangelical Church. We settled on Guadalcanal and I was born on Guadalcanal. We lived on Guadalcanal and I regarded Guadalcanal as my home. My livelihood and my future was on Guadalcanal. Somehow in 1998 we heard rumors come around that something was going to happen. We thought everything was going to be okay because we did not have any conflict with anybody. The people whom we lived with were just like us too. Our family also served in the ministry and also participated with us in the

local churches with our brothers and sisters on Guadalcanal too. I thought it would turn out that they would look on the other side as we were all Christians.

When the militants came they were not people from the same place but they were from areas around Guadalcanal. They came and harassed us. When they did this to us, I called for RSIPF assistance and, in fact, they came. Later on we received advice that we had to evacuate from the place. We came down to town; we were expecting the authorities to provide what we needed and there was not enough food. So when my dad saw this, he said he would go back to get food from our gardens because we had enough gardens of potatoes and cassava. So he went to the garden and he was caught by these militants. He did not turn up that afternoon. So I went up to search for him, expecting to find his dead body. I came and went to the Guadalcanal Provincial Police and talked with the PPC there, if he could assist me to find out where my dad was. No matter what I tried to do, it was unsuccessful; they said to me, "Oh, it's a bit hard for us to do that." These people whom I talked with were from Guadalcanal. I asked if they could assist me several times. Some people from Guadalcanal came and said to me; "Andrew we saw your daddy; he was blind folded and taken away."

When I heard this, I said; "In that case, I will go and look for my father." If those people had the access to go but could not go, why waste my time. In frustration, I said to myself, I will go up to my dad. From that situation, I was dragged on and the faith I had at that time put me aside that I should take up revenge. Whatever the situation, I sought more assistance, how I would get to my dad. Then I received information that my dad was at that location. I was trying to work out how I would get to that location. At that time, it was getting hard and I could not go any more because there were roadblocks everywhere, bridges had been blocked, no vehicles could pass through. I just wondered what would happen if I could get the assistance of the RSIPF but nothing happened as well. With the RSIPF, division also came up; people like Frank Short had to leave. Those who were in charge thought about the law, they thought about the situation but nothing much could be done. I started to enquire more about my dad and if he was still alive and if there was a chance in the whole world if I could go and release him. The next feedback I received was that my dad was tortured. The next thing I received from witnesses was my dad was chopped up; when he was to die they said to him, "Old man, you pray for yourself." What

my dad said was, “Don’t do that to me, just kill me straightaway.” They continued to torture him and eventually they split him in half. When they split him in half and threw him in the hole, his heart was still beating. When I heard all these stories about my dad, I could not stand it but I had to pick up arms and I became a militant.

When my dad died up until today, I have not seen any sign of my dad. The only way to see my dad was to make peace, to settle down and get things done. During that time, we eventually said yes, we had to go and sign the Townsville Peace Agreement. We thought we were having amnesty for what had happened. Our heart and mind thought we would have a selection, what we did was not proper. We cannot go on like this, are we going to fight until everything is destroyed? No, but thank God for the churches; it was through their prayers which brought us together to the TPA. When we came up with this it was the spirit and the heart of the militants that we would like to see peace prevail once again in the nation. When the TPA was signed, it was granted to us that amnesty would be given on the condition that arms would be surrendered. We understand that the amnesty was gazetted. There were signatories in support to that; yes, the militants were granted amnesty if you surrendered your weapons.

I have a copy of the TPA that I would like to give you. They were leaders of this country; they were representatives of the Queen. They were Honorable Ministers of the Crown, Attorney General, Commissioners, and Honorable provincial Members, head of SICA, permanent secretaries, and directors from Government agencies, all provincial governments and the warring parties. This was an Agreement which became something like a Constitution of the land; all our hopes were there. Somehow after the TPA, what expected there did not eventuate. We thought amnesty was granted to us; because of that Agreement, all of us signed. We signed this because we thought we were going to be granted amnesty. We fulfilled all those conditions that we were required under the TPA. When the intervention came in, this did not work; we thought this was the Constitution of the land. These were gazetted Acts of the Parliament but they were ignored by the intervention force. This landed us behind bars. When we were behind bars, we tried our best to come out. Why did we have to sign and yet we are put behind bars; where is amnesty? Our rights have been deprived.

We saw there was injustice; our right to appeal was not there, and usually it should be after three months. Some of us had to wait for more than two years before our High Court Case was held. Nothing happened until I made a submission to the Registrar of the High Court, my lawyer's letter to review our rights. After our submission to the High Court, we were accepted to make our appeal. Actually, we came to our appeal we made it; we came out from behind bars. Our question is, "Why did the amnesty not apply?" We still have outstanding cases. One of the cases we were charged with was an incident which happened in 2000. We appeared in the High Court too, it was heard 25 March 2005. When the High Court heard that case, amnesty was granted.

I would like to ask a question, why was amnesty granted to this case? What happened to all the other cases that caused us to be behind bars? Last year I went to the High Court and look for that case to present the ruling of that case to the TRC but it was removed from the file. . It was no longer in the file and more seriously when I checked the data with PINA [PacLII?], it was not registered. My question to the TRC, can you look into this; this is a High Court of the country. When things were done, amnesty was given, why was it hidden? As a signatory to the TPA, I see this as injustice. It is corruption in there, justice for as a right is no longer there. I complained to my lawyer the Public Solicitor's office. I can't say anything, I am an only employee. What she said to me was, "I am leaving soon." Is that because of that case which I won? She said, "Well, you can see for yourself. I am going back because my salary was ceased." Those lawyers who represented us and we won our cases were sent back. They were sent back because they did something for justice; this does not make sense to me. We have two justice systems in the country and one of them is killing us for our rights. I am asking the TRC with the Government to look at and investigate the Intervention Force that is here to assist us. This is very serious; the Constitution of the land is there. I believe, or we believe if we uphold our Constitution, I think Solomon Islands will become a better country.

I would like to thank the TRC for paving the way for peace and reconciliation. I know there are outstanding issues we have. I believe these will have to be reviewed. When I look at this one, my own war is not over yet. I am still fighting. My talk will finish when I receive justice. If not, be careful or something serious is going to happen. They took their own stand, as they saw no justice in the nation. They see our leaders to be influenced by

foreigners. Chairman, Sir, I won't hold you too long. These are my humble requests, to look into our justice system. There are terms and conditions where the Government has to implement. I will give a summary of recommendations, a submission to be implemented in respect of the people of Malaita. And I would like the TRC to think of a way that we can see a better a Solomon Islands, with hope. In conclusion I would like to convey my sincere thanks to our priests, our mothers and our wives, for their prayers. But before I finish, there is a Scripture I would like to tell from II Chronicles 7:14: "If we humble ourselves and seek his face, turn from our sins, God will forgive our sins and heal the land." I see promise; our God is God and he never dies. Chairman, Commissioners, we need to sort this out. We need the truth and I believe this nation needs our soul; it tried hard with the militants to see this nation healed. We saw mistakes that we through God's grace. Chairman, Commissioners, Honorable Ministers, Solomon Islands, that's all I can say. May God bless. Thank you.

Pastor Johnson Apeo's story:

Thank you, Chairman, Commissioners, Premier of Malaita Province and media representatives. I am so happy to come up in this program where I speak out. I would like to say thank you to the TRC for this venue where we could come out. Since ten years ago when peace was signed, we did not know where to voice our feelings and our experiences. We were frightened of the TRC for a start; we did not want accept our coming to here due to reasons that we did not have confidence in them. During these ten years, we heard through radio voices from civilians who were harassed and tortured or mistreated by the former militants. The way the information was put on the air really put us down. I could not defend it but that was how the picture came out.

I would like to talk on behalf of the Marau ex-militants where three of us are present here to participate in this particular hearing. I am very happy to come and share with our other colleagues who had already shared their experiences. I am one of the civilians who lived in Marau; Marau is situated 50 miles from the capital Honiara, east towards Makira and it is part of Guadalcanal. The population is about 4,000-5,000 people. I am not up-to-date with the recent census but we are between those numbers. We live on a shore which is nice and the most beautiful place in Guadalcanal. If you have been there before, you could see, but

if you have not been there, you are welcome to take a trip to come and visit the place. It is an economic area of Guadalcanal. The Marau people lived in there about 300-400 years ago, now it is 500 years; it was Marau people who greeted the explorer Alvaro de Mendana when he arrived on Guadalcanal. We regarded ourselves people from Guadalcanal. We could not believe what had happened. In 1998 we heard rumors that went around, that Guadalcanal people were going to fight the Malaitans. I did not believe that story because Guadalcanal people are very good people. They are very gentle people; you talk to them they will not answer you back; they are so kind and very caring too. No wonder they gave lands to Malaitans, they are very good people and I could not believe that the Guadalcanal people could raise arms against the Malaitans. It was unbelievable to me. Not until 1999, when I started to see clear movements of the militants around and especially in the Marau area.

I was responsible for the congregation as a pastor and I watched criminal activities move here and there; looting had taken place, harassments had taken place and rape cases were also taking place. Anyone in his right senses just could not stand and just watch. I could not think about anything because my father is a pure Guadalcanal man and my mother is quarter-Malaita and because of all these I did not think they would raise anything against us. As time went on things went out of what we expected. Those half Malaitans and Guadalcanal who live there started to be harassed as well. It happened that one time one my uncle was stabbed on the shoulder with a screw driver. Due to the stabbing of his shoulder, he was just about to die. He was the captain of Hilda Kari's boat which was called *Akolova*. From that I could not believe with my ears, from that incident, it gave me confirmation that we were no longer safe. It was a sad thing to see the police officers at Manekaraku who were there and had some arms from the police where they looked after the station, begin to withdraw from the station and to join the militants or gave arms to the militants. We felt as if we had no protection. In town it was still okay because if you requested the assistance of the police they would still be there today; but for Marau, it would be two or three days, otherwise nothing at all.

As I watched these happenings, the people from Marau were finding their way out, either they went to Honiara or paddled across to Malaita to save their own lives. Mr. Chairman, it was not easy, talking about it sounds light but during the time when it happened you could

not swallow your spit, it was tough. Especially women and children, everybody tried any means of help, any way. The only legal body people trusted was the police where they were at the station. Every police officer withdrew and either went back to Honiara or joined the militants. I took my first trip from Marau to Honiara to get assistance from the police. When I got to Honiara, the first place I went was to Rove Police Headquarters to approach the Police Commissioner at that time and I asked him, please can you give us help? If you cannot give us your men to give us protection, please allow me and my four boys to come under community policing, so that we may swear under oaths so that we may have legal right, have arms in hands to protect our people. The Police Commissioner said that's a good idea he will think about it, and so we waited and waited for three months. It took him about three months to think about it. Within that span of time, the militants called into Marau communities and began to burn down houses and continued to destroy properties and so forth. I had no choice as I waited and there was no response. I knew my people were at the point of death. I tell you that story because that was why I was involved. If there is a law in the country that I broke, it is this law that I made my life to save my people. I was not a militant anyway; I was a civilian and a victim, but because police could not give a hand and the Government could give protection, I have taken myself, as someone you know to be a militant, and take then front line to save my communities.

After awhile, the police gave the right to six lead men – PFF, police officers, and one of them has just given his story, James Kili and others joined me to protect our people. During that time, there were criminal elements apart from the GRA. There was no Malaita Eagle Force or Marau Eagle Force. That time only the police were the legal body to uphold law and order in the country. I came to the right place, the right body who were the legal body to protect law in this country. They gave me four men so I saw this as a police operation, so I had the full confidence to take them to Marau. I was happy with that one. After we came from that operation, and then there was another operation, by then the people started to move out to find somewhere to go and hide. We tried to do something for ourselves. If people saw us, that we could win this country, we had no choice. Until 7th February, the peace agreement was discussed, this was called MPA [Marau Peace Agreement]. The first was the Ceasefire Agreement and the arms were not given back as yet.

The signing of the Marau Peace Agreement was on 7th February 2001. Inside this peace agreement, Marau people believed they could not go out from Marau. We were born Guadalcanal and will always remain Guadalcanal people, although we speak a different dialect, language, Are 'Are language, and we adopt the Malaita custom where men are higher than the women. During the height of the tension, we were forced to leave our culture and custom and speak the Guadalcanal language. It was not possible, because we speak Marau language and adopt the Marau culture. Then we saw we lost our rights and there was no one to defend us. Seven of the Marau boys joined the GRA militants; they were on the way to Aola where their main base was but were captured by the police on their way to Aola to join the GRA. That time you had to choose where to go because the decision rested with yourself.

On 7th February 2001 [we signed] the MPA Agreement. While the MEF went to Townsville to sign the Peace Agreement we decided to hold back signing that TPA Agreement because Malaitans would come back to Malaita, but we would always remain in Guadalcanal. We would like to sign a different agreement which would help us to understand ourselves and the Guadalcanal people. Inside this Agreement we put forward three things: one of them is for Guadalcanal to give us a different constituency: a separate constituency for the Marau Are'Are-speaking people, before we could surrender our arms. We need peace. Why? Because since from every funding that came from the Government to the rural areas, Marau did not receive anything. There is discrimination amongst the people. They treat us Are'Are people like second-class people. That's how they treated us. I would like Guadalcanal could give us a separate constituency. We would like the Government to recognize our Peace Agreement so it could give amnesty because we still have two of our boys in prison.

The third point included in the Agreement is rehabilitation. Marau needs rehabilitation because since we left Marau, everything was destroyed and damaged and we have to start all over again. This Agreement was signed just like the Townsville Peace Agreement. The respected people signed the TPA but it was not honored. I would like the TRC to investigate why these Agreements were not honored. What went wrong? Are we pulled by the nose? I would like the TRC to investigate this one so that our country should be ruled by those who have the due right to rule our own country. We would also like the TRC to

look at a bill to make sure that the amnesty is guaranteed; we would like to see it work. Some of the boys from Malaita and Guadalcanal and Marau are still behind bars as yet.

When we talked about Marau having its different constituency, a body was formed for the Marau leaders to draw some drafts and hand them to the Truth and Reconciliation, Boundary, and Electoral Commissions. These were included and signed in the Agreement. When the Parliament met, they amended the Electoral Commission Bill. They amended these to bring in some other new constituencies. They talked about this but they told us that we did not get the number. We tried to compare with Renbel, Rennell and Bellona; we are the same and they gave it to them, why not us? By having a different constituency, we would like to step out from Guadalcanal. Geographically, Marau is part of Guadalcanal and we would like a different constituency just as everybody else. We will be contributing economically into the Guadalcanal Province, but they did not give it to us.

Recently, maybe it was the outgoing premier; they announced that Marau has been handed back to the Guadalcanal Province. I don't dispute this because we stay on Guadalcanal. When the Government gives financial assistance to the Guadalcanal province, we do not benefit from it. We did not enjoy as everybody else in other provinces and also we do not have a voice in the Parliament. We do not have a voice in the Provincial Assembly or even in the Parliament so we thought we were lost. There is no one to represent us. Those three things I mentioned, there will be reconciliation between Marau and Guadalcanal, Marau and the Province and Marau and the Government. If these cannot be addressed, I do not see any way possible reconciliation. If the Government cannot honor [the MPA but] because this was signed and to us it was a legal document, I would like TRC to investigate this. With all the stories that I shared with you today, I would like the Guadalcanal province to take these seriously, we did not ask it just for nothing but they gave us a legal paper.

With these few words I would like to apologize to everybody else who is watching if my 200 or 300 ex-militants at Marau spoiled anything of any people, whether Malaita, Guadalcanal or anywhere else. May I say a public apology to you and I would you like please to forgive us. Once again, I am sorry if we hurt you or destroyed or took the lives of any of your children. Anyone from Marau, if you are listening today, or anyone from Guadalcanal, that we hurt you: I would like to apologize on behalf of my ex-militants who

are not able to come with us today. Thank you Chairman, Commissioners, everyone who is listening. May God bless Solomon Islands. Thank you.

Mr. Moses Ako's story:

Good afternoon everyone. I would like to say to thank you to the Minister of the Crown, the Premier of Malaita Province, the Chairman and the Commissioners.

My story is going to be like this. When I was at Mt. Austin, the GRA militants burnt down my house. I came down to town and later I went back to take my children but at the same time the militants chased me with their guns. There were 30 militants who chased me with their guns at Mt. Austin. This made me involved with the ethnic tension. Also people of Malaita who were at Aruligo were chased out of their place. The people were also chased out, women and girls were raped and men and children were harassed, also one of my relatives was abducted at Tabaa. I also wanted to help in defending Honiara town. When we looked back to 1998, we expected the Government to defend Malaita but this did not happen. They did a lot of bad things to the people of Malaita. The Government did not retaliate to defend the people for more than one year six months. The Government was just watching what was going on, so we had to step in to defend our own people.

I would like to say that my brothers from Guadalcanal were not to be blamed for starting the ethnic tension and our boys also did not start the ethnic tension either. The Government was to blame for the ethnic tension. When there was call for the Government to defend Malaita. there was no response and that's why Malaitans had to take up arms to defend their own people. That was how I was involved inside. Thank you for your attention. I would like to say sorry to the people of the Solomon Islands, especially to our friends on Guadalcanal for what happened and I also need your forgiveness. Thank you.

Mr. Moses Suu's story:

I would like to say thank you to the Minister of the Crown and the Provincial Government and also the TRC Chairman and Commissioners and also people of Solomon Islands. Thank you for this time where I am privileged to come and share my story. This is a very important time for me to show out my heart with my contribution. First of all, I would like to say how I participated in the so-called MEF. Well, before I proceed on. I would like to

clarify myself in front of my good people as you watch in from the outside world. Most of us were just victims; thank you for this moment. Actually, we were here for so long with wounded hearts. Most of us ex-combatants have wounded hearts; I am sorry to say this, my good people of Solomon Islands. It was not our cause, it was not our cause, especially for me; I did not have any choice to be a militant. When I was born, I was not branded with the militant. I was a beloved son in my family. After all, I was defined as a criminal and militant. It [this hearing] has come to the right time; I will also highlight what had affected us, especially why we took part in the ethnic tension. We were affected just like others, so we took part in ethnic tension.

Most of us took part because we lost loved ones. We lost our dignity, for most of us; this is the reason why I took part. Once upon a time I lived only a normal life and I was working very hard. I was working very hard for my family's survival. The only way to keep my family surviving was, I had to work especially for us. We were chainsaw operators; I worked in the bush cutting timber. One evening, a group of men who were fully armed [came]. I did not know anything and immediately I was pointed at with the barrel of a gun. I did not experience this before and when I turned around I could see a gun. I thought I was going to die. That person ordered me to pack up my equipment and go home. After that I came home early and that's why I was involved in the ethnic tension.

Thank you for the chance that the TRC could seriously take steps to address our needs with the Government; this has been dragging on for a long time, especially promises from the Government to us in respect of the signing of projects for the main provinces, Guadalcanal and Malaita. It's almost ten years; since then nothing has happened I don't know what the process is; but our expectation is that something should be done by our Government. What I would like the Government to look at seriously is the past situation and to address it because of the demands of this country. The Government [must] look at them and address them quickly, because it has been long time, especially the major projects and the rehabilitation of the ex-combatants and also lasting peace for this country.

Mr. Jerry Futa's story:

Before I start, good afternoon Solomon Islands, Chairman, Commissioners, Honorable Minister of the Crown, Permanent Secretary, staff of the TRC, ladies and gentlemen:

My other cousin had already spoken out. We were brought up in the same area. When we talk about the issues of the ethnic tension, actually I did not see, but I went through it; it was a painful thing when I went through ethnic tension. I was an ordinary civilian and stayed at home and lived a normal life with my family, until 1999. We started to see strangers coming into our areas at Marau. Not very long after, a boat came to my village; actually I did not know what was going on. My dad was from Malaita, Kwaio and my mother was West Are'Are and we have been there so many years. I think we were the first type of people who were targeted by the GRA. So a boat came and my sister ran up to me and said that there's a canoe over there and it looked like a canoe belonging to the Guadalcanal men going around our area. When they came to the shore, the first person they asked for was me. I came to them and as I came I could see those homemade guns, and it was my first time to see those guns too. I just went and sat down and did not know what to do. The first thing they said to me was that I should not go anywhere, not to town or even around here but to remain at my village. I did not reply to them because they were armed. I stayed and then one day I went to Honiara and came back; somehow the information of my going to Honiara got to them. So they came to me and demanded that I should give them \$300 and a pig for compensation. "We will give you three days to look for these and if we come back and these requests are not available, you will be arrested and be taken to our camp." I did not know what to say, as my family lived in a small village. I called my family together and told them that it id not safe for us to stay in our village any more.

At that time, Hilda Kari's ship was serving that area Honiara-Marau-Honiara. I told my families, just take a few clothes and run way; any other properties or anything, just leave them behind, it is the only chance for us to go. If they came around the second time, there would something different that would take place. So I paddled to the ship and I told my uncle that he should come and pick us up in the morning. Our neighbours did not want us to go but we had to leave because we would be shot if we did not meet their demands. For our safety, we had to leave. We could not take much with us except beddings, baskets and other lighter things. Everything, including, our boats, engines, chainsaw and other valuable properties had to be left behind. We got on board I could see someone had a pistol with him. As we got into the ship and I saw this, I could not move to another place because I

was frightened. When we got to Honiara, we heard that the ethnic tension was getting worse in the Marau area; people did not know where to go and started running all over the place. They started to harass and rape females and demanded money and pigs, this went on for some time. As another brother earlier stated he had to call the police for assistance. Why I joined was because of the way the Marau people were treated was really bad; some children who ran away even urinated in their clothes, and for some of them, even their clothes fell down from their bodies and they just ran away naked. When I referred to such cases, then my life was disturbed and I questioned myself why did these people have to frighten the innocent women and children, older people and others?

My family came to town and we were put at Holy Cross Hall. There were also others at Holy Cross; there were people who used to live in the plantations who were also chased out and who were put at the Holy Cross Hall. There were Malaita people who were in the plantations due to colonial rule and also they were in the Holy Cross Hall. The Holy Cross Hall was fully packed so they started to move some of us to the Multipurpose Hall. Out of all these actions and criminal elements, that's why the militants started to fight. Before I joined, I was just like any ordinary civilian; I did not know about guns or how to use them. I wrote down some of the facts that I could not explain, so that I have to write them down. I will try to elaborate on them; what was going on at Marau during that time, until the signing of the Peace Agreement.

Marau was vulnerable to the escalating atrocities done by the Guadalcanal militants during the three year period of the ethnic tension. As a result, we experienced all of us losing a total of 18 villages, 71 family houses and other valuable properties, burnt down and destroyed. Our girls and women were raped and our people were harassed, tortured and money and pigs demanded from them as compensation at gunpoint. We didn't understand what these compensations were for. The Royal Solomon Islands Police Force was not there to protect us; officers manning the Marau Police Station fled because there were threats and overpowering by the Guadalcanal militants. We were defenseless and were at the mercy of the militants. During that time the Marau Council of Chiefs requested help from the Bart Ulufa'alu-led Government but help was not forthcoming. We were denied protection by the state as provided for under the national Constitution. The SIG attempted to resolve the crisis by peaceful negotiations with assistance of the Commonwealth Secretariat which sent

two envoys to Solomon Islands. In pursuit of request for peaceful resolution of the crisis, the SIG facilitated and secured the signing of the following agreements:

- Honiara Peace Accord, dated 25 June 1999;
- Panatina Agreement, 12 August 1999.
- The Marau Communiqué, 15 July 1999.
- The MOU between SIG and Guadalcanal Provincial Government, 13 June 1999.

All these peaceful attempts to resolve the crisis failed. Fortunately, after 5th June 2000, the Malaita Eagle and Joint Operation came to rescue 120 civilians held hostage by the Guadalcanal militants. All in all, it's a situation between life and death, We were forced into the conflict; men, young men and boys from all over Marau rallied together and fought side by side with our Maasina Brothers from Malaita to save hundreds of lives which might have been lost. Our men and women prayed under the ship of peace values. They were the darkest hours the people of Marau had ever experienced in our modern history.

On 2nd August 2000 the Ceasefire Agreement was signed by all parties and later on the Townsville Peace Agreement was signed on 15 October 2000, followed by the Marau Peace Agreement on 17 February 2000. These two Agreements were for restoration of peace and ethnic harmony in Solomon Islands; it is of great concern to us, after the signing of the Marau Peace Agreement, preliminary matters in the Marau Peace Agreement were never honored and implemented by successive Governments until now:

- Separate Constituency for Marau;
- Rehabilitation of former combatants;
- The Amnesty Act.

Separate Constituency for Marau: We, the people of Marau, need to have our own political representative in the highest decision-making body of the land. The Marau issues will be never be addressed if we don't have a political leader in the Parliament. So the Marau people need a constituency of our own as stipulated in the Marau Peace Agreement.

Amnesty Act 2000 and 2001, an Act of Parliament, granting amnesty or immunity in respect of criminal acts done. It has never been implemented or considered in the courts of Solomon Islands. Some of our former combatants on all sides were charged and convicted and are behind bars at the Rove Prison. They have suffered enough and the Government should pardon them through a Pardon or Forgiveness bill.

Rehabilitation: all former combatants have not been rehabilitated and have been denied our rehabilitation for the last ten years. Since the Townsville Peace Agreement and the Marau Peace Agreement, we have been given empty promises by successive Governments for the last ten years. I appeal to the Danny Philip-led Government to address the above issues seriously. If these issues will not be addressed, we will never achieve peace and reconciliation in our community, province and the nation as a whole. These issues will always be a stumbling block towards the road to real peace and reconciliation.

Now before I close, I would like to take this opportunity to say to all Solomon Islands people, any friends or brothers from Guadalcanal or Malaita. I am not sure whether Malaitans got cross with me. I would take this opportunity to say sorry in whatever I did that was wrong or at anytime I did some acts that were not right before anyone, especially in Honiara I just want to take this time to ask for your forgiveness to forgive me. As I have said, we did not initiate the system ourselves. As the system did not care about us at that time, so we had to jump in to save the lives of our people. I mean it's not of our own making; it's not of our own plan; it's the failure of the state, that it neglected so many issues; that was why it forced us into the ethnic crisis. So I ask for forgiveness from everyone; from those who know I have done them wrong during the years of the crisis. I ask forgiveness from them. Thank you.

Mr. Simon Anisi's story:

Before I begin my story, I would like to say thank you, Chairman, Commissioners, and the Premier of Malaita Province, Honorable Minister and Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Peace and Reconciliation, media and everybody. I will start my story like this: I was just as normal as everybody else. My brain, my thoughts and my mind are just normal. Something made me lose my normalcy and become a perpetrator or criminal. I got a job and later I lost my job. I lost my job because of what had happened during the ethnic

tension. I had relatives who stayed for many years in east and west Guadalcanal respectively. When the ethnic tension started in 1998 and onwards, my relatives started to run away from those places, like Aruligo, CDC area and other places. As you know, when families ran away with their children and especially with only the clothes they were wearing, it made us sorry. Their good houses were burnt and all their properties were destroyed. Even some of our relatives were killed and even we heard stories that Malaita people were killed and the women were raped. I could not stand to see my relatives and *wantoks* dying in front of my eyes. They also lost all their properties. Who was going to help them? They lost everything, like my two colleagues said, even if they were police officers, they could not do anything. It was a very difficult situation at that time. Who else would help during such a situation?

When I saw my relatives were being threatened, my normalcy began to change. Anybody at all, if somebody did such cruelty to your close relatives, men, women and children, you would have anger against them. So that caused me to retaliate and defend my people of Malaita. We heard that our brothers from IFM were going to conquer Honiara and chase all the Malaitans out. For those Malaitans living in town at that time, we had to defend our people from any atrocities. That was what led me to be involved in the ethnic tension. I had to stand and protect the people, women and children, so I had to go in for the people of Malaita. That's why I came and became involved in that group; and that was my involvement,

What I would like to say to the present Government is; we have to be careful, otherwise the same thing will happen again. Government, you are the responsible body that takes care of the people and you know and have the authority to go about national issues that will suit everybody in the country and won't cause any problem to our country Solomon Islands. I cannot speak longer but I just voice out why I was involved in the crisis. Before I conclude, I would like to say to the nation, the people of Solomon Islands, during those days whatever the boys and even myself did that hurt you and you did not agree with us, I would like to apologize and say sorry to the nation for what we committed during the ethnic tension. God bless Solomon Islands. Thank you.

Mr. David Samo's story:

Thank you, Chairman, Commissioners of the TRC, media, committee people, men, women and children who are here today for this very important hearing. I am not going to say too much but just want to share my involvement in the crisis. In 1998, I was in Honiara, then the ethnic tension sparked up; the people were harshly treated on the outskirts of Honiara, people were brutally killed. I personally witnessed some of the events that took place. When I visited the National Referral Hospital, I could see my *wantoks* being admitted due to wounds sustained from ethnic tension. When I saw these people, one thing that came into my mind was that, is there any security force to protect us the people of Malaita? The people of Malaita living outside of Honiara and people from other provinces were also affected and they all ran away and came to town. So I said to myself, I must do something to secure my people to do a protection service so that whatever came, we would be able to face it before any members of my family dies or anything like that. We continued to protect the people in and around Honiara during those darkest hours. We had to sacrifice ourselves to secure all Malaitans living in around Honiara. During that time, the late Bart Ulufa'alu forwarded a formal request to the Australian Government to come and intervene with what was going to happen and how it would destroy whole nation or it would cripple Solomon Islands. The Australian Government refused; they said it was "an internal matter" within our country. That was how Australia responded to the Solomon Islands Government.

The first time the Guadalcanal people submitted their Bona Fide Demands to the Government at that time, it was never addressed because of ignorance. If the Government of the day was not ignorant, if they had listened to the cries of the people of Guadalcanal, we would not have been on our knees. The people of Guadalcanal submitted their rightful claims but were not met because of ignorance; that's why those things happened. If the Government of the day took things seriously and considered them, I believe nothing would happen. Those were the real factors that caused the ethnic tension to happen. My people of Malaita were treated harshly; that's how I got myself involved in the ethnic tension, to sacrifice myself for my people, as well as for people from other islands. I am proud to be part of that; if we did not do any protective service during that time, I do not know how

many people we would bury in a mass grave or how many people we would bury in one day. My people did not come to say, you do this; no, I participated on my own. It was own decision that I joined the Group to protect the people of Honiara. If the Government took on board those people's submission instead of shelving it away, nothing would happen. When everything was its peak, then the Government requested for assistance and that's why we see the presence of RAMSI here in the country.

One more thing I would like to comment on here is the immunity given to RAMSI personnel. I am not comfortable with this; I fear this because when any RAMSI officer commits a crime in Solomon Islands, you think they will face justice – never; when they go back to their country, then they will face justice. To me, this is not correct. When you committed a crime in a country, you have to face the justice of that particular country. You have to go through the law of that country. There were lots of cases involving RAMSI, I would like the Immunity extended to RAMSI struck out, not because I hate RAMSI but because if they commit any crimes, they should face the law of the country, Solomon Islands.

Not until 2003 was I arrested by PPF Officers. I was taken to Rove Detention Center and I was in there for almost three and half years. The justice system is not straight. When we were in prison, RAMSI officers usually got cross with us. What have we done that made these AFP Officers got cross with me? I really experienced this when we were at Rove Prison behind the bars. When late Bart Ulufa'alu approached them, they said it was internal matter; why should it not happen that way? Anything to do with the law, we have our own law, we have our own Police Force. That's what I saw: our rights had been deprived, we had no choice.

I would like to go back to the Government. If the Government does not address the outstanding issues, all the issues that have been piling up and if they can deal with them bit by bit, they will be reduced to a manageable level. If they do not address those issues bit by bit, they will pile up and make people frustrated again [then another happening will take place in the near future. So I will appeal to the Government to seriously consider what we are trying to get across to them. I will call upon the TRC to take on board whatever we submit today. To me, I do not want to repeat the same thing again, what we would like to

do now is to get out of those things that brought this country down to its knees. The Government knew very well what caused all these things; they caused these things, not our brothers on Guadalcanal, not from Malaita or not any other part of Solomon Islands, but because of the typical high ranks. As I have mentioned earlier on, if they took these things into consideration at the first place nothing would happen. We would always be a peaceful Solomon Islands.

I will not talk so long but try to cover the areas I know about. I will bring you back to the prison; some of our brothers are still behind the bars. They are there not because they caused the tension, or they planned it; but [it was] planned by somebody whom we do not know. Something has to be done so that they can be released to see their families. Before I go out, I would like to say whatever actions and whatever I did to any brothers or sisters or any foreigners during the time of the ethnic tension that did not please your mind, I kindly ask you please forgive me. We were labeled that we brought the country to its knees. I don't think so. That is all I can say and thank you very much.

Mr. James Tatau's story:

I would like to give an account of my involvement with the group called the Malaita Eagle Force. First of all, I would like to say thanks to everyone who arranged this program for us the ex-militants to tell you our stories. First of all, my story is going to be like this, before I joined the Malaita Eagle Force. Some of us were just normal people; some of us were pastors, and some of us were just ordinary people who worked for ourselves to look after our own families. Then the Government caused the problem for the people of Guadalcanal. This hatred between Guadalcanal and Malaita caused this to happen. We went to see the Prime Minister at that time to request assistance from an outside Force to come and stop the people of Guadalcanal from what they were doing. What they said at the time was, "that's your problem, solve it yourself." So there was a negative response; I came and joined the Malaita Eagle Force. This was because of the people of Malaita; it was their cry and tears that formed up that group called the Malaita Eagle Force. Their blood was poured all over Guadalcanal soil; that's why we came and formed that group.

You heard that the Malaita Eagle Force landed on Guadalcanal and also you heard and knew what they did over the two years. We did this for security purposes of the town,

especially for our people of Malaita and other provinces. We did not know what was going on between the Government and the Guadalcanal people. Our main purpose in forming up the group was to secure the town, that's why you can still see the town today. As you could see, most of the big companies were destroyed, like Gold Ridge, SIPL, Foxwood; these companies were destroyed by the GRA. And because we blocked them not to come to town, that's why you are living comfortably in town up until today; if not, all of us could be at home or back in the villages. After we carried out what we did, then we came to the ceasefire, then we came to peace; the boys went to Townsville to sign the TPA and then they came back. We thought we were going to be covered under that TPA but we were all thrown behind bars. Some of us were remanded for five years, which is against the law of the country. Some of us were even told by RAMSI that we would rot in the prison. We kept on praying that if it's God's will we would be released from the prison. We came out from the prison and we knew that God's power was still with us. What I would like to say to the Government is that they have to be very careful, don't be hungry for power. Let one Government rule the country first; it will not be in our interest to see the Government run for two months and then another Government takes over. There is no one else to utilize; they will come back to us and use us, but we are tired now, we are tired of being thrown into prison. We are sick and tired of everything. I think that's the end of my story.

Before I stop, I would like the Government to address the rehabilitation package of the ex-militants. Some of our boys are still behind bars, and some of them are still in the bush. That's because of the amnesty; they told us lies and they threw us into prison. On the subject of rehabilitation, I appeal to the TRC to take it up with the Government before any lasting peace can be achieved in the country. I would like to apologize for anything that I have done wrong during the crisis I would ask you to forgive me. If you see me and you recognize that I pointed a gun at you, I would like to say sorry, because we were at war. That's all. Thank you.

Mr. Chris Maebiru's story:

Before I tell my story, I would like to say thank you, Chairman, Commissioners to allow me to share my experience during the ethnic tension. I was a good working man in town, Honiara; the tension which happened, I should not be involved in. As I saw it, it went

beyond the treatment which my people faced. I did not lose any properties; I worked only as an electrician in town. The year in which the tension happened was 1998. I was just walking along the street and then I heard that people had run away to town. I met some of my relatives and they told me that our people had been chased from Aruligo and as far as Aola. If you wish, you can go and check at the Multipurpose Hall. When I got to the Multipurpose Hall, I saw them there and they told me stories about what our brothers from Guadalcanal did to them. When I heard their stories, I got very cross indeed. I thought about my *kastom* from Malaita, that women could not be forced by other men to undress; relatives could kill those who did this in the past. The punishment for this in the past would be death penalty if committed by someone. Due to my frustration I got involved in the ethnic tension.

I came and joined up with the group which is everyone knows, the Malaita Eagle Force. During that time, for those of who were involved, we did not sleep properly; we had to look after the safety of the people in town, because that time, only a few people from Malaita had run away back to Malaita. But if you talk about Matariu, Kobito, Gilbert Camp, Koa Hill, and other places, those were Malaitans settlements. They did not run away from their properties. These were the people whom we thought of; that's why we tried to secure all the borders. That was my story, why I was involved with the ethnic tension to secure the Honiara town; we did not sleep properly, we left our respective families just to secure those places to help our policemen. That time the Police Force was slack and most of them ran away too; it could be they were frightened, so some of the remaining policemen from Malaita, we had work with them to look after this town. That's how I was involved.

Then it came to the time where the Government negotiated for the peace process. We were involved in this too; we talked about it and it got to the stage where they said that an intervention force was going to come. In my mind, even if they arrived, they would not do anything. Even if they told us that such-and-such a time you were going to lay down your arms, you would have to go back to Auki and surrender your arms, we would do that. After the arrival of RAMSI, the story was different. I was the first man to be arrested. I was remanded in custody for more than three-and-a-half years. So I said, what about the amnesty they promised us, what happened to it? I could not say anything; it's up to the

Government. I was punished for what I did. That was my experience which I went through and in which I ended up in prison.

I have nothing more to say and that was my involvement in the tension, to join with the group called the Malaita Eagle Force. The people of Solomon Islands might label me as one of the perpetrators. I was only doing security work and I did not have the heart to spoil anyone. Now I would like the Government, people of Solomons and whoever I caused anything wrong or even death or disaster at that time, I would like to apologize for what I have done and I would ask for your forgiveness. Thank you.

Mr. James Tarokabo's story:

Before I tell my story, I would like to thank TRC and others who come to join with us. Why I joined the ethnic tension was because of my parents and my brother. I used to live at the border at Mount Austin. I was at the border when my parents and my brother came down. When they came down, they did not bring anything with them except their clothes. Their house was burnt down with all their belongings. So I joined up with the Malaita Eagle Force and we joined up with the para-military to secure the town, with road blocks at White River and Alligator Creek. After assisting the paramilitary, then we went to Townsville to sign the Peace Agreement. After the signing of the Peace Agreement, we came back to Honiara. On the arrival of RAMSI, they started to arrest some of us. I was put in prison, and my wife and my children, they pointed them with guns in South Malaita. I was taken to court and I won my court case and I was released. After I was released, I just remained at home and helped my family and I do not intend to be involved in anything. I think that's enough for me.

I would like someone to investigate the cause of the ethnic tension. If there was no cause of the ethnic tension with Guadalcanal, I think we would not fight. I think because the Government [had met] the Bona Fide Demands of Guadalcanal, we would not fight. They chased the people of Malaita out at Aruligo; even my cousin Harry, they cut his body at Visale; these were some of the reasons why we joined the fight. We ask you to investigate who really started the ethnic tension. It was true that we were arrested and put in the prison like the other brother who served three-and-a-half years, and myself, for two-and-a-half years. My request is to ask you to ask someone to investigate the root cause of the ethnic

tension. If there was no root cause of this fight, we would not be involved in the fight, but you could see in the TV during those times that all the ships were full and bound to Malaita.

When we defended the people of Malaita, they called us criminals. The Police Field Force was trying to defend the town but they found it hard so that's why we joined the fight, to defend Alligator Creek and White River to make sure those people could come in. If we came out from Honiara, there would be no town. For example, at Gold Ridge the Police Field Force ran away because there were only a few of them and they would not fight against a lot of people. So for us, we just kept the town so that they would not burn the town down. Just like the other brother has said, there were lots of people from Malaita and other provinces who settled behind Honiara. We just looked after the town until the arrival of RAMSI and then we were arrested. I think that's all I would like to say, but I would like to say sorry if I made you cross; and I would also like the people who made statements against me and I went into the prison and suffered for the two-and-a-half years, to come forward and shake hands with me. If happened that I would stay in prison for life time, it was you who caused that to happen to me and I would not be able to see my family. You are the ones who made those fabricated statements. I would like those people to come forward in front of me so that we can hold hands. That's my story.

Mr. John Makasi's story:

Before I start, I would like to say thank you, Chairman and Commissioners for giving me the chance to explain my involvement during the ethnic tension. Before I started, I was just a good man. In 1999 I was in Honiara. I heard that my uncle was killed at CDC 5 on Saturday 12th June, 1999. Because of this, I had to join my brothers to go together and I have a heart for my people of Malaita. The treatment they received was not fit for a human being; they raped the women, stripped them and tortured our people. So I had to join my brothers to go together at the height of the ethnic tension. I saw our people who ran away and were displaced, so we had to secure the town. We were only doing security work and we were victims ourselves, Mr. Chairman. Some of the people from Malaita came back home; the majority just stayed in town, that's why we had to fully secure the town. We

secured the town and we looked after our people from Malaita until the day where some of my brothers went to Townsville to sign the Peace Agreement

So when we came back, we thought that we now had peace with our brothers from Guadalcanal. After signing the TPA, for example, a man has a child and he promised him something to his child, he would not forget that promise and when you came, he was going to ask for what the father had promised. So it's the same, the Government had promised to rehabilitate us but we are still waiting for that. So it showed that the Government at that time told us a lot of lies. They told us a lot of lies; they were people who crooked [tricked] the Government at that time. So the Government at that time was liar, Mr. Chairman, people who were crooks, that was the impression of the Government at that time. Later the intervention came in; RAMSI came in, to restore law and order in Solomon Islands. We thought that the TPA signed in Townsville also covered amnesty and we thought we were on the safe side. Instead, we were put behind bars; they told lies to us that Peace Agreement was not true, that's why we were put behind bars. I know, Mr. Chairman, my name is John Makasi; I know you saw me in some issues of the *Solomon Star* and even you heard me through SIBC and One Nius, when they suspected that I shot Adam Dunning. But I did not commit that. They took and locked me up for several hours; I was stripped naked in front of them. Mr. Chairman, how the intervention force came, they did not come to do good to us but to kill us. They came to deprive us of our rights; their work was inhuman. Since that time up until now, I could not forget what they did to me. I am happy that I joined this program and thank you that I went through counseling before I came.

So Mr. Chairman, I ask you to consider whether the engagement of the intervention is okay or not. What they did to us was too much; we were not criminals, we were looking after the town at that time. So when they put us in the cell and the treatment we received from them was inhuman. They talked about human rights but our rights at that time were not respected. They did not respect us, Mr. Chairman. So I now ask you, Mr. Chairman and Commissioners, to try and look inside the Intervention. How did the intervention come into the Solomon Islands, how did the previous Government ask them to come in? How many Ministers of the Crown signed that intervention agreement to come to Solomon Islands? What I heard from the escort I travelled with, they came in; instead of giving promotions to those officers who went through those hard times. They put them behind bars

too. There was no right given to them. Mr. Chairman, would you look at that, please. There was a lot of corruption in the Government that time. Today we come here to testify and ask you, Chairman and Commissioners, to take note of that one. We would like you to work together with us on this one. That's my story on how I was involved in the Ethnic Tension. I would like to ask the whole nation, my community, my constituency to forgive me and I am sorry for what had happened. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Commissioners for the chance of sharing my story. Thank you very much.

Mr. Robert Spencer' story:

Thank you for this chance to voice out what's in my heart during the past 11 years. Thank you, Chairman and Commissioners of the TRC. Prior to the tension, I worked hard to look after my family. In 1998 the ethnic tension came up. Actually I did not want to be involved in the ethnic tension. The crisis started and, as I said, I did not have any intention to involve myself into the crisis, no. I had a wife and children to look after, until the same day when I walked from Kukum and I came back to Chinatown. I went in to the hospital and see what the problem was. I went and I was surprised to see that people were chopped up like pigs. I did not know what to do. The same morning, I received reports that two of my cousins who were looking after Placid Walekwate's farm were taken by the militants. Stories came later that they were killed and I don't know what other atrocities they did to them and still we don't know where they were buried. I went to the Commissioner of Police so that he could assign his PFF officers to accompany me to go down to Vura to try and locate their bodies; some of the officers came but there was no sign. The people at Vura did not even come to see us and ask why we went there; they just turned their backs from us. No mercy to us. We just wanted to get their bodies back for a decent burial. Up until today, we still don't know the location of their remains. So seeing that there was nobody to help us, we came back.

Then another day I went to town and when I got to the White River Bridge, I saw a three-ton truck full of people. I asked around to find out what had happened and the answer I received was those were Malaita people who were attacked by GRA on the west side. I was still there when the second and third trucks came up. I watched, there were people with scratch marks, torn bodies, women who had been raped, and indecently manhandled.

These were the ones who were on the truck. So I went back to the house and, as I said, I had no intention to take part in this crisis. As I went up the White River Road, I met with my wife and children coming down. I said to them, “What happened?” Our house was at Kogulai. For those people who live at White River would know that Kogulai is the water source which supplies water to most parts of Honiara city. “How come you are asking us to go back seeing that we are being chased out now.” We did not take anything with us, so I was only left with the clothes I was wearing at that time. I tried my best to get back to house at Kogulai. I found my way through the bush and when I looked at my house I did want to look at it twice. That very time and very hour I made up my decision, I think that it’s time to put a stop to this! Regardless of whether I am armed or not, it’s better for me, one man, to die than the whole of Malaita people to die. I imagined that if the GRA militants did that to my family, they could have done that to others too. So my anger just came up. So I went and tried to look for MEF so that I could join up with them. Not because I wanted to fight or not because I wanted to kill anyone but enough is enough, we had to put a stop at what had happened.

People from Malaita ran away back to their places up until when we signed the Peace Agreement. So we went to Townsville to sign the Peace Agreement. I was one of the signatories and they promised us that after 30 days, after the return of arms, your rehabilitation package will begin. Seeing my life was being promised by rehabilitation, I was happy then. I will have to kick start again, make a new start. We came and waited for the 30-days rehabilitation. We waited and up until now it’s almost 11 years of waiting and nothing has been done so far. Putting myself in mind, if it was that rehabilitation under amnesty, which we signed, gazetted and passed as a law of the country and included as part of the Constitution, why was it not implemented? We want to start back our lives from the rehabilitation being promised to us but so far nothing! Nothing has happened. Our lives are still empty, our names have been tarnished; they called us militants, they called ex-combatants, they called us criminals, they called traitors and so forth. All sorts of rubbish names. There was nothing the Government did. During the General Election, campaigns went around, members stood up, they promised that we would get our rehabilitation package, nothing happened. The name “criminal”, I think, is true. One thing I would like to put into your minds, we did not to die, we did not want the people of Malaita to die; we

did not want any women and children from Malaita to die. That's one thing we have to bear in mind, we did not want any more Malaitans to die. We had to fight for the sake of the people of Malaita! Is that why people from Malaita called us criminals? If we knew it was going to turn out to be that way, we would not want to protect the town and the people of Malaita. It was no good. After our good intentions, there were people addressing people that they were throwing backwards. It is true there were criminal elements involved. Criminal elements happened; they caused the problems that meant we were branded with the rubbish names until today.

Time went on; law and order started to come back; another new event came up. The intervention force came up. Instead of building up the law and Constitution of Solomon Islands, they tore it down. They called it law and order. Yes, the law is there but its order. When you arrest people, it's not the work of the CPC or the Procedures Code, Procedures of Solomon Islands. Nothing! How do we know, as militants or special constables, and those words were used of us by those who implemented them? Before we put someone in the custody, you will always investigate why you need evidence that you could prove beyond reasonable doubts that man could be convicted before you put him behind bars; otherwise release him. What happened was that they put us behind bars then they started to find out evidence and in doing so, the majority of us remained behind bars even up to five years the maximum, some of us two to three years. The law of Solomon Islands did not work that way. So when we analyzed how this new system of "*helpem fren*" came in we did not understand it. I thought this was wrong.

From the 1800's, we should know our own history, we had been colonized by the British. In 1978 we achieved independence. In 2003 we were re-colonized again by the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands. Maybe you don't like it, but that's how RAMSI was unfair. In the law of Solomon Islands, the last highest order no other any laws can supersede is the Constitution of Solomon Islands. Why is it that RAMSI just came in and they looked down on the law of Solomon Islands? Why? Solomon Islands is a sovereign nation and in the section under foreign relations we have people, and those people have their rights. Today or maybe in the future we will become slaves in our own land.

When we went to sign the TPA, we were very happy, over happy, all the hard work was over, every sleepless night that we spent out on the boundaries, mosquitoes fed on us until they were satisfied. No, all happiness was turned around; everyone who signed the Agreement went behind bars. The majority of those are still behind bars this time with the small crimes they committed. What about the amnesty, was it not passed by Parliament? Who deserves that amnesty passed by the National Parliament; it was meant for the ex-combatants. We are not happy, we tried every another avenue to get on with a new life. Our children who went to school, some of them could not continue with their education. I blame the past Governments since the time of the crisis. What I would like here is seeing that if the Ministry of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace is now not doing its work, it is best to get rid of it. That Ministry was set up for us; it is ours to rehabilitate us, to make peace in this nation. How are we going to rebuild this nation again; we do not have peace, lasting peace. The Ministry said they were going to do something; we waited and nothing, but what time!! Sometimes we went to the Ministry; they told us, we will look into the request. How long will it take you to look at it, we need explanations? We would like to know, not because we like it, but because you promised us; and promises are meant to be kept. That's not good enough; we are all human beings, *mifala hatsoa ia* [our hearts are broken]. We are all human beings just like you. It is best that we forget the peace and reconciliation [TRC?] because that Ministry exists for the sake of IFM and MEF; those were very first ones to be reconciled at the very first place, before we could go around and pick up the smaller ones. That Ministry was set up without any budget to implement its obligations. If it has no budget, better get rid of that Ministry. It shows the Government's failure to address the crisis from the beginning and it will continue. It looks like corruption finds its right place in Solomon Islands.

Before I conclude, I would like to add my last word; this goes to our brothers from Guadalcanal. If I did anything that spoiled your minds, I ask for your forgiveness; and to the public, if I did anything wrong against you, please have a heart. I am also a human being like you. I also make errors and also other Solomon Islanders, please forgive me. Thank you.

Mr. Nelson Maeta's story:

The Chairman, Commissioners of the TRC and Solomon Islands who are listening at this time, viewers around the world, ladies and gentlemen. Once again, I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to the Chairman to give me this opportunity to share my story on how I was involved in the ethnic tension with the group called the MEF. In 1962 my family of three, including my father; my father had lived in northeast Malaita at Gwaunasu'u. My father came to Guadalcanal in 1962 in search of work on the plantations. They came in a ship which took three days to reach Guadalcanal. My father told me this story when I was small. He went ashore at Ruavatu and worked for the Lever's at Ruavatu plantation in the year 1962. He went back to Malaita and got his brother to come and work in the same plantation to support his children. These two brothers came across to Guadalcanal to work in the plantation they called Ruavatu plantation. At that time, my dad and his brother had concern for the children; what happened, was they found a piece of land which was demarcated with the people of Mberande, where we settled in, and this was in 1968. At that time, I was not yet born. At that time, they had to carry 50 grown coconuts from Ruavatu to Mberande to plant at our new settlement. This was about ten miles from Ruavatu to Mberande. I was born at Binu Clinic in 1971, so I thought my home at Mberande would be my home forever, but at that time my dad was sick, we had business there at that time, as you know. My dad was sick so we had to move down and stayed with relatives at a place called Sun Valley.

On June 11th on a Friday, I could still remember it was the Queen's Birthday and I was surprised to see a six-ton truck calling at Sun Valley full of things. I asked them what had happened and they said we have to move because the GRA are near our village close to the road going up to Komukama; so we unloaded the truck. We wanted to go back and get few other things so we boarded the same truck and went back to our village. Sadly, some of the women, my sister in-laws, did not see their houses because they were transferred to the six-ton truck and came to town. On Sunday the 13th our village was burnt down by the GRA militants. I made up my mind to join the MEF to secure the town because the next thing was to come through Sun Valley to attack the town. I made up my mind to stand and give my support to the village of Sun Valley. Since that time, when I looked at our security, like our Police Force, I am sorry to say that only two police officers would be at the bunker.

Some of the police officers from Western province had to run away because they were afraid too. They took their families and went to their respective villages. Those police officers from Guadalcanal said they were going home for weekends but they did not return. They feared for their lives too because of the ethnic tension. Only the Malaita police officers were manning the bunkers. I would like to thank those MEF boys who supported the police officers at that time. That's why Honiara is safe and still our city. If the Malaita boys did not help those Malaita Police officers at that time, we would say that there would be no Honiara.

We look back to the major companies like SIPL at that time, there was no SIPL. You look at Gold Ridge, there was no Gold Ridge; you look at Foxwood, there was no Foxwood. I had to join the MEF because the Police Force at that time was not enough to fight back our brothers the GRA from Guadalcanal. So that was why I was involved with the MEF. I was in the MEF group; I think it was okay, even though we were labeled as militants or criminals. They told us that we took the law in our own hands. If we did not help the paramilitary, Honiara would be like SIPL or Gold Ridge and this was a fact. So everyone should be thankful to the MEF for without their assistance there would be no Honiara, no capital of Solomon Islands. I would like to thank the police, the paramilitary who assisted the MEF. When the boys went to sign the Peace Agreement in Townsville, '*helpem fren*'.

I am sorry to say, the treatment given to us at Rove prison, I must honestly tell you, Chairman, they torched in our mouths and even they torched in our private parts, our assholes. I don't know, why did they label us as terrorists? In fact, we were behind nine doors and it was hard to visit us. They brought in big dogs; if those dogs were released, they would bite us. Those dogs were brought in to search us. Even if we went to the bathroom to have our bath, they would escort us with guns. I am telling you the truth, Chairman and Commissioners; this was how we were treated at Rove prison. "They came to help friends or to spoil friends?" I was so sorry at that time because we were mistreated; we are citizens of Solomon Islands, we are deserved to be treated nicely. They should not treat us in that way. We were given ten minutes to have our shower. If you watch the beetle swimming in the pool of muddy water, that was how we had our shower in the prison. We were under threat; they had to escort us with guns.

Then we came out. When we came out, we thought the Government was to rehabilitate us as promised in TPA Agreement. This was to take place after 90 days (three months). When we came out, we thought life was going to change. We did not have any work; our children could not go to school. Nobody is going to pay for our children's school fees, their daddies were behind bars. For those of us who came forward to testify thought the Government was going to listen to our cries. The Government should appreciate what we did by defending this town called Honiara. Even people labeled us with names such as militants or rebels but what I think the Government should appreciate what we did in defending Honiara. For the promise of rehabilitation, we are still looking forward to this promise. It was laid down in black and white. For us Christians in the church today, Christ said to his disciples, in John 14:1, "I will come again." That's the promise Christ said to his disciples and the Christians that he would come again. Just like the Government, they promised to rehabilitate us after 90 days but nothing happened until today. Maybe it will be the same; Jesus will not come back because the Government has not paid us.

For those of us who come today to share our stories, [wonder] whether the TRC will help us in another way in life to assist us to build our lives so that we can settle down with our families; so that we can enjoy the same life that we used to live in our land, where we were chased out from. If the ethnic tension did not take place, I should already be somebody in life. My last talk is that if you can help to sustain us towards building our lives, because there is no way for us, I think I will say thank you on our behalf. For the cause of the ethnic tension, I will not blame anyone, I was also a victim. We are all victims; I will not blame my brothers from Guadalcanal. They were also victims. I will not blame the boys from Malaita, we were victimized. The Government of that day was to be blamed. If the Government at that time met the Bona Fide Demands of the people of Guadalcanal, nothing would happen. They should have done things earlier rather than late. I would like to put it across to the floor, please; our boys submitted their demands to the Government; we are getting tired of waiting. We would like you now to assist us. When we are tired we could have millions of things in our mind, we would say that we are tired of being waiting, let's do this so that they could see, we are all human beings. We are not God, we are only human beings. We are tired of being pushed around. Blame is not to be put on our brothers of Guadalcanal. No. In the past there was nothing wrong, we slept on one bed, we

ate from one plate, and we stayed together. When the Government did not meet their Bona Fide Demands, then the fire ignited from their belly. I would like to conclude by saying sorry to Solomon Islands; if anything which the former boys from MEF did to you, or took anything from you; please I ask your forgiveness to forgive them. Anyone who has hatred towards the former MEF members, please forgive us. On behalf of myself, I would like to say, God bless Solomon Islands.

Mr. Nick Oxley's story:

Good morning, Solomon Islands. Mr. Chairman, Commissioners and people of Solomon Islands. Before the ethnic tension, we the people of Marau had two groups. The first group was the indigenous Guadalcanal people whom we called the Marau bush people. The other group was Marau sea-people. We [the latter] are regarded as people from Malaita. Before the ethnic tension, the Marau bush people recognized and respected the Marau sea people. We worked together as one people. We attended cultural activities, sports activities, death ceremonies and other ceremonial activities together as one people. We cooperated with each other in everything, until 1998 when we heard that the people of Guadalcanal formed an army. I did not believe that Guadalcanal would have an army. We had been together for centuries but not until 1998 we heard that Guadalcanal had an army. I did not believe this, until in 1999 I saw them with my own eyes, that Guadalcanal had an Army. When we saw them going around in front of our eyes, when they travelled in their canoes, they put up their flags and put up their guns on their shoulders and we could tell from far that this was the army. That's where we learnt that Guadalcanal had an army. I was so surprised that Guadalcanal had an army.

During that time they started to do looting, harassments and demanding from the Marau sea people. I felt so upset about what was going on with the Guadalcanal militants. In 1999 the tension at Marau was very high. The militants went through our villages and I remember there was a man from Fiji who came to meet with the militants at Marau substation. This man came and met with them and after he left the militants advised us to have an open forum with them. In my mind, when we had this open forum I thought we would discuss things that would benefit the welfare of our communities. As we discussed, the leader of the militants read out bylaws that the Marau sea people should be subjected to.

These bylaws, if not followed, we would be sent back to Malaita. The bylaws which were laid down for us were as follows:

- Change from our *kastom*, from our genealogy where the men owned the land which is opposite to the Guadalcanal genealogy.
- We must change our language; we must not speak the Malaita language. We have to speak the Guadalcanal language. We must change the names of the islands.

When they said this to us, I felt as though Marau was no longer my home and that someone else has taken over my home. That's why we had to find somebody to come in and help us. I did my first attempt to go down to Honiara. I had to do this without the knowledge of the militants because if they knew that I would be in great trouble. I went to the PPC [Provincial Police Commander] at the Guadalcanal Police Station. I went and talked to him and said; "Sir, do you know what's going on at Marau?" He said he did not know. So I told him everything about what had happened at Marau. There was looting, harassments, threats and demanding going on. I told him that they wanted to change our *kastom* and culture; they wanted to change our language, and they wanted to change the original names of the islands into Guadalcanal names. I asked, "Could you do something about it, could you either send some police officers or remove those militants from Marau?" He he said, "We we will look into it." I went back to Marau and waited and there was no response up until today.

I was not satisfied, so I went back to Honiara. What I did was I told lies to the boys to go fishing so that I could take the esky down to Honiara. When I saw a police truck, I told the driver to take the esky to the house and that I am going down to Rove. During that time the ethnic tension was at its height. So I went to Rove and I went to see John Homelo. So he sent one of his CID Officers to come and take my statements. I also gave them reports on what was going on at Marau at that time so that they could follow up and to help them succeed with their operation. When I returned, I had to travel by plane because if I was to travel by boat they would catch me. I got home from Honiara and I waited and I waited but there was nothing forthcoming from headquarters. The situation went from bad to worse. At that time our community had a crushing mill machine and a generator donated by World Vision to be used by our community but these too were taken by the militants. So I said,

they had taken our machines so we have to move somewhere; the next thing they will do is to take us. My brothers and their families and my family took a ship and went to Honiara for our safety.

When we got to Honiara we stayed at the Multipurpose Hall. While we were, there I recalled, when we left Marau I said to myself, “Why did I come to stay at Marau?” I should not live in that situation; my mind started to wander here and there. I made up my mind while I was at the Multipurpose Hall that I have to do something. I had to do something; I cannot lose my people at Marau. I thought that Honiara must be defended and I must make sure that the Guadalcanal militants should not take over Marau. Marau should remain as my home. As a result, what I planned in mind, I decided to join in with the MEF to carry out operations to look after Marau plus Honiara. I would like to say this, that without the strong determination I had at that time for the people of Malaita and Marau, I think Marau would be in the hands of different people and we would not enjoy Honiara today; because some of us had strong determination and some of us had a mind that we had to sacrifice ourselves for our own, the people of Malaita and the people of Marau. We stood up for them until we achieved our aims through the suffering we went through. Some of us suffered for our good living. I would like to say, people of Solomon Islands, especially in Honiara and Marau, that we enjoy living in these places because some of us suffered to defend them.

In 2003 there was the arrival of the intervention force. I would like to say this: we suffered the most at the beginning and we suffered the second time when RAMSI came in. I did not suffer the second time because I had to hide myself from RAMSI. Why I was frightened of them was because they usually arrested people for nothing. I know I did not commit anything wrong against anyone. I would not want to be arrested and put behind bars while they carried out investigations on me. I did not want to go into prison, that’s why I had to hide myself from RAMSI. That time I did not have any freedom of movement because I was frightened of RAMSI so I did not move around too much. We suffered from the beginning during the tension and on the arrival of the RAMSI we had to suffer again when most of us were put in prison. Our suffering continues from the start of the tension until today, while I am talking.

I would like to say to the Government and the TRC that we have not settled down with our lives as yet. We have not come back to normalcy as yet. We are still waiting for the Government to rehabilitate us; rehabilitate us in the form of cash, so that we can involve ourselves in development for the country. This time we are just living an idle life; the Government does not assist us in any way. The second point is we need amnesty for some of our boys who are still in prison. Our boys have suffered enough and I would like the TRC and Government to recognize them and grant them amnesty. And the third and last thing I would like to say is, the Government should honor its agreement between Marau and the Government under the Marau Peace Agreement. This is a legal document and the Government should honor it, that the Marau sea people should have a constituency separate from the Marau bush. I would like the Government to honor the Peace Accord which was signed in the *Tobruk* in Honiara. That has to be respected and honored and that Marau should have its own constituency.

I would like to stop and say that I would like to apologize and say sorry to women and children who suffered during the operations we carried during the ethnic tension, especially to the women and children of Guadalcanal. I would like to apologize and say sorry to them. Also I would like to apologize to anyone from Malaita or anyone in Solomon Islands as a whole where you had any problems with us, the Marau Eagle Force and the Malaita Eagle Force who were involved in the ethnic tension. I would like to say this: I hope the TRC and the Government will recognize us with our claims and you should recognize the situation of the ex-combatants, to assist us to live together and a peaceful Solomon Islands. Thank you.

Mr. Alick Ota's story:

I thank the Chairman and Commissioners of the TRC. Thank you for giving me this chance to share my story. I just want to say briefly of how I joined the ethnic tension which happened ten years ago. Before I start, I would like to say that I was born in a Christian family. I was brought up with my family with other family members, my uncles and aunties. We lived at Mberande too and that time I was working. I worked as a chainsaw operator at Aola, right in the bush. While we were there, the militants chased us out from the camp. Luckily, we had a friend from Guadalcanal too; he heard stories that the

militants were going to raid the camp where we were staying. He came and whispered to us that we had to move out as soon as possible because the IFM were going to come and raid the camp. I said to him, "Are you telling the truth?" And he said yes; he began to swear to his own father and mother and at the same time he began to cry. So this indicated he was serious and emotional so I said to the boys, "Okay, boys, let's take off." There were two roads between the villages but they came out together at one place. So they followed one side and we went to the other one, so we just missed each other. They chased after us until they got close to us and fired shots; I was shot and wounded. So, in fact, I got a bullet scar from that chase.

From that time, I thought of what had happened to me and I could not settle down. Then I thought of my family who were based at Mberande in the middle of Guadalcanal. I asked my family to come down to town then the old man refused. He said that we had settled there too long and if there was anything like that, he should be informed about it. Our family planned to move out from our settlement the next day; unfortunately we did not make it. The militants came that day and blasted with a device near the house; unfortunately the old man was shocked and died immediately. When I saw my granddad die that way, I also had a different feeling, so I had decided to go and join the MEF. We secured the town and also defended the people of Malaita around Honiara. We heard that the Guadalcanal militants threatened and harassed our people and even raped our women and girls and also shot our men. We had to work together with the remaining police officers; most of them had run away to their respective homes.

So with the few remaining police officers, we formed up the Malaita Eagle Force. Some of them are here to testify like me. So we planned and worked together to defend this Honiara town. We did not defend Honiara for the people of Malaita only but for the people of Solomon Islands who were in Honiara at that time. We were surprised and sorry to learn that we were labeled as criminals. They called us an army and regarded us as having committed atrocities but sorry, if you had that in mind, put it aside, our participation that time was to save everyone in Honiara. We did not know the minds of our brothers from Guadalcanal; we did not come together to discuss how and why this should happen. We did not have any knowledge why this happened; all we did was to defend Honiara. As far as we know, the initiator of that move is there. He has a round hat, that man; if anyone

knew he had a round hat that time; that was the man. He was the initiator of that move and only that time he had that hat on. I am only talking in general and I hope you understand that.¹⁰

Later on, there was the signing of the Peace Agreement. We were asked to surrender our weapons; they regarded as rubbish bins just like the ones painted with yellow and green with the five stars [in Honiara]. “Look at them, they are rubbish people,” that’s what they said to us. Nobody really told us but we could tell. Let me put it this way, “What did Christ die for, did he die for the people or trees? Did he cut the trees and burn them, is that why he died?” That’s how we sacrificed our time and effort for the people of Malaita and Solomon Islands as a whole. People, when they heard the name MEF, they ran away. Who are you that you ran away from MEF? Why did you run away from MEF, are you not God’s creation? MEF has a meaning, not Malaita Eagle Force!! It’s “Mighty Eternal Father.” That’s the name we know, why did you run away from that? If without that name, there is not going to be a Solomon Islands. The whole town would be burnt down. If our brothers from Guadalcanal handled weapons which were meant to kill people; Malaita is too far away [to run away to]; they would not be frightened of you when they sharpened your knives on both sides and use them against you. Do you think you would live? No I don’t think so, you would not survive. . . If the Guadalcanal militants came and run through there and came out to the sea, they would say, “Malaitans belong to Guadalcanal!” Nobody would say a thing. No Malaitans would survive. That’s why we had to stay and defend the town and the Malaita people. It’s a matter of time, zooooop . . . trees and stones and everything would roll into the sea.

That’s why our hearts bled to help the Malaitans and other people in Honiara. We were labeled with lots of bad names. Please put those away, today we are new people. That’s all I can say. My concern about the intervention force (RAMSI). I am frightened of them too, but they came to help friends [*helpem fren*]. What about us, are we not their friends? Everything had been signed, TPA is there, and amnesty has been covered. Some of us are still being handcuffed and they are still in the cell. They are kept just like pigs in the pen, just like when LDA used to keep pigs at Mamara. That’s how they are kept. If we did not

¹⁰ The speaker may be referring to Members of Parliament from the round hat-like shape of the Parliament building.

defend the people of Malaita and Honiara, we would all be dead and there would be no one around. That's what I would like to put across.

So, Chairman, we have had enough of RAMSI. Is their coming into the country legal or illegal? I would like you to find this out. If their presence is straight, I don't think we would be behind the bars. Every document had been signed and gazetted. When we come to that stage, why did we have to sign those documents? From now on, we will be frightened to sign any documents; otherwise they will not be honored as the first signed documents. We were just a pig which came in front of the house; as soon as it got there; it has to be chased away. For us, we are not happy with the work of RAMSI. They are here now and what happens after they leave; only a few people would know this. Everybody in the Solomons does not really know why they are here; they eat, drink and sleep on comfortable beds in a good house. That's only for today. Or how? You try and think far away, where is your future, are you just there and finish? Don't you have any children, think of the future. That's why we are here because of we think of our future even though we were labeled as rubbish, but we thought of our future. If the tension did not happen you would not see anybody here. That's all I can say. Thank you, Chairman.

Mr. Alick Saeni's story:

Mr. Chairman and Commissioners of the TRC . . . first of all, before I can tell you what happened and how I was involved and also to clear some confusion that I have, I would like to thank God Almighty for this opportunity, for his unfailing love for bringing me into this new day here. I am here for reasons; I am not here to blame anyone. I am not here to pinpoint anyone, but I have the same question as you have, Mr. Chairman. I am happy that the TRC has organized these programs which I heard about through the radio, and victims publicly confessed what had happened too. All the victims had made their confessions. How I look at it, they have all the answers about who started the ethnic tension. They have put the blame on the concerned organization, and today I am very happy it happened that way. I am happy [because] it's an opportunity to pinpoint the MEF or paramilitary or any organization that started the tension. I am very happy to have this opportunity to come forward to tell my side of the story, and I will still the question the root cause of the

tension. It shows that I am one of the victims as well, in what had happened and the country had experienced during those past years.

Well, before I go on, I am a citizen of Solomon Islands and I am a man from Malaita, born Malaitan. I have the love which God has given me and I remain with that love. I believe that everyone has land to stay on it. So I live in my village on the northern side of this island and I am happy to be a Malaitan and I am proud to be a Malaitan. I am proud that I have land on Malaita that God has given me. I am one of the rural citizens and I thank God for that. It happens that every need and want in life that all humans have, also apply to me. During that time, it was in 1998, I decided to go to Honiara because I saw and believed that the system that the Government was doing was that all the major developments centered on the island of Guadalcanal; and it's the capital town of Solomon Islands. All people from the other provinces have to come to Honiara for all their needs in life. It was the same as me that time. The Government had the system that it only recognized Honiara on Guadalcanal to be the capital and that's why I had to leave my home and to go there.

In 1998 I was recruited under the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force during that time. Mr. Frank Short was the Police Commissioner when I was recruited. I had to go through formal training and I got through and started to work as a police officer. In 1998 and 1999 was the height of the ethnic tension. We were told that the tension was very great and I was under an operation carried out by the Government. I was happy and ready to work to help this nation. I was posted at the Foxwood Police Station. Then one come to think about posting a Malaita police officer during the height of the tension and what would happen next. There were a few Malaita police officers being posted at Foxwood at that time. There were other police officers posted at Alligator Creek and they were armed. This was a checkpoint for those coming in and going out. Those of us who were posted at Foxwood were unarmed. Those officers manning the roadblock were armed but those officers posted beyond Foxwood were not armed. I would like you to listen very carefully and think about it. Anyone in his right sense will just tell the decision. He will know the answer to that decision, those five Malaitan officers without arms and went beyond the roadblock to do community policing in the height of the tension. Is that right, Chairman? When I came to think about it, it did not make any sense to me. What inspired me to go out that time was because I thought of my oath, the oath that I took. I thought of that and also the nation.

Even I knew that that order was not straight but because of the oath [I went]. I kept to my oath; that was why I went beyond the roadblock and worked at the height of the tension to do community policing.

This was in December 1999. Anyway I was to loyal to my oath; I went beyond the roadblock unarmed and did my work. I was surprised and later I continued to ask the same question, what type of community policing I would carry out with the Guadalcanal people when they already chased out the Malaitans from Gold Ridge? The rest of the Malaitans at SIPL were already evacuated and only five police officers from Malaita to do community policing with the Guadalcanal people? It's unbelievable. As I have said, we were loyal to our oaths, we had to do it. During public hearings, it was said that the MEF caused the tension; but during that time, it was not the MEF Operation. It was the Government's operation. I still remember the Operation commander at that time. I knew who told me that time and if he is listening, he should know who he is. He should know the order he gave us that time. I still know him today. It's good that I come because I come for reasons and later on I will reveal why I come here to speak out my mind. I did not want to appear in the public hearing but a closed hearing; but later on I changed my mind, and that reason I will tell you later.

Mr. Chairman that question makes me confused and I wonder and searching too, for an answer. What happened that night? We were at that post because we had been doing community policing. We were doing community policing around that area and it happened during the night unexpectedly that the militants from Guadalcanal Plains came and raided the Police Station. They took over the police post and took away two of our officers; I was lucky enough I escaped. My escape was to come to report the raid so that reinforcements should come up and rescue us. They took two of our officers; one of them was killed and the officer escaped. Later on, I followed up with what happened with that friend and I found that he was mental in the head. He was mentally affected because of what happened that night; I feel sorry for him. The other officer was stabbed and left on the roadside. The reinforcement arrived during the night and rescued us and took us back to the police headquarters. For myself, I wanted an answer to the question that raised confusion which I did not experience before, which brewed inside me. I am a good citizen and, as I said before, the same as you, a human being. There was a new sense which I was not born with

which came up after what had happened to me during that night. I did not go through any trauma counseling in 1999 to year 2000. I was not the person I used to be. What happened to me that time developed a new sense inside me and now I was mentally changed. That happened in the year 1999 and year 2000; as I said I was mentally changed I did not have trust in the Government. The Government just cannot leave me on the way, in the Police Force after what happened. I don't know, those who were affected that time, there was nothing for us. There was no advice from our high ranking officers to tell us what to do next, nothing of that sort. I said to myself, what is next, I risked my life that night. Where am I going to be posted next? What is the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force going to do with me next? That question remained unanswered in 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2003.

My colleagues from the Police Force came and told me that the Force has a division amongst themselves. They did not trust each other. The Guadalcanal officers had concerns for their own people, and it was the same with others they had concerns for their own people too. That's what happened at that time and made me mentality changed. That's what changed me but because of the oath I took, I risked my life and I thought everything was fine; that's why I went up that night to man that police post. I thought that operation order that time was in good faith. I thought there was nothing behind it, but as I kept on asking that question I thought there was a motive behind that order. Why there was no mixture of police officers from other provinces to share the shift that night? Instead there were five police officers from Malaita to do community policing at the height of the tension. There must be some wrong down there, that's why it affected us. It was even worse when the shift officer went and dropped us off and he said to us, "Order from the Operations Head that this vehicle was not to be left at the police post, otherwise the militants would take it way." There was no vehicle, so I kept on asking questions. If that vehicle was there, we would board it quickly and escape to town to the police headquarters. The officer who was in charge of the shift at that time was a man from Guadalcanal and I knew him. He went and dropped us off and turned back; he said the vehicle was to be taken back and not to remain at the police post. I kept on asking question on what happened that night; luckily that it was not my time God had planned for me to die. That was why I am still alive and overcame that situation. I believe today the shift officer in charge, if you are listening out there, I will tell you what I have to say. That's the reason

why I am here in this program. I know who you are, whether there is a hidden motive there, that is why I am in this program, I will tell you later.

Let me say this, I want to be healed too. That was the situation at that time, Mr. Chairman. Then came the year 2000; then 2001 I continued my work as a police officer. As I said, in the Force there were divisions, things were not right. The Police Commissioner had left and gone. I believe the high-ranking officers at that time have their own stories. They knew what was going on. We were victims of their decisions. In 2003 I came down to man the Auki police station under some operation orders too; I would like to put it this way so that you see what the root cause of this is. That's why I said I will not blame anyone. I would like all of us to see what is in the story; you will see there's truth in there. People said that MEF carried on those criminal things; during that night, it was not the MEF that sent me, it was the Government that sent me. That was not MEF's operation. We went beyond the road block without arms to do community policing; this was not right, nobody could perform community policing at the height of the ethnic tension. As I said, that was because of the oath; we were loyal that's why we had to do it.

In 2003 I was advised to come to Auki to carry out an operation there. When I arrived the intervention force was already there. Some of their officers were already there; as we were police officers, we also came down to Auki. When we got there the intervention force disarmed us in front of the Auki police station. It was an order from the operations side, from the police headquarters, for us to come to Auki. So the RAMSI officers disarmed us at Auki police station. This made me want to ask more questions as to what had happened. We were asked by the police headquarters to come to Auki; it looked as though the RSIPF did not know what the Australian force was doing and vice-versa. The operation set by the RSIPF was not known to the Australian Force. When we got there the Australian force disarmed us and sent us back. I accepted that and we went back, that was okay. Anyway after 2003 I came back to Auki and I was arrested and flown out from my island Malaita to Honiara in an Australian Army plane. I can still remember the name, *Koruba*. We got off at Henderson and I was questioned but I did not have anything to say. They questioned me but I did not answer them because they did not answer my question too. In 2003, I was remanded in custody. I was remanded in custody from 2003 until 2006, when I appeared in court. I was only remanded from 2003 until 2006; I was still to appear before the court.

When I appeared in court, they laid eight charges against me. I accepted the charges and I said okay, it's the court's decision. The truth would be revealed by the court, if I was guilty of those eight charges laid against me. In 2006 my lawyer came and asked if I was ready to go to court and I said yes, that's why I am here. I told them that I would be happy if I was proven guilty by law, otherwise I don't deserve to be remanded in custody. When they asked me if I was ready to appear in court I said, yes, 100 percent, I am ready. My lawyer arranged everything for my case and he came to visit me in custody. He was one of the lawyers recruited under the [RAMSI] intervention package. He came the next day and said that the Prosecutor wanted to negotiate with me. He said to me that he agreed to drop the murder charge; if agreed to that, then he would also drop another six charges [leaving him to plead guilty to the remaining charge]. Mr. Chairman, the negotiation went like that. They dismissed the murder charge and the six other charges and I was going to be charged of something I was not guilty of. Mr. Chairman, I would like you to take note of this; something I had not committed I was charged and guilty of. That was how the parcel of negotiation went. They dropped the cases which they did not find enough evidence for and they charged me for the case I had not committed.

From 2003 to 2006 I was in jail and I had enough of that. I was charged for what I did not commit but because of my freedom I had to go along with it, because I wanted to be free. So I appeared at the High Court and I was guilty of a charge which I did not commit. I was charged for the offence I did not do just because I agreed for them to drop the other charges. So I was guilty of the other charge so that I could get out of jail. That was the system at that time, my people. I was put in prison for the offence I did not commit; but being tired of staying in prison, I was charged as guilty so that I could be released from prison. The court did not have any proof on the other seven charges laid against me. They did not find any proof on a murder charge laid against me; they did not have proof about the other six charges about abduction. The charge where they said I was guilty of, I agreed to accept it so that I could get out of the prison at the end of my term. I was in custody from 2003 to 2006; that was enough for me. I was remanded for that period of time and at the end of the day I was not proven guilty of those charges laid against me. I was charged and found guilty of an offence that I did not commit. Where did it come from? It cropped up from the negotiation and I agreed because I wanted my freedom.

People who have not been prison did not know what was going on in there. You enjoyed your freedom, that's fine. For those of us behind bars from 2003 and up, we really felt the treatment done to us by the intervention force [RAMSI]. I should say whatever they prepared before they came were fulfilled at the Rove prison. They did a lot of things which I am not prepared to disclose. I am here for a reason and I will later disclose it. One of the things which I thank God for, Mr. Chairman, in that prison, I found a new type of life in the prison in 2004, a life in Christ; he changed my life, and because of this I tried to be patient enough. A new life I found during the darkest time. This life is in Christ; I was encouraged and hopefully one day I would leave that place. I had patience in my life when I went through that and I had hoped that I would overcome that hardship and treatment because of Christ. Through the power of Christ, let him take back the glory and honor for all those things, not me. That was the situation which I went through at that time. I am very happy today to give my confession on what I have been through, the confusion and question.

Maybe the same as you, or we blamed MEF? What I see is that MEF just came on the way. The MEF came in to defend but I was affected before the MEF came in. Something had happened before the MEF came in. The MEF was formed for the sake of the Malaita people living in Honiara, for security reasons. It's not what MEF did to me that affected me, it happened before the MEF came in. It showed that the root cause of the ethnic tension was already there before the MEF came in. We are just reaping the fruits of trees that somebody else had planted. I was already mentally changed before the MEF came in. Maybe my other colleagues were mentally affected on what had happened outside the town boundary. I was mentally changed before the MEF came in that's what happened to me. I was a victim of somebody that time, the victim of the system in the police force and not the MEF, that made me mentally changed. I do not blame anyone, either MEF or the militants who raided the Foxwood police post. Those militants were victims too from decisions made by the leaders of that time. That's their rights and their home. If they are listening today, I would to say, it's your right and you were also a victim as me. I don't blame the militants from the Guadalcanal Plains or the GRA militants. They are all victims. I don't blame the MEF because I was not affected by the acts the MEF committed. I was affected

because of the order that night. I was affected that night for carrying out Government orders.

As I came out in 2006 I found a new life in that darkness. That life gave me hope and even as I came outside, there was no rehabilitation to the militants as promised by the Government. As the militants wondered, what time will the Government rehabilitate us as already said by the other speakers. It was a promise and everyone was looking forward to it. It is a promise. Every ex-combatant looks forward to it. Thank you Mr. Chairman. As for the TRC, as I looked through your mandate [I see] it's a legal organization and was established by the Government. I believe this is the right channel for us to voice out the rehabilitation [issue] which has been burdening us. We voiced this out in the *Solomon Star* a lot of times but this was only the media. Nobody would stand behind us to push the issue forward. We also voiced it through SIBC but nothing happened, it was just a piece of news. When I looked through the constitution of the TRC, it's there and I know this is the right channel. If it is true that the Government established this organization (TRC), then I think it is the right channel for us to voice our complaints. The Chairman, for you to take note of the rehabilitation package and also the amnesty law. It was a plan at that time for the Government to negotiate with the militants to sign that. It was planned and later on when we were at the Rove prison, the amnesty was conditional. When you applied amnesty to your court case this time, it's conditional. There is nothing right in this world. Anyway, I am very happy, before I come to my conclusion, to thank TRC, now that we know this is the right channel for the boys to voice their complaints. This is a Government-established organization and I believe it's a private body and I believe you can carry forward what the boys laid down in their talks and even I personally. I believe that this should be our last try, I think. I don't know what is going to happen next but I believe you would consider what we have submitted to you.

Before I conclude, I would like to say to all of us the reason why I attended this program. I am here to forgive and I am here to ask forgiveness from others. That's the reason why I am here. I am here not to enjoy my time with my other brothers. I would like to say that if I had any feeling towards you during that night, especially the one who sent me out that night, I'd like to say like this: yes, after Christ changed my life, I have a heart of forgiveness and today, the operation commander of that time, if you are listening, since

God has forgiven me, I must also forgive you. Maybe you had a motive that time; from my heart and in the presence of these people who are sitting down here and in the presence of God, I forgive you. I am not going to mention your name but you know me and I know you. I forgive you from my heart. And, secondly, for the Shift-in-charge that night, you dropped me at that place and took off with the vehicle where I risked my life; and it might be that you knew a story but you did not tell me; as we worked together as colleagues or friends and if I died that night I would not put the blame on anyone; but if you knew you did something wrong, since God has forgiven me I will also forgive you, the shift-in-charge that night. And also for my friends from Australia who are in the intervention force: the treatments which you did to me in the prison which was inhumane which I should raise today as this is an opportunity for me to voice it out. If you are listening out there, I forgive you RAMSI personnel during that time from 2003 to 2006. I forgive you because God has forgiven me. I give what God has given and I forgive them.

That's the reason why I am here, to forgive and the next to forget. I would like to repeat. I give you my forgiveness and I forget. I have no remorse about what you have done to me. I will not think about this in the future and I will not pass this story to my children. I would not like this story to continue because I forget. Let whatever happened that night, I will forget about it and I will remember no more, the past, the first reason why I am here. Secondly for the people of this nation, especially those in the provinces, especially Malaita, in the communities, I humbly ask you to forgive me, for whatever I have done during that time, whatever hatred or what you might have never dreamt that one day something like that was going to happen. Seeing that it has happened already and in the system, I beg you and ask you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to forgive me, please, forgive me. If you forgive me, you also forget what I had done wrong. Personally, within myself, I promise to help the peace process in this nation. Whatever [way to use] my life for the sake of the peace process of this nation, I welcome [the chance] to assist in whatever areas I could be of assistance. I would like to say, thank you, the Chairman, Commissioners, the nation and those who listen out there. I would like to say thanks to every one of you for taking your time to listen. Let God take back glory and honor and may God bless Solomon Islands.

Mr. Daniel Tai Faafunua's story:

Thank you, Chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Commissioners. Firstly I would like to thank the TRC for the invitation that went out to all the ex-combatants of the disbanded Malaita Eagle Force for the opportunity here today to share our experiences, to confess and to speak our minds to this nation. Before we go on, I would like to introduce myself. My name is Daniel Tai Faafunua. I come from north Malaita, Malaita province. I am married with three children. I was a Government officer during that time of the ethnic crisis. During the span of the ethnic crisis, I aspired to become a political leader for my constituency and I won the election in 2001. I became the youngest member ever to be elected into Parliament in 2001 on the 5th of December. I became a Minister of the Crown and I served as a Minister for two years. The first portfolio I was given by the Kemakeza Government was the Minister for Economic Reform and Structural Adjustment. The second year I was the Minister for Communication, Aviation and Meteorology. Then I was arrested in 2003 and sent to prison and I stayed in prison for four years. I was released in 2007.

Therefore Mr. Chairman, what I would say today I know the nation and my people in Malaita have been waiting for. The things that I will say today are the truth. "Nothing but the truth." I know my people around here who are listening; some of you have been waiting for me to say something. I will ask you, Mr. Chairman, to listen very carefully to some of the things I would say. Everything that will come out from my mouth now is very important. Before I begin, I will begin this way, Solomon Islands as a nation has a population, and they are social beings and these social beings are humans. Therefore the system of Government adopted on the eve of the Independence Day was not proper and right. These social beings will explode and then the economy or the politics of this nation will go right down to its knees. For your information I am a political scientist. Allow me, Mr. Chairman to share this to the congregation, Solomon Islands and the rest of the world; two important proverbs that Malaita had in the past. The first one is this: every fight is filled with men but only real men stood up tall for the rights of the men, that's one. I will interrelate this later. So this nation needs to understand it's all a Malaitan problem. The second is one is the old, old or ancient eagle proverb. The eagle says, animals and birds of the jungle must understand and bear in mind that I only attack for two reasons. What are

those reasons? You kill my partner and secondly you destroy my nest. So, the members of the Malaita Eagle Force, the disbanded ones, I will say today, out of the many sons of Malaita, they are the only fighting men who stood up during the darkest hour of this nation, put their heads high and fought for their partners and their nation. So all the Malaita Eagle Force former members, I salute you, I commend you. Whether it be your partners, you fathers, your mothers, your sisters and your children. They are from the past our wives, our sisters and our eagles have been raised right in our eyes.

So the formation of the Malaita Eagle Force is not abuse to Solomon Islanders. We were only caught in the situation in the midst of confusion and in the darkest hours of this nation. The Malaita populaces living in around Guadalcanal were caught up in the whole situation. That's the truth about the whole situation. Mr. Chairman and the Government of the day want to know about the root of the ethnic crisis, then allow me to speak more. If anything happened, the white men came to our shores, looking for natural resources. They came with their self-interest and their selfishness to our shores, they were so self-centered. Then the nation Solomon Islands was a British Protectorate. During those days we were so very primitive, uneducated and they colonized our islands. All the colonizers must have understood that we did not have any say in drawing these boundaries. These political boundaries and borders were drawn up by our former colonizers. They were cross-sectioned, cultures were breached; people from this side of the border could not cross the border to the other side. Why? This was not our way of life. The system and the culture and their consciousness were new to us. Ever since those days, before they came, we already had our cultures. Our relationships were intact, our people lived happily and intermarriage took place during those days amongst these islands. Most of our resources had been taken away by England and see for yourselves today, what is Auki like, what is Malu'u like, what is Afio like in your eyes, compared to London. I have been to London twice and I know the place. What about Auki, you are the colonizer, why didn't you develop this place so that population lives in Malaita. It's gone now, it's history. On the eve of independence, our Legislative Council members accepted the Constitution of Solomon Islands. We Malaitans and Solomon Islanders should analyze which culture of Solomon Islands the Constitution of Solomon Islands is based on. The British Protectorate came in, they were anthropologists, and sociologists, they went around all our islands to

find out the cultures, the behaviors, the attitudes and the norms of the people who live, because the Solomon Islands is so diverse, with so many people; as such, when they came around Malaita they began to see the people of Malaita had a culture and that's their nest. This nest refers to our home, our wives, our sisters, and our daughters-in-law. If there is any breach within or above the women or within the tribe, the punishment for that would be death. Let me speak to the human rights lawyer, if there is one around here. If you want to know the quality or the rights of our women in Malaita, we treated them with all respect. We treated them holistically, it is an approach we were born into and we will die in this culture.

From that day after independence, our leaders were so illiterate with only a few members being illiterate; all of them were school teachers who took up ministerial portfolios within the new Government of Solomon Islands and they continued their journey for a new Solomon Islands. So if you want to know the cause of the ethnic tension or the ethnic crisis, go back to history and find out what our colonizers had done to this nation. It has been referred to this nation, that human resources were illiterate and uneducated and then they gave us independence on a plate, we did not fight for it, they just gave it to us. Why? Because there was a policy within the British Government on colonization. We were no use, we had no meaning, we were not important anymore to Britain. That's their process of decolonization. We were not ready for independence; our human resources were illiterate and uneducated. How could they rule a nation? That's history, that's long gone. That's the beginning of the ethnic crisis. How could they make policies for the future generation? They knew for sure the ethnic crisis was looming around the corner. They knew it from the start; they did not have that capacity to plan and to implement the policies in readiness for the youths of this nation, for the population of this nation. Let's not blame each other for the crisis from 1998 to 2003; blame our leaders, they were the ones who took those ministerial portfolios. The decision-making powers of this nation depended on them but how could they make good decisions when they themselves were illiterate? The colonizer had already gone, run away, who cares about you, Solomon Islands; I am going back to England. What did they leave behind? – a trail of destruction to our primary resources, natural resources. Then history tells us during independence, there were signs of rebellion, there were some provinces that were not willing to be part of Solomon Islands.

Are we blind to ask ourselves, what are the root causes of the ethnic crisis? No we political leaders of this nation should understand, from Day I before Independence, there was rebellion from Western province and the people of Guadalcanal. Their bona fide demands began from Day I but still our leaders were so blind, so illiterate, uneducated, they did not prepare for that moment in 1998. In 1988 Mr. Chairman, there was a peaceful demonstration by the people of Guadalcanal; they handed in a petition to the Prime Minister then. The then Prime Minister was from Guadalcanal. He was Ezekiel Alebua; he should deal with the Bona Fide Demands. Why? The question I want to raise to the Commission now, is why? Why he did not deal with the Bona Fide Demands, the Demands were given to him, through a peaceful demonstration. I was a student in 1988; I was at the roadside watching them marching peacefully down to the Prime Minister's office. They had made a petition and the Bona Fide Demands were turned down flat. What did the Government of that day do? They said nothing; they said they would solve it. They said they would see the Demands should be addressed and then shelved them away in the Prime Minister's office for another ten years. They did nothing about it. There was no Commission to address the Bona Fide Demands of the people of Guadalcanal. So they went into the dust. So the whole process began from Day I before independence and then in 1988 when the Bona Fide Demands of the people of Guadalcanal were presented through a peaceful demonstration, through a petition to the Prime Minister and his Cabinet, why didn't deal with that right on the spot? He is from Guadalcanal and he was the head of the Executive Government of the day. These are questions that we the people of Solomon Islands must analyze and come up with conclusions about the answers. Who held the Prime Minister ship?

Then in 1996 and 1997, the Prime Minister lost the election. Then he [Alebua] ran for the Premiership of Guadalcanal province and then he became the Premier of Guadalcanal province. When he became the premier, the problem began. Why look elsewhere, who is the instigator? He himself received the petition; he now became the person behind the ethnic crisis. Months leading to the ethnic crisis, if you can go back to your record, *Solomon Star* has a good record of that. Mr. Chairman, check those issues; there were lots of advertisements, a lot of notices that were printed in the papers. Where did they come from? They came from the Government of Guadalcanal province. Who was the

Government of the province at that time? He was Ezekiel Alebua, the former Prime Minister of Solomon Islands, the person who received the petition in 1988. He was the Premier of Guadalcanal province. So now I am asking the people of Malaita, the people of Solomon Islands and the viewers around the world to understand that he was one of the ones who instigated and escalated the ethnic crisis. I will lay the blame on him.

I was a Government officer then. I was involved in the first reconciliation amongst the people of Guadalcanal and Malaita. I was the one amongst the people of Malaita when David Oeta was still the Premier. I was the Officer in the Provincial Government who made all the arrangements for the chiefs and the Provincial Government of Malaita province. I was involved in that reconciliation at the Art Gallery and that reconciliation was just nothing. The Government spent \$2 million in that reconciliation. They came in minutes before the reconciliation started, and after they were chased out from their places. What sort of reconciliation did we want? During those days in 1998, the economy of Solomons was just very, very wealthy. We were receiving \$400 million a month. A national press release, go back to records. \$400 million a month, divided by four weeks, you would get how much per week. Solomon Islands was so rich, its basket never went empty. Why didn't we solve the problem of the people of Guadalcanal then? They demanded some money; the SIAC Government is to be blamed here. Who was the Leader of the SIAC Government? It was the late Bart Ulufa'alu. Why I am leading you towards the ethnic crisis, if you can see Mr. Chairman, what is the cause of the ethnic tension? It is the political system that we adopted since independence, the Westminster system itself that gave us this problem. The Westminster system demands the majority rules, so if these leaders happened to address the bona fide demands of one island or one Province, then they wouldn't reign in power. So you could see the selfishness in the hearts of our leaders. They did not want to let go of being a leader. They did not want to bow down to the people. The social being had been locked up; the people of Guadalcanal had been locked up in a metal cage filled with poisonous gas because of the political system, the political structure. The leaders themselves locked their people in a metal cage for ten years from 1988 to 1998, if you don't mind twenty years. In 1998 because of so much poisonous gas being filled into the metal box, the people were weak and became so aggressive so they

burst out in anger and became so absurd and began chasing, killing, raping the people of Malaita who settled on the island of Guadalcanal.

After that Mr. Chairman, it took two years, two solid years for the Government to settle that problem. It began with criminal activities in chasing these people. They called themselves the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army. There were criminal activities according to our law committed around Guadalcanal, chasing, killing and raping of women and threatening people of Malaita. Malaitans only respect two things: if you kill my partner, I will kill you; if you destroy my home and my family, I will kill you. In 1998 the protection of the people of Malaita had broken down and after 18 months of waiting, that's where the MEF came into place. During those times, my friends from Australia, our late Prime Minister requested assistance because you know we could not do it on our own. What was the reply then from the former Prime Minister of Australia, Mr. John Howard, what was his reply to late Bartholomew Ulufa'alu? He said, it is "an internal matter for your country, go back and fix it." Mr. Chairman, that's the beginning of the ethnic crisis. We could not handle it, but, Solomon Islands, the Police Force remained intact. If I may say now to this nation, there were some allegations, that there were some guns that we had in stock that were supposed to use against those criminal activities. I am very that sorry of our political leaders came into the scene during that time. We knew for sure, the people of Malaita knew the Police Force remained intact with so many of our friends from Solomon Islands. We were well trained; some of us went to the United States of America, some to Australia even to Britain to train, Some of us even went to east Jerusalem; we were really good at that time, but what was our problem then? We got a very, very big problem.

The problem was not with the Police Force, the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force; the problem grew with the political circles at the top. If I can well remember, history tells me that the Commissioner of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force was Mr. Frank Short. If I can say, Frank Short was one of the best ever foreign Police Commissioners who we ever had in this country. There was a State of Emergency, so that the Police Force could do their work, but the politicians said no to it. Instead, they themselves in a secret meeting somewhere in Honiara called Mr. Frank Short to leave this nation. He was none other than the Minister of Provincial Government during that time Mr. Nathaniel R. Waena, the Honorable Member for Ulawa and Ugi who . . . [*The TRC Chair interrupted, reminding*

the witness not to mention names; the witness apologized.] Those people will be implicated in the root of this crisis. I am still trying to come to the root of this crisis. Sorry, Chairman, I will go quickly and I will finish off.

The Commissioner of Police headed out of this nation. The Force was divided, the Guadalcanal police officers to help their own people, some police officers from other provinces went for their own lives; they were supposed to be charged for cowardice under the Police Act; and then it turned out that only the Malaitan police officers were left in the Force and some of the loyal officers who were there at that time. The problem continued to escalate after the Commissioner left. There were so many things that happened during that time, so many bad things that happened. Then the formation of the Malaita Eagle Force came into being. Knowing very well the people of Solomon Islands, those living in Honiara plus people who were living at the outskirts of the town, who were still in Honiara, so those loyal officers who came in and joined up with the MEF boys to secure the city or the capital city of Solomon Islands. What Honiara is today is supposed not to be what Honiara is if our friends and our brothers from Guadalcanal came in and burnt the place down. During those days, there were rumors and warnings that came from the outskirts of Honiara, that the GRA militants were coming down the next day to burn down Honiara city and anyone they found in their homes, they would kill them. They said they would slaughter them. So the only thing we did was to secure the boundary of the city.

As such, Mr. Chairman, let me reiterate here that the former members of the Malaita Eagle Force plus the paramilitary who secured the city, were supposed to be compensated somehow by the national Government. What I would want to reiterate is that; and after that in 2000 there were negotiations by the Sogavare Government for a Ceasefire to be signed, on board an Australian warship the HMS *Tobruk*. It was signed and set the basis for the Townsville Agreement which was signed in Townsville on 15th October 2000. On the third day, it concluded the operations of the Malaita Eagle Force and it became a disbanded force. Under the TPA, they told us lies, they said there was the blanket amnesty, you can sign it. The TPA included the rehabilitation program after 30 days; there would be the Bina Harbor project, Suava project, the Aluta Basin oil palm project, and some other things also stated in the TPA Agreement. All these sounded very sweet to us. So we thought, oh yes, that's the rehabilitation we should be waiting for. Mr. Chairman, it's been ten years down

the line, nothing has happened. So if you look at the Malaita Eagle Force living based on why we are sitting here, I am only a victim on the political process. These events happened not because we caused them, but because of the decision-making by the Government. You Government during that day, you made life easy; no I did not see anything happen, because there were criminal activities that took place. It went so bad that caused our country down to its knees.

After the signing of TPA, we came back and arrived in the Solomon Islands, and instead of receiving a heroes' welcome at home, we arrived with our heads down. The people of Honiara did not like us, they ignored our arrival. After we came, things slowly fell into place; our people from Marau signed another, the Marau Peace Agreement – the MPA, we tried to rehabilitate them, the second group without rehabilitation, without the Government. Our mindset which was destroyed we tried to rebuild it back. Then in 2003, there was the arrival of RAMSI. For your information Solomon Islands, the intervention force [RAMSI] was an illegal thing. Months leading to the Bill tabled in Parliament, all those Ministers were sent on overseas trips. Those Ministers were just like tourists, they went and after two weeks they were sent back again. Why? What was the motive behind sending us every week overseas? Just three weeks before the Parliament met, the South Pacific Games were held in Suva; they sent me, but the Sports Minister was in his office. Why didn't they send him? They sent another Minister from Malaita province to oversee the South Pacific Games. I came home on the eve of a Wednesday and the Parliament would be in its first Session on Thursday the next day. The Bill was passed in at the Executive level. For record purposes, TRC Chairman, please check the record of the Cabinet Ministers who sat in the meeting to accept the proposed Bill at the Executive level from May and June in 2003. I know there was no quorum at the Cabinet at that time and anything that did not pass by a quorum it could not go up to Parliament. Any decision needs a quorum to qualify so that it could be forwarded to Parliament. For us the Cabinet Members of Parliament from Malaita, we walked out from discussion of that bill. We walked out, it was not accepted and during that time, if you listened during the session of Parliament, it was debated and only three of us, the late Bart Ulufa'alu, Sogavare and me, Member for North Malaita and Minister of Communication, Structural Development and Meteorology. I was part of the Government but I had to argue because that bill had not been written on the soil

of Honiara. No, it was not our bill, it was done in Canberra. It's not our Government bill, it's an Australian bill. It was prepared in Australia. After it came back to Honiara, it went Cabinet, there was no quorum, and it went to Parliament and passed.

After 15 days, RAMSI landed in Solomon Islands. So [resulted] all the human sufferings that we went through because of the Malaita Eagle Force. Just in the name of '*helpem fren*', but we did not benefit from it, I myself was being part of it. They said it was going to benefit us but that \$800 million I did not see. The Government of the day said "Let's pass it," so whatever happened in 2003 when we were arrested just like pigs, raided our houses without respecting the rights of our own children and our people who lived with us. It happened not because of the intervention bill; they did not have any respect for our cultures. Let's go back again to the political issue involved, that's corruption. That's self centered, that's selfishness. So the decision made in black in white, it's not the same decision that we said by mouth. . . . The inhumane treatment that RAMSI did to us at Rove was so big; we even asked the Human Rights Section to come. We were stripped naked, they touched our private parts and they brought in dogs.

Let's move on, these things became history. What I would like to say, Mr. Chairman, RAMSI should go back. Their mission has been completed; law and order has been restored; what else is still to be done? That's why they are still here. I think they are here on holidays, they have nothing to do. At the moment they are doing nothing; let them go home, we don't need them, we don't need their money and that I want you to register. Two of these operations in Solomon Island are still coming up; one is from RAMSI the other from the Government. . . [Our] voices are now inferior to them, so whatever white men do, somehow they are advanced. Sometimes we would say, slow, how does our law fit in such areas? It's hard now, but there is the law of Solomon Islands under the national Constitution of Solomon Islands. It seems that the [RAMSI] intervention bill is being superior and above the national Constitution of Solomon Islands. So who is to be blamed? The system itself, the political system, the political leaders, the system is there, but we blame the men who are there. So leaders from 1976 to 1997 and 1998, they have to bear the root of the ethnic Crisis. On the rehabilitation package, where the former combatants were traumatized and had been waiting for the last ten years, I have a few recommendations

to make, where the TRC Commission should see how to facilitate the implementation process:.

1. Why does not the national Government put it as priority for the major projects around Malaita to be implemented in order for the migration to Honiara should stop and people from Malaita should work with those developments around Malaita. They should stay in their own country and own island and work in their own developments.

2. Rehabilitation should come considering of the projects to become viable; to help open up their small businesses because they are jacks of all trades. They come from all walks of life. Allow them to own their small businesses so that they can prioritize to do maintenance, security and name it, the list goes on.

3. Through rehabilitation, the Ministry of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace should prioritize the small scale commercial projects for individuals, so that they could rebuild back their lives.

4. We would like to recommend that our brothers who suffered but who could not come here today, the TRC should hold trauma counseling for them.

5. The other one, we would like to add on is through rehabilitation, the Government should involve us in further training; they should take up further training. For I was to go on a scholarship but it was withdrawn. I wonder if I could get back my scholarship, so that I could get a higher paper. There are a lot of us [in a similar situation] in the disbanded Eagle Force.

6. Another thing is, Ministries like the Ministry of Development, like the Ministry of Fisheries, Agriculture, Forestry and so forth, should continue with a percentage of all the provinces which were put for the ex-combatants, for both Malaita and Guadalcanal. A percentage supposed to be there, may be even one percent. Give it to the boys who applied to there. If anyone uses it a lot there will be nothing for us. Another thing, through rehabilitation in the communities where the ex-combatants reside, the Government should recognize them, so that whatever you do for rehabilitation in the rural levels the Government should assist them. We are not accepted in our communities; we are forced to come back home and stay home in our communities but we don't accept that. How can the communities accept us; can the Government assist us in that area through rehabilitation?

Before I finish and otherwise I am implicated in any crimes, I will put across several recommendations on behalf of myself and my fellow colleagues who are here:

That through the report of the TRC:

1. A Forgiveness bill should be in place and all ethnic-related crimes be forgiven and forgotten, including any criminal records of any individuals affected during the cause of the ethnic tension.
2. The branded names such as “perpetrators”, “criminals”, “rascals” and so forth be stopped being applied us, on the basis that we were all victims of the political structures and systems taking place in our nation.
3. The rehabilitation package be treated with all priority and paramount with the Ministry of National Unity Reconciliation and Peace.
4. Our people of Marau to have a separate constituency because we have the boys in Marau and we are working together to make sure their survival and their future is well looked after by the Government. Why I give that recommendation because the voices of the people of Marau are lost among all Solomon Islanders. Money had been thrown into Guadalcanal and Guadalcanal throws it back to us. So they have no say among the top authorities in Solomon Islands. So I strongly recommend that there should be a separate constituency for the Marau people.
5. Our brothers who are still behind bars to be considered victims should be given amnesty or rated under the established law such as the Commission of the Prerogative of Mercy or the Parole Board on the basis of good behaviour and how many years they have served in prison since 2003. an our brothers be considered victims and be given amnesty or be freed under the established laws of this land, such as the Commission of the Prerogative of Mercy or the Parole Board on the basis of good behaviour and how many years they have served so far in jail.
6. Counseling process to be continued for ex-combatants because they were traumatized by events that took place during the ethnic crisis.

7. The TRC to reach out to be given more time to thoroughly complete its tasks as mandated in order to serve the nation by relinquishing it from fear. I am recommending to the Government that you TRC to complete your work thoroughly.

8. I call on RAMSI to go back so that our Police Force could re-arm so that we can look after our own interests and to keep the law and order.

9. The ethnic crisis also affected the legally licensed gun owners because RAMSI destroyed them; and they should be compensated for the guns or, if those guns are still there, they should be returned to the rightful owners. In and around Solomon Islands, crocodiles are breeding at an alarming rate and people are dying because of that, because we have no guns to kill them.

10. Any future reconciliation, Chairman, the TRC must accommodate the parties involved in the conflict because a lot of reconciliations that have taken place since 2003, sorry to say, we were not accommodated.

11. Police officers who were unfairly dismissed must be compensated according to law. The Labor Law of this land must be activated to compensate all police officers who were unfairly dismissed from the Force.

12. All Special Constables who were unfairly terminated to be compensated by the Government of Solomon Islands.

13. I will reaffirm that the Government of Solomon Islands to compensate the former Malaita Eagle Force and some of the members of the Police Force who secured Honiara during the ethnic crisis. They must be compensated.

These are my recommendations to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Some of them have not been covered now; otherwise I will be talking too much. I will say here to the people of Solomon Islands and my people of Malaita. I have been affected very much by the ethnic crisis. My involvement in the Malaita Eagle Force came in because some of my cousins had been raped; they were my rightful people who were living on Guadalcanal. [The GRA militants] threatened their husbands and took their wives and raped them in their camps. Today I will recommend that trauma counseling should be done to those victims. Another thing, my uncle, with his wife and two of his in-laws, was ordered at gunpoint to

rape his in-laws. Nature had been violated. How can we forget these things and that's why I have to come today.

Solomon Islands as you are listening out there, my people of north Malaita. My good people of Malaita province, I would like to say this on behalf of every one of us: Human beings' lives are short. I would like to commend you the Premier of Malaita province for your regional policy. We Malaitans should work together to assist the province in order to look after our own island. Just two weeks ago the Premier started to visit the outskirts of Honiara too. Why is doing that? I would encourage coming home and assisting the Province. So Premier, I am with your Government because the policy of regional developments in our provinces which I wholeheartedly support. Before I go back to sit down, I am sorry, Chairman, to take such a long time. I just want to say that I come here to forgive those who did bad things to my relatives; my uncles, my aunties, my cousins and my brothers and sisters. I forgive you with a good heart. When we forgive we forget. I also ask you people around Malaita and Solomon Islands to consider forgiving me too for anything that I did as a person or as a leader I ask you to forgive me. One thing is not clear to is. what is truth? All of us should understand Truth; Truth is Jesus Christ himself. If you believe in Jesus Christ, and that truth that you speak out shall save your way. So my brothers on Guadalcanal, I would ask your forgiveness for anything that I said or anything that I did during that time that was not good to you; please forgive me. Thank you Chairman, the Commissioners and Solomon Islands for this opportunity, thank you.