



**Speech by the Honourable Prime Minister,**

**Hon. Manasseh Damukana Sogavare, MP**

**Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> July, 2022**

**44<sup>th</sup> INDEPENDENCE ANNIVERSARY**

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**“IUMI TUGEDA FOR A STRONGER AND PEACEFUL  
SOLOMON ISLANDS”**

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**Salutation**

Acting Governor General of Solomon Islands and Chief Justice, His Excellency, Sir Albert Palmer and Lady Palmer;

Hon. Deputy Speaker of Parliament – Hon. Commins Mewa ;

Deputy Prime Minister – Hon. Manasseh Sogavare, MP;

Ministers of the Crown;

Leader of the Official Opposition – Hon. Mathew Wale, MP;

Leader of the Independents – Hon. John Dean Kuku, MP;

Members of Parliament;

The Attorney General

Constitutional Post Holders;

Commissioner of Police;

Mayor of Honiara City – Councillor;

Premier of Guadalcanal provincial

Premiers and Members of Provincial Assemblies;

Heads and Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Representatives of our Development Partners;

Representative of Solomon Islands Christian Association;

Representatives of Solomon Island Full Gospel Association

Chairman, Executive, and Members of the Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce;

Heads of Statutory Organizations;

Church Leaders and Clergies;

Senior Government Officials;

Traditional Chiefs and Community Leaders;

Fellow Solomon Islanders and Friends of Solomon Islands;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

## **Greetings**

Fellow Solomon Islanders living in our country and abroad, today I greet you as your Prime Minister on behalf of my family and on behalf of the Democratic Coalition Government for Advancement (DCGA) as we share and reflect together on our journey as an independent nation – since we attained political independence from Great Britain forty-four years ago on 7<sup>th</sup> July 1978.

Over the past two years, we were not able to celebrate our Independence Anniversary due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures we took to protect our country from COVID-19.

However, I know many of us celebrated our Independence Anniversary in our own homes in 2020 and in 2021. For this I thank you all for your dedication to our country's journey.

Before sharing my 'Independence Day' message with you today, let me first take this opportunity to wish you all, a **Happy 44th Independence Anniversary**. I ask our Almighty God to continue to Bless and Guide us in our journey to many more Anniversaries of our nation's independence.

### **Scope of today's message**

Fellow Solomon Islanders, as this is my first Independence Anniversary address since July 7 2019, so it will be longer than usual:

- I will first reflect briefly on our journey as an independent nation over the past forty-four years.
- I will then speak about the challenges faced by the government and achievements we have made during the Eleventh Parliament commencing from the time my government was elected into power in April 2019, and
- I will conclude with the priorities the DCGA will focus on as we move forward.

## **A. The Journey since the attainment of Independence on 7 July 1978 to 7 July 2022 - Challenges, Opportunities and Lessons in our journey as an independent nation**

Fellow Solomon Islanders, as we commemorate our 44<sup>th</sup> Independence Anniversary today, let us also remember those that started the process that brought us independence 44 years ago - the forefathers and foremothers of our nation.

These men and women negotiated our political independence from Great Britain who ruled the country for 85 years since declaring us as a protectorate from 1893.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of July 1978, our young country attained nationhood. Our first leaders solemnly declared to the world our choice and determination to champion our own destiny. On that day, 44 years ago, we started the process of governing ourselves.

My fellow country men and women, as we look back over the past 44 years of nationhood, we must reflect seriously on our journey with questions like:

- Has our country achieved the vision and aspirations our founding fathers and mothers had of a strong and united Solomon Islands when they led our quest for political independence?

- Has our country achieved the vision portrayed in our National Anthem?  
Which is a country:
  - that exudes 'Joy, Peace, Progress and Prosperity'.
  - where 'men shall brothers be'
- Has our young democracy stood the test of time? Have we matured as a people and a nation? Do we stand united for our country Solomon Islands? Is our allegiance to our country, and to the future of our children?
- Or is it divided? Are we planting seeds of doubt and dissent that will continue to divide us and prevent our country from achieving long-term peace and prosperity?
- Fellow Solomon Islanders, what legacy should we, the current generation of Solomon Islanders and leaders leave behind for our future generations?
- What kind of Solomon Islands do we want to see in ten or twenty or fifty or a hundred years from today?
- And what must we do to ensure that the decisions we all make will lead us to the type of Solomon Islands we wish to see and to leave behind for our children, our grandchildren and their children?
- To put it in another way, how do we want to be remembered by future generations?

- Do we want to be remembered as the generation of leaders and people that strengthened the foundations of unity, joy, peace, progress and prosperity for our nation?
- Or do we want to be remembered as the generation that continually undermined the future of our country:
  - because we cannot work together,
  - because we continue to undermine progress,
  - because we put our own interests first ahead of the nation's interest?
  - because we continue to create division amongst ourselves which steer us away from a path that will lift our nation to new heights?
- Fellow Solomon Islanders, answers to these questions will help us navigate the waters of hope and promise ahead of us to help us all build the Solomon Islands that is worthy to leave behind for our future generations.

However, to answer these questions, '***we must first look back to our past, and then consider the realities we face today, before we can chart our path into the future***'.

## **B. Key challenges and successes since our independence 44 years ago.**

Fellow Solomon Islanders, like all countries in our region, Solomon Islands faced numerous challenges during its journey as an independent small island nation.

Many of the challenges that had set our country back were from natural causes such as cyclones and earthquakes, or from global events such as the global economic crises or health epidemics.

**Some however were sadly driven by human conflict amongst and between fellow Solomon Islanders.** Unless we address the underlying elements of these conflicts our country will find it difficult to achieve its full development potential.

### **Reflections on our journey since Independence**

Over the past 44 years, we have expanded our economic base through improved trading arrangements with other countries. Our exports base increased to include round logs; sawn timber; fish – fresh and canned; palm oil; coconuts and other niche products including cocoa and marine products such as beche-de-mer. Tourism and our cultural industry grew. These among others have generated much of our revenue.

In 1996, we adopted a system of government that formally established and empowered our provinces to establish legislative Councils through the Provincial Government Act (1996). Prior to 1996, our provinces were called districts and managed through a system of District Commissioners (DCs) deployed from Central Government.

With the implementation of the Provincial Government Act, many of the services previously provided directly to the then districts by the central government, were devolved to the respective provincial governments.

Christianity flourished since Independence. Civil Society Organisations grew. Foreign Nations and International Organisations established their presence in our country and we reciprocated in the same manner – a recognition of our Statehood.

These developments generally show progress. We have come a long way since independence. **But there were also challenges.**

The history of Solomon Islands shows that the country had met many challenges since we attained our independence. We do not have control over some of these challenges, such as natural disasters or the impact of global challenges.

**However, what has been of a worrying trend are the challenges relating to relationships among and between our own people. *Knowing and addressing these challenges is important because they have the potential to unify or to divide our country.***

In this regard it is useful to remind ourselves of some of these challenges, lest we forget, because we must learn from them in-order to forge a united Solomon Islands going forward.

In 1988, the people of Guadalcanal marched and presented their demands to the then Prime Minister Rt. Hon. Ezekiel Alebua.

In 1999, civil unrest began in Guadalcanal – what had become known outside our country as ‘ethnic conflict’. The events of 1999 remind us of the fragility of our nation. They also remind us of some of the darkest and most trying times our people and our country had faced.

In July 2003, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands [RAMSI] commenced. This was the beginning of our journey of recovery. Australia, New Zealand and our Pacific Islands brothers and sisters came to support us, through RAMSI, a programme that lasted 14 years.

In 2006, we experienced the April Riots and the first burning of Chinatown. This event once again tried our resolve. Once again and with the support of RAMSI our unifying spirit helped us find a peaceful solution.

On 30 June 2017, RAMSI completed its mission in Solomon Islands after 14 years of service to our country. This signals a return normalcy. We were once again in complete control of our own destiny to lead our nation in peace and harmony.

RAMSI helped restore law and order and strengthened government institutions, which were severely compromised during the civil unrest during its 14-year presence in the country.

## **C. Challenges faced by the Democratic Coalition Government for Advancement since April 2019.**

Let me now focus a little on the challenges faced by the DCGA since it came into power in April 2019. Later, I will also share on the achievements it has made during the same period.

The past three years had posed many challenges for the government and our nation. However, I will focus on the five major ones that had significant impact on the way our country had progressed since the Democratic Coalition Government for Advancement came into power after the 2019 general elections.

### **1. Challenge to the legitimacy of DCGA**

Fellow Solomon Islanders the Democratic Coalition Government for Advancement started facing challenges from day one of its tenure. The legitimacy of DCGA was challenged at the High Court of Solomon Islands shortly after the formation of government. **The Highest Court in the land validated the legitimacy of the Democratic Coalition Government for Advancement in its Judgement handed down on 24 May 2019.**

### **2. Challenges relating to the establishment of bilateral relations with the Peoples Republic of China**

The DCGA came under undue scrutiny for making a decision that is considered a normal undertaking in any democratically elected government of a sovereign country when after extensive consultations including with several Pacific Island countries, the Solomon Islands government established formal diplomatic relations with the Peoples Republic of China, thereby bringing to an end the 36-year-old relationship with Taiwan.

The action taken by my government to formally recognise the Peoples Republic of China complied with United Nations Resolution No. 2758 that was adopted by the 26<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly in October 1971, which we had ignored since independence.

This Resolution which is implemented by 178 out of 193 member states of United Nations clearly states that *“the representative of the Government of the People’s Republic of China is the sole legal representative of China in the United Nations... and [that member states] recognize the representatives of the PRC government as the sole legal representatives of China in the United Nations Organization.”*

By exercising our sovereign right to recognise PRC, Solomon Islands was merely joining 177 other United Nations member states that had already adopted UN Resolution 2758 recognising PRC.

As I had reflected on many times, Solomon Islands is finally on the correct side of history by implementing United Nations Resolution

2758 and joining the other 177 United Nation Member states that recognise PRC.

Fellow citizens it is my hope that we can focus on the benefits of our bilateral relations with PRC in the same way as we focus on the benefits of our bilateral relations with our other partners such as Australia or Japan or New Zealand.

### **3. November 24, 2021 Riots**

On 24<sup>th</sup> November 2021, the Democracy of Solomon Islands came under attack from people that were intent on removing the democratically elected government from power through illegal means.

The wilful destruction of property resulting from rioting, burning and looting of Chinatown and other business houses in the national capital worth more than eight hundred million dollars simply showed there are people in our country that would resort to illegal extremes to bring down a legitimate government.

The rioting, burning and looting brought back memories of the darkest days in our country's history.

I thank governments of Australia, Papua New Guinea, Fiji and New Zealand for their rapid response to my urgent request for assistance

and for the subsequent deployment of police personnel within 24 hours and throughout the following weeks to help stabilise the situation at the national capital.

Fellow Solomon Islanders, there are legal ways to bring about changes in elected governments. It is my fervent hope that we make use these legal provisions instead of resorting to illegal means of the type we saw on November 24 2021 if we want to change democratically elected governments.

#### **4. Deferral of the National General Election to early 2024**

Fellow Solomon Islanders, a lot of misinformation has been cultivated about government's intention to defer the national general election until after the 2023 Pacific Games is held.

Let me be very clear on the deferral of the national general elections so that everyone is of the same understanding.

- i. Firstly, the government does not have any plans to change the term of the Parliament from four years to five years.
- ii. Secondly, the government is not proposing to extend the current parliament to five years, but rather to defer the national general election to be held after the 2023 Pacific Games is hosted.

- iii. Thirdly, the government is only seeking a 'once-off' delay in the national general election to be held after the 2023 Pacific Games which is scheduled between 19 November 2023 and 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2023
- iv. Fourthly, the deferral of the national general election to be held after the 2023 Pacific Games will still require a Constitutional Amendment to allow it to be deferred.
- v. Fifthly, the Bill that will be tabled in Parliament on this subject will only be seeking a Constitutional Amendment for a 'Once-Off' deferral of the national general election to be held after the 2023 Pacific Games.

On the reasons for the deferral of the national general elections, we simply do not have enough funds to conduct two high-priority, major, and costly events in the same year – the 2023 Pacific Games and the National General Elections. The 2023 Pacific Games will cost between 400 – 450 million dollars to deliver in 2023.

The National Hosting Authority for the 2023 Pacific Games had sought to shift the games to 2024. However, it was unsuccessful because 2024 is the Olympic year and the Olympic Charter prohibits the convening of any sporting events at regional and international levels during the Olympic year.

The deferral of the national general elections will also enable the Electoral Commission to complete its national consultations on several key reforms it

wishes to implement before the national general election. These reforms include:

- i. Further amendment to the Electoral Act to address deficiencies picked up during the 2019 national general elections
- ii. Completing preparations to enable:
  - Synchronisation of the national, provincial and ward elections to the same date throughout the country
  - Continuous voter registration
  - Out-of-Constituency Voting

The COVID-19 pandemic had prevented the Electoral Commission from undertaking the necessary consultations over the past two and half years. The proposed deferral of the 2023 national general elections will allow time to Electoral Commission accomplish the required reforms.

## **5. The COVID-19 Pandemic**

Fellow citizens the COVID-19 pandemic that affected 228 countries and territories had posed significant social and economic challenges to Solomon Islands since early 2020 when countries started closing their borders thereby affecting trade and international travel between countries.

After keeping the infection out of the country for a good part of two years we finally experienced community transmission in January 2022. However, despite our lower vaccination rate of only about 50%, we were blessed with shorter periods of community transmission compared to other countries, and

we experienced fewer numbers of very severe infections and lower death rates compared to other countries.

I pay tribute to the vigilance of the Oversight Committee who for almost three years oversaw the development and implementation of our strategy to prevent, contain and control COVID-19 in our country.

As we have finally re-opened our international borders, I thank all the front liners and their families for the huge sacrifices you have made over the past three years to protect our country and our people from COVID-19, in particular our staff from the Ministry of Health and Medical Services; Ministry of Police, National security and Correctional Services; Immigration, Customs and Bio-security.

I also thank all other government ministries that became part of our collective defence against COVID-19 during the pandemic.

I also take this opportunity to thank the Provincial Premiers and your staff and the Lord Mayor of the Honiara City Council and your staff for working with the national government to control the COVID-19 pandemic. Thank you for leading the vaccination efforts in your respective provinces.

I also thank the members of our churches, the business community, and the general public that have assisted the government in our fight against COVID-19. It is our collective effort that has allowed the government to fully re-open our borders 6 days ago on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2022. Thank you.

## **D. Achievements by the Democratic Coalition Government for Advancement.**

Fellow Solomon Islanders, despite the many challenges we faced since my last Independence Anniversary statement three years ago, I am immensely proud that my government has delivered many successes over the past three years, some of which I share with you as follows.

### **1. SUCCESSFUL RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

We have successfully managed the COVID-19 pandemic in our country. We re-opened our international borders on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2022. The total number of people infected by COVID-19 in Solomon Islands reached 21,237. About 153 people lost their lives to COVID-19. Our vaccination rate had been slow. However about 50% of the eligible population are now fully vaccinated.

It is government's policy that all eligible person must still be vaccinated. We encourage all eligible persons including children between 12 to 17 years of age to get vaccinated.

### **2. SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF FLAGSHIP PROJECTS IN THE FUNDAMENTAL REFORM SECTOR**

The DCGA has successfully implemented several flagship projects of the government as follows:

#### **i. 2023 Pacific Games**

Fellow Solomon Islanders, our preparation to host the 20-23 Pacific Games is on track.

- The synthetic practice track and field at KGV East has been hand over.
- The Solomon Islands National Institute of Sport (SINIS) is complete and operational.
- The Indonesian funded Friendship Hall will be handed over in the next month.
- The main stadiums project comprising the national stadium, the tennis centre, the swimming pool is well underway
- Construction has commenced for the PG2023 games village - SINU dormitory project comprising three –four-story complexes.
- SINU and HCC community field upgrades are in progress.
- Planning for refurbishment of identified schools to accommodate athletes is underway.
- The Pacific Games projects will employ about 1,000 by third quarter of 2022 and between 8,000 to 10,000 people by June 2023.

## **ii. Development Bank of Solomon Islands**

- DBSI was launched in June 2020 as a fully-fledged development bank providing loans to individuals and small to medium enterprises / business (SME's).
- The total loan portfolio of the bank has reached \$65million and expected to nearly reach \$100million by end the year with a further \$30 million provided under this year's development budget to grow the loan portfolio to SMEs.
- The government is currently working on a new project for DBSI to immediately expand to the provincial centers. The DCGA hopes to open two provincial branches by end of the year.

- The DBSI Cabinet sub-committee will be re-activated to oversee the provincial expansion on behalf of SIG. The Terms of reference for the DBSI Cabinet sub-committee director has been drafted

### **iii. Commodity Export Marketing Authority [CEMA]**

- Assessment reports with costing of repairs and maintenance of three buying centers in Pakera, Kirakira in Makira Ulawa Province; Buala, Gozoruru in Isabel Province; and Tarakukure in Choiseul Province plus the Honiara head office, warehouses and storage facilities have been completed.
- The Pakera Buying Centre was opened in April 2022. Trading activities are now in place for copra and cocoa and other emerging commodities to also commence soon.
- Preparation for repairs and maintenance work is in progress on the other buying centres at Malu'u, Auki, Buala, Gozoruru, Lata, Tulagi, Hakama and Noro. These centres will open progressively from late July to August 2022,
- Land works and preparations are in progress for refineries at Russel Islands and Noro.

### **iv. RIPEL**

- Russel Islands Investment Forum - the entity overseeing all the investment activities on land owned by the indigenous Lavukal tribes in Russell Islands has been established.
- DCGA will support RIIF with provision of three processing machines, buildings for the machine and operating capital through the Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of Fisheries.

- DCGA through a \$1.3 million allocation to the Ministry of Fisheries will rebuild the fisheries centre in Yandina and procure fisheries equipment for the centre to operate this year.

**v. TAX REFORM**

- DCGA has approved an increase in the zero-tax threshold for PAYE from \_\_\_\_\_ is there something missing here?

### **3. PRODUCTIVE SECTOR**

The DCGA has successfully implemented several key projects in the productive sector as follows:

**i. DBSI Credit Loan Scheme**

\$15 million was allocated by DCGA in 2021 under the productive sector to DBSI for SMEs involved in the tourism, agriculture and commerce subsectors to access as loans at very competitive interest rate.

This allocation continues under the 2022 fiscal year to assist SMEs step up their preparedness for expected increase in demand for services in the hospitality industry and supply of farm produce as we reopen our international borders.

**ii. Economic Facilities**

The DCGA has invested in the following economic facilities:

- a) ***Suava Bay Economic Growth Centre*** – The landfilling works has been completed. The market house for local communities to sell their produce will be built this year.
- b) ***Malu' u Fish Filleting Centre*** – Renovation was completed in 2021 and equipment from Japan for fish filleting, fish mince and fish sausage has already arrived in the country ready for installation.

Malaita province will be able to supply fish fillets, fish sausages and fish mince including to the 2023 Pacific Games through this partnership project between SIG and Japan.

- c) ***Kirakira cocoa oil factory house*** – will be constructed this year after two years of delay due to changes in the design and bills of quantity (BOQ). Its construction will further boost the export of cocoa products abroad and increase sales for cocoa farmers.
- d) ***National pig breeding centre in Gizo*** – this will be constructed this year to replace the KGVI piggery farm which had been converted to PG 2023 - SIFF football academy.

### iii. **Biosecurity Vapour Heat Treatment (VHT) plant**

The DCGA has invested in the first ever Vapor heat treatment plant for Solomon Islands.

- a) The Vapour Heat Treatment equipment will help Solomon Islands meet international market requirements for export of crops, fruits and vegetables. This equipment is the first of its kind in Solomon Islands and is fully funded by the government.

#### iv. **Major Airport Infrastructures**

The DCGA has invested in several airports and airstrips in the country as follows:

- a) **Honiara International Airport Upgrade** funded by Japan will have four new aprons for international arrivals.
- b) **Honiara New International Departure Terminal** funded by Japan is expected for completion in the last quarter of this year.
- c) **Munda International Airport Terminal** is under construction
- d) **The new Honiara Domestic Terminal** will be located in the departure terminal of the current international airport terminal.
- e) **Kirakira airstrip surface upgrade** was completed Jan this year
- f) **Seghe airstrip upgrade** is jointly funded by NZ and Australian governments. This will see the expansion and tar sealing of the Seghe runway. It is expected to be completed in early 2023

- g) **Taro Airstrip upgrade** is jointly funded by NZ and Australian governments. This will see the expansion and tar sealing of the Taro runway. It is expected to be completed in mid-2023

v. **Other Major Transport Infrastructures**

The DCGA has also invested in other major transport infrastructure as follows:

- a) **Noro Port Upgrade** – the government is undertaking a study to expand the Noro port through support from the Australian funded Solomon Infrastructure investment program [SIIP].
- b) **Kukum – Henderson Road Upgrade** funded by Japan and is expected to be completed before the 2023 Pacific Games.
- c) **Kirakira ramp construction** has been completed.
- d) **Malu’ u wharf construction** is almost complete.
- e) **Tulagi wharf** is in progress
- f) **Chea wharf in Marovo** is in progress
- g) **North Malaita Taba’a bridge** is completed
- h) **East Malaita Kware Bridge repairs** is completed
- i) **Malaita roads maintenance** is ongoing.
- j) **Honiara feeder roads maintenance** is ongoing
- k) **Guadalcanal roads maintenance** is ongoing.
- l) **Makira coastal roads maintenance** is completed.
- m) **Taro new township road** is in progress.
- n) *The ground-breaking ceremony for* **Lomlom airstrip ring road** has been done and work will commence soon.
- o) **Gizo feeder road drainage** is ongoing.

## **vi. Major Communication Infrastructures**

- a) Consultations are in progress with communities for project sites on this **162 towers 3-4G** project which will transform communication through-out the country.

## **4. RESOURCES SECTOR**

In the resources sector the DCGA is driving the following priorities through its relevant ministries.

### **i. *Downstream processing***

DCGA supported the development of Value-Added Timber Association (VATA) facilities in Henderson (Honiara) and Noro (Western Province) which will enable our timber products to access overseas markets whilst at the same time helping our farmers getting increased benefits from their forest resources

### **ii. *Sustainable logging policy***

Over the past three years DCGA has been implementing a policy to reduce round log exports until our downstream processing capability is established. The policy intention is to move away from round log export and focus on downstream processing.

The Forestry Act is currently under review and the sustainable logging policy is nearing completion.

### ***iii. Support to SINU***

The DCGA is also supporting SINU to provide relevant forestry-related trainings to our students including through the establish the Poitete campus in the Western Province.

### ***iv. Renewable Energy***

DCGA is driving its renewable policy through the development of hydro-power generation such as at Tina hydro and the Mini-hydro at Beulah. Mini-hydro projects together with solar hybrids plants are currently being explored for implementation in rural communities.

### ***v. Water Sector Development***

The Ministry of Mines, Energy and Rural Electrification has completed more than 50 borehole drilling works in Honiara and Guadalcanal. It is working in partnership with Solomon Water to expand urban water services in some provincial capital centres

### ***vi. Mining development***

The Ministry of Mines, Energy and Rural Electrification is fast tracking the opening of three mines on Guadalcanal, Isabel and Choiseul, with the Gold Ridge Mine in Guadalcanal being at the most advanced stage.

It is also making improvements to its laboratory facilities to enable testing of geological materials locally.

The Ministry is also working on the Mining Bill that is expected to table this in the November 2022 sitting of Parliament.

**vii. *Environmental conservation***

The Ministry of Environment has established five conservation Protected Areas in the country and is looking to establish more Protected Areas

**viii. *Early warning System***

The Ministry has upgraded marine weather early warning system Temotu and Rennell/Bellona Provinces and has delivered new weather equipment to schools and communities in Makira Ulawa Province. These instruments are of great importance to our people especially in relation to sea travels.

## **5. SOCIAL SECTOR**

In the social sector the DCGA is making the following progress through its relevant ministries.

**i. In the Health sector:**

- Several Rural Health Infrastructure have been completed including at Aola, Avuavu, Afio & Manuopo and several are still progressing including at Takwa, Namuga, Renbel, Wagina.
- New health facilities will be constructed at Konide, Ole, Dedeu, Gounanataea, Sulufoloa.
- Work is progressing on improvements to Kilu'ufi, Gizo and Tulagi hospitals.
- The new CT Scan equipment was commissioned at the NRH this year and is fully operational. This project was fully funded by SIG
- Improvements to the NRH are progressing while work on the NRH relocation continues
- SIG has increased its commitment in procurement of medical supplies- and now covers the full cost of all our procurements.
- New Comprehensive Medical Centre has been signed off with PRC and construction will commence soon

## ii. In the Education sector

- The administration of government scholarships now come under SITESA.
- Increased support is provided to expand infrastructure development in the educator sector through the development budget as well as increased support in school grant allocations.

- Increased support is provided to the Solomon Islands National University for infrastructure development as well as commitment to ensure SINU become a competent regional institution.
- New Education Bill is ready to be tabled in the next sitting of Parliament

### iii. In the Police and national security sector

- The Lofang Patrol Boat outpost is now progressing following the ground-breaking ceremony last year
- The National Security and Boarder roadmaps have been validated
- Increased support is provided to Police and Correctional Service infrastructures projects

### iv. In the Traditional Governance, Peace and Ecclesiastical Affairs sector

- Consultation on the ‘Reintegration and Reparation policy’ has been successfully completed.
- The SIG & Ecclesiastical Institutions Strategic Partnership Framework 2021-2025 has been endorsed
- The Traditional Governance Bill will be ready soon
- The TRC recommendations are progressively implemented through various government ministries and institutions.

### v. In Home Affairs Sports Division

- The National Sports and Recreation Policy has been launched
- SIG will support the development of sports infrastructure at provincial levels including at Aligegeo in Malaita, Noro Tuna Park in Western Province, GPPOL stadium in Guadalcanal, Shortland Boxing Hall, and Taro Community Hall

vi. In Public Service,

- The Retirement policy has been developed
- New housing policy has been developed
- The Covid-19 vaccination policy for public servants has been implemented

## **E. Our Population Growth and DCGA Priorities going forward**

Fellow Solomon Islanders before outlying my government's priority projects going forward, I want to reflect briefly on our population growth because this is going to be the most important determinant of what we will do to ensure we can support our population.

In 1931, Solomon Islands only had 94,000 people.

In 1970, our population grew to 161,000 people.

During our independence in 1978, our population was estimated to be 211,648 people.

At the 2019 census, our population grew to 721,445 people.

In 2022, our estimated population 776,195 people.

It is estimated that by 2031, our population will exceed 1 million people. *We will overtake Fiji to become the country with the second largest population in the Pacific by 2031.*

And it is also estimated, that by 2050, the Solomon Islands population will reach 1.35 million people.

Based on these projections our population will increase by about 573,800 people in the next 28 years between 2022 and 2050.

Fellow Solomon Islanders, I go through these population statistics to show that our population is growing at a very fast pace.

The key question we must answer is, if we are already struggling to feed, educate and provide adequate jobs for our current population of 776,000 people in 2022, how will we cope with the challenges of feeding, educating and providing jobs for 1.35 million people in 2050 with the same level of natural resources in our country?

This is the reality we face today – a reality that must shape our development strategies going forward

### **DCGA Priorities Going Forward**

Fellow Solomon Islanders, I will now focus on the most important priorities of my government going forward.

### **1. Tabling of the Report on the Federal Constitution in Parliament**

The DCGA will table the Report on the Federal Constitution to Parliament for its consideration and discussion to determine the next steps to be taken.

### **2. Tabling of the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Parliament.**

The government will table the TRC Report to Parliament and present an update on progress to date on implementation of the Summary recommendations to the report.

It is the intention of my government to also table the Bill to establish the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that will consider all outstanding claims related to the ethnic conflict.

### **3. Driving the completion of the Electoral Reforms before the next General election**

My government will work with the Electoral Commission to:

- a) Review and amend certain parts of the Electoral Act based on lessons from the 2019 general election
- b) Ensure the proposed reforms to simultaneously conduct national, provincial, and ward elections is in place for the next elections,

- c) Put in place the mechanisms for out-of-constituency voting,
- d) Put in place mechanism for continuous voter registration in between election dates

#### **4. Review and Amendment of the Political party Integrity Act**

We will work with the Political Parties Integrity Commission to review and amend relevant sections of the Political Parties Integrity Act before the next general elections

#### **5. Explore possible reform and amalgamation of several existing standalone commissions**

The government will conduct a review of several existing standalone commissions that conduct similar roles and functions with the view to exploring possible reform and amalgamation and standardisation.

#### **6. Cabinet Subcommittee for Economic Development Initiates for Provinces**

- DCGA is serious about addressing the economic development needs of all Solomon Islanders with the aim to maintaining peace and unity of the nation.
- It has therefore established a Cabinet subcommittee to assist with facilitating major long term economic development in provinces to ensure Cabinet is informed directly and regularly about priorities for Provinces.

- The Subcommittee will focus on all current, pending and emerging priorities for Malaita province in the first instance that will form the basis of a Malaita Economic Development Initiative (MEDI) for consideration by Cabinet
- Similar economic development initiatives for other provinces will follow.

## **7. Explore / Drive / Implement Transformational Projects**

DCGA will explore, drive or implement transformative projects that have the potential to transform our economy either through direct revenue raising potential or transform the way our economy can work. We will commence with the following transformative concepts.

### **i. Citizenship by Investment program**

Citizenship by Investment is a global program that offers interested parties to invest in certain countries and in return are granted passports of that country.

Many countries already operate this program, including Vanuatu that on average earns between US\$100 to US\$120 million dollars a year.

The government will explore this avenue to better understand the risks and benefits. It is an innovative financing program that many

countries have used as an additional revenue stream to their budgets.

## **ii. Digital Transformation Program**

The Cabinet has approved the establishment of a Digital Transformation Authority. We will undertake further work to drive digital transformation that will ensure we reach all corners of our nation while at the same time provide cheap, reliable, accessible connectivity to businesses that drive our economy.

## **iii. Tourism and hotel development**

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism sector saw an annual tourism flow exceeding 1.6 billion travellers. It is anticipated that by 2030, the tourism market will not only rebound, but will double to more than 3 billion travellers per year.

By 2030, Solomon Islands population will exceed Fiji. Our natural attractions can match any country with established tourist destinations. Our tourism infrastructure is very limited.

Solomon Islands must invest in-order to attract the numbers of tourists that will generate meaningful economic growth. This means we must invest in hotels, long-haul tourist markets, and domestic destinations.

DCGA will work to attract investors for ‘4 star’ and ‘5 star’ hotels as well as drive ‘Eco and small holder tourism’ and ‘Cruise tourism’ simultaneously to fast track our tourism industry.

We will need to fast-track the expansion of our international airport to accommodate larger long-haul aircrafts. Solomon Airlines need to start planning for regular long-haul flights and adequate domestic capacity to take tourists in increased numbers to provincial destinations.

#### **iv. Tax Reforms**

DCGA will continue to drive tax reforms that will deliver win-win results for those paying taxes and the government revenue.

### **8. Drive Implement Flagship projects**

- i. **The 2023 Pacific Games** is the government’s most important priority between now and December 2023. We must deliver this to the required standard on time and on budget.
- ii. **The International Airport Upgrade** project will be completed before the 2023 Pacific Games.
- iii. **The Kukum Phase 2** project will be completed before the 2023 Pacific games

- iv. **The Tina Hydro** project is progressing and will be completed in 2024
- v. **The USP Campus** project will be completed before the 2023 Pacific Games
- vi. **The NHR Comprehensive Medical Centre** is a brand new four-story medical facility funded by PRC that will transform tertiary care services at the NRH in the areas of cardiology and renal medicine. Once this is operational, most of the cases we normally refer to Australia could potentially be done locally. Clearing work for construction has already commenced at the eastern end of the NRH.
- vii. **Work on National Transport Core** will pick up to follow through with feasibility studies to determine scope and cost of investment.
- viii. **Work on the upgrade of the roads from Honiara City Council to White River and from Hendersen Airport to Mbarande Road** Construction will commence later this year.
- ix. **Work on five provincial markets**, in Malu'u, Buala, Seghe, and two in Guadalcanal and **one market** at Naha in Honiara will commence within the next twelve months.

## **F. Conclusion**

Fellow Solomon Islanders, my address this year had been longer than usual because over the past three years a lot of achievements have been made and it is important that I share with you some of these achievements.

The list of achievements I share with you today is not comprehensive, however it gives you a good feel of the amount of work the DCGA has undertaken during the past three years, which was also one of the most challenging periods in our country. I also highlighted several challenges we faced.

However, our journey to the future can only be measured by the level of determination and commitment by our people to unite and move forward together, as one people and as one nation, uniting together for a stronger and more peaceful Solomon Islands.

Fellow citizens, we will continue to face challenges from within our country and from outside our country.

However, if we are united in our resolve and join hands to work together to uplift our nation, our families and our children we can achieve the unachievable.

In closing let me convey to each of you, citizens of our beloved country, whether you are young or old, male or female, living in the country or abroad my deep and sincere gratitude for who you are and what you invest in our country with your God-given gifts and talents.

Today, as we commemorate our 44<sup>th</sup> year of Independence, I call on every Solomon Islander personalise the **‘theme of the 2023 Pacific Games, to – Challenge, Celebrate, Unite’**.

I call on each of you to **challenge** yourself, your families and your friends to do your best for our country.

I call on each of you to **celebrate** our diversity as individuals and as a people, as brothers and as sisters of one nation to uplift and be proud of our country

I call on each of you to **unite** as one people, for one common purpose to help our people and our country realise and achieve the message inscribed in our National Anthem, to ensure Solomon Islands can experience ...

**...Joy, Peace, Progress and Prosperity... that Men should brothers be, ... let Nations See... Our Solomon Islands, ... Stands for Evermore”.**

Fellow Solomon Islanders, today our country is 44 years old. We have come through trials and tribulations during these 44 years. But we have also enjoyed peace and serenity during the same 44 years.

The future of our country is in our collective hands. We can all stand together and commit to the future of this country and the future of our children.

Let us **challenge**, ourselves and each other, let us **celebrate** who we are and our diversity, and let us **unite** as one people to uplift our nation.

Let me close with a quote from the Book of James Chapter 1, Verses 2, 3 and 12, and I quote...

***“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance”*** and

***“Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him”*** ... close quote

**Fellow citizens - HAPPY 40<sup>TH</sup> INDEPENDENCE ANNIVERSARY**

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

**To God be the glory great things He has done.**

**IUMI TUGEDA FOR A STRONGER AND PEACEFUL SOLOMON ISLANDS.**

**God Bless Solomon Islands from shore to shore.**