

T News and Views on the Pacific Islands TOKBLONG PASIFIK K

Dirty Field Notes:

What I Learned About Peace, War, and Development In the Solomon Islands

Written by Kenneth D. Bush



Solomon Islands

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Earlier this year, I embarked on a three-week mission to Solomon Islands. Officially, this was an “initiative to better understand the patterns of violent conflict and to prevent a return to the violence of the recent past.” What it became, however, was a journey into the international peacebuilding industry in a hidden part of the world.

To be clear here: Solomon Islands was not on my map, mentally, professionally, or geographically. Depending on the context, the label that most accurately described me was “recovering academic” (early into a 12-step programme), or “gonzo academic,” (working to bridge the space between ideas and action -- whether “action” is framed as policy, development practice, or advocacy). I had already turned down an invitation to lead a team to Solomon Islands, based largely on “ick factor” generated by seeing the legions of so-called professional consultants flying blind from one war zone to another dispensing truths gleaned from business class at 10,000 meters.

In the end, mea culpa, I agreed that the work I had initiated on Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment might prove interesting – if not “useful” – in a Solomon Islands context. I was curious to see how the unique experiences of Solomon Islanders might help me, and Solomon Islanders, better understand the uses and limitations of these tools and processes to assess how development interventions can affect the dynamics of peace or conflict in conflict-prone areas.

One of the conditions I put on my participation on a “team” was that the division of labour would be one where I contributed to the development and application of an appropriate methodology (drawing on 24 years of work with colleagues in Sri Lanka and the Philippines), while the rest of the team of Solomon Islanders would provide the substantive “stuff”. In the end, the “team” consisted of two Australians,

one Brit, an American, one Solomon Islander intern, and me, a Canadian – certainly not the local team that I had argued was needed for the exercise. Our weeks together took us in and around Honiara, as well as to Malaita, Rural Guadalcanal and Western Province, where we met with the widest range of actors including UN agencies, Regional Assistance Mission in Solomon Islands, international development agencies, government officials, NGOs, churches, chiefs, youth, and others. Specifically, we were there to determine whether the interventions of the international community were contributing to peacebuilding.

Simple Questions, Hard Answers

By the end of the mission, we had held intensive conversations with more than 300 people. The assessment of whether or not international intervention is contributing to peacebuilding boils down to two pretty straight-forward questions: Is the initiative in question increasing the capacity of Solomon Islanders to identify problems, and to formulate and implement their own solutions non-violently and effectively? And, is the initiative in question built on a partnership that leads towards genuine ownership by Solomon Islanders?

In the less-than-diplomatic language of a gonzo academic, the response to both of these questions is short and blunt: No.

My first exposure to the active undermining of local capacities to build peace was “Expat Wantokism.” Those familiar with Solomon Islands will know that “Wantok” (derived from “One Talk”) refers to the basic way in which Melanesians organize themselves whereby social, political, and economic interactions are determined by one’s membership in a particular subgroup (“Wantok”).

This system tends to determine the economic, social, and political opportunities available to individuals. Outsiders often see this as a form of structured favouritism that permeates Solomon Islands.

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Keeping the peace, the Australians bring jeeps and personnel through the Regional Assistance Mission in the Solomon Islands.



Pacific Peoples' Partnership
407-620 View Street
Victoria BC, Canada, V8W 1J6
Phone 250 · 381 · 4131
www.pacificpeoplespartnership.org



photo - Elaine Brière

C-SPOD Wraps Up



After 14 years spent promoting the sustainable development of living marine resources in the South Pacific, the Canada-South Pacific Ocean Development Program is scheduled to conclude in December 2004. Funded by the Canadian International Development Agency, which recently cancelled its aid programme in the South Pacific, C-SPOD has implemented \$28 million worth of natural resource management projects in the region and was the main source of aid from Canada to the region over the past decade. Working in partnership with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, the South Pacific Regional Environmental Program, the Forum Fisheries Agency, and the University of the South Pacific, C-SPOD has spearheaded marine conservation projects, participated in the development of fisheries legislation, and tackled gender issues in the fisheries industry. C-SPOD has also bolstered the USP Marine Studies Program by providing scholarships for post-graduate students and supporting research projects throughout the Pacific Islands. C-SPOD is currently seeking ways for other donor nations and partners to carry on the work it began. ■

Saipan Sweatshop Workers Unwillingly Repatriated

Following the out-of-court settlement of a lawsuit against 27 garment manufacturers who operated sweatshops in Saipan (see story in Tok Blong Pasifik, Vol 2, No. 1), some of the 30,000 affected factory workers are now unemployed. Many of the workers chose to return to their countries of origin and were eligible for up to \$3,000 in travel costs under the terms of the settlement. However, some of the garment workers have lived in the US commonwealth of Saipan since the 1980s and have elected to remain in residence. Despite American federal laws that permit a person legally residing in the United States for at least five years to apply for permanent residency, local government officials have declared that all unemployed garment workers are to be “repatriated” to their original countries of residence. Although many of these long-time residents have appealed to the government to remain in the country, a May 2004 list named 434 workers who had been identified by the government for deportation. ■



Garment worker in Fiji
photo - Elaine Brière

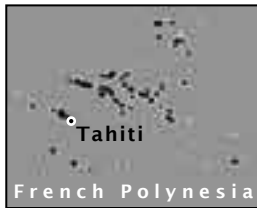
Hundreds of Pacific Islanders Sent to Iraq

In July 2004, the US government alerted more than 3,100 soldiers of possible combat duty, 500 of whom are army reservists from Guam, Saipan, American Samoa, and the neighbouring islands. For many of these reservists, serving in the American military is a path to US citizenship, which is not granted to Pacific Islanders at birth but can be acquired through military service. With the increased commitment of US military personnel in Iraq also comes increased pressure to recruit more volunteers, and the promise of US citizenship and economic gains have been attractive enlistment incentives for many Pacific Islanders. While the American government maintains that they do not seek to employ a mercenary army, this message is in stark contrast with President George W. Bush’s recent decision to expedite the citizenship process for members of the armed forces on active duty. With hundreds of Pacific Islanders on sortie in Iraq, Pacific Island communities are besieged by critical personnel shortages. According to a July report in the Saipan Tribune, 80 members of the Saipan police and fire departments have already been called to duty in Iraq, with another 40 reservist officers still on-call. ■

Kanaks Take On Canadian Nickel Mining Grant

Two of New Caledonia’s Kanak elders, Senator Dick Meureureu and Chief Adrien Koroma, traveled to Toronto in April 2004 to attend the Inco annual shareholders’ meeting. They say that since the launch of its 2001 Goro nickel-cobalt project, Canadian mining company Inco Limited has refused to address the concerns of the indigenous people of New Caledonia, including widespread environmental degradation and loss of the region’s unique biodiversity. The two elders called for negotiations with the indigenous population and for immediate review of the environmental impact assessment conducted by a team of independent scientists. Joining the elders in protest were members of the Algonquin First Nation, who danced and drummed in solidarity with the Kanak elders. Despite ongoing opposition, an October 2004 press release announced Inco’s plan to proceed with the Goro mining project based on its ability to meet “financial objectives.” Contact MiningWatch Canada, www.miningwatch.ca, for details. ■

Confusion Reigns in French Polynesia



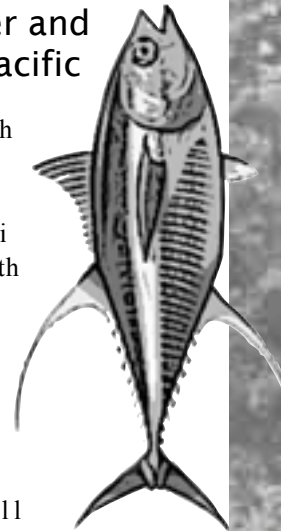
Citizens have taken to the streets in this French protectorate, blocking government offices in Tahiti, and closing down post offices on the Leeward Islands of Huahine, Raiatea and Taha'a while calling for the dissolution of parliament and national elections. The protests mark the increasing political and economic instability that has taken hold of the islands since two no-confidence votes toppled the country's first pro-independence president, Oscar Temaru, and his Union of Democracy coalition government just 15 weeks after he came to power. The censure served a devastating blow to the pro-independence movement in Tahiti – Temaru, who led the campaign against France's nuclear testing that ended in 1996, had edged out incumbent Gaston Flosse, a close ally of Jacques Chirac, by only one vote in the last election. Despite increased support for independence within Tahiti (France annexed the archipelago in the late 1800s), Flosse had worked for many years to maintain French rule over the territory. Temaru and his allies are hotly contesting Flosse's recent re-election. ■

Canadian Cheetah in PNG

Canadian corporation Cheetah Oil and Gas Ltd. recently acquired five new petroleum-prospecting licenses in Papua New Guinea covering an area about twice the size of Canada's smallest province, Prince Edward Island. Most of these 8.4 million acres lie along PNG's fertile coastline and have never before been prospected for oil. In total, Cheetah now maintains leases covering 12.2 million acres, making it the largest petroleum exploration company in the country. Through these leases, Cheetah is committed to US\$20 million in exploration expenditures before January 2006. Despite this aggressive prospecting program, the Cheetah Oil website and press releases currently make no reference to the company's environmental policies or its relationship with indigenous peoples. ■

New Book on Gender and Fisheries in South Pacific

A new book providing a fresh look, through a gender lens, at Pacific fisheries issues is about to be published in Fiji by the University of the South Pacific. Written by Pacific Islanders in collaboration with Canadian academics, *Pacific Voices: Equity and Sustainability in Pacific Island Fisheries* highlights the challenges facing small scale and subsistence fisheries, the labor conditions in fish processing and marketing, and lessons to be learned from evolving community-based management institutions in the South Pacific. The authors argue that the importance of subsistence fishing traditionally conducted by women has remained undervalued and, for the most part, unstudied. They maintain that the fisheries resources that feed many South Pacific peoples are now at risk, particularly from the over fishing that is driven by processes of modernization and the commodification of marine resources. And they conclude that the need for effective and equitable management is clear and urgent. The book is based on several case studies coordinated by Irene Novaczek of the University of Prince Edward Island, and will provide new understandings of the importance of the inshore fisheries and the role that women play as fishers and resource managers in the South Pacific. Funding for the studies was provided by C-SPOD. ■



CUSO is looking for Canadians with skills and experience in agriculture, forestry, fisheries, environment, and community activism to work in volunteer programmes in some thirty countries world-wide. Standard contracts: 2 years, plus language training, basic cost of living and benefits.

Since 1961, more than 12,000 Canadians have gone overseas to work with CUSO's partners. CUSO supports alliances for global social justice. We work with people striving for freedom, self-determination, gender and racial equality and cultural survival.

If the time is not right for you to commit to an overseas posting, you may want to volunteer your time, energy and expertise on a local committee.



Check out our website at www.cuso.org for current postings and information on how to apply

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Email: micheal.loo@cuso.ca, CUSO BC/Yukon office
Tel.: 604-683-2099 or 1-888-434-2876



PROGRAMS

British Columbians Have Their Say About Trade

What do out-of-work mill workers, the head of a Victoria-based engineering firm, a high school activist struggling for a “free Tibet” and a creative designer for a prominent cosmetic company have in common? All of them, together with close to 150 other British Columbians, have been meeting in 15 communities across the province to talk about how local and international trade affects their lives and communities.

Pacific Peoples’ Partnership has teamed up with the Victoria International Development Education Association to organize this round of deliberations, working to bring a Pacific perspective and to ensure that the international dimensions of trade – and our capacity to affect them – are central to the discussion. Participants explore the local, international and ethical dimensions of trade and its impact on people, communities, and economies around the world. Participants work for more than three hours to achieve “common ground” – principles, values, and strategies they feel will build healthier communities both in Canada and abroad. The deliberations intentionally bring together a diverse group of people who differ in age, ethnicity, economic standing, and life experiences. Whether they believe trade is the bedrock of prosperity or is responsible for impoverishing millions, whether they subscribe to a system where business is heavily regulated or feel that businesses will do the “right” thing if allowed to move freely, and whether they feel that the local economy should be subsidized or that local businesses who can’t compete shouldn’t be treated preferentially. Participants explore varied perspectives, grapple with their contradictions, and consider the trade-offs while working hard to identify any principles and values they might share.

As a methodological approach, public deliberations are unique in their ability to bring together people with divergent views on potentially divisive issues. It allows discussion of issues in a non-confrontational way, focusing on common ground rather than differences. Unlike a debate, where individuals listen for flaws in arguments and seek winners and losers, deliberations assume that everyone has a piece of the answer and forces participants to listen carefully for points where agreement can be found.

Out of this will emerge a set of policy recommendations that PPP, VIDEA, project participants and others can use in their own efforts to build healthier economies. Moreover, PPP will create a fair trade and cooperative development guide based on the results that we will take into high schools on Vancouver Island and the British Columbia mainland in an effort to stimulate discussion among young people about the costs and benefits inherent in the international trading system, along with viable alternatives they might want to explore. ■

Support for this initiative has come from the Canadian International Development Agency, Vancity Savings and Credit Union, Mountain Equipment Co-op, the Cooperative Secretariat, Transfair Canada, Kicking Horse Coffee, and Ethical Bean.

Canadian Documentary Film on Pacific Wins Award

Early this year, Pacific Peoples’ Partnership invited CTV journalist Nelson Bird, host of the weekly news programme, Indigenous Circle, to travel to the South Pacific for two weeks of intense exposure to the development struggles encountered by indigenous peoples there. Six months later, the documentary he produced, *Reaching Out: Indigenous Circle in the South Pacific*, has captured the Native American Journalists Association award for best documentary.

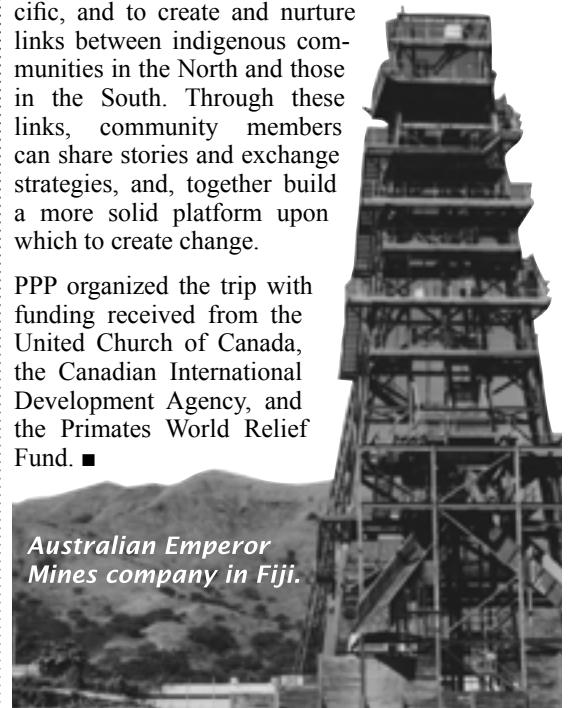
The 20-minute film challenges viewers to look beyond the idyllic beaches and resorts for which the South Pacific is generally known, to the real poverty, injustice, and livelihood challenges which indigenous peoples in the Pacific regularly confront. The film takes us from the impoverished barrack-like quarters of miners in Fiji, where workers have been striking for more than a decade, to a tiny picturesque island in the archipelago of Vanuatu, where their communal land-holding structures and cultural traditions are under siege from the globalizing forces of privatization and trade.

“The PPP journey was valuable to me as both a journalist and indigenous person because it gave me the opportunity to share the stories of two cultures... mine and theirs. Like many, I always believed the South Pacific was a paradise where issues like poverty and injustice did not exist. The PPP media project allowed CTV to expose the realities of life a world away,” Bird said.

In particular, Bird draws parallels between the lives, communities, and struggles he has witnessed through his coverage of First Nations communities during more than 10 years of reporting from rural and urban Saskatchewan, and those he encountered while in indigenous communities in Fiji and Vanuatu. Bird’s exposure trip was part of a broader effort on the part of PPP to heighten awareness in Canada of development issues in the Pacific, and to create and nurture links between indigenous communities in the North and those in the South. Through these links, community members can share stories and exchange strategies, and, together build a more solid platform upon which to create change.

PPP organized the trip with funding received from the United Church of Canada, the Canadian International Development Agency, and the Primates World Relief Fund. ■

Australian Emperor Mines company in Fiji.



WHO'S WHO

Executive Director
Rita Parikh

Programme Co-ordinator
Glenn Raynor

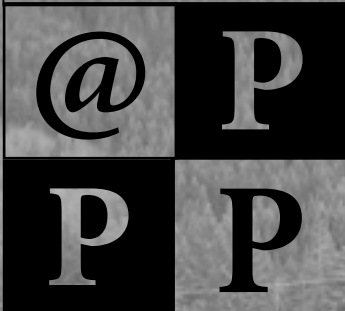
Programme Officer
Towagh Behr

Events Co-ordinator
Susie Charbonneau

Educational Programmer
Ali Donnelly

Graphic Designer
Blair Kennaley

Volunteers
Kristina Aghassibake
Miranda Moore





After a rewarding experience in Port Vila, Vanuatu, Jennifer Chong found herself reacquainted with her previous employer, Canada World Youth, but assuming new responsibilities as an international youth exchange program supervisor. Jennifer's experiences thus far have not disappointed her – the contract began with a move to a new community in Canada in May where she started to search for work placements and housing for the 16 youth soon to be arriving from Poland and the Ukraine. These placements included helping Habitat for Humanity build a house for a homeless family, organizing the Salvation Army Food Bank, and raising money for HIV North's annual AIDS awareness fundraising walk.

In the winter, the Eastern Europeans will travel back to Europe with their young Canadian counterparts, and contribute to community development efforts there for another three months. Jennifer's training with Vanuatu's Wan Smolbag, a youth-run community theatre company that uses drama to reach and engage young people on a range of development issues in the South Pacific, bolstered her skills in working with young people across cultures in innovative and creative ways. With a heightened sense of the realities confronting young people, particularly in a developing world context, she is working to empower youth to affect change in their communities, especially around issues of globalization and development.

Upon her return from Rarotonga, Cook Islands, Renee (Keyskwecandskew) Hetu, a member of Saulteau First Nation in British Columbia, resumed her position as a First Nations students advocate within the Kelowna School District, working with Aboriginal students as well as teachers, principals, parents, and social workers to support and encourage First Nations students to stay in school. Now she is back in school, hoping to complete her Bachelor of Social Work by 2007 and to pursue a career in social service, corrections, addictions, and therapy. Renee travelled from Moberly Lake in Northern BC

to Rarotonga, Cook Islands, where she introduced principles of restorative justice and healing circles practiced within many First Nations communities to prisoners at the Arongi Prison and to Probation Service staff at the Ministry of Justice.

Upon reflecting on her time in Rarotonga, Renee says she's "learned that although we are thousands of miles apart, as indigenous people, we have many similarities". She feels that both in the Cook Islands and Canada, customs shared through dancing, feasting, and community lead to a sense of togetherness and community strength. While Renee has always had an interest in the field of corrections and therapy, her experiences in Rarotonga reinforced her dedication – she is especially interested in First Nations-focused corrections approaches, and hopes to work with the Ministry of Children and Families in the future.

Now in its sixth year, Pacific Peoples' Partnership's Indigenous Peoples Abroad Programme is open to young Canadians with an interest in gaining international work experience and contributing to the community development aspirations of peoples of the South Pacific. Over the past six years, Pacific Peoples' Partnership has placed more than 50 participants in countries like Fiji, Vanuatu, New Zealand and the Cook Islands. In this story, we catch up with former interns Jennifer Chong, Renee Hetu and Lyana Patrick, look at what they've been doing since their return, and talk to them about how their time overseas has set them up for success today.

on First Nations communities, how that artificial border bisected those communities," states Lyana. "I'll look at these issues in the context of post-9/11 and in particular how the 1792 Jay Treaty, which allowed First Nations to work and travel freely across that border, is now considered abrogated in light of global terrorism."

As an intern in New Zealand, Lyana worked with the Kiwaia Maori TV and Film Production Company where she had the opportunity to direct her debut film, celebrating the traditional Maori practice of ta moko (tattooing). Hoping the film could contribute to efforts to invigorate Maori culture, Lyana is also interested in exploring the use of art and tattoo in Canadian indigenous culture through her film-making. ■



Renee In Cooks



Jennifer in Vanuatu



Lyana in New Zeland

Leatherbacks Make a Comeback Thanks to Canadian Support

What does turtle conservation by coastal communities in the Solomon Islands have to do with Canada? Surprisingly, there are several connections, most involving the critically endangered Pacific leatherback turtles.

These huge reptiles that lumber up the black sand, wave-swept beaches of isolated communities in the Solomons from November to January each year are the same ones that travel huge distances to feed off the Hawaiian Islands and the Pacific coast of North America. In fact, recent research using satellite tagging shows the turtles that nest on the western Pacific beaches in Indonesia, West Papua, Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands make long migrations to the California area, and probably also move up the coast to B.C. and even Alaska to forage for food.

Pacific leatherbacks are among the most critically endangered species on the planet – at severe risk because of their entrapment in fishing nets, the over harvesting of turtle eggs and meat, and their consumption of plastics in the ocean, which resemble jellyfish, their favourite food. They have been with us since the age of the dinosaur; but now environmentalists and scientists are ringing alarm bells, predicting their total extinction within a decade.

Indeed, Malaysia, home to one of the largest nesting beaches in the world, has seen the number of nesting females drop from more than 2,000 in the 1960s to only one or two today. Similarly drastic declines are being reported from the Pacific coast beaches of Mexico and Costa Rica.

This decline has led both Canada and the US to develop species survival strategies for leatherbacks, with a focus on conservation efforts in the western Pacific key among them.

And this is where the Canadian connection comes in. The Canada-South Pacific Ocean Development Program, with money from the Canadian International

Development Agency, has been supporting and encouraging various turtle conservation efforts around the Pacific through the South Pacific Regional Environmental Agency since the 1990s. In PNG, the Solomons, and Vanuatu, researchers, NGOs, and local communities are surveying nesting beaches, educating communities on conservation, and monitoring turtle nesting. In the Solomon Islands, this work has shown that nesting beaches are much more important than previously assumed. Researchers identified more than 60 nesting beaches, with about 10 that host more than 50 nests each year. Canada has also helped to train village turtle monitors who

document the numbers of turtles nesting, and their hatchings, while also educating community members in conservation approaches.

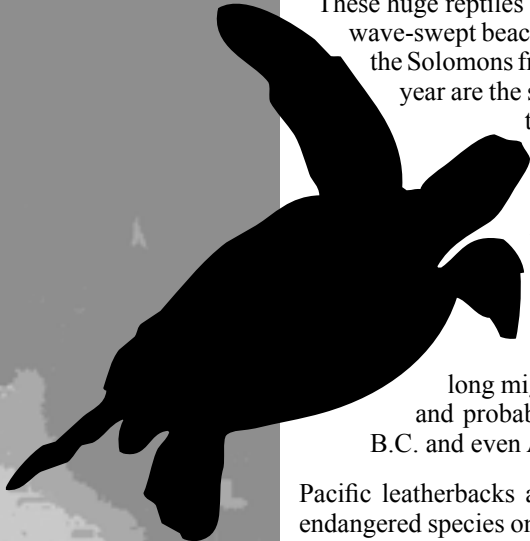
And that brings us to the people of Baniata, Rendova Island in the Western Province of the Solomon Islands. Unaware of these global concerns for the large black turtles, Solomon Islanders have for centuries considered turtles an important food source, eating about ten each year and collecting most of the eggs. The residents of Baniata are the descendants of those who used to live on Tetepare Island, the largest uninhabited island in the South Pacific and one of the last remaining relatively intact terrestrial and marine ecosystems of the region. Since 1996, a local NGO has been working with the descendants of Tetepare to protect the island from logging, developing a resource and wildlife management program to protect its many species of wildlife and marine life, including three species of turtles.

Here we find another Canadian connection: two Canadians have been placed by CUSO, a Canadian international development organization, to work on a very unique conservation project in Western Province, adjacent to Baniata. David Augement and Laurie Wein, wildlife biologists from Alberta, are now in their first year of training and programming with the Tetepare Descendants Association. TDA began a turtle-monitoring project in 2002, both on Tetepare Island and on Rendova, focusing on conservation awareness and education training, and hiring turtle monitors to discourage the harvesting of leatherback turtles and eggs and to promote hatchling survival. On Tetepare, the turtle-monitoring project focuses on counting and protecting turtle nests.

As a result of this intensive monitoring and protection program, the leatherbacks have begun to return and villagers have recorded hatchling leatherbacks. The turtle monitoring has also identified other threats to turtle nesting, primarily a local predator - the monitor lizard - and work is underway to increase survival rates for the leatherback hatchlings.

Canada, through CUSO and C-SPOD, will continue to look for ways to support this important ecological program, even after the C-SPOD program officially ends in December 2004. To that end, this fall in the Solomon Islands, C-SPOD brought together researchers, conservation groups, NGOs, and community representatives from across the region to focus on the plight of these turtles.

Meanwhile the residents of Baniata and the Tetepare Descendants Association are watching over the rare leatherback turtles that come to their beaches, with the assistance of many concerned and committed individuals and organizations, among them a small group of Canadians who are doing what they can to ensure that these gentle and ancient creatures are with us for many more decades. ■



Conservationist Scott Benson demonstrating a turtle tagging device.

However, when the gaze is reversed, one comes nose-to-nose with the same phenomenon within the development industry. Over the course of the mission, this was illustrated in: the practice of hiring expats living in the Solomon Islands – mostly Australians– to fill “local hire positions”; the expat composition of monitoring or assessment missions to the country – my own included; expat salaries reported to exceed Aus \$13,000 per month; and in the estimated 60-80 per cent of Australian donor assistance that finds its way back to Australia (a point boastfully and proudly extolled in the land of John Howard). The implications of this practice (aside from obvious accusations of hypocrisy) can be seen in the incapacitating impact it has on Solomon Islanders attempting to fashion home-grown responses to the most pressing challenges facing their country.

Peacebuilding as Empire-Building

No one in Solomon Islands would deny that the arrival of the Australian-led Regional Assistance Mission in Solomon Islands in July 2003 – when close to 2,500 military and civilian police streamed off the ships and planes – quickly restored public order and security, in addition to stabilizing government finances in the wake of galloping lawlessness, personal insecurity, and violent conflict. Impacts of the intervention, which came at the invitation of the Solomons’ government, have been tangible, measurable, and significant. The banks are now open, children attend school, and the small arms that had been circulating have been, for the most part, turned in.

But, more than a year later, RAMSI’s military and non-military forces remain in place with personnel ensconced in virtually every strategic government ministry, shaping and determining for Solomon Islanders the course that its development journey will take in years to come. Indeed, while RAMSI has been successful in creating short-term stability, it is simultaneously undermining Solomon Islander capacities for longer-term peace. In short, the high foreign presence in Solomon Islands might reasonably be framed as a form of occupation or a return to colonial rule. And this presence, in turn, threatens to backfire. As RAMSI continues to successfully arrest and prosecute the “big men” involved in criminal-political-militant activities, the risk will increase that the “bigger men” (who might feel that it is only a matter of time before they join their colleagues in Rove Prison) will actively mobilize dissent around this “foreign occupation” issue in an effort to revoke the invitation for RAMSI to be in the country.

At the moment, this would likely be a hugely unpopular move throughout the country, as the tangible benefits of the law and order delivered by RAMSI are acutely appreciated, not least because of the rawness of the memories of violence during the tensions. However, it would take only a little time, and a few unsavoury nightclub incidents (or worse), to create the space for those same “conflict entrepreneurs” of 1998-2003 to begin actively stoking an anti-foreigner sentiment under the banner “Solomon Islands for

the Solomon Islanders”.

If the international community is not contributing to peacebuilding in Solomon Islands, then the challenge is this: what needs to be done to reverse this situation? The following steps may be useful -- at least in clarifying the challenges ahead:

Step One: recognize that many current international initiatives effectively incapacitate Solomon Islanders.

Step Two: recognize that the current semi-colonial structures are not conducive to Solomon ownership.

Step Three: recognize that Solomon Islands is blessed with individuals and groups (both local and expat) with firm and proven commitment to constructive social change.

Step Four: recognize that these individuals and groups are the resources/networks/allies to be supported strategically.

Step Five: recognize that development is unavoidably destabilizing because it undermines existing political, economic and social structures. The greatest challenge, therefore, is to manage a process of destabilizing change in a conflict-prone area in a way that does not re-ignite into earlier forms of violence that served the interests of some elites at the expense of the rest of the country.

Clearly, there is a considerable jump between Step Four and Step Five. But let’s be clear about the nature of the challenge in front of us.

In some interesting ways, Solomon Islands appears to be in a much better position than most other countries that have walked through the fire of militarized inter-group violence. The vast majority of weapons (stolen from government armouries) that terrorized and traumatized communities during the tensions have been returned. Consequently, SI appears to have avoided the development of cultures of violence that usually develop in cases of more protracted conflicts. However, the political corruption and economic self-interest that characterized and motivated most leaders during the Tensions remain on the Solomon political landscape. And therein lies the fundamental challenge: the transformation of the structures of governance that are still inhabited by individuals with vested interests in thwarting such change. ■

Conference Proceedings Available
Visit www.pacificpeoplespartnership.org for the proceedings from PPP’s Pacific Networking Conference entitled, *Peace and Development in the Solomons: What Role for Canada?*



Photos – Kenneth D. Bush

Assistant Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies, St. Paul University, Ottawa, Canada

kbush@ustpaul.ca



Developed Nations Complicit in West Papua Injustice

Written by
Tom Benedetti

Sharing an island with Papua New Guinea, West Papua (or Papua) contains 15 percent of the world's known languages and some of its oldest and most unique cultures. As well, some environmentalists believe West Papua contains greater ecological diversity than anywhere else on Earth.

But we may never know.

Papuans and their natural habitat are vanishing at an alarming rate. Dr. Peter King of Sydney University estimates that one-sixth of the population has been killed since Indonesia invaded in 1962. Many more have been 'disappeared' or have starved to death as a result of forced relocation. The exact number of victims is impossible to ascertain, since humanitarian organizations, journalists, and academics are constant targets of intimidation, torture, and assassination.

More than three-quarters of West Papua's tropical rainforest (the largest in that hemisphere and home to many Papuans) has been designated for logging or mining. Much of it is already destroyed. The Indonesian military directly owns and operates lucrative business ventures in the region, key sources of revenue for their operating budget. The military also holds long-term contracts to protect multinationals operating in Papua. A prime example is the military's contract with Freeport McMoran, a Louisiana-based company that has been mining the largest gold deposit in the world since just after Indonesia invaded. Freeport itself reported that it paid 'security fees' to the Indonesian military of \$5.6 million in 2002.

Australian sources report that 25,000 additional Indonesian troops have arrived in West Papua since 2000. Raids on villages are increasing, along with more gruesome reports of torture, rape, and summary executions en masse. Health clinics, churches, schools, gardens and entire villages have been set ablaze, according to an extraordinary press statement issued last August by the Council of Churches in Papua.

Papuans have endured this smoldering injustice for more than 40 years. For much of that time, the iniquity was fuelled by Cold War politics and outright complicity from so-called "developed nations". While backroom conspiracies have always been suspected, details could not be confirmed until last July when previously classified U.S. documents were released by the National Security Archive in Washington which stated, "The documents detail United States support for Indonesia's heavy-handed takeover of West Papua despite overwhelming Papuan opposition and United Nations' requirements for genuine self-determination."

Indonesia gained its present authority over the region through a controversial United Nations "Act of Free Choice" in 1969. Anyone campaigning for independence was labeled a subversive, and Papuan communities opposing integration were bombed (with equipment supplied by Western nations). Paving the way for this travesty, the U.S. facilitated Indonesia's de facto control of the region by sponsoring the New York Agreements, which left the choice of how to carry out the 1969 referendum "entirely to GOI (Government of Indonesia)".

As a result, 1,000 locals were forced to vote openly in front of armed soldiers, and told they would be shot as traitors unless the vote supported Indonesia. The result was unanimously in favour of integration, even though the U.S. embassy in Jakarta admitted, as the recently-released documents reveal, that "... probably a decided majority of the [Papuan] people, and possibly 85 to 90 percent, are in sympathy with the Free Papua cause or at least dislike Indonesians."

The documents also include U.S. dignitary correspondence on how to prevent debate at the U.N. by lobbying cynics and tabling the issue as "an internal affair". U.N. records have shown that Canada took a similar position until the mid-1990s, consistently tabling motions to remove Indonesia's aggression from U.N. agendas. Propaganda since then has reinforced the myth that West Papua is an Indonesian province striving to break away. The truth is that Indonesia illegally invaded, and continues to occupy and plunder a foreign country, with no historical connection or claim to its land or people.

These documents help to explain why the world has continued to look the other way while one of the longest untenable military occupations of a formerly independent nation not only continues, but escalates. This is the same regime that committed atrocities with impunity in East Timor (occupied by Indonesia from 1974 to 1999) – a military force unaccountable even to its own government.

The released documents are even more pertinent now that the Bush administration appears to be moving toward resumption of military aid to Indonesia in the name of fighting terrorism. Since 9/11, Indonesia has been trying to recoup military support from the U.S. by labelling Papuan freedom fighters as terrorists. This is ironic, since the Papuan resistance movement has reportedly never killed nor had a policy of attacking civilians. In the past, this aid focused on counter-insurgency techniques and equipment. In other words, it would likely be used to suppress attempts by "provinces" like Papua to regain their sovereignty. Fortunately, a small handful of activists are lobbying the U.S. to link aid to systemic changes in Indonesia's approach to human rights.

In the meantime, Papuans continue their struggle for self-determination against overwhelming odds – odds exacerbated by global indifference and the spotlight on apparently more important events elsewhere. All that most Papuans ask is for a legitimate referendum on self-determination, conducted in a reasonable way under the supervision of UN observers rather than Indonesian soldiers. They desperately need our diplomatic support to fend off the increasing might of a determined invader, and, ultimately, to ever see justice. ■



Tom Benedetti is with WestPAN (West Papua Action Network), Canada (www.westpapua.ca). WestPAN is a network of Papuans and Canadians attempting to end the injustice in West Papua and the associated destruction of unique cultures and rare ecosystems.