



**COMMUNIQUE OF THE PACIFIC ECUMENICAL REGIONAL GROUP (PERG),
8TH – 13TH NOVEMBER 2002,
Honiara, Munda, Gizo
SOLOMON ISLANDS.**

We, the members of the Pacific Ecumenical Regional Group (PERG), wish to express our deep appreciation to the Moderator of the United Church in Solomon Islands, Rev. Philemon Riti and the church congregation and leaders of the Solomon Island Christian Association who in true ecumenical spirit enabled us in our recent meeting in Solomon Islands from 8th to 13th November 2002 to interact more closely with grass-root communities and groups in the areas of Munda, Gizo and in Honiara.

During our discussions and interactions with the various communities, we took note particularly of the following:

- a) Peace and relief initiatives undertaken by churches and religious societies and the needs they had identified to assist them in the reconstruction efforts they continue to actively pursue,
- b) The structural reasons for the crises in the country that warrants attention in the long-term and areas that could be pursued by the church community,
- c) The needs and concerns identified by youth and women's groups and
- d) Prioritised areas to be addressed by the Pacific Desk of the World Council of Churches.

We commend the leadership of the Solomon Island Christian Association (SICA) for their unity, active and determined stance to continue to find ways and programmes in the country that would bring about peace, reconciliation and rehabilitation to people in the wake of the violent ethnic tensions of 2000. Apart from these collective efforts we acknowledge the important role and leadership of the individual member churches and religious societies when civilians lost confidence in public authorities. Their immediate relief and mediating work in the height of active shooting between militant groups, in the disarmament ministry and post conflict support for victims and perpetrators of violence and the basket campaign of Women's groups is humbly recognised by PERG.

We are immensely grateful to these groups for sharing their challenges and struggles and plans for the future.

PERG witnessed a sense of oneness with the people of the Solomon Islands. In the issues and problems that were encountered. PERG as well as individual members of our organisations

will continue to bring these issues and concerns to the forefront, as well as through the Pacific desk to the attention to the world. To stand in solidarity with them in their lives and their struggles is a part of the pastoral aspect of the visit. The PERG also witnessed the strong sense of ecumenism through the two ecumenical services in Munda and in Gizo.

CALL TO CHURCHES

In light of the discussions and meetings with the church leaders and local associations, the PERG calls on:

- The churches to encourage the government to engage in dialogue with the people to listen to the needs of the people that affects them
- The churches to encourage the government to address the issues of welfare and wellbeing, of the medical workers and the issues of shortage of medicine in the nation and the slow and non-payment of salaries in the Ministries of Education, Health and Police Department.
- PCC and WCC to encourage their members or counterparts in Australia to pressure the government of Australia to immediately lift the ban on medicine and supply to Solomon Islands.
- The churches, government and civil society to listen to the needs of youth, women and children and provide ways and means to address the issues that affect them.
- The churches to strengthen ministers fraternal movement in all places as a medium to bring about a spirit of oneness and unity in the communities.

The PERG:

- Commends the churches for their active involvement in initiating discussions on a possible national platform (Truth Commission) for the creation of a framework for peace and reconciliation in the country.
- Encourages the churches to actively seek further assistance to religious orders and groups in their efforts of peace, conflict resolution, counselling, sanctuary support and disarmament and reconstruction ministry e.g. Professional trauma counselling and training of its own work force in these efforts.
- Encourages the churches to identify meaningful programmes that would contribute towards building of ethnic harmony, confidence, hope and trust in the nation
- Encourages the church leadership to consider setting aside a time to discern and reflect, dream, and to seek the wisdom of God on important issues affecting the people and to develop strategies to address these issues.

Priorities for the Pacific Desk

1. The strength of the SICA Peace Office is that it relates to the issues from the churches and its agenda is based on experiences and the closeness of the workers to the events. SICA PO has a good knowledge of the activities of the government and hence was able to influence the course of the debate. It was the churches response to the crisis of the Solomon Islands that remains the strength of this office. The Civil Society network of the Solomon Islands was born out of this network and its presence serves as an alternative avenue for the voice of the people to be heard. In this regard the SICA Peace office plays the intermediary role between the people and the government.
2. ***PERG recommends that the Pacific Desk identify ways in which the other teams of the WCC could be of assistance to the SICA PO and to support SICA PO in their initiatives on peace and reconciliation and in particular the question of Amnesty for the perpetrators of violence during the ethnic tension.***
3. The PERG commends the efforts of the civil society network and the churches in the proposal of a process on Truth and Reconciliation. PERG requests that the Pacific Desk seeks a ***critical opinion on the proposal for the creation of the CTR from the network of the WCC.*** It also urges WCC to provide these assistance in identifying the options that relate to the truth Commission.
4. Financial support to the efforts of the SICA PO will only to be identified after SICA is clear on the future of the SICA PO. Funding will come through the SICA to assist the SICA PO and SICA to continue to work together. The PERG noted the need for human resources to continue the peace effort and requests that the Pacific Desk assists the churches in this regard.
5. PERG recommends that the Pacific Desk places urgency in the provision of professional counselling in terms of trauma counselling to the victims, to the perpetrators and most importantly to the Melanesian Brothers and Sisters who have been on the frontline. These brothers and sisters have not been trained to render assistance in such cases but have stood between the warring factions in their efforts to bring peace. In addition, another psychological effect of the ethnic conflict is that the attitude of the young people has become more violent and militaristic.
6. PERG urges the Pacific Desk to assist churches in defining its role with regard to the aftermath of the TRC. In addition, the PERG recognises that the resolution of the ethnic tensions in the Solomon will only be sustained if the structural reasons for the conflict are addressed such as issues of land, identity, decentralised governments etc. There is a need to have other options available for the people.
7. The tension between the pastoral role and the prophetic role of the churches was noted by the PERG with regard to the efforts of the SICA member churches in addressing the conflict. The PERG acknowledges this tension and regards it as a positive tension that is an indicator of the pertinence of the churches action in such situations
8. Education and youth. Networking on this issue to support the churches in their provision of qualified persons to assist them. PERG members will take back the

experiences of the Solomon Islands to share with their networks and to see how we can be of assistance to the Solomon Islands.

9. On the issue of fear in the nation that the Solomon Islands would revert back to a state of conflict, PERG proposes that the concept of restorative justice be assessed and its pertinence to the situation in the Solomon Islands be analysed. This would promote a cohesive approach which would promote a process that is participatory in nature.
10. The PERG noted the lack of communal effort in self-employment. This is of great importance for the Solomon Islands which has a predominant rural and younger population. In addition the education system which has a lot of filtering mechanisms further compounds the problem. How can the church encourage the young people to go back to the villages? In this regard, the PERG was touched by the youth in Munda and Gizo where they filled the church and present in church activities.
11. There is this need to support church initiatives aimed at addressing this concern such as the church based vocational training centres. In addition, the PERG noted the need for more leadership training for the youth and noted that perhaps the overall development of the country does not give an incentive to develop their potential.
12. The PERG noted the need for medical supplies and encouraged the Pacific Desk to assist in identifying opportunities through its network to address this need.
13. The PERG noted the strong spirit of ecumenism amongst the churches in the Western Province and noted the overall strength of ecumenism in the Solomon Islands was to be envied. It was also noted that the SICA was strong in the rural areas.
14. The PERG noted the proposal for the adoption of the pillars of ecumenism to be the principles of PERG:
 - Belief in the triune creating God; ie seeing the face of God in each other
 - Mystical body of Christ. You are a member of me and I of you. Many members make one body.
 - Each member has gifts and talents that are meant to be shared with each-other.
 - Giving each-other space. Accepting each-other as you are.

Sermon by Fr. Line Folaumoeloa to the ecumenical service in Gizo.

This will be included in the review of the policy document of the PERG entitled “Sharing in God’s Mission”
15. Within the continuing efforts of the Pacific Desk on the Island of Hope, the PERG urged the Pacific Desk to address the traditional means of compensation and conflict resolution internally and to support the efforts of the churches in regaining the true meaning of the traditional forms of compensation.
16. There is a need for the Churches to vocalise the needs of the GIZO community. Most of the programmes of the youth are not filtered through Christian sensitivities. As such the PERG is requested to assist in the identification of committed Christian trainers (resource persons) to assist the churches in these issues.

In addition to the priorities listed above, the PERG urges the Pacific Desk to look at the following matters

1. For PCRC to be requested to work closely with the EENCIL & PCC in the drafting of a **briefing paper** on the Noumea Accords to bring the attention of the leaders and church leaders.
2. To work closely with the EENCIL in the implementation of the national level meeting on the Noumea Accords.
3. The Pacific Desk, PCC & PCRC to work on the dissemination of information on the Noumea Accords for the churches.
4. Initiative to be taken by EENCIL and PERG to ensure that support is given to the EENCIL to highlight the sustainability aspect of the mining.
5. PERG to coordinate the visit of resource persons and the provision of books to give information on the effects of mining. Awareness raising visit to be made to give information that the church can go with to the villages.
6. CRC is willing to provide informational material (in French) on the issue of mining.
7. Encourage PCC to regain the prophetic voice of the people on Kanaky on the issue of decolonisation.
8. That the Pacific Desk and the PCC work closely on matters regarding the peace and reconciliation.

Regarding the relocation of the Pacific Desk:

The PERG recommends that the Pacific Desk be retained as it is the voice of the voiceless of the Pacific. In addition there is a need to maintain a Pacific presence at the global ecumenical level hence the need to keep the desk in Geneva. As such it provides the link to WCC Geneva and first hand and personal contact with the other WCC staff.

In addition, the PERG is not too keen of the relocation in the Pacific because of a possible overlap with the efforts of the member churches/PCC. This situation would aggravate the relations as the PCC is in the process of regaining its regional position.

[Hence the PERG concludes that if the relocation of the Pacific Desk is inevitable, that this decision is taken based on thorough consultation and clear analysis of the option with the member churches following established guidelines of consultation with constituency and relevant bodies on the viability of the decision to relocate the Pacific Desk.