The Solomon Islands

The Solomon Islands is a country in the South Pacific Ocean. It consists of a group of islands east of Papua New Guinea.

It has a population of just over half a million people. The population growth rate is 2.68%. Over 90% of the people are Melanesian, and about 4% are Polynesian.

Government
The Solomons gained independence from Britain in 1978. A member of the Commonwealth of Nations, its Head of State is Queen Elizabeth II.

The Solomons is a parliamentary democracy with a single chamber (unicameral) parliament of 50 members. The parliament has a four-year term, with the last elections held in December 2001.

Economy
Most of the population depends on primary industries such as agriculture, fishing and forestry for their livelihood. The islands have extensive supplies of mineral resources such as lead, zinc, nickel and gold, but these are relatively undeveloped. Most manufactured goods and petroleum products are imported.

Recent difficulties
The Solomons was in a state of relative lawlessness in 2003. Ethnic violence, civil unrest and street violence was common, and many vital businesses had closed. Between 1988–2002, the Gross Domestic Product (the measurement of total economic output) decreased by around 24%. The Solomon Islands was in danger of becoming a ‘failed state’. The government could not enforce law and order, official corruption was widespread and the country’s debt was growing.

In June 2003, the Solomons Government sought assistance from Australia to help restore order.

Regional assistance mission to Solomon Islands
In response to the request for assistance the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) was established. Among the participating countries were

Australia
New Zealand
Fiji
Papua New Guinea
Tonga
Samoa
Vanuatu
Kiribati
Cook Islands

RAMSI was a police-led operation with the military playing a support role of providing protection and logistical assistance. Australian-led forces arrived in the Solomons on 24 July 24 2003.

By the end of 2004, the commitment had been scaled back to about 400 police officers and military personnel.
Work undertaken by RAMSI

- establishing law and order
- strengthening government institutions, particularly the public service
- improving infrastructure (health, education, telecommunications, water, electricity, transport)
Press Release – Alexander Downer – 10 May 2005

New Funding For Solomons Peace Mission

The Australian Government will provide funding of $840.5 million over four years for the Australian-led Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI).

This funding is an important commitment by the Australian Government and will meet the aspirations of Solomon Islanders for long-term certainty of the RAMSI package of assistance. Disbursement of these funds clearly relies on continuing support for RAMSI from the Solomon Islands Government and continuing efforts by the Solomon Island Government to implement difficult and complex reforms.

Funding will enable us to continue our assistance to the Solomon Islands Government in the restoration of law and order and to support broad-ranging reforms. It will provide for the ongoing rebuilding of the law and justice system, including reforming the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, and pursuing economic, governance and public sector reforms.

The Government will provide $15.1 million over four years to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade - the lead agency - to continue its coordination role in Honiara for this whole-of-government effort.

The Government will provide $537.9 million over four years to the Australian Federal Police to continue the policing activities which have made such significant progress since RAMSI’s deployment in 2003. AFP funding will support transition to self-reliance by the Royal Solomon Islands Police, help provide safe and secure communities and develop an efficient, effective and sustainable law-enforcement capacity.

AusAID will receive funding of $282.2 million over four years to support a strengthened programme of assistance in law and justice administration, economic and financial management, machinery of government reform and provincial development. Priorities will include supporting the Solomon Islands Government in the conduct of high-profile criminal trials, improving the capacity of the prison system, addressing corruption, expanding economic growth including improving rural livelihoods and service delivery to provincial areas, and building capacity in economic, fiscal and public sector management.

RAMSI assistance will complement assistance already flowing through Australia's bilateral aid programme in areas such as health and rural development, including new community-level initiatives and support for peace-building activities.

Funding of $5.2 million over four years for the Australian Customs Service will enable RAMSI to increase its focus on helping Solomon Islands maintain border security and integrity.
Web Links

Australian Prime Minister’s Press Conference
Transcript of the Prime Minister’s press conference announcing the formation of Operation Helpem Fren

Operation Anode – Australian Government Department of Defence
This is the official Department of Defence site for Operation Helpem Fren. It contains lots of information plus images and video of activities Department of Defence personnel have been involved in.

Australian Federal Police
A small site from the Federal Police with information about Operation Helpem Fren

Operation Helpem Fren

The World Factbook
Information from the CIA (US Central Intelligence Agency)