

Honiara Urban Development: Harnessing Opportunities, Embracing Change

Minister for Lands, Housing and Survey

Thank you for joining me, our hosts from the *Australian National University*, and my Ministry to launch this important report on Urban Development in Honiara. This report has been a collaborative effort between the ANU, government officials, and many people in our community to define pressing urban issues facing Honiara and possible pathways forward.

It gives us a foundation on which to chart our own course and to decide how we wish to shape inclusive urban development in this country.

In June last year, I opened our first *Solomon Islands National Urban Conference*, as an important step forward for urban planning in this country. At that time, I emphasised the significant challenges facing Solomon Islands with respect to the ‘lack of good urban planning and design’, the ‘disconnect between urban and rural communities’, and the pressures of population growth.

This report takes those concerns forward, examines the issues in more detail through many dialogues and consultations with our communities, NGOs, government agencies and the private sector. It expands the ways in which we think about urban issues, by making available to us lessons learned from our other Melanesian cities.

It concerns me that by 2050, it is likely that Honiara region will have grown from our current population of about 100,000 to treble that size, or more, that is possibly a population of 350,000 – 250,000 more than today!

We need to all start working proactively together now to ensure that, like in other cities around the world, urbanisation drives national growth and underpins prosperity, and does not result in more inequality and poverty.

As Mr Foukona has raised, we have recently experience land confrontations due to eviction actions. This only highlights a point made by this report that the Honiara land tenure system needs to create a clear balance between customary tenure and state rules of tenure. More efficient, fair and

uncomplicated ways to enforce mutual agreements between landowners and developers need to evolve.

I agree with the previous speakers, this means urban planning and development must be more inclusive, so communities and their leaders can help shape the city. There is much for government to do, but we all need to work together. Examples of positive partnerships in this report include:

- the *Young Women's Parliamentary Group's* work on better public transport
- the private sector's contribution to public-private partnerships to enhance the returns from tourism, especially the increasing number of cruise ships visiting Honiara, and
- some local communities' own work to improve waste management and access to clean water.

The challenge is to better coordinate these issues and become more strategic.

This report, and work by my government, recognise that well managed, urbanisation can be a driver of national development and growth. No country has achieved prosperity without urbanisation. But if we don't plan for our cities, invest in our cities, and ensure that cities are well connected to rural areas, then urbanisation can be a source of social problems.

Here in Honiara and in the peri-urban areas, there's also a strong call for rural communities to receive an "urbanisation dividend" by enhancing connecting infrastructure between urban and rural areas, such as transport and financial services. This is important, and needs more attention.

Moving forward requires strong local leadership. Honiara will continue to grow. The key question is whether the country will benefit from this growth in the form of better development outcomes. This will depend on the decisions we Solomon Islanders make about how our capital is managed.

The Ministry of Lands, Housing and Survey is working on a number of frameworks to improve outcomes, including a *National Urban Policy*, a *National Housing Policy* and reforms of urban land administrative processes. This report provides us with many more options for action derived from

consultations with our people, and from drawing out lessons from other Melanesian cities for our city, Honiara.

In addition to the main report, there is also an important collection of short *In Brief Policy papers*, some have been co-authored or written by our own people or people who have lived in Honiara for a long time. These short issue papers provide further insights into the urbanisation process in Honiara and options for inclusive action.

I encourage you all to have a look at these two important reports, and to join with me and my staff at the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Survey, in planning for Honiara's continuing growth and development. Importantly, we need to ensure that urban development benefits not only all of us living in Honiara, but the nation as a whole.

It is now my pleasure to launch the *Honiara Urban Development Report*, and to thank ANU for working with us to produce this important document. I hope it does provide an impetus for inclusive action for all. I and my Ministry look forward to continuing our work with ANU in advancing positive urban development and growth in Honiara.

Tagio Tumas.