

THE MELANESIAN SPEARHEAD GROUP AND PACIFIC REGIONAL COOPERATION

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The Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) is a subregional organization in Oceania where friendly diplomatic relations, free trade, and cultural and technical exchanges are encouraged. One of its founding principles is to promote the aspirations of Melanesians under colonial servitude to political autonomy. At the same time, it is a forum by member states to drive their national interests under the auspices of subregional resolutions. Recent developments and decisions by MSG leaders provided profound insights into the affairs of the organization and its member states. In 2010, the prime ministers of Fiji and Vanuatu were at loggerheads over whom to transfer the MSG chairmanship to. Consequently, a political glitch that touched the heart of the organization surfaced. In 2014, Solomon Islands and Fiji had a dispute over airline routes and conditions. In June 2015, MSG member states were divided over whether to support the West Papuan application for membership or to support Indonesia's bid to be an associate member of MSG. What ensued in the said Leaders' Summit in Honiara was controversial. This article looks at the historical evolution of MSG and developments that took place since inception, highlighting the small "wars" of the 1990s and early 2000s. External interference, major issues of concern, and major shifts in the organization's outlooks between 2010 and 2015 are also investigated and discussed. This article partly argues that recent developments could result in long-term impacts on future subregional and regional initiatives. On the other hand, if properly engineered, positive advances may spring from the current efforts and decisions by the MSG.

THE CULTURAL, POLITICAL, and geographic demarcations established by explorers, ethnographers, anthropologists, and missionaries became acceptable and useful distinguishing area names in contemporary Oceania. For example, despite the racist origins of the initial divisions of Oceania into Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia (Tcherkézoff 2003, 176), they are now divisions of social and political significance in the Pacific. Melanesia is notable for a number of reasons. First, there is the huge potential that Melanesia has in terms of mineral endowments and energy, agriculture, forestry, and marine resources. The marine habitat that comprised part of the “Coral Triangle” (Papua New Guinea [PNG], Solomon Islands, Indonesia and East Timor, the Philippines, and Malaysia), also called the “Amazon of the Seas,” is critical to global biodiversity. Second, Melanesia has the population and the landmass, posing both an opportunity and a development challenge. Melanesian countries themselves account for 85 percent of the Pacific population and 95 percent of the landmass of the entire region (Laban 2008). Although these could be regarded as opportunities, they are currently liabilities. Population growth is uniformly high in Melanesia and has outstripped economic growth. Basic poverty indicators are also poor by any global standard, and youth unemployment is very high (Laban 2008). Third, trends in provision of social services, such as health, education, water, sanitation, and transportation, are pathetic, and impacts on children and women have been highlighted in many reports. For example, a recent report by Amnesty International (2011, 5) indicated that even in the suburban slums of Honiara, Solomon Islands, 92 percent of the houses do not have water supplies. Finally, political instability and upheavals have been notable in many Melanesian countries over the past three decades. Commentators and academics even referred to the subregion as an “arc of instability,” or one that offers good case studies of “weak and failing states” (May 2003).

The above scenario of opportunities and challenges in Melanesia provided a fertile ground to nurture political and economic cooperation that addresses common challenges and exploits opportunities. Other organizations, such as the Pacific Islands Forum (the Forum or PIF), the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC; formerly the South Pacific Commission), and other institutions, are present at the regional level. The Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) is a subregional body that seeks to promote political, economic, and cultural integration and a sense of identity in the Melanesian subregion. Pacific regionalism stemmed from the spirit of the “Pacific Way,” while the MSG can also be said to emanate from the Melanesian and *wantok* spirit. This article looks at the historical development of the MSG as a subregional organization over the past 25 years. It briefly outlines the structure of the organization and the decision-making

process. Moreover, the relationship between member states, especially in terms of collaboration and disputes, is discussed. The interference and effects of external interests in MSG affairs are also highlighted. Analyzing the development challenges encountered by MSG since its inception, fundamental questions and issues that require attention are subsequently outlined and discussed. The article closes with an assessment of the potential impacts that current decisions made by MSG leaders may have on the future of regional cooperation in the Pacific Islands.

The MSG Organization

The MSG is a subregional organization established to serve the interests and welfare of the Melanesian Pacific. It was supposed to be a force for good to realize the aspirations and mitigate challenges experienced by Melanesian states. The conviction is that Melanesia can be a subregion that promotes cooperation and camaraderie in pursuit of specific national interests of member countries while also strengthening institutions of regional and international cooperation. The MSG membership includes PNG, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, the Front de Liberation Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS) of New Caledonia, and Fiji. A paramount concern of its founders was to discuss the Kanaks' road to independence, thus the inclusion of FLNKS in the original membership (MacQueen 1989, 35).

One may expect that the Forum is the appropriate body to deal with calls for independence or national autonomy since it was established in reaction to the French and British reluctance to allow political matters discussed during SPC deliberations. What then was missing that warranted the creation of MSG and other subregional bodies? Or how can a region with such cultural diversity be regarded as a "subregion" with some uniformity? Fry gave a response in the early 1980s that is more relevant for today's assessments. He argued that the context in which the "Melanesian identity" becomes relevant beyond diversity is "in South Pacific regional politics" (Fry 1982, 651). This remained true, as the MSG countries also use their subregional body to push for their own interests in regional affairs. This tendency is explained later in this article.

The MSG was established to encourage subregional diplomacy and friendly relations, maintain peace and harmony, encourage free trade economic and technical cooperation, and promote Melanesian traditions and cultures. It was established in 1986, and after subsequent meetings in 1988 and 1994, the principles of cooperation were agreed on and signed in Kiriwina, PNG, in 1996 (May 2011, 2; Pacific Institute of Public Policy [PIPP] 2008, 1). It opened its offices formally in 2008 in Port Vila, Vanuatu. From the

outset, the purpose of the organization is “to promote and strengthen inter-membership trade, exchange of Melanesian cultures, traditions and values, sovereign equality, economic and technical cooperation between states and the alignment of policies in order to further MSG members’ shared goals of economic growth, sustainable development, good governance and security” (MSG Agreement 2007).

Apart from the political intentions of the group, trade, economic, and technical cooperation are also emphasized. In 1993, it entered into what is known as the Melanesian Spearhead Group Free Trade Agreement (MSGFTA), a trade treaty governing reciprocal trade among PNG, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu. Fiji, a latecomer in MSG, signed the MSGFTA only in 1998. In 2005, the trade agreement was revised with all duties being eliminated among the four members except for a small number of “negative list” products that would ultimately decline to a zero tariff around 2015. The review also resulted in the expansion of product lines covered, from three in 1993 to many more in 2005 (MSGTA 2005). The MSG also assisted the Micronesian Trade Centre to develop a treaty to establish the Micronesian Trade and Economic Community (MSG Communiqué 2015). It should be noted, however, that the MSGFTA initially did not do much to increase trade flows among the Melanesian countries. It also resulted in some intra-Melanesian disputes, discussed below.

The MSG cooperation is also founded on cultural exchange and the promotion of a Melanesian identity and culture. This assumes that there are similarities that can be identified from the diverse traditions and cultural practices throughout Melanesia. It may be attributed to a kind of “artificial *wantoks*”¹ to promote a common cause at the subregional level (Nanau 2011, 35). Promoting Melanesian cultural identity is critical, as it gives the Melanesian countries a sense of homogeneity at the regional level. Moreover, art and culture are important to promote nationalist feelings and solidarity to push for the independence of West Papua and Kanaky from Indonesia and France, respectively. As Tjibaou wrote in reference to Melanesians of New Caledonia, “The colonial system not only made the kanaks a foreign people, despised in their own country, but men who could only be identified by economic criteria, by consumer goods. It was a very primitive system! . . . we prefer an identity through traditional character” (Tjibaou 1989, 76).

The Melanesian Arts and Sports festivals are important events that showcase cultural exchanges and solidarity among Melanesian people amidst diversity. The MSG recognizes this strength and builds on it to promote a Melanesian identity. Arts festivals and similar events put traditional culture in the spotlight and help Melanesians appreciate their diverse traditions and

cultures in the contemporary context. They provide a source of pride, cultural security, and solidarity that MSG needs. Tjibaou earlier pointed out that “the Melanesian cultural identity can only attain its true dimension if the Melanesian society has the capacity to master its destiny” (Tjibaou 1989, 78). Promoting Melanesian cultural identity therefore has to be streamlined with political and economic cooperation to enable an “effective” subregion.

The Political Structure

The Leaders’ Summit is the most important meeting of the MSG governing body. It is at the Leaders’ Summit that general policies of the organization are discussed and approved. The summit also determines the appointment and termination of the director general. Approval for amendments to agreements and appointment of ministerial committees from time to time are taken care of in the Leaders’ Summit (MSG Agreement 2007). For example, at the 2015 Leaders’ Summit, the MSG Secretariat was directed “to do further work on the amendment of the criteria for admission of groups as observers as well as to undertake further work on the criteria for observer/associate membership taking note of expressions of interest by states not in Melanesia for some form of association with the MSG” (Prime Minister’s Press Secretary Office 2015). The guidelines for associate membership were agreed on at the 2012 summit. These summits are held biennially on a rotational basis in MSG member countries. Indeed, special summits can be called on by the chair as and when deemed necessary. The chair retains the post for a period of two years.

Apart from the Leaders’ Summit, there are also foreign ministers’ meetings, senior officials’ meetings, trade and economic officials’ meetings, and ministerial meetings that may be held from time to time (MSG Agreement 2007). Senior officials’ meetings usually precede the foreign ministers’ meetings, which will recommend resolutions the MSG leaders should adopt, amend, or reject during the Leaders’ Summit. MSG also provides for special missions when there is a crisis or dispute between member countries or between a member country and a third party. In times of crisis, the MSG can appoint a special mission to undertake a goodwill and solidarity mission in a member country. Interestingly, in such events, the MSG falls back to the provisions of the Biketawa Declaration 2000 Forum for such purposes. Apart from these, the MSG has a Secretariat, its administrative arm located in Port Vila, Vanuatu. The Secretariat is headed by the director general. In 2011, the second director general, Peter Forau, replaced the first, Rima Ravusiro, whose contract expired in July of that year (*Vanatu Daily Post* 2011). Both Ravusiro and Forau,² who were from PNG and Solomon Islands, respectively, had stints in the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, and they brought



FIGURE 1. Chart showing MSG's decision-making structure.

into MSG their experiences with the Forum. Figure 1 depicts the decision-making structure/body of the MSG.

Historical Undercurrents in Pacific Regionalism

Since the establishment of its headquarters in Port Vila in 2008, MSG has been seen as a permanent organization dealing with the affairs of the sub-region in terms of cooperation, trade, and cultural exchanges. Nevertheless, it is important to look at the historical trends in the relationships in that subregion, as these may shed light on what we currently witness and the future likely scenarios. It should be pointed out that the first countries in the Pacific to gain independence were those in the Polynesian subregion. The Melanesian countries (except Fiji) were latecomers in the decolonization process and thus latecomers in regional politics. The Polynesian countries (plus Fiji) were instrumental in establishing the first regional organizations in

the 1960s and 1970s. PNG became involved in regional forums only in 1973 (Fry 1982, 657). The independence of PNG in 1975 as the largest country in the Pacific and linking up with Fiji and later Solomon Islands (1978) as the “Melanesian bloc” had significant impacts on what was to follow in regional politics. Vanuatu was the latest Melanesian state to gain independence (1980), and as Fry (1982) commented, the French involvement in Vanuatu and New Caledonia was instrumental in forging unity among the Melanesian bloc members in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The relationship between Fiji and PNG in regional and Melanesian politics is important in many respects. I briefly discuss this historical relationship below.

Early Fiji–PNG Relations

In the early days of regional cooperation, a source of concern by leaders of the region in general was Fiji’s domination of regional activities. Fiji was dominating the region and taking on the role of a regional leader rather than a spokesperson in the UN Assembly. At that time (1970–1975), Fiji was the only Pacific Island member in the United Nations. Regional leaders tend to allege that Fiji was doing things in the name of the region that actually focused on its own national self-interest. Examples where disagreements show were in the establishment of the University of the South Pacific, the regional airline (Air Pacific), the telecommunications school, and other regional organizations. Fiji, through Ratu Mara, disagreed with these sentiments. In one of his responses, he stated that “we may have over-reached and done it [the encouragement of regional cooperation] at the expense of our own interest” (cited in Fry 1982, 660). It is important to note that despite the span of time since then, such sentiments are still present, and regional leaders are skeptical about Fiji’s dominant role in regional affairs and institutions. The recent push by Fiji to remove Australia and New Zealand from the Forum³ and its ambition to get Indonesia as an associate member of MSG reignited such skepticism (ABC News 2015; Radio New Zealand 2015a).

Another important point to note in regional disputes is the unwelcomed entry of PNG in regional politics. In the early days of Pacific regionalism, Fiji in particular and Pacific states more generally were apprehensive of PNG’s participation in the Forum. Fiji saw the inclusion of PNG in regional organizations as a potential rival to its own position as a regional leader. It was reported that PNG was refused admission to the Forum in 1972. After denials and counterarguments by both Ratu Sir Kamasese Mara and Sir Michael Somare, they came up with a statement in May 1974 to dispel the claim of tension between them. They stated that “Fiji and Papua New Guinea have no desire to dominate the leadership in the Pacific region, but only to ensure

that the best interests of each Pacific country are protected and maintained and will continue to work towards maintaining close co-operation with other Pacific countries” (cited in Fry 1982, 662).

The years that followed showed the movement of Fiji into the Melanesian bloc and then out into the Polynesian bloc when the situations suited its needs. For example, Fiji, under Ratu Mara, criticized PNG’s intervention in Vanuatu in the 1980s despite the fact that Fiji was the only Pacific Island country that had participated extensively in UN peacekeeping operations (MacQueen 1989, 41). Moreover, because of the historical connection and intermarriages that Eastern Fijians had with Tongans and Samoans and the prevalence of the chiefly system in Fiji, it was regarded more as a Polynesian country. At other times, as in the 1980s when Fiji challenged external influences in the region, it was regarded as a Melanesian country. The admission of PNG into the Forum showed that PNG and Fiji actually agreed on many issues at the regional level. This followed a visit by Ratu Mara to PNG in 1974 and by Michael Somare to Fiji the year after. Developments since 1978 indicated that there are two core groups within the Forum family: the Melanesian and Polynesian blocs, as described below.

The Melanesia–Polynesia Divide

As mentioned earlier, the pioneers and “builders” of regional cooperation were the leaders of the independent Polynesian states, including Fiji. With subsequent independence of PNG in 1975 and Solomon Islands in 1978, the Melanesian member states of the Forum also increased. What distinguished the two blocs were their approaches to regional issues. Credit is due to the postindependence Polynesian leaders who “rebelled” against the continued domination of metropolitan powers in Oceania through bodies such as the SPC. The establishment of the Pacific Islands Producers Association (PIPA) was an assertion by Polynesian leaders to reflect on decolonization. They were also large producers of bananas in the Pacific then, so PIPA was seen as a body through which their interests could be pursued. PIPA was an assertion of self-determination.

The then prime minister of Samoa, Tupua Tamasese Lealofi IV, remarked that PIPA “is the strength of our small body . . . this is an association of islanders, created by islanders, and successful only from the efforts of such” (Fry 1982, 655). The then premier of Cook Islands, Albert Henry, further stated that PIPA is a Polynesian assertion of self-determination (Fry 1982, 655). The creation of the Pacific Islands Forum in 1971 subsumed the activities of PIPA, but sentiments raised by Polynesian leaders were instrumental in establishing the South Pacific Forum, now the PIF.

The independence of PNG, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu gave way to the emergence of a Melanesian bloc in what was originally a Polynesian organization. It was insinuated that the Melanesian countries came in with a more radical approach to issues, and this distinguishes the two blocs in Pacific regional politics. PNG in particular moved to support liberation movements. For example, in 1982, Prime Minister Michael Somare sent PNG soldiers to quell anti-independence fighters in Santo, a move not much welcomed by Fiji and the Polynesian countries (MacQueen 1989, 34). Another recent example where Melanesian leaders' positions differed from their Polynesian, Australian, and New Zealand counterparts was in the decision to suspend Fiji from the PIF and in its delay in holding democratic elections (May 2011, 4).

Recent actions and decisions by Melanesian leaders reminded members of the PIF that the two groups existed. In the current scheme of things, Polynesian leaders seemed to cooperate more with Australia and New Zealand, while Melanesian leaders were caught between the need to stand for their national interests but also conscious of the powerful influences that Australia and New Zealand had over their development aspirations. In a lecture to mark the 40th Anniversary of PIF in Apia in 2011, the Samoan prime minister echoed the idea that the Polynesian countries will meet to formalize an organization to represent Polynesian interests in the region, a similar setup to the MSG. He stated that the Polynesian alliance "would focus attention on issues facing Polynesia. Besides the preservation of languages, cultures and traditions, sub-regionalism would also provide better platforms for the delivery of programs" (Pireport 2011a). The Polynesian Leaders Group⁴ (PLG) was formally established in September 2011 "in response to resurgence in the Melanesian Spearhead Group" (Pireport 2015).

Intra-MSG Hostilities

The establishment of MSG and its trade treaty, MSGTA, was regarded a step toward subregional free trade. It formalizes the Melanesia–Polynesia divide that one finds in regional politics. The tendency by Fiji to move in and out of the Melanesia grouping is again evident in recent times. Indeed, the initial invitation for Fiji to join MSG in 1988 was turned down by Ratu Sir Kamasese Mara. Moreover, there is continued "division" between leadership in the Polynesia bloc who are receptive to external advice and opinions and the Melanesian leaders under the auspices of MSG who tend to resent external pressure. The formal establishment of MSG and its corresponding trade agreement gave way to some intra-MSG disputes over the years. Three cases, discussed below, are inter-MSG disputes under the trade agreement;

a political dispute over good governance, ethics, and rule-of-law principles; and an airline standoff.

The “Kava-Biscuit” and “Beef” Wars

The MSGFTA induced trade rivalries and conflict between MSG countries in what are now known as the kava-biscuit and the beef wars. The kava-biscuit war was a trade dispute between Fiji and Vanuatu in 2004 and 2005. Under the MSGTA, there is supposed to be free movement of goods between member countries. Consequently, the more developed Fiji biscuit industry flooded the Vanuatu local market with Fiji biscuits and at cheaper prices. Sensing the threat this had to its industry, Vanuatu sought to protect its biscuit industry by banning biscuit imports to protect their sole biscuit supplier (May 2011, 3). Fiji responded by banning import of Vanuatu kava. Fiji banned Vanuatu kava officially on health grounds, but Vanuatu's kava prices were lower (Connell 2007, 11).

A similar case, known as the beef war between Fiji and PNG, occurred in mid-2005 when a corned beef canning business in PNG sought to export to Fiji under MSG terms. Fiji, however, banned corned beef imports on the grounds that they failed to meet sanitary and quarantine requirements. PNG felt that this was unfair since Fiji was merely using an excuse to protect its beef industry. PNG responded by threatening to ban imports of canned beef, mutton, and chicken products of a Fijian company (Connell 2007, 9). Commenting on the action by Fiji, the chairman of the PNG Manufacturers' Council complained that “if we can't trade amongst ourselves, quite frankly I think that we have a major concern within the Pacific. And as far as regional integration would be concerned that would be extremely difficult” (Connell 2007, 9). Such cases of dispute point to concerns that MSGTA may encourage competition but discourage regional/subregional cooperation.

MSG Chairmanship Disagreements

Apart from the disputes under the MSG trade agreement, there were also political disagreements in recent years. A notable case was that between the prime ministers of Fiji and Vanuatu over the MSG chairman. In 2010, the then Vanuatu prime minister and outgoing MSG chair, Edward Natapei, decided not to hand over the chairmanship to Fiji's Frank Bainimarama. He argued that the MSG chair could be given only to elected leaders. Since Bainimarama took power through a coup, it was not proper to give him the chair of MSG. He stressed that it is inappropriate for a person who has violated MSG's obligations to democracy and good governance to take up its

leadership, as that would ultimately threaten the values the organization stand for (May 2011, 4). Natapei confirmed through ABC News (2010) that the decision not to transfer the chair was a common stance by MSG members: “This is a collective decision of the leaders of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, the FLNKS and Vanuatu, in light of the current impasse we have in the grouping over the chairmanship of the MSG. The potential long-term ramifications of allowing Fiji to chair the MSG this time cannot be ignored. There are basic fundamental principles and values of democracy and good governance that our organisation is built on, and we must continue to uphold them” (ABC News 2012).

Despite this declaration by Natapei, the prime ministers of PNG and Solomon Islands were not happy with the decision. There were allegations that Australia was behind the move by Edward Natapei with a \$66 million aid package to Vanuatu (Davis 2010), although this was played down by other commentators (Hayward-Jones 2010).

This decision by Natapei enraged Fiji’s interim government, and Fiji quickly pulled out of any deals with MSG. The alleged involvement of Australia in Natapei’s decision and attempts to discourage other MSG members from attending the meeting in Fiji resulted in the expulsion of the Australian acting high commissioner to Fiji. Fiji took up the challenge and continued with the proposed MSG meeting under the name “MSG-Plus,” which was later renamed the “Engaging Fiji” meeting. Things changed with the removal of Natapei as the prime minister of Vanuatu through a no-confidence vote and the election of Sato Kilman as the new prime minister. The invitation by the Solomon Islands prime minister on December 15, 2010, cleared the impasse. Fiji again returned to the MSG family following the reconciliation and transfer of MSG chairmanship to Bainimarama.

The “Sky” War

In 2014, a bitter dispute between Solomon Airlines and Fiji Airways emerged. Although airline service is not one of MSG’s focus, it involved two MSG member countries and thus warrants some discussion. The dispute stemmed from an application by Fiji Airways to operate a second flight to Honiara on Saturdays, a day on which Solomon Airlines is already providing a flight between Honiara and Nadi (Pacnews 2014). Since there is already a flight scheduled by the airlines on Saturdays, Solomon Islands aviation decided to decline the application by Fiji Airways. This decision did not sit well with Fiji, so it banned all Solomon Airlines flights to Nadi. Fiji Airways went ahead and sent the first Saturday flight into Solomon Islands without the approval of the Solomon Islands Aviation Division, which was ultimately refused entry.

The Fiji Airways minister then went on air and claimed that the Solomon Islands aviation authority banned all Fiji Airways flights to Honiara.⁵ Solomon Islands reacted by banning Fiji Airways flights to Honiara and blamed Fiji for initiating this standoff, calling Fiji a “bully boy.” Fiji reacted by banning all Solomon Airlines flights to Fiji. It went a step further and banned all code-shared tickets with Air Niugini, which also serves the Nadi–Honiara route. As such, all tickets with Solomon Airlines (IE) labels was not accepted in Fiji. Therefore, all passengers from Solomon Islands to Fiji were required to have Air Niugini or other airline tickets that do not have code sharing with Solomon Airlines (Fiji Times Online [FTO] 2014).

The dispute went on for almost eight months, and after a few meetings, Solomon Islands Aviation and Airlines gave in to the demands of Fiji (*Island Sun* 2015). Both parties agreed to return to the old Airline Service Agreement despite the fact that Fiji Airways has many more lucrative routes and is a larger, well-functioning airline in the Pacific. As the aviation minister confirmed, “Fiji Airways is a fully commercially driven entity and we have adapted to the new situation. Fortunately for us, there is no financial downside deriving from the current suspensions” (FTO 2014). The dispute was sorted out at least for the time being with hope for a review of the Airline Service Agreement in the near future (FTO 2015). Again, this dispute showed the nature and depth of partnership and cooperation between MSG member countries.

External Interests in Melanesian Affairs

Apart from the minor MSG wars, there were also more substantive issues that the MSG was and still is up against. Among the main issues of concern are (1) negative labels, images, and representations by outsider non-Melanesians; (2) the negative relationship between Australia and Melanesia, as demonstrated by the Julian Moti affair; and (3) the position taken by other PIF members when Fiji was suspended from other regional organizations. These remain core issues for MSG leadership in its “experimentation” with subregional cooperation, as described below. It should be noted at this juncture that Indonesia’s interest and membership of the MSG is also an external issue. Nevertheless, instead of discussing it here, the issue is covered in the section “Outstanding Questions” later in this article.

Negative Representations

There is a tendency for external assessors to represent Melanesia as problematic, hopeless, and a subregion reminiscent of Africa in Oceania. The thesis

“Africanisation of the Pacific” was premised on this very pessimistic view of the subregion (Reilly 2000). Even personal opinions provided by academics such as Hughes and Gaurav (2008, 2) were pessimistic assessments of the division of the Pacific into the developing Polynesian bloc and the “stagnant” MSG bloc. These sentiments were probably justified by past events that got out of control, or some were due to leadership gaps and corruption. However, these should not be used to paint a subregion in pessimistic terms. It is usually external assessors, who do not understand systems of authority and relationships in Melanesia, who tend to give skewed assessments of events in Melanesia. For example, there is a general tendency to think that MSG as an organization previously maintained a communication link with Fiji’s Frank Bainimarama from the onset because it is somehow the nature of “big-man politics” in modern government. Melanesian societies were subdivided by early anthropologists as egalitarian and big-man societies, and the thinking is that people in such societies somehow accept a leader who emerges through force. The rise of Major General Sitiveni Rabuka or Commodore Frank Bainimarama in Fiji, Francis Ona in Bougainville, and Harold Keke and Jimmy Lusibaea in Solomon Islands are examples cited to support such positions (Fraenkel 2004; Davis 2010; PIPP 2009). From that standpoint, MSG’s support for Fiji’s Bainimarama was often regarded as corrupt Melanesian leaders supporting a big man turned prime minister.

These were the same sentiments that instigated the need to establish MSG as a subregional organization. The move to establish MSG was to show the world that Melanesia and Melanesians have a civilization and should not always be disregarded. The words of Honourable Taureka in 1972 remain as strong today as it was then: “Most people in the South Pacific regard us as people still sitting on top a hill watching the aircraft takeoff and landing. In other words, they regard us as primitive” (cited in Fry 1982, 667). The sentiments were also shared by the grand chief Sir Michael Somare at the opening of the MSG headquarters in 2008. He declared that Melanesians “proved the earlier cynics wrong. They said that we were too fragmented, too parochial in our interests and too poor to make the organisation work. We shall overcome whatever difficulties that confront our countries” (PIPP 2008, 1). This negative representation that external commentators continuously perpetuate is a huge challenge that Melanesian leaders, especially in MSG, struggle to put right.

Melanesia, RAMSI, and ANZ Subtlety

The other challenge facing MSG countries is related to external influence through aid conditionality, military intervention, or political interference. The 2006 case involving Julian Moti is a fitting example. Julian Moti, a Fiji-born

Australian citizen, was appointed to be the Solomon Islands attorney general in 2007 but was accused of a child sex offense in Vanuatu earlier in 1997. On his way to take up his Solomon Islands post, he was intercepted by police in Port Moresby after the Australian Federal Police issued a warrant for his arrest for the 1997 charges through Interpol. The Julian Moti story demonstrated the typical interest and influence by metropolitan countries on decisions made by Melanesian leaders.⁶ It also demonstrated the ability of leaders in both PNG and Solomon Islands to collude and work against their own laws to oppose external interference.

After Moti's arrest and initial appearance in a Port Moresby court on September 29, 2006, Moti failed to appear in court on both September 30 and October 2 and sought refuge instead in the Solomon Islands High Commission Office (Salika, Huai, and Liosi 2007, 6–7). On October 9, 2006, he was transported by a PNG Defence Force aircraft and dropped off at Munda Airport in the Western Solomons (Nelson 2007, 4). There, Julian Moti, together with Chris Harper and Robson Tanabose, was arrested by RAMSI officers stationed in Munda. Allegations were that both prime ministers of Solomon Islands and PNG colluded to oppose the neocolonial and bullying tactics of the Australian government.

The collusion could be contextualized and understood by revisiting developments prior to Moti's recruitment. Briefly, the formation of the Sogavare-led government was not welcomed in Australian government circles. This was because of Sogavare's bold anti-RAMSI statements as a member of Parliament. He became prime minister after the 2006 Honiara riots, which destroyed large parts of the business district. The riots were done right in the face of RAMSI, which was unable to contain it. Until then, RAMSI was regarded as a great success. The two members of Parliament who were jailed for allegedly masterminding the riots, Charles Dausabea and Nelson Nee, were appointed by Sogavare as government ministers. Julian Moti's recruitment was like adding another burden to the already complex heap of trouble that Australia has to deal with in its peace and development effort. Moti is an avid critic of RAMSI, and the Australian influence in Melanesia and Australia did not want him in such a powerful position. His recruitment was a threat to Australian efforts in the RAMSI intervention and in state building.

Alexander Downer, then Australia's foreign minister, wrote a letter to Solomon Islanders, telling them that Sogavare intended to shut down RAMSI efforts. In a follow-up interview, Downer stated, "I think Mr Sogavare's view is that it would be better to get rid of RAMSI and to go back to the situation where, you know, the country was basically run by the Malaitan Eagle Force" (ABC News 2007a, 2007b). Sogavare blamed RAMSI for unduly controlling Solomon Islands affairs and accused Australia of using RAMSI to further

its own interests. He even boycotted the Pacific Islands Forum meeting in Nukualofa in October 2007 as a protest against Australian influence through RAMSI. Solomon Islands police officers and the Participatory Police Force (the RAMSI police component) raided the prime minister's office on October 20, 2006, in an attempt to retrieve a fax machine suspected of being used to arrange for Julian Moti's illegal escape to Munda. This raid of the prime minister's office received strong condemnation from MSG leaders.

PNG's dislike of Australian influence started in 2005 when its prime minister was offended by Australian immigration officers at Brisbane International Airport. On his return from the New Zealand Forum leaders' meeting, they asked him to remove his shoes and belt and to empty his pockets (*The Age* 2005). The foreign affairs minister of PNG, Rabbie Namaliu, subsequently presented a diplomatic note to the Australian high commissioner in PNG on March 28, 2005, for a formal apology from the Australian prime minister John Howard within twenty-four hours (Marshall 2005). Canberra did not want to make a formal apology with Downer, emphasizing that Australia is an egalitarian country. He stated that "it happens to me when I go to other countries. I have to take off my belt and shoes from time to time. It's just the way of the world these days. It's not a question of trying to insult anybody" (quoted from <http://wsws.org>, April 22, 2005). Such hostilities and unfriendly relations between Melanesian leaders and their Australian counterparts affect genuine relations. The feelings are always at the back of leaders' minds as MSG leaders interact with Australia and New Zealand in the Forum.

It may be worth noting here that MSG's relations with Australia and New Zealand were also tested when Fiji was under military rule between 2006 and 2014. The Polynesia–Melanesia divide in the Forum was once again evident in the positions taken on this issue. As in the past experiences with Vanuatu's independence, the fisheries deal with the United States, and nuclear-free issues in the Pacific, the Polynesian countries were closely allied with New Zealand and Australia. Fiji found more comfort in the MSG family, who seemed to understand the difficulties it was going through. The smaller states, such as Tokelau, Kiribati, and Tuvalu, were also sympathetic toward the Fiji interim government's cause, as they are indirectly dependent on Fiji. Before the 2011 Forum meeting in Auckland, for example, the president of Kiribati shared some wisdom by looking at the Forum as a family. He openly declared that Fiji should be allowed back into the Forum family. In his words, "If you have six children and one is a bad young boy. What do you do with him, you kick him out? You don't. You never do. Because we are a family and we must act like a family, and so Fiji is part of this family" (The Australian 2011).

Although Fiji's readmission is now possible due to the 2014 elections, a small achievement that was directly linked to MSG's efforts and the engaging Fiji dialogues was the subsequent resolution in Auckland that allowed Fiji to participate in PACER-plus trade negotiations at the officer level (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat [PIFS] 2011, 7). Fiji has now been invited to rejoin the Forum. However, Fiji indicated that it is not in a hurry to join the Forum and instead wanted Australia and New Zealand expelled from the regional organization (ABC News 2014; PIPP 2015). Interestingly, the other members of the Forum were not supportive of Fiji's call. The Samoan prime minister has always been vocal against the Fijian prime minister's position to remove Australia and New Zealand (Radio New Zealand 2015b). In addition, PNG's prime minister also argued that the structure of the PIF does not need to change since Australia and New Zealand are also part of the Pacific region (ABC News 2014). This is an ongoing debate that has yet to be resolved.

Outstanding Questions

As a young subregional grouping still experimenting after twenty-six years, there are many issues that MSG needs to address. In its June 2015 Leaders' Summit, the issue of who is eligible to be an observer or an associate member became a heated issue between citizens and their respective governments. Why, for example, did they allow Indonesia and Belgium as observers at the 2011 meeting? Why did they admit Indonesia as an associate member of MSG and give the West Papuans observer status? Going back a bit earlier, was it ethically right to allow Fiji to chair the subregional organization when Frank Bainimarama was then not an elected leader? These are some questions that need answers, as they may determine the future of "pan-Melanesianism." Let's take some of these issues and discuss them separately.

Observers and Associate Members

The practice of having guests and observers at MSG meetings has been entertained for quite a while. The 2011 MSG meeting, the first that Bainimarama chaired, raised some eyebrows, as Belgium, Indonesia, and East Timor were all invited or accepted as observers. It is the prerogative of the senior officers' meeting and the foreign ministers' meeting to decide on what guests, countries, or development partners are allowed to attend the meetings. The criteria for assessing the applicants are as follows:

- (1) Whether the applicant is situated in the Pacific region

- (2) Whether the applicant has any political, economic, or security interest to the MSG
- (3) Whether that applicant is committed to working in partnership with the MSG
- (4) The ability of the applicant to implement or abide by the decisions of the MSG (MSG, 2011a)

Looking at the above criteria, one wonders why countries such as like Luxemburg, Indonesia, and East Timor were given observer status in that meeting over applications from, say, the West Papuans. Perhaps East Timor's interest is understandable given the common colonial experience that it had with Melanesian countries and the current West Papuan ordeal. Indeed, it seemed that the privacy of debates and what can be included in the agenda for leaders' summits may be restrictive because of the presence of contradictory observers. This became even more contradictory at the 2015 leaders' summit, as discussed below. As such, the 2015 MSG communiqué directed the Secretariat to do further work on the criteria and procedures for those countries interested in becoming observers and associate members in the organization (MSG 2015, 3).

Others, such as Luxemburg, used the event to try to secure votes for its bid to be on the UN Security Council. That in itself is an important international relations and security exercise. Belgium—as the current fifty-fourth ranked contributor to the United Nations in general terms and twenty-first to UNDP, sixteenth to UNFPA, eighteenth to UNICEF, eleventh to UNIFEM, eleventh to WHO, sixteenth to UNEP, and twentieth to the UN High Commission for Human Rights (Permanent Mission of Luxemburg to UN 2010, 7)—can probably be excused for using the event to lobby for support. In 2011, one may even be tempted to see the MSG chair's invitation as a protest for its stance in Fiji's unelected government. Australia was then also vying for the position in the UN Security Council for the 2013–2014 term and New Zealand for the 2015–2016 term. The PIF communiqué of September 2011 confirmed that Forum countries will be supporting Australia's and New Zealand's candidatures in the said periods (PIFS 2011, 10). That in itself is a sign that Pacific Island states as sovereignties are important and that there is high concentration of Pacific state votes in the UN General Assembly. This is a strength and regional status that ought to be respected and supported in a diplomatic, nonexploitative manner.

The West Papuans and Kanaks

The decision to have Indonesia as an observer at the 2011 MSG meeting and then further elevated to an associate member in 2015 was even more

controversial, at least for keen observers and MSG citizens (MSG 2015). The West Papua Melanesians struggled to secure observer status at MSG meetings for years but were denied. Human rights abuses against indigenous people and their properties were highlighted by UN agencies and other independent bodies in recent years. For example, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported a number of abuses in the Merauke area of West Papua from 2007 to 2009. The physical abuses endured by young Melanesian males at the hands of the Indonesian Special Forces were horrific, with personal stories of beating, and many other atrocities (HRW 2009, 6–12). Similar reports with specific cases, such as the ill treatment of political prisoners and endemic abuses, were also recorded in the West Papuan Highlands in 2007 (HRW 2007a, 2007b). The MSG turned a deaf ear and blind eye on what was going on in West Papua by denying membership to the West Papuan people since their 2011 application. Of all MSG members, only Vanuatu openly supported the West Papuan cause. On June 19, 2010, the Vanuatu Parliament passed a bill on the status of Indonesian-administered territories of New Guinea that was then submitted at the sixty-fifth session of the UN General Assembly in support of West Papua's struggles for independence (*Vanuatu Daily Post* 2010). The Solomon Islands position traditionally seemed to be treading a cautious line. The Fiji government since 2006 had been very much interested in linking up with Jakarta, making its position on West Papua clear. PNG, while appreciating the human rights abuses in West Papua, is also conscious of the sovereignty that Indonesia has over the "territory." Because of that—and the fact that it shares the border with Indonesia—PNG has always been cautious with statements on West Papua.

In 2015, a contentious decision was made by MSG leaders on the states of Indonesia and West Papua following both of their submissions after the 2011 Leaders' Summit. Civil society organizations, citizen groups, and nongovernmental organizations throughout the Pacific and beyond showed solidarity in their call for MSG to recognize the West Papuan application for membership (*Pacific Scoop* 2015). This overwhelming show of support for the application for membership by the United Liberation Movement for West Papua⁷ (ULMWP) was because of human rights abuses in West Papua uncovered by social media over the past few years. There is also more awareness among Pacific Islanders on the controversial international deals that led to the subjugation of the West Papuans. Despite extensive regional and international support, the decision made by MSG leaders was based on international but contentious notions of sovereignty and representation. Since West Papua is recognized by the United Nations as a province of Indonesia, it follows logically that those in formal authority representing Melanesians in West Papua should be representing their

interests.⁸ The MSG leaders therefore resolved that Indonesia be given associate membership with representatives of five Melanesian provinces in West Papua represented in the MSG. Based on this same logic, the ULMWP, which is seen as an activist group representing the interests of West Papuans who are pushing for independence, was given observer status in MSG⁹ (MSG 2015, 5). Many commentators and groups throughout the Pacific criticized the decision and likened it to MSG leaders neglecting the request of their own Melanesian *wantoks* in favor of Indonesia, an Asian colonial power.

It is worth reiterating the obvious double standards shown by MSG members in the above issue and others. Perhaps it showed the sovereign independence of the MSG members and their right to make their own decisions. On the other hand, it may be seen as a sign of diverse opinions and self-interest that overrides the seemingly united principles of MSG as a subregional grouping. As mentioned earlier, only Vanuatu¹⁰ was supportive of the West Papuan call for independence, while Fiji embraces Indonesia as an important diplomatic partner with military and economic interests. PNG maintains a neutral stance on West Papua but obviously supports the Kanaky movement to independence. In the 2015 Leaders' Summit, Solomon Islands as usual treaded a cautious line, but its prime minister and chair tried his best to support the ULMWP application at the eleventh hour (*Solomon Star* 2015). These contradictory responses and compromises by MSG members ought to be addressed, or they will have implications for the organization in the future.

The Kanaks of New Caledonia, through the FLNKS as another group of Melanesians still under colonial rule, was fortunate to be around when the MSG was formed. In the 2011 communiqué, there was a further request by MSG for the FLNKS to provide additional information on preparation for independence. The communiqué stated that “UN-based MSG Ambassadors would be requested to be involved in consultations with the Decolonization Committee (C24) on the issue of New Caledonia” (MSG 2011b, 3). It is therefore a case in progress, acknowledged also in the 2015 communiqué, with an uncertain future (MSG 2015, 6). Until the political status of Kanaky is changed from the current status as a dependent territory, it will continue to be a central feature of MSG meetings. Alternatively, an independent Kanaky can change the profile of MSG as a regional group of the future given the size and location of New Caledonia in the Pacific. On the other hand, what if the decision after the 2018 referendum is not independence? What will MSG do as an alternative strategy to emancipate the Kanaks from French control? This—and the many other questions highlighted throughout this article—lingers on for MSG leaders.

Potential Impacts of MSG Decisions on Regional Cooperation

The question that comes to mind after the above discussion is, What would be the possible impacts of the current MSG decisions on Pacific regionalism? Moreover, what could be the contributions of MSG in regional cooperation and development in Oceania? Certain observations can be made in response to these general questions. First and foremost is the reality that recent decisions and activities within MSG have invigorated interest in the Polynesian bloc to meet and formalize its own subgrouping. The prime minister of Samoa, Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, endorsed this position in a speech to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the existence of the PIFs and reiterated it after the Auckland Forum meeting of September 2011 (Pacnews 2012). There is little doubt that the resurgence of the Polynesian leaders to form a formal subregional organization of their own (i.e., PLG) was a reaction to recent decisions made by MSG leaders. For example, in the 2011 MSG communiqué, a resolution reads, “Leaders agreed to nominate a candidate from Melanesia for the position of Secretary General to the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Secretariat at the PIF Leaders Meeting in New Zealand later this year” (MSG 2011b, 9). The message from such a statement indicated that since the then secretary-general was from the Polynesian subregion, he was closely pushing for the interests of New Zealand and Australia in the Forum. Such allegations were especially related to Fiji’s suspension from the regional organization. What the MSG leadership may have not contemplated then was the negative reading that such a resolution would have from both the Polynesian and the Micronesian subregional groupings. Ultimately, the early response from Polynesian leaders after the 2011 Forum in Auckland was a call to unite and look after the interest of Polynesian countries in the Forum, which in itself can actually be a positive thing. Leaders from Cook Islands, Tuvalu, Niue, Tonga, and Samoa met in November 2011 to formalize the group’s aims and objectives and formally established an office in Apia, Samoa (Pacnews 2012; Pireport 2011b).

As noted in this article, these subgroups in the Forum have distinct characteristics when it comes to decision making. Past experiences recorded by Fry (1982), May (2011), and MacQueen (1989) indicated that Polynesian leaders were often cautious when deciding on controversial issues compared to the more radical Melanesians. Two examples given by MacQueen that highlighted this difference were when decisions were made on the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty and the fisheries agreement to curtail US activities in the 200 Exclusive Economic Zones. According to MacQueen (1989, 34), Melanesians took radical positions in both cases, while the Polynesian

leaders (including Fiji) took a softer stance. Nevertheless, the formalization of the PLG could be a positive development. In that way, the Polynesian bloc could make a combined stance as a subregion on issues of importance to that subregion. It may also be the beginning of a new chapter in Pacific regionalism where decisions that are based on the interests of individual subregions. This is increasingly obvious in recent statements released by MSG leaders, as exemplified in the one by MSG leaders to nominate a Melanesian candidate for the secretary-general's post. If that is the trend, then MSG would have already paved the way for divisive politics at the regional level.

Melanesia as a subregion could use its land and population size to improve trade arrangements and take a leading role in facilitating other undertakings in the region. This has the potential to improve if independence efforts by the Kanaks and West Papuans from France and Indonesia, respectively, are successful. Recent indications by Timor Leste of its intention to join MSG can also be a positive development in that regard if properly nurtured (Fiji Sun Online 2010). These are not simple undertakings but ones that will involve both "subjects" and "metropolitan powers" discussing openly and frankly. The MSG could be instrumental in bringing together "colonized" Melanesians and controlling powers to discuss and understand each other's position and find ways forward.¹¹ The sooner the MSG leaders realize this critical role, the better it is for all those Pacific territories that are still colonies.

In light of recent criticisms from the pioneers¹² of the subregional organization, the future focus of MSG should go back to the drawing board. It started off as a voice for the voiceless and the oppressed, especially to support proindependence movements. There is still scope to return to the original mission of MSG and support the independence for those still under colonial rule while also pursuing the interests of people in the independent MSG states. One way of doing this is to get back to the people of the subregion and get their views on a favored future for the organization. Figures from a survey carried out by PIPP on MSG in 2011 provided useful indications. For example, an overwhelming number of respondents from the MSG countries support independence for West Papua. The actual figures were 56.2 percent (Fiji), 89.3 percent (PNG), 70.2 percent (Solomon Islands), and 88.2 percent (Vanuatu) in support of independence for West Papua (PIPP 2011, vi). With such huge support from ordinary MSG citizens for the independence of West Papua, it is troubling to think why the MSG leaders' decision in 2015 was actually the opposite, giving associate membership to Indonesia and only observer status to the ULMWP. It is important for MSG members to rethink and frankly talk about what people consider to be important and essential for the organization to focus on. After two and half decades

of experimenting as a subregional organization, it is time to reevaluate and refocus its fundamentals.

It is also fitting to recognize new MSG initiatives to further its development efforts. Such initiatives are a result of recent problems encountered by MSG members since the late 1980s. Over recent years, there have been talks by MSG members to develop a police academy and a police response group within for the subregion. Such realizations were contemplated after terrible experiences with uprisings in places such as Santo, Bougainville, and Solomon Islands and inter-*wantok* tensions. The MSG member countries could pull resources to bring about order when there is lawlessness in member countries. The 2011 MSG communiqué confirmed this intention, and the 2015 communiqué endorsed the draft agreement establishing the Regional Police Academy¹³ and the draft legislative framework for the Formed Police Unit (MSG 2015, 4). Apart from that desire to cooperate in policing work, there has also been cooperation in the civil aviation area. For example, in 2011, Fiji, with its aviation experience, entered into an understanding with Solomon Islands to manage its airspace. This would allow Solomon Islands aviation personnel to be trained, up-skill, and gain experience in Fiji. Also in 2011, PNG announced its intention to open up its labor market to MSG member countries. The 2015 communiqué also endorsed the outcome of the trade ministers' meeting on the MSG Travel Card to ease travel between member countries (MSG 2015, 2). These are initiatives by MSG countries that are slowly taking shape with promises for a bright future for the subregion and for Oceania more generally.

It is also worth noting that Fiji's conduct in both regional and subregional politics will be interesting to monitor in the coming years. The cultural, historical, and economic setting of Fiji makes it one of the most influential Pacific states in shaping the future of regional politics in Oceania. Historically, Fiji had been in either camps of the Polynesia–Melanesia divide in the Forum. Fiji was instrumental in the establishment of earlier regional organizations, such as PIPA, discussed earlier. Ratu Mara in particular was able to articulate what he considered best for the region by aligning with the leaders of Cook Islands and Samoa. Since the emergence of PNG in the Forum, Fiji has been skeptical about the role of PNG in regional politics. The historical relationship it has with MSG countries and positions taken on issues that required cooperation have not been consistent. Since 2006, the MSG camp seemed to work well in favor of Fiji, although the political hiccup over the MSG chairs was almost enough to halt that relationship. Recent developments and decisions in the MSG camp encouraged the formal establishment of the PLG and the strengthening of the Micronesian Trade and Economic Community. Because of the position that Fiji plays in the region, it will have

much influence on the strength of regional cooperation in the future. It is thus important that key players in the region take note of the direction that Fiji takes in terms of regional politics to appreciate the likely future trends in Pacific relations and cooperation.

Concluding Remarks

The future of MSG as an organization and the livelihood of its citizens are important, but efforts must be exerted to “weed out” negative misconceptions about Melanesia and Melanesians. The negative images, labels, and preconceived ideas that outsiders have about MSG member states should be seriously pursued and corrected. Education and information sharing could be utilized in this regard. A strengthened, optimistic, and positively proud people are always destined to persevere and succeed. This may require fundamental efforts to develop a united Melanesian identity. Given the diversity existing in Melanesian states, this can be a daunting task—to unite and develop common ideas and identities as those representing Melanesia. An important starting point could be founded on the common Melanesian language. At the moment, MSG encourages the use of French and English as official languages of the organization and members. Perhaps it is an opportune time to include the Melanesian Pidgin (PNG *Tok pisin*, Solomon Islands *Pijin*, and Vanuatu *Bislama*) as the third official language of the organization and the grandeur of modern Melanesian identity.

NOTES

1. I dealt with the concept of the *wantok* system in my other article cited in the list of references. What is important to note is that the *wantok* system expresses patterns of relationships and networks that function as a social capital at the micro and family levels and an identity concept at greater aggregates. As such, the concept of *wantok* is an “artificial” (but important) structural societal reference to Melanesia as a subregion of Oceania.

2. Peter Forau resigned from the post of MSG director general in mid-November 2015 citing circumstances beyond his control intervening (Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation [SIBC] 2015). At the time this article goes to press, MSG has just appointed a new director general. He is Amena Yauvoli, a diplomat and former interim secretary general of the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF) (Radio New Zealand 2016).

3. Bainimarama recently stated, “As head of government, I will not participate in any forum leader’s meeting until the issue of the undue influence of Australia and New Zealand and our divergence of views is addressed” (ABC News 2015).

4. The establishment of subregional organizations—MSG, PLG, and the Micronesian Chief Executives—could be indicative of the future trend in Pacific regional cooperation.

5. Fiji's aviation minister ignored in his statement that Solomon Islands disallow that particular flight because its application to fly on Saturdays was not approved and thus not authorized.

6. It should be noted that the Moti case was a 1999 case pending in Vanuatu awaiting the accused to be within its jurisdiction. The Australian police became involved in 2006 after an Interpol request was made after the announcement of Moti as the attorney general of Solomon Islands.

7. Prior to the 2015 MSG Leaders' Summit, Melanesians in West Papua were represented by a number of different groups. As such, the MSG resolutions in 2011 requested that they be consolidated into a single representative body, thus the establishment of the ULMWP to represent West Papuans in their application for MSG membership.

8. This is logical under normal circumstances, but in this case it is strange to have the aggressor represent the interests of the "oppressed."

9. As controversial as it may sound and given the skewed definition of representation in this context, the fact is that 150,000 West Papuans signed to endorse ULMWP as their legitimate representative, and the decision was a difficult compromise.

10. This usual support was not clear in 2015 because neither the prime minister nor a senior minister of the Vanuatu government attended the Leaders' Summit. Vanuatu's prime minister nevertheless confirmed his support for the MSG decision several weeks later (see <http://pacific.scoop.co.nz/2015/07/vanuatus-pm-breaks-silence-over-west-papua-and-msg-move-on-jakarta>).

11. The decision taken by MSG leaders in 2015 suggests that they also wished to get the Indonesians and West Papuans to have some space for dialogue.

12. A former Solomon Islands prime minister, Ezekiel Alebua, lamented that the "current MSG leaders have diverted the group's founding values by inviting non-Melanesians to have an influence in Melanesian politics." He was making reference to the MSG leaders' position on Indonesia's application for associate membership (Radio New Zealand, 2015a).

13. Paradoxically, Indonesia already offered half a million US dollars toward the establishment of this Regional Police Academy (FTO 2015).

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