



# Working together to build peace

## Diversity and conflict

Many Pacific islands have a history of warfare, but they also had effective ways of resolving conflict and building peace from which we can learn. For some, particularly those with diverse languages and cultures, it was a fight for control of land and resources. For others, fighting was a way of proving strength and bravery, or appeasing the gods which at times involved headhunting and cannibalism.

Conflict today may be caused by disagreements over such issues as land rights and competition with recent settler groups. Conflicts in colonial times, such as the nationalist Mau movement in Samoa, were dealt with internally by the colonial powers. After achieving independence, many Pacific nations found ways to help each other to solve internal conflict. For example in 2003, members of the Pacific Island Forum contributed to the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), the force sent to restore order on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands.

### Key words and concepts

**censure, conflict, consensus, corruption, coup d'état, matrilineal, peace-building, penitents, reconciliation, Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), stratified, the Allies**

## Cultural values of peace in Samoa

### Fa'a Samoa

Traditionally, Samoan society was extremely stratified, reflected by its three forms of language – the colloquial form (used between people of equal status), the polite form (used between people of different statuses) and the aristocratic form (used between chiefs). Harmony and peace were maintained by following rules of politeness and behaviour based on age, gender and social status. Formal village meetings were held, beginning with an 'ava ceremony in which the dignity of everyone was acknowledged. The polite form of language was used and all opinions were heard and discussed until consensus was reached.

### Ifoga ceremony

The *ifoga* ceremony is a powerful peace-making ceremony, offered for offences ranging from a verbal insult or not using the appropriate words to accidental death or murder. In the ceremony before dawn, the chiefs of the family or of the village of the offender would sit on the ground outside the house of the offended party with their heads covered with a fine pandanus cloth, *ie toga* holding a bundle of sticks in one hand and a stone in the other. The cloths signify shame and repentance because the head is the most sacred part of the body. The sticks and stones symbolise the traditional cooking oven, 'umu and signify that the offenders are willing to be thrown into an oven like animals. The injured party accepts this mute apology and the treasured cloths are presented with speeches of apology. Reconciliation and forgiveness follow.

### Mau movement

After World War One, New Zealand was granted a mandate to govern Samoa, parts of which had been previously governed by Britain, Germany and the United States. During the 1922 to 1930 period, the nationalist Mau movement, with its motto 'Samoa for Samoans', campaigned for independence using peaceful methods. However, the movement was forcefully repressed, and a number of Samoan leaders were killed, including one of the four paramount chiefs, Tupua Tamasese. As he lay dying, his message to the people of Samoa was: 'My blood has been spilt for Samoa. I am proud to give it. Do not dream of avenging it, as it was spilt in peace. If I die, peace must be maintained at any price.' Although the colonial rulers continued with force, the chief's followers obeyed, fleeing to the bush. Limited self-government was eventually introduced in the 1930s, and in 1962 Samoa was the first of the Pacific island nations to be granted independence.

*Adapted from Teaching Asia-Pacific Core Values of Peace and Harmony: A Sourcebook for Teachers/Asia-Pacific Programme of Educational Innovation for Development. UNESCO Bangkok, 2004.*

## Thinking about

1. Select one of the Samoan examples of peace-building and suggest how the actions taken would assist the people to avoid future conflict.
2. In small groups, compare and contrast the selected example with how a similar offence would be handled in Australia.
3. What aspects of these forms of peace-building could be useful to people living in Australia?

## Solomon Islands – Operation *Helpem Fren*

After years of dislocation and loss of connection to the land, political and tribal conflict on Guadalcanal Island began in 1998. The prime minister of the Solomon Islands, Sir Allen Kemakeza, asked Australia three times to help restore peace and security. In 2003, a special meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum unanimously approved a comprehensive package of assistance, known as the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI). *Helpem Fren* ('Help a Friend' in Solomon Islands pidgin) was approved by all members of the Solomon Islands National Parliament.

RAMSI focuses its work on three areas considered necessary to develop good governance:

- Machinery of government – helping government better serve the people and reduce corruption.
- Economic governance – encouraging broad-based economic growth.
- Law and justice – ensuring a safer and more secure Solomon Islands, building strong and peaceful communities.

Under the agreement, the 15 countries of the Pacific Islands Forum (Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu) contribute police officers, military personnel and public service officers to work in the Solomon Islands.

While the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands has been effective in its peace-keeping activities, there are questions about its future role and how the Solomon Islands will achieve its goals of good governance and independence.



Peter Davis, AusAID

### RAMSI

Members of the Participating Police Force at a reconciliation meeting on the Weathercoast. From left: Keshwa (Fiji), Faapine Lavi (Samoa), Darren (New Zealand) and Graeme (Australia). Police from around the Pacific are helping RAMSI to establish law and order and rebuild the nation.

# Solo Idol

'Solo Idol' is an annual singing contest that was first held in the Solomon Islands in 2006. In 2008, the theme was 'I am a nation builder' and the Australian High Commission in Honiara invited the 'Australian Idol' 2004 winner to help the contestants prepare.

## Weaving the basket of *Helpem Fren*

'I begin my story in a village, because that's where I began,' says RAMSI's culture and community outreach coordinator Chris Tarohimae, immediately catching the attention of the 16 new advisors with the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) sitting before him in the breezy *lif haus*, thatched roofed pergola, by the sea. 'In the village, we are all linked together like the weave of a basket. If one part of the weave breaks, then the whole basket will fall apart, so we must work together, supporting each other.'

They are welcomed with green coconut drinks and locally made pandanus fans and bags as they begin to learn about local culture, communal life and ways of communicating to help them build better relationships with the Solomon Islands public servants they are working with.

They discuss what makes a good relationship work and discover such insights as what it means when Solomon Islanders raise their eyebrows in response to a question.

'Initially, people thought that RAMSI was actually a man; a great man, a big man, a "Rambo-like man" who could touch bad people. People were surprised when they met individuals like the first special coordinator, Nick Warner.'

The people of Quila village entertain participants with a traditional *kastom* welcome dance before sitting down in the cool shade of a giant rain tree to share their stories and impart a sense of their lives and the impact that RAMSI has had at a village level. For many advisors, these stories give real meaning to RAMSI's pidgin slogan, *Helpem Fren*: 'The village is really what we are here for,' says Anna O'Keefe, a New Zealand advisor, 'Our success will be measured when we are gone.' She suggested that to make long-lasting changes, building relationships and increasing the confidence of Solomon Islands public servants is key. 'You simply can't spend too much time developing relationships.'

Adapted from [www.islandbusiness.com](http://www.islandbusiness.com)



Liz Thompson/Lonely Planet Images

Weaving a basket from pandanus leaves.

## Women for peace

Women in the Solomon Islands have traditionally played an active role in conflict resolution. In one group, the Areare culture, women intervene by standing between two warring parties and challenge them to stop. Any male contact with or over a woman's body is *tambu*, forbidden, so would require compensation. The fighting has to stop immediately and negotiations for reconciliation and compensation begin.

In 2000, Solomon Islands women formed a non-aligned multi-ethnic group aimed at restoring peace and pursuing reconciliation. They worked together to meet with both sides of the conflict, building trust and taking food to families caught up in the conflict. They started a weapons-free village program.

## Thinking about

1. What was the underlying reason for the conflict in Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands?
2. Why might Australia have been reluctant to provide assistance when first asked? How important was it that Australia was asked to provide support to the Solomon Islands and that this support was endorsed by the Pacific Islands Forum in 2003? Why was a peace-building force necessary in Solomon Islands? Draw a flowchart to show the events that led up to the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands and the people involved in the operation. Why might it have been called *Helpem Fren*?
3. Why does RAMSI's culture and community outreach coordinator, Chris Tarohimae, begin with a story?
4. Why is the image of a woven basket appropriate for peace building?

## Thinking more deeply

1. Use the image of a woven basket to illustrate the things Solomon Islander men and women and the RAMSI peace-keeping force can do to resolve conflicts. How could you learn from these suggestions?
2. Draw a stool with three-legs, each labelled 'machinery of government', 'economic governance' and 'law and justice'. For each leg, list two activities used in *Helpem Fren* in the Solomon Islands. Outline your ideas about why all three 'legs' might be needed to make the program work.

## Building peace in Bougainville

Bougainville is the most easterly of Papua New Guinea's 19 provinces. It consists of two large islands, Bougainville (8,646 square kilometres) and Buka (598 square kilometres), separated by a narrow passage, as well as many smaller islands, or about two per cent of Papua New Guinea's land area. Geographically, culturally and linguistically, Bougainville is part of the Solomon Islands chain, but became part of the German colony of New Guinea rather than the British colony of the Solomon Islands in the late 19th century.

Copper mining began on Bougainville in the mid-1960s. The mine created jobs for many Bougainvilleans and was a main source of income for the government of Papua New Guinea, but the mine damaged the environment and caused many social changes. Some groups felt they were missing out on the gains and losing their culture. An armed pro-independence group, the Bougainville Revolutionary Army, fought against the Papua New Guinean government. An opposing group, the Bougainville Resistance Force, aligned itself with the Papua New Guinean government. Civil war spread. Thousands of people died between 1989 and 1998, and much of Bougainville's infrastructure – health, water, sanitation, education, transport and communication – was destroyed. Many people fled their homes and lived in fear, scratching a meagre existence from the bush. Malnutrition and poverty were widespread. Many people lost trust in each other and the economic impact was enormous.

Traditional Bougainville society is matrilineal: the women's line determines kinship and the inheritance and use of land. According to a local saying, 'Women are the mothers of the land'. Their authority is respected; the word of the women carries weight. As the conflict in Bougainville intensified, women from different backgrounds used their status to negotiate peace in their communities, acting as intermediaries to maintain dialogue. The Leitana Nehan Women's Development Agency – established in 1992 with its motto 'Women weaving Bougainville together' – was one such organisation. Women distributed food, clothing and medicines to people on both sides of the conflict. Through prayer meetings, reconciliation ceremonies, peace marches and petitions, they took a political stand against violence.

In 1997, the New Zealand government, drawing on its neutrality and cross-cultural sensitivity, facilitated a peace conference of all Bougainville leaders that led to a ceasefire. Later agreements involved ex-combatants in the peace process, and eventually, in August 2001, the Bougainville Peace Agreement was reached. The agreement comprises three main parts: (a) autonomy, (b) a referendum in 10 to 15 years on the future political status of the island, and (c) a weapons disposal plan.

An Australian-led multinational unarmed peace monitoring group, with members from Fiji, New Zealand, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, operated in Bougainville at the invitation of the Papua New Guinean



government between December 1997 and June 2003. Their role was to monitor all aspects of the ceasefire and promote and instil confidence in the peace process through its interaction with people in Bougainville.

A strong desire for peace at the grassroots level on Bougainville and the presence of the peace monitoring group have helped weave the community together again.

Geoff Tooth, AusAID



### Guard of honour

The prime minister of Papua New Guinea, Sir Mekere Morautu, inspects a guard of honour at the signing of the Bougainville Peace Agreement, 30 August 2001.

Geoff Tooth, AusAID



### Peace agreement

The signed Bougainville Peace Agreement, being carried by locals in ceremonial style, 30 August 2001.

Mathias Heng, AusAID



### Weapons disposal

The disposal of weapons, arms, ammunition and explosives in Bougainville was an important part of building a safe environment for peace.



Papua  
New Guinea  
timeline

## Thinking about

View the **timeline**. In small groups, create a mind map in one colour showing factors that contributed to the conflict in Bougainville. Using a different colour, show how these factors were addressed.

## Thinking more deeply

Write a short description of the rebuilding and reconciliation activities and the people who were involved.

# Wan Smolbag Theatre

Wan Smolbag Theatre is a non-government organisation that started out in Vanuatu but now operates all over the Pacific. The group uses song, humour and drama to inform, raise awareness and encourage public discussion on a range of challenging issues such as waste management and deciding how to vote where traditional ways of life and governance conflict with Western styles of governance to domestic violence and AIDS.

## Song from script about democracy

Reproduced with permission of Wan Smolbag Theatre



<i>Hey my friend</i>	<i>Working twelve hours, six days for</i>	<i>Bad life for me!</i>
<i>Have you had a look out there?</i>	<i>minimum wage!</i>	<i>We're gonna change the system!</i>
<i>Young people on the streets</i>	<i>This is our democracy</i>	<i>Get rid of the rule of law!</i>
<i>Walking up and down everywhere!</i>	<i>Good life for you!</i>	<i>The law's for the rich not for the poor!</i>
<i>We're fifty per cent of the population</i>	<i>Bad life for me!</i>	<i>You don't take the rich men to</i>
<i>And what do we get?</i>	<i>Every four years the people vote</i>	<i>the courts</i>
<i>No hope, no work, no education!</i>	<i>To change the government</i>	<i>If you do they walk out free!</i>
<i>Life's got a lot to offer you</i>	<i>That's when we get to see MPs,</i>	<i>So my friends</i>
<i>Big houses! Fast cars! Foreign holidays!</i>	<i>When they come to buy our vote!</i>	<i>We'll take over now</i>
<i>What have we got to look forward to?</i>	<i>What do we get from this democracy?</i>	<i>Bye bye law and democracy!</i>
	<i>Good life for you!</i>	

### Thinking about

Read through the words of the song.

1. What tempo, dynamics and action might be used when it is performed?
2. What is your view of the messages in the last seven lines of the song?

### Chapter activities

#### Collecting your thoughts

1. Create a song or humorous drama to convey a message about peace building and conflict resolution in relation to one of the situations outlined in this chapter or a current Pacific island situation.
2. Debate: 'The pursuit of peace and progress, with its trials and errors, its successes and setbacks, can never be relaxed and never be abandoned' – Dag Hammarskjöld, Nobel Peace Prize winner, 1961. Use one of the conflict situations described in this chapter to support your argument.

#### Taking action

Using library internet resources, find out about Dr Sitiveni Halapua's Talanoa method of conflict resolution. Describe how it draws upon traditional cultural methods of discussion to assist participants to work together to solve problems rather than have outsiders impose a solution.