



**Australian Government**

**Refugee Review Tribunal**

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# Country Advice

## Solomon Islands

Solomon Islands – SLB37559 –  
Micronesians – Employment – Wantok  
system – State protection

13 October 2010

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### 1. Do people of Micronesian ethnicity suffer discrimination in areas such as employment?

Demography and Diversity

The Solomon Islands has a population of 523,000 who live on more than 27 islands<sup>1</sup>.

A report by Amnesty International ‘*Solomon Islands. A forgotten conflict*’ published in September 2000 cites UN data which lists these islands as ranking among the poorest and least developed in the world. According to the 1999 census the population is predominantly composed of Melanesian Solomon islanders who live as cash crop farmers in small villages in culturally different island communities.<sup>2</sup> According to a study published by the Norwegian Refugee Council in 2004, the Solomon Islands have great cultural and language diversity: approximately 94 per cent of the population are Melanesians, 4 per cent Polynesians, and 2 per cent Micronesians, Chinese, Europeans and others. 87 languages are spoken in these islands.<sup>3</sup> Dr Jennifer Corrin Care, currently Executive Director of Comparative Law in the Centre for Public, International and Comparative Law and a Senior Lecturer in the TC Beirne School of Law of the University of Queensland, stated in ‘*Customary law and women’s rights in Solomon Islands*’, Development Bulletin no. 51: ‘culture and social organisation vary from island to island, and even from village to village.’<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Solomon Islands*, 11 March Section 1 - Attachment 1

<sup>2</sup> Amnesty International 2000, *Solomon Islands. A forgotten conflict*, September. ASA43/05/00, (p. 1 Background) <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA43/005/2000/en/bbe77cbd-de9b-11dd-b378-99b26579b978/asa430052000en.pdf> - Accessed 7 October 2010 - Attachment 2

<sup>3</sup> Norwegian Refugee Council 2004, *Profile of internal displacement: Solomon Islands*, November. <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/txis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?page=printdoc&docid=47d65477c> – Accessed 7 October 2010. p. 11-12 – Attachment 3

<sup>4</sup> Corrin Care, J. 2000, ‘*Customary law and women’s rights in Solomon Islands*’, Development Bulletin, No. 51, pp. 20-22 - [http://devnet.anu.edu.au/GenderPacific/pdfs/05\\_gen\\_legal\\_corrincare.pdf](http://devnet.anu.edu.au/GenderPacific/pdfs/05_gen_legal_corrincare.pdf) – Accessed 11 October 2010 – Attachment 4

## Loyalty to One's Clan

The constitution of the Solomon Islands provides for fair treatment of its citizens; however, there are continuing problems with government corruption and discrimination against women.<sup>5</sup>

In fact, society in the Solomon Island is divided by ethnicity and language. The Norwegian Refugee Council's study of 2004 - *Profile of internal displacement: Solomon Islands* - found that divisions along linguistic, regional and ethnic lines exist and have an impact and influence on society and public opinion.<sup>6</sup> The US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Solomon Islands* corroborates this view when it observes:

Many islanders see themselves first as members of a clan, next as inhabitants of their natal island, and only third as citizens of their nation.<sup>7</sup>

Dinnen S. and Firth, S. in 'Politics and State Building in Solomon Islands' (2008) found that the '*wantok* system (networks based on common linguistics or kinship bonds)' have permeated into bureaucracy.<sup>8</sup>

A search of all available resources has failed to confirm or deny that Micronesians suffer discrimination in areas such as employment. However, as information from the abovementioned sources indicate that Solomon Islanders display greater loyalty to their clan, it is plausible that Micronesians may experience difficulties when they seek employment or access to education. The Norwegian Refugee Council's study found that because of its young population the Solomon Island has a high level of unemployment. This same study found that there are insufficient schools – and these lack funds and resources.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the US Department of State 2010 also found that women are not treated fairly:

Despite constitutional and legal protections, women remained the victims of discrimination in the male-dominated society. Unemployment remained high...<sup>10</sup>

## 2. To what extent do the laws and state authorities provide protection against such discrimination?

The police force is undergoing reform as it is being monitored by the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI). A multi-national police-centred force called

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<sup>5</sup> US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Solomon Islands*, 11 March, p. 1 - Attachment 1

<sup>6</sup> Norwegian Refugee Council 2004, *Profile of internal displacement: Solomon Islands*, November. <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?page=printdoc&docid=47d65477c> – Accessed 7 October 2010. p11 -12, 58 – Attachment 3

<sup>7</sup> US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Solomon Islands*, 11 March. Section 6. National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities - Attachment 1

<sup>8</sup> Dinnen S. and Firth, S. 2008, 'Politics and State Building in Solomon Islands', Australian National University, ANU E Press, May. p. 201 - [http://epress.anu.edu.au/solomon\\_islands/pdf/whole\\_book.pdf](http://epress.anu.edu.au/solomon_islands/pdf/whole_book.pdf) - Accessed 11 October 2010 – Attachment 5

<sup>9</sup> Norwegian Refugee Council 2004, *Profile of internal displacement: Solomon Islands*, November. <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?page=printdoc&docid=47d65477c> – Accessed 7 October 2010. p11 -12, 58 – Attachment 3

<sup>10</sup> US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Solomon Islands*, 11 March, Section 6. National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities - Attachment 1

Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Island (RAMSI) was dispatched by the Australian government in 2003 in a bid to restore law and order after the 1998-2003 violent conflict between the Malaitan and Guadalcanalese ethnic groups. It is currently headed by Peter Marshall, a New Zealander who is the Police Commissioner. Parliamentary elections took place in 2006 and were considered to have been generally free and fair apart from some incidents of vote buying.<sup>11</sup>

As mentioned in Question 1, the US Department of State states that the constitution of the Solomon Islands aims to provide fair treatment for all and has legislated to provide criminal penalties in matters of official corruption. However, the law is not implemented effectively and officials have often engaged in corrupt practices with impunity.<sup>12</sup>

According to the report by Amnesty International referred to in Question 1, there is a severe ethnic imbalance in the national police service, and this has hampered efforts of some senior officers to operate with impartiality and neutrality.<sup>13</sup>

The 'wantok' system regulates people's choices, so that they favour their own kinship networks – and this has an impact on bureaucracy.<sup>14</sup>

According to the U.S. Department of State Report the police force operates more effectively than previously because it is supported by RAMSI; nevertheless, it continues to be weak in investigation and reporting. This report noted that police corruption and impunity were major problems in 2009. Furthermore, the report found that the police lacked professionalism and was unable to provide impartial service and protection to all citizens:

...some observers criticized the police as more loyal to their respective ethnic group, or wantok (extended family), than to the country as whole.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. Deleted.

## Attachments

1. US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Solomon Islands*, 11 March (Section 1 Respect for Human Rights. d. Arbitrary Arrest and Detention. Role of the Police and Security Apparatus).

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<sup>11</sup> US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Solomon Islands*, 11 March. (p. 1 and Section 1.d. role of the Police and Security Apparatus ) - Attachment 1

<sup>12</sup> US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Solomon Islands*, 11 March. (p. 1 and Section 4. Official Corruption and Government Transparency) - Attachment 1

<sup>13</sup> Amnesty International 2000, *Solomon Islands. A forgotten conflict*, September. ASA43/05/00, p. 7. The Police and Human Rights; p. 27. The criminal justice system.  
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA43/005/2000/en/bbe77cbd-de9b-11dd-b378-99b26579b978/asa430052000en.pdf> - Accessed 7 October 2010 - Attachment 2

<sup>14</sup> Dinnen S. and Firth, S. 2008, 'Politics and State Building in Solomon Islands', Australian National University, ANU E Press, May. (p.201) - [http://epress.anu.edu.au/solomon\\_islands/pdf/whole\\_book.pdf](http://epress.anu.edu.au/solomon_islands/pdf/whole_book.pdf) - Accessed 11 October 2010 – Attachment 5

<sup>15</sup> US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Solomon Islands*, 11 March. (p. 1 and Section 1.d. role of the Police and Security Apparatus ) - Attachment 1

2. Amnesty International 2000, *Solomon Islands. A forgotten conflict*, September. ASA43/05/00, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA43/005/2000/en/bbe77cbd-de9b-11dd-b378-99b26579b978/asa430052000en.pdf> - Accessed 7 October 2010.
3. Norwegian Refugee Council 2004, *Profile of internal displacement: Solomon Islands*, November. <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/txis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?page=printdoc&docid=47d65477c> – Accessed 7 October 2010.
4. Corrin Care, J. 2000, 'Customary law and women's rights in Solomon Islands', Development Bulletin, n. 51, pp 20-22 - [http://devnet.anu.edu.au/GenderPacific/pdfs/05\\_gen\\_legal\\_corrincare.pdf](http://devnet.anu.edu.au/GenderPacific/pdfs/05_gen_legal_corrincare.pdf) – Accessed 11 October 2010.
5. Dinnen S. and Firth, S. 2008, 'Politics and State Building in Solomon Islands', Australian National University, ANU E Press, May. - [http://epress.anu.edu.au/solomon\\_islands/pdf/whole\\_book.pdf](http://epress.anu.edu.au/solomon_islands/pdf/whole_book.pdf) - Accessed 11 October 2010.