



IIMA
Human Rights Office
Istituto Internazionale
Maria Ausiliatrice



Human Rights Council

Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Solomon Islands

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Joint Stakeholders' Submission on:

Human Rights in Solomon Islands

Submitted by:

IIMA - Istituto Internazionale Maria Ausiliatrice

VIDES International - International Volunteerism Organization for Women, Education

(NGOs in Consultative Status with ECOSOC)

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. This stakeholders' report is a joint submission of the above-mentioned organizations. The report highlights key concerns related to Human Rights in Solomon Islands in the following areas: **education, birth registration, ill treatment and violence against children, child and adolescent health, the rights of women, and economic and sexual exploitation of children.** Each section conveys recommendations to the Solomon Islands Government.

2. The data and information obtained for this submission came from various sources and includes information from teachers, educators, and other civil society actors living and working in Solomon Islands. All information concerned the period from March 2016 to October 2020.

3. **IIMA** is an international NGO in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. IIMA is present in 96 countries where it provides education to children and adolescents, youth and women, particularly the most disadvantaged and vulnerable.

4. **VIDES International** is an international NGO in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, which is present in 42 countries worldwide. It was founded in 1987 to promote volunteer service at the local and international levels to ensure the implementation of human rights to vulnerable groups, especially children and women.

II. GENERAL REMARKS AND COOPERATION WITH THE UPR MECHANISM

5. This NGO coalition welcomes the constructive participation of Solomon Islands in the 3rd cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). The present joint submission represents the follow-up to the UPR recommendations accepted by Solomon Islands in 2016.

6. The implementation of recommendations is critical in order to ensure a true advancement of human rights in the State under review. Therefore, special attention should be paid by Solomon Islands to the follow up of recommendations in an effective manner and in consultation with Civil Society.

III. VULNERABLE CHILDREN

7. The most vulnerable groups in Solomon Islands society consist of children and women in difficult situations: children living in poverty, children and women living in rural and remote islands, and children living on the streets.

8. This NGO coalition acknowledges the acceptance of recommendation No. 99.1¹. However, young girls in Solomon Islands continue to be a vulnerable group and face great danger due to the persistence of harmful practices against them in the country. More specifically, this coalition is deeply concerned with reports of young girls being sold as brides. This practice is more prevalent amongst disadvantaged families who are forced to marry their daughters to a

¹ Recommendation No. 99.1. "Ratify and/or accede promptly to, as appropriate, the three Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Uruguay); Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (Switzerland); Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (Panama)" See Report of the Working Group p.15, UN Doc. A/HRC/32/14 , 13 April 2016.

groom, in exchange for a monetary compensation known as the “bride price”². In return, grooms feel entitled to seeing their bride as “property”, exposing young girls to serious abuse.

9. We recommend to the Government of Solomon Islands to:

- a) Double efforts to combat the sale of children by criminalizing the sale of young girls as brides.**
- b) Strengthen its efforts to implement more effective policies to protect children, especially young girls, against violence.**
- c) Promptly Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.**

IV. RIGHT TO EDUCATION

10. This NGO coalition welcomes the significant progress made by the Government of Solomon Islands in the area of education, especially through the implementation of The National Education Action Plan 2016-2020 (NEAP) and the Education Strategic Framework 2016-2030 (ESF), which led to increased enrollment rates in primary and secondary school, as well as an increased number of qualified teachers in the classroom.³ However, we perceive that there are two main categories of children in Solomon Islands who still lack adequate access to education: disadvantaged children living in remote areas and children belonging to low income families.

11. Children living in remote areas. We note with concern that several measures still need to be taken to adequately respond to the specific needs of children living in distant and remote areas, where schools and education services are lacking. The geographic nature of the country makes it difficult for these children to reach other islands to access school, placing them at a disadvantage.

12. Children belonging to low income families. We welcome the acceptance of recommendation No. 100.70⁴, aiming to make education compulsory and free for all. In 2009, Solomon Islands implemented the Fee Free Education Policy in efforts to make primary school free for all, however, government funding continues to be limited and oftentimes insufficient to meet operational needs⁵. Families are therefore asked to contribute to school related fees, as well as pay for other hidden fees, such as those for transportation and school materials⁶. The inability to pay for such fees places many children at a disadvantage in realizing their right to education, especially children belonging to low income families.

² See Report Girls Not Brides- <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/solomon-islands>

³ See The National Education Plan Report: https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/planipolis/files/ressources/solomon_islands_education_strategic_framework_2016-2030.pdf

⁴ Recommendation No. 100. 70 *Step up efforts to ensure that primary education is compulsory as well as free of charge, and improve the capacity of all educational institutions, importantly through the increase of budget allocations towards education (Republic of Korea)*; See Report of the Working Group p.23, UN Doc. A/HRC/32/14, 13 April 2016

⁵ See UNICEF Report: Solomon Islands Case Study https://www.unicef.org/17_PBEA_Solomon_Islands_Case_Study.pdf

⁶ See Report of the Convention of the Rights of the Child p.10, UN Doc. CRC/C/SLB/CO/2-3

13. Moreover, we report that the **quality of education** in certain provinces is disproportionately lower than others, especially in provinces experiencing a shortage of schools, teachers, and didactic materials. For example, the student to teacher ratio in the Honiara province was reported at 64 to 1 in 2014; as opposed to 13.9 to 1 in the provinces of Renell and Bellona ⁷. Similarly, the textbook to student ratio was reported at 2.5 to 1 in most provinces, and at 32.7 to 1 in Honiara. Similarly, there is a disparity between public and private schools. Schools run by faith-based organizations seem to be more organized, financially stable, and teachers tend to be better equipped and motivated to work. Many teachers in public schools often go unpaid⁸, resulting in the general absenteeism of teachers in the classroom.

14. **Human Rights Education.** We observe with concern that Human Rights Education is not part of school programs nor of teachers' training. Most individuals in Solomon Islands do not have sufficient knowledge and understanding of their human rights.

15. *We recommend to the Government of Solomon Islands to:*

- a) *Adopt all necessary measures to facilitate access for children and teachers to schools in remote and rural areas, by building new education facilities and providing adequate roads and public transportation.*
- b) *Empower vulnerable groups, especially low income families, by raising awareness campaigns on the importance of education and by providing financial support to allow children to attend school.*
- c) *Undertake specific measures to improve the quality of education in rural and urban sectors, including through the provision of adequate classrooms, school materials as well as adequate remuneration and training for teachers.*
- d) *Include Human Rights Education in school programs and in teachers' training programs.*

V. BIRTH REGISTRATION

16. This NGO coalition acknowledges the implementation of the Civil Registration Database system to simplify birth registrations in Solomon Islands. We commend the government's efforts to encourage birth registrations in hospitals and government clinics. However, women living in remote areas and women giving home births find it challenging to obtain a birth registration in their province and therefore have to travel to the capital. In addition, we note that Solomon Islands charges a penalty fee for late registrations. Families traveling to the capital often incur late penalty fees which discourages them from obtaining a registration.

17. *We recommend to the Government of Solomon Islands to:*

⁷ See UNICEF Report: Situation Analysis of Children in Solomon Islands
<https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/media/1221/file/Situation-Analysis-of-Children-Solomon-Islands.pdf>

⁸ See Report: Hidden Pacific: Communities at the heart of youngsters' education
https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11814507

- a) Make birth registration accessible to all, especially to individuals living in remote and rural areas, by implementing mobile birth registrations and eliminating penalties for late registrations.*

VI. ILL TREATMENT AND VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

18. While Solomon Islands expressed its commitment to prohibit corporal punishment in all settings through the acceptance of Recommendation No. 100.57⁹, corporal punishment remains lawful under Article 233 of the Penal Code 1963, confirming “the right of any parent, teacher, or other person, having the lawful control of a child or young person to administer reasonable punishment to him”¹⁰. The language in the penal code does not strictly prohibit corporal punishment, leaving leeway for parents and teachers to exercise corporal punishment in the home and school. As a result, children are often victims of ill treatment¹¹.

19. In particular, we note with deep concern the neglect, ill treatment, and violence faced by children living in rural areas. There are inadequate resources to raise awareness and educate parents on alternative forms of discipline. Similarly, despite the existing domestic legal framework protecting children against violence, there is a lack of personnel to enforce such laws, leaving children living in rural areas at a disadvantage.

20. We recommend to the Government of Solomon Islands to:

- a) Modify Article 233 of the Penal Code 1963 in order to prohibit corporal punishment in all settings including in the family home, in schools, in alternative care settings, in day-care and penal institutions, without any exception.*
- b) Ensure the full protection of children, particularly children living in rural areas, by providing training to parents and teachers on alternative, non-violent forms of discipline.*
- c) Take all needed measures by improving law enforcement to ensure the full implementation of existing domestic legal frameworks protecting children from all forms of violence.*

VII. CHILD AND ADOLESCENT HEALTH

21. IIMA and VIDES report that inadequate funding, insufficient number of well-trained health workers, and poor access to health-care services, particularly in rural and remote areas, all present significant barriers to the improvement of children’s health in Solomon Islands. In spite of government efforts to improve inclusive access to health for all, including the implementation of the National Health Strategic Plan of 2016 – 2020, children and adolescents in Solomon Islands continue to face health care barriers, particularly the shortage

⁹ Recommendation No. 100.57 End all forms of corporal punishment of children in all settings, including in the home and in schools, by enforcing its prohibition, as previously recommended (Slovenia); See Report of the Working Group p.22, UN Doc. A/HRC/32/14, 13 April 2016.

¹⁰ See Report on corporal punishment in Solomon Islands: <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/reports-on-every-state-and-territory/solomon-islands/>

¹¹ See Report on corporal punishment in Solomon Islands: <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/reports-on-every-state-and-territory/solomon-islands/>

of well-trained health workers, translating into two doctors for every 10,000 people.¹²

22. The insufficient number of health care personnel makes access to health difficult for many individuals, especially for marginalized communities living in remote and rural areas. Individuals have to travel to neighboring islands to receive health care, and oftentimes lack transportation. In 2017, 157 doctors were registered in the country, 126 of them were based in the capital of Honiara¹³. The uneven distribution of healthcare professionals results in higher patient to doctor ratios, which in return affects the quality of service received by those in need of medical attention, especially those living in remote islands.

23. We recommend the Government of Solomon Islands to:

- a) Strengthen its efforts to improve access to basic health-care services for all children, particularly in rural and remote areas, by implementing mobile clinics.***
- b) Adopt all necessary measures to improve the quality of public health services, including the equal distribution of adequate and qualified medical staff between urban and rural areas.***
- c) Reduce the disparities in access to health care by providing transportation to individuals in disadvantaged neighborhoods in need of medical attention.***

VIII. RIGHTS OF WOMEN

24. We welcome the acceptance of Recommendations No.99.22¹⁴, 99.23¹⁵, and 99.24¹⁶ concerning women in the workforce, the political participation of women, gender equality, and women's empowerment, as well as the state's implementation of the National Strategy for the Economic Empowerment of Women and Girls. However, we are deeply concerned with the gender gap between paid and unpaid work. In 2018, 56% of employed women were accounted for as unpaid workers and only 33% were paid for their work¹⁷. Similarly, 60.4% of women are employed in Solomon Islands, compared to 72.2% of men¹⁸.

¹² See report on Healthcare in Solomon Islands: <https://www.healthcareglobal.com/supply-chain/look-health-care-system-solomon-islands>

¹³ See Report on transforming care in Solomon Islands: <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/health-closer-to-home-transforming-care-in-the-solomon-islands>

¹⁴ Recommendation No. 99. 22 *Take steps towards the effective implementation of the National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Development and the National Policy on Ending Violence against Women, through coordination, advocacy, awareness-raising and resource allocation (Canada)*; See Report of the Working Group p.16, UN Doc. A/HRC/32/14 , 13 April 2016.

¹⁵ Recommendation No.99. 23 *Develop a concrete action plan to encourage and support women's active involvement in economic and political life, including effective measures to increase women's involvement in the economy and formal political institutions by addressing existing legal, social, and cultural barriers (United States of America)*; See Report of the Working Group p.16, UN Doc. A/HRC/32/14 , 13 April 2016.

¹⁶ Recommendation No. 9.24 *Take measures to ensure non-discrimination against women within all sectors of society, particularly with regard to access to education and employment, and to amend and align all existing laws in this regard (Namibia)*; See Report of the Working Group p.16, UN Doc. A/HRC/32/14 , 13 April 2016

¹⁷ See report on Gender Equality: <http://www.mwycfa.gov.sb/what-we-do/gender-equality-women-s-development.html>

¹⁸ Statistics derived from UN Womens Report <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/fiji/co/solomon-islands>

25. Furthermore, violence against women is still a very common practice. Prevalence rates of family sexual violence in the Solomon Islands, including physical and sexual abuse, are one of the highest in the world, reported at approximately 64% in 2018¹⁹. Similarly, 2 in 3 women, ages 15 to 49, have experienced physical and sexual violence, with the main perpetrators being men living in the household. The alarming numbers of such cases are, in part, due to a cultural mindset that has “normalized” violence against women in the country. A study from the World Health Organization (WHO) showed that 73% of men and 73% of women believe violence against women can be justified for factors such as “infidelity” or “disobedience”²⁰.

26. We recommend to the Government of Solomon Islands to:

- a) In compliance with previous UPR Recommendations No. 99. 22, No. 99. 23, and No. 99. 24, effectively and promptly implement existing policies in order to ensure equal opportunities and equal pay for women.**
- b) Strengthen its efforts in combating violence against women by raising awareness of the harmful consequences of violence against women, bringing perpetrators to justice, and ensuring victims have quality services available to them.**
- c) Enhance efforts to promote women’s rights by raising awareness campaigns and adopting formation and education courses for women.**

XII. ECONOMIC AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

27. We welcome the acceptance of Recommendation No. 99.10²¹ aiming to combat child labour. Nevertheless, we are concerned that economic exploitation of children is still very common in Solomon Islands. Poverty is currently the main contributing factor to child labour, and while primary school is not yet compulsory in Solomon Islands, many children are forced by family members to enter the workforce²².

28. Moreover, we note with great concern that the minimum age for work is still set at 14 years old in Solomon Islands. Similarly, though Solomon Islands has established some work regulations for children, its legal framework does not clearly prohibit children from engaging in hazardous work. Therefore, many children, especially boys, are exposed to dangerous

¹⁹ Statistics derived from NIH report on Domestic Violence in the Solomon
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4943125/>

²⁰ See WHO Report on Violence Against Women in Solomon Islands:
<https://apps.who.int/iris/rest/bitstreams/1078080/retrieve>

²¹ Recommendation No. 99.10 *Adopt a national plan of action against sexual exploitation of children and against child labour. Raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to internationally accepted standards and ensure that juvenile justice protection is accorded to all children up to the age of 18 years, as previously recommended (Slovenia)*; See Report of the Working Group p.15, UN Doc. A/HRC/32/14 , 13 April 2016.

²² See ILO Report on Children in Child Labour in Honiara, Solomon Islands
https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-suva/documents/publication/wcms_619014.pdf

work conditions, such as working in high temperatures and with dangerous chemicals²³.

29. Concerning human trafficking, we welcome the acceptance of Recommendation No. 100.66²⁴ as well as the establishment of the Anti-Human Trafficking Advisory Committee. We are alarmed, however, that children in the Solomon Islands continue to be victims of human trafficking, and primarily subjected to sex trafficking. A recent study, conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO), highlighted that in the province of Honiara, out of 176 children interviewed, 54 stated they were victims of some type of sexual exploitation, including prostitution ²⁵. Similarly, adolescents, mostly girls, ages 15 to 17 risk being trafficked.

30. We recommend the Government of Solomon Islands to:

- a) Increase the minimum work age to 15 and ensure legal frameworks clearly prohibit children under the age of 18 from working in hazardous conditions and occupations.**
- b) Strengthen efforts to combat human trafficking at the source and continue investing efforts to prevent human trafficking with special attention to cases of adolescents and girls.**

²³ See U.S. Department of Labor Report on Child Labor and Forced Labor in Solomon Islands

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/solomon-islands#:~:text=child%20labor%20exploitation,-.Children%20in%20the%20Solomon%20Islands%20are%20engaged%20in%20the%20worst,harvesting%20of%20palm%20oil%20fruits>.

²⁴ Recommendation No. 100.66 *Further strengthen its measures to combat all forms of trafficking in persons and protect and rehabilitate its victims (Egypt)*; See Report of the Working Group p.22, UN Doc. A/HRC/32/14, 13 April 2016.

²⁵ Statistics derived from the ILO Report: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-suva/documents/publication/wcms_619014.pdf