

**Solomon Islands Low (Moderate)**

The local impact of broader geopolitical tensions continues to play out in the Solomon Islands. The premier of Malaita province, an outspoken critic of the Solomon Islands' relationship with China, was subject to a vote of no confidence in February 2023.<sup>1</sup> The motion made accusations against Premier David Suidani about financial mismanagement and corruption, and passed unanimously after the Premier and his executive boycotted the motion. The premier has previously called for Malaita to declare independence from Solomon Islands and advocated against the security agreement between the country and China.<sup>2</sup> Protests by supporters of the premier followed the vote, which police responded to with teargas.

In late 2022, it was reported that the Australian Government had donated supplies to the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF), including vehicles and semi-automatic rifles, with the aim of enhancing the capacity to maintain stability especially in the lead up to the November 2023 Pacific Games and national elections in 2024.<sup>3</sup> Australia's High Commissioner assured that relevant training would be provided, but given the history of conflict in the Solomons, it is crucial that Australia continues to offer capacity building for the security sector in human rights and peacebuilding. The Solomon Islands has also recently formalised a security pact with Papua New Guinea, which provides for PNG police to contribute to joint operations and assist in both law and order, and humanitarian assistance. This follows requests for international assistance by the Solomon Islands in response to the 2021 riots.<sup>4</sup>

80 court cases relating to the 2021 riots have been completed, with 11 outstanding, according to the Solomon Islands Chief Justice Sir Albert Palmer, who released details of the cases in January 2023.<sup>5</sup> There were 158 defendants and 10 different charges including breach of restriction movement orders, arson, and sedition. Half of the defendants pleaded guilty, 43% had charges dismissed or withdrawn, and of those that went to trial, 40% were convicted.<sup>6</sup>

There is a long history of violent riots in the Solomons, often with a component of ethnic conflict. Accountability for violence is a mitigating factor for future violence and atrocities. But a recent report on riots in Pacific nations found that an important but often missing factor is a human security approach, "looking beyond riot events as matters for police response only, to matters that the development, peace and security sectors should coalesce around for positive change."<sup>7</sup>

**Recommendations**

The Solomon Islands government should:

- Ensure that the security sector is provided with ongoing training in line with international standards on human rights;
- Consider preventive approaches to protests and riots, such as continual dialogue and peacebuilding.

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<sup>1</sup> Charley Piringi, Protests in Solomon Islands as key China critic politician is ousted in no confidence vote, The Guardian, 7 February 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/07/protests-in-solomon-islands-as-key-china-critic-politician-is-ousted-in-no-confidence-vote>

<sup>2</sup> Chrisnrita Leong, Solomon Islands police tear gas supporters of ousted pro-Taiwan provincial premier after no-confidence vote, ABC, 7 February 2023, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-02-07/protests-in-auki-solomon-islands-as-premier-loses-vote/101940742>

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen Dziedzic, Australian Federal Police gives Solomon Islands police semi-automatic rifles, vehicles, ABC, 2 November 2022, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-11-02/australia-supplies-vehicles-guns-to-solomon-islands-police/101606466>

<sup>4</sup> Harlyne Joku, Papua New Guinea police role in Solomon Islands formalized by new agreement, BenarNews-Radio Free Asia, 9 February 2023, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/pacific/png-solomon-police-02092023204332.html>

<sup>5</sup> Assumpta Buchanan, 80 riot related cases done, 11 outstanding, Solomon Star, 24 January 2023, <https://www.solomonstarnews.com/80-riot-related-cases-done-11-outstanding/>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Anouk Ride, Riots serve an unexpected lesson in the Pacific, Lowy Interpreter, 25 November 2022, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/riots-serve-unexpected-lesson-pacific>