

Gizo TRC Public hearing Session One

PUBLIC HEARING AT GIZO – DAY ONE – SESSION ONE

Chairman: The Chairman explained the purpose of the Public Hearing.

He said such theft of dignity caused by the Perpetrators of Human Rights Violations is not acceptable abuses. They caused serious hurt and they take away our dignity as human beings. Public Hearing is a Forum in which the Truth and Reconciliation Commission seek to give voice to those who suffered abuse and horrific crimes in silence since the year of Tension in 1988. The Public Hearing aims to put an end to the silence so that entire society will begin to listen and accept this strategy as part of its own history. The Public Hearing also a Forum where TRC offers a space and solemn moment to the victims, give them opportunity to share the harsh history which they suffered and for the country to offer them the long denied recognition. It is also a moment for which the people of this nation are given the opportunity to listen with respect and compassion and above all retrieved the memories of those who were killed, to hear the pain of those who were humiliated and abused in countless ways and to restore the dignity of victims. On the other hand Public Hearing also offers the Perpetrators the chance to recognize and gain their humanity and an opportunity for the state to explore its own role in the years of the civil unrest. The right to know the truth of the past is crucial for individuals, for communities and the future of Solomon Islands. Whilst the past is known, we will be able to confess our wrongs and to build a foundation for reconciliation. Giving testimony, to our pain, and paying respectful attention to one another will also begin to close old wounds and finally set the foundation for reconcile peaceful and for eternal life together as a nation. A Public Hearing also provides a unique opportunity to victims to tell their stories to our people about the experiences of others too. Truth is a fundamental building block for the future of our country, it allows people to become survivors who want to move on or forward with their lives instead of being trapped in their own situations when the tension affected their lives. The path may be challenging but I strongly believe that we cannot move forward until we know what had happened in the past. Until we know about the Truth and Truth is the key component in any genuine reconciliation. Public Hearing dignifies and empowers the voice of the victims by giving them time and space, giving them atmosphere where they can tell stories, this will help our country to realize what went wrong. Public Hearings also particularly prepare our country to initiate reconciliation at two levels. The first one is reconciliation of individual victims with him or herself as a human being or as a citizen in full enjoyment of his or her rights. Secondly, Public Hearing also helps the process of reconciliation in the sense it will remove all forms of discriminations where victims are excluded over the last ten years. This we need to understand; only when we understand this, then we recognize the importance of reconciliation and celebrate our diversity as a people of a nation which comprises of different cultures and island groups. While we try to claim that God's forgiveness and healing is necessary, it also important to know that our words given too must be received with a truthful heart.

On behalf of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, I now officially open the Western and Choiseul Public Hearing on this thirteenth day of July, 2010.

Chairman: The first Victim Felix Kojamana was called before the Commission.

On 5th October, 2001 was at his home at Barabarakakasa village, when the Militants came to the village and started shooting and intimidating the people of his village. They also destroyed

properties and the Militants shot his brother and physically threatened his cousin who escaped unharmed. The victim was asked to stand up.

The victim stood up and took his Oaths.

After taking his Oaths he was seated.

He was advised as follows: He has the right not to incriminate or involve yourself or members of your immediate family in any possible criminal offence which means that you will be warned against saying anything which might be used against you or others in any legal proceedings.

Interviewer: Good morning Mr. Felix Kojamana, thank you and welcome to the Western and Choiseul Province Regional Public Hearing. Thank you, on behalf of the Commissioners that you are willing to come forward to tell stories on what happened to you during the Ethnic Tension.

Victim: Before, I proceed with my story, I would like to say thank you to the Chairman, Commissioners and the people of Solomon Islands, Choiseul Province and Western Province.

I am very happy to attend the counseling today, especially to tell my story on what happened in 2001.

On 5th October, 2001, one evening I was at village, Barabarakakasa, I saw a boat coming, at that time, we were working as community, and after that we stopped and rest. The boat came ashore and fired two shots; one warning shot was fired at the village. Everyone in the village had to run out from their houses. One of my brothers went towards the five men, and asked why they fired those shots, because there were women, men and children. We do not know what is going on. Five of those men came and attacked my really brother, they shot him, but my brother tried to escape, there was only one bullet left so they fired at him but missed him. They went back to the canoe and loaded the guns and when they came to the village they started shooting at our engines, water tanks, damaged water supply plus other properties, like houses etc.. One of the elders in the village, my first cousin, by the name of Brian went to the militants and told not to harm us because women, men and children had run away. All ran away to the Women's sacred place. One of the militants shot my brother, he then fell down to the ground and died instantly. By then the militants took most of our valuable things, burnt most of the houses, including church buildings, they kept on shooting and all the people in the village fled into the bush to hide.

Somehow, I was braved enough to attend to my brother's dead body and after the shooting, the militants left our village. Some of the people came back from their hiding places after two days for the burial. During the shootout and the people were running away in fear of being shot, a three month old baby also fell to the ground and died instantly.

Since 2001 up until today, no assistance whatsoever was received from our Provincial Member, the Government, our Parliament for North Choiseul. It seems that no one cares about us.

Some of us were asked by TRC to come for counseling and to be included in this Public Hearing Program. I heard that there are things stated will benefit us, the people of Choiseul

and Western Provinces to improve in our living standards and become one people. Now I would like to appeal to anyone who is not good in terms with me to come forward so that I can forgive him or her, so that we can live in peace and harmony. Thank you.

Interviewer: Thank you for your story on how you and your community suffered, the TRC will take into consideration on what you said to the Government and the people of Solomon Islands. Thank you Felix.

Chairman: The ground rules must apply; there must be total silence during the progress of the victim's story. This rule must be observed and restrictions to movement must be also observed and there must be silence throughout. There should be no clapping of hands at the end of each victim's interview and please no laughing if there are funny things mentioned during the interview. We have to respect the victims. Thank you.

The second victim was Gabriel Tuke. He is part PNG and Rarumana, Western Province. He was suspected by GRA to have worked closely with the Malaita Eagle Force. In Honiara too, his family was harassed by Malaita Militants.

Please rise.

Gabriel Tuke his Oaths. After taking his Oaths, he was seated.

Interviewer: Gabriel, Good morning, welcome and thank you for coming, now you are invited to commence with your story.

Gabriel Tuke: Chairman of the TRC, Fr. Sam Ata and your Deputy, Commissioners, Counselors, Ladies and Gentlemen.

My name is Gabriel Tuke, I am from Rarumana, and part PNG. In 1998 to 2000 I worked for Goldridge Mining Limited. During that time I went through two incidences. Firstly I would like to talk about Goldridge. I was employed by Goldridge Mining Limited, as a Heavy Equipment Fitter, under UMW subcontracted to Goldridge Mining Limited and eventually I was transferred to Goldridge Mining. In the year 2000, on 5th June, this was during the Amory take over, during that night of 5th June towards Monday morning, I was on night shift. I completed my shift at 6:00 am and went back to the Camp. After I had my breakfast, I went to my room and I saw some of my workmates listening to the Radio. When I got closer I could hear someone talking through the radio, announcing the Take Over of the Amory. By then we were not sure of what to do, we were frightened, we thought of our families in town and how we could get to them. I needed rest at that time, so I went to my room. All of a sudden, I could hear lots of gun shots outside my window. My room-mate and I did not what to do. We went outside and we were asked to lie down outside our rooms, by then the Guadalcanal Militants started beating up the RRU Officers who were manning the Mining Site. There were shouting, screaming and lots of gun shots. After a while the Leader of the Militants, came and shook hands with us and talked to us, they then left us and went their way. All the Company vehicles were taken and driven down towards Honiara by the Militants. All we could hear were gun shots at Alligator Creek, we did not what do. We did not work that day and during the night we remained indoor. On Tuesday morning 6th June, 2000, we went to check the Workshop, when we got there, it was already empty. Most of the tool boxes and other things were either destroyed or taken away. While we were there, a white Hyundai bus was driven into the Workshop. One of the workers said, "hey, one of the Leaders of the Militant Group is in the

bus”. All of a sudden, the Leader of the Group came out and started questioning. Some of the workers pointed at me. They called me so I went, the Leader said, “Are you Gabriel”? I said yes, I am Gabriel. You are part PNG, I said, yes. They asked me where do I live in Honiara, and I explained to them where I lived in Honiara. The particular person who was questioning was in possession of a gun. I did not recognize the type of gun; it was hanging over his shoulder. I was then accused that I was a spy for the Malaitan Militants. I was threatened, I was told not to go anywhere and I would have to wait them until they came back. I waited all through the night, being so frightened; I went to see my immediate boss for any possible arrangement so that I could take the first trip on the Chopper to Town. That was on Wednesday 7th June 2000. When the militants came back on Wednesday morning, I was not there; I took the first Chopper trip down to Honiara. When in Town I was not feeling secured, so my parents had to send me down to the Western Province via the MV Tomoko? During that time I lost my job, I lost all my tools and I came to Town with the only clothes I wore at that time. Since then I was unemployed for more than three years, until I got my next job.

I'll come to the next incident. In 2001, after the shooting in Noro, at that time I was still unemployed and I came back to Honiara and was helping my family with the family business at Panatina. The shooting incident took place on Friday, then on Sunday morning, a group of boys, may be related to the victims of the Noro incident. There were five or six boys, I did not recognize them, I was in the Canteen. They came to the house and threatened us, they were not armed at that time but they said they guns in the Hilux. They came in the Canteen, took some cash and some goods, and pushed me out of the Canteen, and then they asked for the car key. By then I went up to the house, I asked my mum and my sisters to go outside, they came in after me. My wife and my son were watching me while I was pushed and asked to go and get and the key to the car. My dad came in the way, he was slapped and pushed away and then fell down. They took the car and drove out, saying, that they were would come back to burn down the house. That night we lived in fear but some friends came and spent the night with us. The militants did not come back. Due to this second incident, my family and I had to leave town and go back to the Western Province. Since that time, the Canteen was closed down for quite a long time. I came back to the Western Province in 2003, I managed to get a job and make a living for my family.

Now I would like to appeal to those who were involved in those incidences where I mentioned, I would like to say that I forgive you. I would really appreciate if you can come forward so that we can reconcile, forget the past and to try live a normal life again. By now the Government as well as the public should realize their failures, as to how and why the Ethnic Tension started, and how it should be prevented from happening again in the future. It is not a good thing for our country. Lots of innocent people suffered during the Ethnic Tension and the majority of people in Solomon Islands the same view that we do not want this Ethnic Tension to be repeated again. We should not discriminate each other as being another person from another Province, eg. Someone from the Western Province or Guadalcanal. Let us regard ourselves as brothers and sisters in Christ.

With these remarks, Mr. Chairman, Commissioners, Counselors, Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you very much.

Interviewer: Thank you Gabriel for your story and it is important that people are listening are to take note of what you say, especially your appeal at the end. Thank you very much.

Chairman: The Third Victim, Elizabeth Takaingo was called and introduced. Elizabeth was a Police Officer and prior to the Tension she lived at Foxwood, Tenaru. During the Tension, the Police Patrol Boat came around to the area and carried out a shooting operation. During the people of the village ran away and after two days when they returned, their houses were looted and burnt down by criminals.

Elizabeth was asked to rise. She took her Oaths and after she was seated.

Interviewer: Welcome Elizabeth, you may begin.

Elizabeth: Thank you Commissioner. First of all I would thank the Group of TRC Team, Chairman, Commissioners and my Good Listeners of Solomon Islands.

I am very happy to be here today to give my testimony. I am one of those women who worked as a Police Officer and I was posted at Honiara and then transferred to Guadalcanal Province Police Post. I was born and raised in Solomon Islands, and as such I am Solomon Islander. I lived at Red Beach Settlement for more than 30 years. The Ethnic Tension started in 1998 through to 2000. During those 30 years we lived in peace and harmony, we were not disturbed by any Guadalcanal people. In 2000 when the MEF took over the Amory, they came to Red Beach and asked us to stay together and to listen to what they would say.

On the night of 16th July, 2000, while we were asleep, we heard gun shots coming from the seaside direction. It was the Patrol Boat, at that time it was still dark. It was a continuous shooting from Dodo Creek to CDC II; the Patrol Boat then came back and was still shooting in the dark. Continuous shooting took place and the bullets went through the branches of trees which sparked lights causing my old age mother of 72 years to wake up. She then asked, “do guns have lights”, no body answered her because everyone in the house were so frightened to say a word. The shooting continue until day break. It so happened that our Food Storage house was destroyed too. After the shooting we went out and tried to retrieve some of our food stuff because these were only goods we tried to store for our families during that period. By then some of the men from the Joint Operation came ashore and their Leader came to me and said, you and your family must leave now. He said, this is our last Group and you must leave immediately. We wanted to collect some of our personal belongings but the time has come for us to leave. We did not collect much except for a few items, like TV set and my dad’s suitcase. We were driven to town and spent the night at the Holy Cross Hall. Early in the morning on 17th July, 2000, we went back to Red Beach to check our houses and to our surprise, I couldn’t believe eyes that my was house burnt to the ground. I felt very bad, they should have killed me, but never mind, live is more important than properties. I thank God; he is always there for us during those times. I also thanked God that he comforted us and in any way made us to prepare our lives.

I am happy to be here today to tell my story. I would like to appeal to my brothers who burnt my house on 16th July, 2000 to come forward. I would like to say I forgive you for what you had done. May God bless you and I hope you will come back to see me so that we can reconcile. My second appeal is to the previous Government, what you paid us in terms of compensation towards our lost properties were not sufficient to rebuild our houses. You seemed to compensate those of your choices only, as Leaders of this Country you have to be fair to everybody, despite of status or what. Do not grade people, treat everyone the same. To my beloved one talks of Kiribati, I appeal to you..... the victim speaks in her language.....

To complete my story, I would like to quote this; “The Revelation of Christ is Peace, Compassion, and Love for Ever. Keep praying for the Lord of the Wine Yard for change of heart. Once again, thank you, Chairman, Commissioners, Counselors for empowering me to come and tell my story, and lastly to the good people of Solomon Islands who are listening to me today. Thank you.

Interviewer: Thank you very Elizabeth Takaingo for sharing your story this morning.

That concluded the Morning Session of the first day of the Public Hearing at Gizo.

The Chairman of TRC: On behalf of the Commissioners I want to take this opportunity to thank the Hon. Premier of the Western for his presence with us this morning and more so his message of encouragement, and that also of support and commitment. We also wish you all the best in your time as the Premier and may your Government proceed with prosperity in everything you do in terms of your plan for the people of Western Province. I wish you God’s Blessing. We also want to invite you to our Tea Break, please come and join us. Also all the Participants here please come and join us. You are all welcome. Thank you.

The Public Hearing resumed after the Tea Break.

The Fourth Victim: Nelson Siam Vatora.

The Victim took his Oaths. The victim was seated.

Interviewer: Mr. Nelson Siam Vatora, welcome to the Public Hearing and thank you for accepting to come forward to tell your story. You may now start.

Mr. Vatora: I would like to thank the Chairman of the TRC, Fr. Sam Ata and your Deputy, Commissioners, Counselors, Ladies and Gentlemen for allowing to come to the Public Hearing this morning.

On 25th September, 2001, I was at home village, Canaan, South Choiseul at 9:30 am in the morning. I was with two men building a house. When I looked towards the road, I could see a group of men with guns coming towards us. When they got to us one of the men pointed at me and the Leader of the Group asked for my name. The Group Leader asked whether a boy came to see me in the morning of that day. I said, yes, that boy came and bought cigarettes from me, because at that I operated a small canteen. He asked where the boy went after he bought his smoke. I said to him, I do not know which way he went, he does not sleep, he is from another place, as soon as I said that, he took his gun put it against my chest. When he speared the gun to my chest, I fell to the ground and could not breathe and the old man whose house we were building came and held me, while I was still on the ground, that Group of men went past. When I took my breath back and looked around and seeing the group going past I got up and went to my house. When I got to my house, I told my family that we should run away to the bush. We went and stayed in the bush for about two weeks. One of my sons did not know the first time we went to the bush, so he said to me, Daddy, that group of men when they came back, they were asking for you. I told them that you went to hide in the bush, so the group went and burnt the house that belonged to that boy. I took my boy’s story that if I was there I could have been shot dead, luckily I ran away and now I am safe. When we were in the bush we experienced a lot of hardships, the children were sick and we could not take them to the clinic because those men’s village is situated along the way to the clinic. My children

could not go to school because of fear of being attacked. These are some of the things we experienced during the two weeks when we were in the bush. After that time and up until today I would like to praise God. I would like to appeal to those people who harassed me during those times, that today I forgive you, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In case any of those people who harassed me at that time and who is here today, please I would like to shake my hands with you today.

Before I conclude, I would like to thank you, Chairman, Commissioners and the good People of Solomon Islands as well as Western and Choiseul Provinces that is the end of my story.

Interviewer: Mr. Vatora, thank you very much for your story.

Chairman: I shall now call upon Trina Faroe. Trina was ten years old and attended Grade 4 at Gizo Primary School when Militants came in and fired shots in Gizo Town. When the students heard gun shots they were frightened because they had never heard of gun shots in their lives.

Please rise.

The victim was asked to rise.

Trina Faroe took her Oaths and was seated after taking the Oaths.

Interviewer: Trina, welcome to the Public Hearing and thank you to be here and we will listen to carefully. You can start.

Trina: Thank, You know my name. I am Sixth Former at KG VI this year.

Mr. Chairman, Three Commissioners, Guests and People of Solomon Islands. Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to voice out some of the activities and things done to me during the Tension. Thank you.

My story started back in 2002 when I was in Grade 4 at Gizo Primary School. In the morning we came to school, it was just a normal day for students to come school and we were laughing, playing etc.. While we were in the Class, three of my girl friends and me were sitting by the door. We sat by the door on one of those desks, while we were there, we heard the first shot, and some of the students thought it was a bottle or something. The shooting continued and we looked out of the window towards the Hotel. The shooting did not stop but continued by then we were all frightened and did not know what to do. Our Class Teacher asked the whole class to lie down on the floor. Our Teacher was panic too and did not what to do but we remained lying on the floor. The teacher then told us that classes for that day would be cancelled and everyone has to go home. We were told not to go either to the market or shops but straight to our respective houses, so we did. This was a very bad day for me at school.

I would like to appeal to those who were involved in the tension during that time whether you are in the Solomon Islands or overseas, that we were not happy at that time, because what you did, affected our learning. You had no respect for the students, not only the students but the people around Gizo at that time. One more thing is that during that time, we were reluctant to attend classes in fear that the shooting would take place again.

That was the end of Trina's story.

Interviewer: Thank you Trina for your story.

Chairman: Now we call upon Nason Poloso. Nason was at CDC III during the Tension, the GRA which he described as Kabilato men, came and asked him to vacate the land which he bought and was occupying at that time to move out immediately. In fear Nason, he quickly packed few of his belongings and left for Honiara.

Nason Poloso was to ask to rise.

Nason took his Oaths before the Commission and the Public Audience.

Nason was seated after taking his Oaths.

Interviewer: Welcome Mr. Poloso, you may begin.

Poloso: Thank you Chairman, thank Deputy Chairman, thank you Commissioners, thank you Counselors and thank you People of Solomon Islands.

This afternoon, I would like to thank the TRC Group who brought me here, and I am privileged to give my story today. My name is Nason Poloso and I am from Choiseul, I live within the North East Constituency, in Ward 13, Choiseul Province.

During the Tension in Guadalcanal, I was living at the boundary of CDC III, which was called Malahu Village. When we were there, we asked to leave the place because we were "Spear". No, we were not "Spear". We knew nothing about what was going on. While we were still in fear of what they said to us, somebody came around and said, "anyone who is half Malaita must leave the place, if they do not leave they will be killed". That time I was very frightened because my wife was half Malaita, she came from East Kwaio. When my wife was very frightened, me too I was frightened just like a small pikinini. We did not know what to do because we lived far from home. Then one night, two men came and threatened us again. They told us that we must leave immediately; if we do not leave they would kill us the next day. By then the whole family was so frightened, especially my wife because she is half Malaita. We did not know what to do except to pray to God to ask for protection during the night. By day break my wife and my niece discussed, and all of a sudden, our pet (bird) spoke out. We kept a bird as pet and it was called Gwenda after my last daughter's name. To their surprise they heard the bird talking, this bird had not done this before. The bird talked out the second time in Choiseul language, and said, "Grace reko half Malaita monjo" which simply means, Grace, you are half Malaita, you must leave. My wife sent two of my daughters to get me and when I got to them, they were all crying so I cried too. By then we could not do much, because that very day some drastic was to happen, so the last few hours, we tried our best to collect few belongings and then we asked a small pick truck from our onetalks to take to us to town. There were five families which boarded the truck leaving most of our belongings back at CDC III. We were not in good state of mind at that time. We were all frightened so we cried; even I am man I also cried. When we got to town we were being looked after by the SI Red Cross at their Care Centre, Honiara. At the Red Cross Centre, we were given food and other necessary items and eventually they paid for our fare to go back to Choiseul.

When we got to my village, we encountered lots of problems, our children did not go to school due lack of money, we thought of our belongings which were left behind at CDC III. We could not do much but put our trust in God for his daily provision. I was so happy when I heard my name that I should come and attend the TRC Workshop. I was glad that I was included in the counseling; I should say I am so happy indeed. I am healed now, previously I felt sick all the time. I usually had headache, I went to have my blood tested for Malaria at the clinic but the results were always negative. I was advised not think too much, I told them I had nothing to think about, but in fact I could not forget the incidents that took place at CDC III and the properties we lost during the tension. Now I am happier than before, my mind is clear, I do not have any more heads. So I appeal to the people of Guadalcanal who harassed my family during the tension, whenever you meet me, let us be good friends as before the tension. I would like to appeal to the People of God from Malaita, Guadalcanal, and other Provinces, I would everyone to be united together, I do not want to see the same thing to be repeated again in Solomon Islands. The Ethnic Tension which took place in Guadalcanal affected everyone in Solomon Islands. We became victims of that Ethnic Tension and let it not happen again. For the Government, it is time that leaders should take note of those victims who are attending the TRC Public Hearing today. I would like to say to the good people of other Provinces, they must choose the right leaders, good people to lead our country and for the new Government to recognize those who were affected by the Ethnic Tension. I appeal to those of you who are listening to me through radio, please help me to enable me survive until Jesus comes back.

Thank you very much Chairman, Commissioners, Counselors, and TRC as a whole, for giving me the opportunity to disclose my stories which had burdened me for a long time. Right now I do not have any more burdens, I feel very light because of the TRC Program which takes place today. Thank you very much.

Interviewer: Thank you Mr. Poloso for your contribution this morning.

Chairman: Now I now call upon Mr. David Pitisopa, in 1999 he was employed by Goodman Fielders in Honiara and he rented a house at LDA area, at Mamara. During the height of the Ethnic Tension, the GRA Militants came and looted his house and destroyed all his belongings. He went back to Choiseul without any of his belongings.

Please rise.

David Pitisopa took his Oaths.

Be seated.

Interviewer: Good after Mr. David Pitisopa, thank you for accepting to come forward and tell your story about your suffering that you experienced during the Ethnic Tension. You can begin now.

The Chairman of TRC, Commissioners, Church Leaders, United Church, for making available this Church Building to host the hearing, Western Provincial Premier and his Executive, Choiseul Province Premier and his Executive. I also thank the Government for the Program.

In 1999 I worked for Goodman Fielders (International) as a Fitter Engineers, in the morning of 1999 I left the house and went to work, because of the distance from LDA to my work

place, I had to leave early. I went to work and late that morning I heard that GRA Militants wearing hoots and covered their bodies went and chased the people out from their respective houses and took away all their belongings. They lined up and marched the innocent mothers and children all the way to White River without any of their belongings including myself because I was at work. During that time I had nothing with me except the clothes I was wearing, all our belongings had been either destroyed or taken away by the Militants. I felt frustrated because to me there is no future. I left my job, good work, good money which I earned during my employment. So I went home to Choiseul. I just appeal to GRA members at that time, which did that to me as well as the people who were victims at that time, you used those things and you were happy with them. We have been affected and victimized for the last ten years up until today. In regards to those good things you took away during that time, it was you who used them and benefitted from, not me, or our families, for those of us who lived in a good community at Mamara, you caused this, and we are still suffering up until today.

1. I come here today to forgive you.
2. On behalf of my brother, Niger Pitisopa who was sick so he could not make it. He was an employee of Telekom. He was an Administration Manager of Telekom. He bought a piece of land at Rekohove, east Guadalcanal. He built up that place for his income generation; he set up a poultry farm which accommodated about 1,000 birds, a sleeping house and a piggery pen. He asked me if I could go and get some of the things out from that place. So he got a truck from Telekom and I drove up which it took about one half hour to get to Reko. When I got there, there were gun fires, because apart from us, there were also people from Malaita, Western and as well as other Provinces. Before I went there, I had to put my Master first because the Militants were in possession of guns and knives and other dangerous weapons. When I got there, most of the things were destroyed; I managed to get hold of only a few things which were left. I was so depressed when I saw what happened. For those of you who destroyed my brother's properties, whether you live in other parts of Guadalcanal or Reko area, on behalf of my brother, Niger, I forgive you. In the name of the Father, Son and His Holy Spirit. In the year 2000, MEF took over the Amory in Honiara.

Now I will talk on behalf my late brother, Jerry Pitisopa. During that time MEF and Joint Operation took over the State owned Amory at Rove to carry out their operation. They went up to Naha Heights went to my late brother's house which he built there and pulled the house down. For those of who did this to my brother, the late Jerry who passed away, and the remaining members of our family, I would like to say here, they need school fees; they need things to support their families. You, my brothers, you destroyed their future. I am very sorry brother, if you are listening to the radio, and whether you are living in a house you built with the materials you got from my brother's house and you are living in it comfortably, for the last ten years the late Jerry's family had suffered a lot. They have no future, you got to come out clear my brother, you will see me on the TV and you should realize we suffered very much for the last ten years. My nephews, nieces of the late Jerry's wife, we all suffered. Whenever they wanted, the basic things, there was no money, you took away their future. My brother today, I am relieved I had to go through counseling, so I am relieved because of TRC which organized this Program, the Public Hearing. Today if you are anywhere in the Solomon Islands or overseas, I forgive you, in the name of the Father, Son and His Holy Spirit. Now, I appeal to you Commissioners, the election will be held in three weeks time, please let the new Government know, that I would like the TRC to remain forever in the Government and the future governments. We are not the only victims; there are a lot of them who could not make it to the Hearing, especially the office to remain, so that counseling must be extended to the National Leaders, Provincial Leaders, Church Leaders, and whoever involved in the Tension.

Why I said this, Chairman, because the people of South Choiseul are still traumatized as the result of the Tsunami. I just wonder where is the funding for Tsunami victims, as for the people of South Choiseul, we are still living in make shift houses, so I feel my request should go to Parliament, I appeal for the Parties to think seriously about what I just have said before moving forward. Thank you very much Chairman, God Bless Solomon Islands.

Interviewer: Thank you very much David Pitisopa, the people of Solomon Islands heard what you said about during your suffering, and that you still have forgiveness and reconciliation towards people. Thank you.

Chairman: Simon, on 25th November, 2000 a group of Militants approached him and demanded the sum of \$1,700.00. He was threatened along with his community with high powered guns.

Please rise.

Simon took Oaths.

Simon was seated.

Interviewer: Simon welcome, you can start with your story.

Simon: Before I can begin with my story, I would like to say thank you to the Chairman, Commissioners and Councilors for giving the opportunity to come forward and present my story. I would also like to say thank you, to the people of Solomon Islands who will hear my story through the radio or by watching TV.

Now I will begin my story, on 24th November 2000, I was in my village at Canaan, South Choiseul. When I was with my family and friends, a group of militants from Choiseul came to my village. I thought they were going to a different direction, but I came straight to me. When they got to me they demanded that I should give them \$1,700.00. I said to them I do not have any money. When I said this, they pushed the butt of the gun at my neck; I did not say anything that time. I am not going to give you any money today. If you can give me time I will look for money and give you tomorrow. We are coming back tomorrow at 10:00 am to get the money, if not, you and your people will be shot dead. The militants left me and went away. I struggled to look for money to give to the Militants the next day otherwise; my family and people will be killed. At that time I did not have any cash on hand, I thought of coming to Taro but because of the Ethnic Tension, the Bank Agency at Taro was also closed. It was getting dark but the thought of the militants coming back at 10:00 am the next day left me with no choice but to go the next village and beg for cash. So I went and a few people gave me some money but this was not enough to make up the total amount demanded. Some of the people in my village contributed too, and luckily we collected the exact amount the militants demanded. The next day 25th November 2000, the group of militants arrived. I wanted to run away, but if I did my family, my people and myself would all be killed. So I waited and at exactly at 10:00 am they arrived at my village and came straight to me. I took the money, the exact amount they demanded and gave it to them. When they received the money they went away. When the people in the village saw this, they all ran away to the bush and stayed there for about two weeks. It was hard to find food during those times. To us being in the bush without food and other necessary items was something serious when you come to think about. By 2003, we were once again free to move around to do our normal business.

That is my story for the people of Solomon Islands to hear. This story is based on true events experienced by my people and me, as I am their leader or chief of our village. I would like to thank, the respective people who willingly gave me cash when I went around asking to make up the balance of \$1,700.00. The money they contributed was really a blessing which I paid to the Militants in order to save entire lives of the whole village. If you are listening out to this Program, I would like to say thank you very much for your financial assistance during that time. For without their assistance, my family and the rest of the people would not have survived the Militants.

For those of you who were involved in that incident during that time, wherever you are, whether you around in the crowd or somewhere else, I would like to say, I forgive you, "Lets forgive and forget the past"; and I would like them to come forward, if you meet here in Gizo, or at home, I forgive you, on whatever you did to me, my family and the people of my village.

That is my short story, and thank you very much for the Counselors, what I went through that time was really a burden to me and I am now relieved. I went to the National Referral Hospital for medical checkup (X-ray) twice, I was given medication but I was not healed. I was ordered not to reveal to anyone that I gave the Militants that amount of money, if I did they would shoot me. Thank you very much Counselors, for this Program. Now, I am free and I feel very much better. Thank you very much Chairman, Commissioners and Counselors. I am now free of everything. Thank you very much.

Interviewer: Thank you Simon and I hope the people of your village are listening and the Militants who demanded money from you would come forward to reconcile with you. Thank you very.

Chairman: Introduces the victim

Victim: Makes oath

Commissioner: Welcomes the victim

Victim: My name is Blackie Steven I am from Gatogae, Kavolaote village. I will go in brief on my story of what actually happened and my experiences during the period of the conflict. My story begins in year 2000, during that year I was the chief security of Omex logging company. We were stationed at a camp on Gatokae called Kogungalaso. It was a new concession, so at that time we haven't yet cleared the proposed site to make our camp. However, the company had rented a house owned by one of the locals basically to accommodate us all its employees. We remain at that specific premise until one Tuesday on year 2000 towards late evening a group of men came to Penjuku village onboard a white banana bray boat, powered by a 75 horsepower engine. Nine men came onboard they arrived towards dark around 6:30 pm, I was not aware of their arrival and was having a small nap at that time in the company house, they arrived at the nearby village and their leader briefed them of their mission and on who exactly they were looking for.

Occasionally, I usually came over and spent the night at Penjuku village, they had planned to raid the village before coming over to our camp to look for me. They arrived on Tuesday and had planned to execute their operation on the following morning (Wednesday). Wednesday

morning came and they raided three houses at Penjuku village, these were the possible house they thought I would be spending the night on. Luckily, I was on the island. They raided the village causing trauma and fear among children and women that morning since they were all armed, people fled over to the nearby villages for safety. After that incident they warned all the villages not to go out into the sea, they are to remain in the village until they apprehend who they were looking for, they further warned if anyone fails to comply with this rule will be shot without warning.

I was not informed or aware of all these development and remained back on the island along with other employees, that morning I sent out the company's aluminum boat powered by a 40 horsepower engine to the village to pick other employees to come for work. Arriving at the village he met up with the militants, instead of picking up the employees the militants threatened him and they took over the boat. Seven of them came onboard and the company skipper took them back to our camp, I was at the beach at that time, refilling the OBM tanks to send my son over to Gizo for school when the boat arrives. I saw the company boat approaching, and it was loaded with more men than usual, I was quiet confused, as it was about to land on shore I can see that none of the employees were onboard, however, the boat came at a high speed and ditched quickly onshore. The men onboard jumped off and ran straight towards me, they had mask on and I could not identify them, they came straight towards me, and I asked them of what had happen, they respond in a very harsh manner stating that they have come for me, I was confused and asked myself of who were those men, and wondered of how they managed to identify me. Out of my confusion I asked them, if they knew my name. They responded by revealing my name. I was in a state of shock, and try to think of any reason why they are looking for me, they were armed with high powered guns (M16 assault rifles), they came and stood around me, I stopped from pumping the fuel, stood up and try to ask why they had come for me and who had sent them. They responded by telling me to shut up. I stood quietly and their overall leader started explaining the reason why they had come, he clearly stated that they were sent by the Western Provincial government (WP) and the province had engaged them to provide security for the two (2) provinces; WP and Choiseul province. They had come purposely to disarm me, I responded in protest that I do not have any arms in my possession. They alleged that I have guns, ammunition and grenades. I continued in protesting my innocent but they insisted that I was lying; I told them that I don't have enough money to even purchase a .22 rifle. They told me to stop telling liars or will be shot. They claimed that I have been hiding weapons by burying them under my house, some of them really want to physically assault me, they told me to shut up, we continued talking for some time but I maintain to stand on my innocence banking on my honesty, however, still they were not convinced.

They then instructed me to climb up the tree and remove the company's antenna on the top, I did as instructed since their guns were still pointed at me, I removed the antenna and they instructed me to also climb up and remove the second one, I climbed up again as instructed, I came down and they told me to go and get them the company's two way radio. Later they ask me if there is anyone from Malaita working with us, I admitted that we have few Malaitan employees working in the company. They then again claimed that these Malaitan are not employees for the company, but are working as security guards, I clearly told them that all my security officers are from Marovo and two of them are my brothers, all the people from other provinces worked as heavy machine operators. They accused me of lying and ordered me to take them over to where the operators were, as we were walking towards the log pond they asked me If any of the Malaitans are in the house, I told them that the company's personal officers (PO) is from Malaita and is in our office, two of the armed men went into the office

and lead him outside at gun point, they then threatened to shot him, I intervened and asked their leader not to kill him, since he was an innocent man, and has no affiliations with the MEF group as they had alleged, and further told him , that we have been working together as a team for some time since the company had started carrying out its operations throughout the Solomon Islands, we are only workers who are trying to earn money to feed our families. Fortunately, in the end they did not kill him, they further instructed for us to go over to log pond to meet other Malaitan employees.

We boarded the company's OBM and were taken over to our camp on the main land, as we arrived our colleagues were quiet surprised to see us being led towards the pond by the armed men, at the same the militants' OBM also arrived, inside was one of the man from Penjuku village, he was my cousin. It was then I started to reasoned that these armed men had been misled by someone who had grudges against the company over land issues. This particular person had attempted on two occasions to burn down the company's machine since their tribe had disagreed with the logging operation, but was unsuccessful. As we arrived at the log pond their leader shouted for all the employees to come out from their tents, and he instructed that all Malaitans should come out and lined up separately on a spot he indicated, everyone was scared to come out and he called for the second time in a very angry manner and threatened to shoot if they fail to show up quickly. Somehow all the workers came out and all the five (5) Malaitans stood on a separate line as instructed, It was a very depressing moment for all of us since we have known each other very well, some of the men started crying since they all knew that none of us has any affiliation whatsoever, with the two warring factions in Honiara. I was instructed to sit and could not help to fantasize of the possible fate that lies ahead of my Malaitan colleagues. I gathered myself bravely and attempted to talk to their boss, questioning him of what they had intended to do with the Malaitans, I continued to press and protest on their innocent and if he intended to kill the five of them he should kill me first, since I know that all from the best of mu knowledge that they were all innocent, I begged for him from harming them, but he ordered me to shut up. At the same time my two brothers working as security officers came and joined up the line along with the five men from Malaita, their boss was confused and asked if those two were from Malaita, I told him that they were my brothers, he responded angrily and asked them what was their reason for joining up with the five malaitan men, they responded bravely, saying that if you wanted to kill these men, you might as well kill us along with them.

Their boss was baffled at that point, at the same time a huge long wooden canoe approached the shore, it was filled up with all the land owners and the chiefs of the group that disputed the logging operation and had fabricated the allegations that I had arms, as they were about to land onshore the boss of the armed men was furious, and used abusive language onto the passengers inside, he shouted telling them that he will shoot them all, since he had put an order that day prohibiting anyone from going out in the sea during that operation, he was so mad and cocked his rifle rising and was in the position to shoot, however, the other man from Penjuku village who accompanied them intervened and stopped him from shooting, explaining to the boos that they were the very people who had sent them to come over and interrogate us, their boss was confused and was mad at his own boys. He took off his mask and told me that it is now over, and his other boys followed in taking all off their masks, it was then that I can actually identify all of them, I've known all of them very well, I use to feed and give them money when they fled over to WP during the during the Bougainville crisis. I was even angrier at that time, and I told them why they have done this to me when I knew them very well, they responded saying I was lucky it was them, if it was a different group I would have been killed already, since their order was to find and kill me without

questioning. They furthered decline to disclose the purpose of their operation, they reveal neither was it to disarm me either and when they arrived they knew it is a land issue, and their purpose for providing security has nothing to do with land dispute matters.

I asked them to spare the lives of my colleagues from Malaita, and they agreed, but they insisted that they wanted to check the three large company containers at our log pond. I gave them the keys and they opened the containers and took whatever they need, food rationed, vehicles parts and tools. They loaded it onboard their boat and offered to take back to the island, as we were approaching they told me that it is now over and they apologize to me, however, I strongly suggested that we should all go to my house, since they claimed to have been sent by the Western Province Police Commander, to search my house for weapons, so to clear my name of the unfounded accusation I told them that we have to go to my house to search for the weapons to fulfil their mission, since I do not want another group to come after and accused me of hiding firearms.

Arriving at the shore they went with me over to my house and they did a thorough search in and around and they found nothing, they return back to their boats and left. That was what happened to me, I my life was threatened to the very verge of death. However, I do not want to blame the militants for what happened, most of the threatening and the harassment done by the so called BS was quiet intolerable compared to my experience, I was lucky to be alive and for sparing the lives of my fellow colleague Malaitans. I would like to convey a message to my people, out of envy, jealousy and ignorance we must refrain from engaging people from outside to intervene into our problems, if we have any disagreements or differences between ourselves, we should come together as brothers and sister and sort it out in a reasonable manner according to our culture and the judiciary, please I call on you to refrain from using foreign elements who are not the responsible authorities for upholding law and order. I have been putting in my mind and waiting for an opportunity to return the treatment (payback) to the people who had fabricated false allegations on me. Unfortunately that opportunity never came and somehow TRC came about and here I am today to share my experience, of what had happened and for which I am happy and would like to thank TRC for facilitating the program.

I would also like to say something to our provincial government, if the allegation is true as claimed by the BS militant group that they were engaged by the province to provide security, I call on our leaders to please stop from engaging such foreign elements in the future, since the repercussion from their actions has had a huge impact on the lives of us people especially the women and children. As alleged our province had spend a lot of money to pay for these men to provide security, however, in the end they threatened and harassed us the innocent people of Western and Choiseul province. I would like to speak on behalf of us victims, we have been facing a very hard time during the period, I do not want to go in detail on what happened to me, but I can say that some of my valuable properties had been taken during that time, I would like to call our government to quickly address such issue if it may arise in future. Our government is very quick to response on natural disaster events but not when it comes to manmade disaster, it is now 10 years after I was harassed and threatened, we the victims are still waiting for our government to address our issue basically on rehabilitation. Finally, I would like to thank the Chairman, commissioners and counselors for giving us the opportunity to voice out what is in side of us, it is like a time bomb that will go off at anytime it was set, today I am happy to say I am now a free man after the counseling process and would like to call on my people who had done this to me, if they could come forward thus we can reconcile, shake hands and forgive each other of what had happened, once again I would

like to thank you all the good listeners, the public and the good people of our country Solomon islands.

Commissioner: Acknowledges the victim

Chairman: Introduces the next victim: Mr. Rolance Hilly. Rollance was the Deputy General Manager for the operation department within Solomon Islands Telekom, Ltd during the period of the coup on year 2000. One day a former telekom employee who had joined in with the Militants entered in his office and threatened him along with his staff with guns and demanded the company must pay him the compensation of SBD Ten million dollars.

Victim: Takes oath

Commissioner: Welcomes the victim

Victim: Chairman, commissioners and staffs of TRC. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for the good work you have done so far, and further extend my appreciation to the counselors Martha and Kairi for their tireless effort in providing counseling for all the victims around Solomon Islands. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the ground staff and for making all the arrangement for us to come together here today, especially for giving us the opportunity to share with you all our stories of what happened to us and our various experiences we had during the period of the conflict, basically to pave way for a reconciliation between us and the perpetrators in the near future. Before going into my story I would like to briefly outline the core details of the situation that prevails during the period of the ethnic tension, especially in Honiara. It was a chaotic time in the history of Solomon Islands, law and order was crippled. Our country was ruled by the barrel of guns.

It happened on June 2000, my wife had submitted her holiday leave request thus she can accompany our children who were also on their school holiday break at that time. On the final week prior towards my wife's leave, that Monday early about 7am as we were preparing to go to work, the overall senior boss at Telekom called me up and asked me of what I was doing, I find his question rather confusing but I replied saying that I am getting prepared to come to work, he responded by saying 'Don't go there was a coup last night', I was shocked of the news. The situation in Honiara then was chaotic masked armed men had taken over the armory and the street. By that time my wife and our children had already left for the holiday. I was left alone in Honiara, the armory take over raises fear among other european nationals and their embassy's had arranged to evacuate all the expatriates who were working in Honiara at that time, my senior bosses including other expatriate technical people working for the company also left.

In that week all international flight schedules had been cancelled because of the recent take over and the influential presence of militants over the international airport and their unlawful activities within the city and the outskirts of Honiara. It was when I heard on 11 am news that the international schedule flights were resumed that Monday morning when two (2) MEF militants drove in to the Telekom Ranadi compund and walked straight towards my office, I heard a knock on my door, went and opened it, and there standing I happened to be staring at two (2) men who were wearing camouflaged uniform, and they one of them requested to speak with me, I invited them in since one of them was a former telekom employee, he was accompanied by another individual which I cannot identify. That former employee had approached my office on previous occasion, I had agreed for him to produce the list of the

items he had claimed from the company for the sales service he had claimed to have done for Telekom. That particular morning when he showed up I expected that he would provide the list of items he had claimed, but instead he came with a demand basing it on the grounds surrounding his termination. He claimed as a result of his termination he could not able to secure or find another job. He demanded the company to pay him an amount of SBD10 million dollar, I was stunned upon hearing the figure he quoted, I explained the financial position of the company and that I am not in the position of authority to pay out such large amount, he continued to argue consistently and I can sense that he was quite drunk, logically I knew not long after our discussion will turn violent since he had started raising his voice in an inconsiderable manner, I stood up and walked out of my office, he was fuming with anger and kicked the door behind me with a loud bang, somehow the loud noise which came from the door was mistaken by my staff thinking the two men had fired shots inside my office. However, they saw me walking out of the room towards the Administration department, as I was approaching the door, one of my staff who was a driver approached the two men and tried to calm them down, at the same time that particular former employee ordered his other colleague (wantok) who was accompanying him to go and get his rifle in their parking vehicle, he claimed that all of the telekom workers wanted to challenge him.

As his colleague was returning to our office with the gun all my staff ducked their head down in a state of great panic in trying to take cover, he grabbed the gun from his wantok, roughly reloading it and pointing it straight at me, at that instance I tried to calm him down and assured him that I will try and get him whatever he wanted, he threatened to shoot everything in the office. I rushed back into my office and called my boss, who was already in Australia by already, at his residence on Gold coast. I managed to reach him and relayed the dilemma, he responded asking me of the possible options I can offer to make them leave the premises. I told him that I will try and over him SBD\$1000, he further asked of the next option if he refuses that amount, I responded saying I will increase the amount to \$SBD5000, and I told him that it was the last amount I can offer. I finished talking with him on the phone and I went out to approach the former grudge employee, he was continuously talking and issued more threats in burning down the office and will kill all the managers.

I approached him and offered to give him \$1000 and on the condition if he leaves our office, he refused. I offered \$5000 and still he refuses, and he told me that he still stand on his demand for the SBD\$10 million dollars. I could not go further in negotiating, and we were in the position of the stalemate. However, he had enthusiastically lowered down his gun down from pointing it at me but consistently talking and walking towards his vehicle, he tossed his gun in the vehicle I followed and tried to calm him down, after my staff learnt that he had concealed his weapon, all the telekom staff came out. I walked towards the other end of the engineering block he went to the other end, he continued talking to other staff there and using abusive remarks.

Somehow some of my staff called up the MEF and Paramilitary leaders and informed them of the situation, we could not return to work since he was still in the compound. Not long after a group of men drove inside the premises, they were police officers who had joined up with the so called Paramilitary group, they approached me and I relayed the situation to them, they were sent over by one of their bosses in response to the call our staff did, they then requested that their boss wanted to see me concerning the incident. I got into their vehicle, as we were about to drive out, this particular former employee saw me in the vehicle he come towards us and angrily questioned the Paramilitary men, of where they're taking me. He responded that he will get another MEF Commander (Disclose name) and they will sabotage all the exchange

and satellite equipments on Ranandi and Point Cruz, meaning it will eventually, crippled the whole communication system in our country. Upon hearing this I was worried and I came out of their vehicle, and he told the Police officers that they were only junior members of the MEF group, and he claimed to be one of the founders of MEF group, he instructed them to move out and used abusive statements onto them. The paramilitary group felt humiliated from his remarks and drove off, it was already around 2:30pm in the afternoon. All my staff could not return back to work since the environment was not conducive at that time. Not long after, I can see that he was moving around talking and joking with his former work mates, seeing that I was confident to call him over for a talk in my office, he responded well and I was also relieved of the tensed feeling I had at that time. We sit down I asked him if he was just joking, he responded sternly and told me that he was not joking and had marked every single word in his demand. However, he had decided to lower his demand to SBD\$500 000, I was again baffled at the amount, I explained that I cannot assist him, if the amount demanded is too high, he then lowered it down to SBD\$250 000, I again explained the financial procedures of the company and that I am not the authorized in handling such large transaction and only the directors are eligible to authorize such large amount. He refuted angrily saying I was lying and claimed that according to his knowledge I was the one responsible for signing the pay cheques. I admitted responsibility for signing the company's pay check but not exceed the amount of \$100, 000. I tried to convince him but he stood on the SBD\$250,000 demand, as we were talking the Sol law firm rang me up, they were the company's law representative firm, they asked me of the situation concerning the demand, and they advise me to call the MEF supreme council members, I called their leader and he was even amazed over the nature of his demand, he(MEF Boss) then requested for me to put him on the phone. I called for him to come to the phone and they talked for sometime at the end of the conversation he told me that his boss wanted to see him, as he was about to leave he told me not to leave the premises since he will return later.

I couldn't return home, since he had instructed me to wait for him, all my staff left at 4:30pm but I stayed on, as I was waiting in my office something tells me that I have to find possible ways to escape from all this hostility and intimidation over to my family in WP basically for my safety. Shortly, before 4:30pm that day I had requested for my secretary to arrange for my airfare tickets over to Gizo on the flight next day, the tickets was prepared as I have instructed. The militant then returned around 5pm in the evening and relayed the content of his discussion with his boss, and further told me that his boss had agreed for him to demand SBD\$30,000 from the Telekom company. He argued that his boss has nothing to do with his demand since he was the one terminated by the company not his MEF boss, and pointed out the I should add an additional SBD\$20,000 on top of the SBD\$30,000 to make it a total of \$50,000 which is the amount he now insisted. I looked up to the wall clock and it was already going towards 6pm. I told him to return in the morning and I would raise a cheque of \$30,000 as his boss had agreed upon, he left and Sol Law rang me up and asked me of my plan, I told them that I have intended to give him \$30,000 and planning to leave for my own safety to WP afterwards on that same day. Sol law advised me on the matter and told me to advise him to collect his money from them (Sol law), by signing the deed of execution, thus he can able to collect the money demanded from the bank, since all the telekom accounts had been closed as directed by the overall boss in Australia. He came next morning and I explained the situation, and showed him the facsimile send by the overall boss in Australia to the MEF boss, he was quiet confused but I advised him to follow the procedures for his own good and to collect the money from the Sol Law firm, I signed a cheque of SBD\$35,000 hand it over to him and he left. That is part of the story that I had encountered during the ethnic tension while working in Honiara.

I have had encountered several other incident that eventually lead to the loss of my job, this encounter does not directly involves me but one of my colleague who was the Deputy General Manager Engineering (DGME) and I was the Deputy Manager Operations (DMO). He was harassed at one point and they remove the company vehicle from him, after the seizure they came to his house that same night and forced him to sign a letter at gun point, stating he had fully authorized that particular MEF member to be in possession of the company vehicle. On the next day, our boss had proposed for us to meet all the managers in the various departments, basically to talk about office and staff matters, as I entered the room I noticed that my fellow colleague (DGME) had turned red all over, he was in a state of shock over that incident (seizure of vehicle), my boss admittedly told me that he had agreed to (Resign) and leave for his home in Australia, my boss turn towards me and asked if I also wanted to resign or to take a leave, all of the managers in the meeting responded reluctantly stating we have families and cannot afford to lose our jobs. On another meeting he asked us of the same question, and then I agreed to resign but I asked him to give me time in discussing the offer with my family. Two weeks passed he called me to his office and asked me if I had thought about the proposal, little that know, to my surprise he had made an official notification to all the staff that I had agreed to retire, up until today I do not know why I was asked to willingly resigned. I blame the militants for the situation that prevail at that time in pressuring my superiors in forcing me to resign, I reluctantly quit my job. The consolation was he will consider posting me in Gizo Telekom, it then brings me to another situation, when I was reinstated.

After spending sometime in my wife's village I came and took up the appointment on may 2001. Sometime later in that year I had a call from Honiara, from one of the managers, telling me that they had gathered information from the Police that militants from Honiara are planning to come over and sabotage GizoTelekom, and I was advised to implement some security strategies to secure the communication facilities. I discuss these with the boss and they agreed that I should engage a security group here on WP, it then happened that there was another militant group called the 'Black sharks' operating in Gizo, after meeting with my staff they all agreed that we should engage them to provide security for the company. Such approach was taken in Honiara during the period of lawlessness, where the management engaged militants to provide security at all the senior staffs' residence, it was a time when anyone has to make the best out of the situation to engage militants or whoever is helpful at that time. However, apparently there was no such thing as alleged by the information given by the Police in Honiara, no militants from Honiara came over to Gizo, after three (3) days I scaled down the security group manning the Gizo facilities, had I knew in the next few days they (Black sharks) would bring me a bill, they brought me a billed claiming the three (3) days for providing security at an amount of SBD\$25,000. I was so shocked and did not expect that those who had claimed to provide security for WP, should also extort their way through and charge us for the service I though should have been free or reasonable, my boss called me up and asked for my opinion, I told him that the amount is not applicable and I refuse to pay, I am only willing to pay if the amount is relatively reasonable at the minimum of SBD\$3000. The militants send over one of their members to my office he was Choiseul province, he approached me in my office and asked for the keys to the company vehicle, I responded and told him that I will not give him the keys to the vehicle, he left. I was not scared since I had experienced the similar situation in Honiara with the MEF militants, on the afternoon the next day, the real militant came, I also could have refused him, but I knew that he had guns with him, I sensed the hostility of environment and I gave him the keys, he went out and drove off with the company vehicle. News reached my boss in Honiara, and he decided to close down the Telekom operation in Gizo, I called up our Premier and explained the situation and that

Gizo Telekom will close and all form of communication will shut down if the vehicle is not returned. I pass the same message to other influential figures of the position of the Gizo Telekom, our premier was very worried since all the communication necessities in the provincial government and other business houses will be at a standoff, eventually after a few days the province paid some money to the militants and the premier personally returned the vehicle and hand over the keys to me. There was another incident in Honiara when I encounter the Militants, it was also in year 2000 one Saturday morning I was watching the famous football league Euro 2000, when two militant arrived and demanded to take my vehicle, I told them that it does not belong to me, it is a company vehicle. They argued with me claiming that it was a foreign owned company, in which they were wrong, Solomon Telekom is a company owned by SINPF and the people of Solomon islanders. They continued insisting in taking the vehicle and since it was very early in the morning and I was trying to buy some time, I told them that we should go over to the Ranadi compound thus they can get one vehicle each, they agreed and instructed me to take them to the company compound. They were drunk at that time, one of them was also the former telekom worker, they were not armed, apparently they had hijacked a Telekom vehicle and forced the driver to take them over to my house at knife point. As we were driving towards Ranadi, one of them told me to stop at Ela motor company, he wanted to go and get his gun from other MEF members who were manning Ela motors premises. I was even scared at that time unfortunately he returned without a gun, he claimed his fellow colleagues had taken his gun, so we drove off up towards the company premises. Arriving there I saw one of our female staff had arrived for work, she tried to talk with me because he knew that these two (2) were militants, she knew of the situation immediately and called the MEF boss. As soon as we arrived they saw a newly bought company vehicle, one of them immediately told me to get him the keys to that vehicle. I told him that I do not have the keys to that specific vehicle and the person entitled to it has the keys, and I told them that there are more vehicles in the garage for them to chose from, I was actually trying to buy more time, we then walk across and his other colleague who was so drunk slept at the back of my vehicle. As we were walking across two (2) Telekom technician drove in, both were also from Malaita. That militant shouted for them to stop, as they came out he bravely told them to give him the keys to the vehicles. My two (2) staff argued with him asking him on who authorized him to take the company vehicle, he responded that he was instructed by his overall MEF boss, and he mentioned that name of his specific MEF camp. My two (2) staff continued arguing with him; at the same time their so called MEF boss also arrived and parked his stolen vehicle outside of the compound. They walked into the company premises and asked me of what had happened, I relayed the incident to them and they told the person to stand off, since obviously the alleged person is someone who had come all the way from Malaita to join in with the MEF group, and they further outlined to him the whole purpose of why the MEF group was formed, briefly stating that they are here to fight for the rights of Malaitans not stealing from innocent people. He then asked for the next next person I told them the he is sleeping at the back of my vehicle. They went and took him out of the vehicle, in a very short while another vehicle drove in, it was the Paramilitary group, they came to me and asked the same question I relayed to story to them and they took over and apprehend the two men into their vehicle and they left. That is my story of the second experience and encounter with the MEF militants.

I would like to highlight two (2) things here, first is the harassment on Cooperate Bodies. Cooperate bodies like telekom are here to provide service, although they are business in their own right they must be permitted to function without intimidation, harassment and other acts of unlawful abuses and violation, It does not only apply to Telekom but for the life blood of any business establishment in any country, respectively the private and the government sector.

All the militant activities had severe impacts and effect adversely on the functions of the cooperate bodies and the economy of our country Solomon Islands; this is one of the message I would like to put forward. In future we must be mindful and cautious in harassing cooperate establishment that provides employment for locals, on the other these people's welfare depends entirely on these cooperate bodies, simply in meeting their children's school fee and in meeting other cultural obligations, cooperate bodies contributes a lot to our economy and as well to the livelihood of our own people.

Secondly, government mechanism should never be disrupted, it must be allowed to function according to its mandate, with the disruption of government service delivery, for instance, schools, and medical services at the end of the day all of us will be affected including the perpetrators themselves, their relatives and families will also be affected, no exception. If any such circumstances may arise in the future I call on everyone to allow the government to carry out its function as mandated by the constitution regardless of what predicament, thus through whatever ordeal still we can receive the maximum benefits from both public and the private sector, my appeal to the general public is to allow and encourage commercialization to take hold of our country and we must also allow good governance to prevail, in doing so we will maintain stability in our country which will pave way for economic growth and the effective implementation of our social functions towards development, in return our children will live and learn in a conducive environment and we can progress as a nation to better advancement in the future, I would like to conclude once gain by thanking the chairman, commissioners and the ground staff of TRC in making all this arrangement successful and possible, once gain thank you very much.

Commissioner: Acknowledges the victim