# Letter from Dominic Morice, media manager, AusAID

**31 March 2004**

To the Editor
*World Socialist Web Site*

I write to correct a number of factual errors in the article *Australia's richest man profits from Solomon Islands intervention* written by Mr Mike Head (*World Socialist Web Site* 3 March 2004) regarding the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI).

Mr Head contacted AusAID on 17 February 2004 seeking information on the role of GRM in Solomon Islands and despite numerous attempts by AusAID to contact Mr Head with the information requested, including telephone calls on 18,19, 20 and 23 February, our calls and messages were never returned.

Mr Head's article makes no mention of the very strong support RAMSI enjoys in Solomon Islands or to the fact that RAMSI is supported by all 16 Pacific Island Forum countries (nine of whom have contributed personnel), not just Australia. In addition, RAMSI was not imposed on Solomon Islands but rather the region responded to a direct request for assistance from the Solomon Islands Government —a request endorsed by the Solomon Islands Parliament.

RAMSI has a wider focus than just restoring law and order. Put simply: RAMSI's key goal is to assist Solomon Islands in their nation building efforts and to ensure the lives of everyday Solomon Islanders are improved. This includes restoring basic services, rebuilding the police service so that it respects and protects the rights of those it is meant to serve, strengthening the criminal justice system, assisting with economic reform, and helping to rebuild the public service.

In relation to the justice sector, RAMSI is working in partnership with Solomon Islands to ensure people arrested are managed effectively through the courts and receive fair trials. RAMSI assistance is providing a Public Solicitor and six mentoring Public Solicitors to provide free public defence for those arrested.

The prison service is being supported to ensure it can effectively manage increased prisoner numbers in a way that respects the dignity and human rights of those prisoners. RAMSI has provided funding to complete new prison facilities in Honiara to engage experienced Australian advisers to train and mentor local prison officers.

Contrary to the claims made in Mr Head's article, GRM is not managing the Solomon Islands Prison Service or any other part of the criminal justice system. The prison service and the court system are managed by the Solomon Islands Government according to Solomon Islands law.

What GRM International does do, is manage the AusAID contract for the Solomon Islands Law and Justice Sector Institutional Strengthening Program. The contract is worth approximately $30 million over the period 2000-04 and was won by competitive tender in 2000.

All AusAID contracts, including that awarded to GRM International, are managed in accordance with the Commonwealth Government's purchasing policies and guidelines. These guidelines help ensure the processes of contractor selection not only result in value for money, but also maximise development outcomes.

There is no doubt that RAMSI is making a real difference to the lives of Solomon Islanders. Police posts have been opened in all provinces and Solomon Islands Government finances have been stabilised leading to increased service delivery, especially in health and education that benefit all Solomon Islanders.

The Australian Government is continuing to provide significant support to the health sector and to promote peacebuilding and community development.

But much work remains to build a better future for Solomon Islands. RAMSI will be in Solomon Islands for the long term, until the job is done and for as long as Solomon Islands wants RAMSI to be there.

RAMSI will continue working with their Solomon Islands counterparts, helping them build a better future for themselves and in doing so, for the region.

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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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