

Keynote Address:
Launch of the Telecommunications Commission of Solomon Islands Annual Report, 2020

H.E. Mr Peter Shanel Agovaka
The Minister of Communication and Aviation
Government of the Solomon Islands.

Salutation

[...]

My dear friends and fellow Solomon Islanders – a very Good Morning indeed to you all. It is my esteemed pleasure to be here with you, for the launching of the Telecommunications Commission of Solomon Islands **Annual Report for 2020**. I have been informed that this Breakfast event will attempt to be very minimal with formalities. This keynote address is perhaps the most formal we will ever get.

Introduction

In the last 10 or so years since the formal establishment of the current telecommunications regime, under the *Telecommunications Act*, this is perhaps the first gathering where the Government, the Regulator and the operators are gathered together to acknowledge the role that we all play in this country. And as is demonstrated in the Annual Report, we are all responsible for the pattern, trend and direction of telecommunications development in this country – a responsibility I am obliged to encourage us to take seriously.

As a Member of Parliament, I have had various ministerial appointments, but my humble beginnings as a telecommunications engineer has always been the underlying reason why I continue to be drawn to the communications sector, and more specifically, the Ministry responsible for Communications. I am personally passionate about this sector and believe in its potential as a catalyst for driving the development of numerous other industries in Solomon Islands. I am confident that this passion is shared deeply by many of you in this room this morning.

Key Challenges for the Sector

We are faced with a number of key challenges in the sector, including:

- the demand for us to close the digital divide between our urban and rural population
- the decreasing demand for Traditional Services
- the CyberSecurity Risks and Data Breaches
- the need for strengthened regulatory scrutiny
- the preparation for the future, in general.

But I want to briefly share some thoughts on a couple of these.

- **CyberSecurity Risks and Data Breaches**

As a Ministry, we are continuously reminded of our responsibility to balance the protection of personal privacy with the need to ensure the freedoms of the internet and communications are exercised responsibly. These issues are part of ongoing reforms in cybersecurity policy development, the proposed SIM-card registration standard in Solomon Islands.

We are cognizant of the increasing importance for service providers to make data security and privacy a key priority for its subscribers. We are also fully conscious of the growing threats experienced online, with potential threats to individuals, companies as well as the government. The government and stakeholders must work together to strengthen our capacity in adequate and responsive cybersecurity policies, frameworks, and technologies.

- **Preparing for the Future**

As a sector, we must be conscious of the demands of the next generation of Solomon Islanders on government, on the Regulator and on telecom service providers. Collectively, we want to stay ahead of the curve and deliver the results that our people expect. And so perhaps it is wise that we explore avenues for greater collaboration between us to help government develop relevant and accurate policies and laws, to help operators embrace opportunities from the new environment, and support businesses and customers to not just be reliable, but be innovative.

2020 Annual Report

With that context, I move to the **2020 Annual Report**.

This Annual Report is the first to be launched, and I am pleased to be the first, as Minister of the Crown, to be invited to officiate it. I am impressed that there is an Annual Report altogether. With the appointment of the Interim Commissioner Ziru in February, the considerable restructuring that he was mandated to undertake, the involvement in ongoing policy and legislative reform proposals, and the level of market analysis involved in compiling such a report; there were doubts as to whether there was time for an Annual Report at all.

We have a revitalized Commission, a young energetic Committee, and a qualified and experienced local Interim Commissioner providing a fresh outlook and perspective on the organization, in a sector that desperately needs competent leadership. In this year alone, I have had 3 separate briefings with the Interim Commissioner, consistent communication on matters of interest between the Regulator and Government, and I am informed that this relationship has also extended to the operators and relevant development partners.

And this is most evident in the quality of the 2020 Annual Report. In this Annual Report, you will see that:

1. Since 2010 **mobile subscribers and coverage have both grown** by 4 times, but mobile data usage as well as users have grown exponentially between 14 to 16 times respectively.

2. Annualized growth has been negative, but this is consistent with global economic trends in a global pandemic, with a drop in mobile and fixed subscribers, **but a clear uplift in data usage nonetheless.**
3. Upon the implementation of the International Submarine Cable, this has seen total **monthly data usage increase by 60% in the 10 months** between February to December 2020, with this continuing to grow.
4. The Solomon Islands first undersea optic fiber cable made possible by the support of the Australian Government has been timely and clearly shown its worth in the statistics.

To the telecommunications operators and the submarine cable company, there would be no telecommunications industry without your ongoing investment and services to the people. We look forward to that further unwavering support towards service excellence for this further year and endeavor to work closely with you to support your organization in enhancing the capacity of Solomon Islands and Solomon Islanders.

I am greatly encouraged by the excellent output of this Annual Report. I wish to highly commend each and every one of you in its production.

On that note, and without further ado, ladies and gentleman, I now have the pleasure to officially launch the TCSI 2020 Annual Report for your reading!

Thank you!

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