KEY NOTE ADDRESS BY THE HON PRIME MINISTER HON RICK NELSON HOUENIPWELA ON THE MALARIA ELIMINATION ROADMAP HIGH LEVEL MEETING – MENDANA KITANO HOTEL 7TH NOVEMBER 2018

Dr Sevil HUSEYNOVA – WHO Representative in Solomon Islands, and your staff
Dr Benjamin ROLF – APLMA CEO and your team
Members of the Diplomatic Corps
Permanent Secretaries of Government Ministries and your staff
CEO of the SICCI and members of the Private Sector
Representatives of the Churches,
Representatives of NGOs, CSOs, INGOs
Representatives of Development Partners
Members of the Media
Ladies and gentlemen

Good morning to you all, and welcome to this high-level meeting on the Malaria Elimination Roadmap for Solomon Islands.

This day will go down in the history of Solomon Islands, as the day when the government and the people of this God-given country take the first step toward eliminating malaria by 2030. Each of you
gathered here today is a part of this historic journey that we hope will deliver a malaria-free Solomon Islands twelve years from today.

Ladies and Gentlemen

About 7 months ago, in April this year, I, together with my fellow Prime Ministers from Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu pledged our support to the Asia Pacific Leaders’ Malaria Alliance (APLMA’s) 2030 goal to eliminate malaria from the Asia-Pacific region.

I am told, **these three nations account for 92% of all malaria cases in the Western Pacific Region. Consequently, Asia Pacific’s ability to achieve elimination will hinge on Melanesia.**

**In Solomon Islands, we can be proud of our progress.** With support from partners, we have reduced the number of cases of malaria from a hardly believable peak of **450 per thousand population** in 1993, to 80 per thousand population in 2017.

With this success on the ground we can now begin to dream of a different future:

- A future that is free of malaria.
- A future that follows the path achieved by other countries including China, Malaysia and Sri Lanka that have achieved zero Indigenous cases.
- A future that joins the Tafea province of Vanuatu which was declared malaria-free in 2017; and,
• A future where the people in Solomon Islands believe and declare, “We can, and we will eliminate malaria.”

However, while this new hope will guide us, we must also learn from the lessons of the past.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Between 1969 and 1975, at the height of the then malaria eradication program in Solomon Islands, the malaria positivity rate was less than 50 per thousand population. This is much lower than what is today. Solomon Islands then, was on the cusp of eliminating malaria.

But in 1975, financial and technical support was withdrawn and diverted. Instead of driving the last mile to eradicate, the strategy changed to one of containment and control. As a result, malaria positivity rate climbed back up from below 50 per thousand population in 1975 to the peak of 450 per thousand in 1993.

We must not let this happen again. We must learn from these mistakes. Today Solomon Islands, is once again on the cusp of eliminating malaria. We have reached the last mile of our journey. **It is time put out feet on the accelerator and push for elimination. We must not ease off like we did in 1975. We must learn and act decisively and with certainty.**
This is the reason I made a commitment at the global stage to eradicate malaria from Solomon Islands. It is the reason I called for the Malaria Elimination Roadmap for this country.

That is why you are all here today – to help plan and put that roadmap in place, which when implemented, will ensure we can eliminate malaria from our shores for ever.

I know it is going to be a long and difficult journey, but I also know it is achievable. Other countries have succeeded. With astute political leadership supported by a whole-of-society strategy involving everyone in the country - including our development partners - Solomon Islands can also succeed.

Ladies and Gentlemen

It took 18 years for malaria to peak at 450 per thousand in 1993 from less than 50 per thousand in 1975. It then took 25 years and millions and millions of dollars to bring it back down from that peak in 1993 to 80 per thousand in 2017.

Today we must make a choice. This lesson shows that malaria is a formidable foe. Any complacency on our part, will certainly lead to a rejuvenation of malaria as we have seen from 1975. This will undermine our efforts to eliminate malaria from Solomon Islands.

The choice is obvious. We must redouble our efforts to eliminate malaria by 2030. I am told that while our average rate of malaria positivity in 2017 is 80 per thousand, there are some provinces where
the rate is much lower and are closer to elimination. However, there are some provinces, where the rate is higher than the national average, and greater efforts will need to be accorded.

I call on all of you present here to develop the roadmap that will see all the provinces of Solomon Islands achieve zero malaria transmission by 2030, regardless of their respective positivity rates in 2018.

This is your collective goal over the next 2 days. This is the legacy that you must plan to achieve; a legacy we must entrust to future generations of Solomon Islanders; a legacy we can all be proud to be part of; and a legacy that will result in a ‘malaria free Solomon Islands’;

- where our tourists and visitors no longer need to worry about being infected by malaria;
- where our workforce is not kept away from the work place by malaria and resulting in greater productivity;
- where school attendance is greater because children no longer suffer malaria;
- where the government and the ministry of health can redirect focus and resources to other priorities; and
- where the country’s economic growth is no longer held back by the impacts of malaria.
Ladies and Gentlemen

These gains will translate to huge economic benefits for the country. Therefore, my government is committed to lead this fight for the long haul. The health and lives of our people are too important to ignore. I am convinced our future economic health will be enhanced when malaria is eliminated.

I am proud to say that my government has increased the level of domestic resources to combat malaria to 12% of the total health sector budget. While this is high by any standards, it is still not enough. We must work harder and get smarter in our fight.

In this connection we are grateful for the continued financial and technical support from the Global Fund, Australia, Japan, WHO and APLMA. Today I put my call to our other important partners, including the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, New Zealand, the USA and Taiwan to join us in this fight and help us realise our vision of a malaria free Solomon Islands by 2030.

Today I also call on all government ministries and agencies, all our churches, the private sector, the NGOs and CSOs, our village communities, international and regional organisations to join forces to help eliminate malaria from our shores.
Ladies and Gentlemen

Our National Malaria Elimination Roadmap - with its national targets - will be complemented and supplemented by each provincial malaria elimination roadmap. The provinces are where the battles must be won, before we can win the war against malaria.

So, we will fight to eliminate malaria community by community and province by province. When a province achieves zero local transmission and is declared malaria free, we will ensure malaria does not get re-introduced to it.

We must put in place a meticulous community level surveillance system to pick up any new or introduced cases very early. This means, our transport industry especially the shipping services that transport most of our populations between provinces will need to become integral parts of the malaria elimination program as it rolls out.

We need to review our human resources strategy to ensure we deploy enough people to do the task. In all this we must focus investment in strengthening the health system to support our elimination efforts.

Indeed, this means we must invest more efforts and resources to non-health interventions to eliminate malaria. This is where all other government ministries and partners can play important roles. For example, clean environment to reduce malaria breeding sites, good housing and water supply, and draining swampy areas, are very effective control measures. Such actions will be key to eliminating malaria.
Ladies and Gentlemen

Achieving malaria elimination means:

- Driving malaria transmission down to zero and ensuring it does not recur.
- Finding and eliminating every malaria infection
- Keep malaria infection rate at ZERO, and
- Prevent re-introduction.

This malaria elimination roadmap will inform our new malaria elimination strategy which will identify the level of resources and breadth of partnership across the whole government and outside of government that will be needed to eradicate malaria from our shores for ever.

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my view that resources applied to help eliminate malaria from our domestic budget, as well as from our development partners, constitute investments for the future and not a cost.

Investing in malaria elimination is an investment in the future prosperity of Solomon Islands. In eradicating malaria, we will save millions of dollars in health care costs, that can be redirected to address other important priorities of government including in health to benefit the country’s young population. Investment to eliminate malaria has the potential to transform our economic development aspirations.
Support from partners will also allow us to innovate and modernise our systems. I understand that the Global Fund Cash-on-Delivery model has enabled the integration of malaria elimination as an integral part of our health system. This approach to financing can change the way we deliver health services. Innovative funding approaches must be part of the solution to eliminate malaria.

To that end I am encouraged by the new partnership between the Global Fund and the Asian Development Bank. This partnership may offer the Solomon Islands new ways of reaching the SDGs, by investing directly in results.

Distinguished partners, ladies and gentlemen,
There is much to do. But, with your support, we can develop and roadmap to eliminate malaria from Solomon Islands by 2030.

I have no doubt we will eliminate malaria from Solomon Islands, from Melanesia, from the Asia-Pacific region and ultimately from the whole world. I am convinced we will be the generation that eradicated malaria.

Controlling, and ultimately eradicating malaria is everybody’s business. I call on all of you to be part of our journey to eliminate malaria from our country.

Today, I challenge all of us to declare our joint commitment, and stand united in our resolve to eradicate malaria from our shores by 2030.
I look forward to receiving the high-level roadmap to eliminate malaria from Solomon Islands to present to Cabinet for its blessing before Parliament dissolves in December.

I wish you God’s guidance as you now focus on the task ahead.

I thank you