

Community interaction builds trust in the Solomons

By Dominic Feenan, RAMSI Media Officer

Providing effective community policing has always depended on officers showing the human face behind the uniform. This is particularly true for those serving as part of the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI).

When RAMSI arrived in July 2003, many members of the Participating Police Force (PPF) began visiting schools or found other ways of engaging with members of the communities in which they worked in order to rebuild relationships. The Solomon Islands Police Force (SIPF) and the Combined Task Force (CTF), the military arm of RAMSI, were also conducting their own community visits.

In April this year, the PPF Executive identified the need to expand and coordinate the successful work of the community policing roles that had been in existence since RAMSI's arrival. The PPF were supported by the Special Coordinator's Office and the community outreach program *Shakem Han* was implemented.

Shakem Han is pijin for "shaking hands", a symbol that in all cultures represents friendship and respect.

In the initial stages of *Shakem Han*, members of the PPF led by Advisor Brendan O'Hara, the SIPF and the CTF



Solomon Islanders read information about RAMSI and the PPF at the Trade and Cultural Show held in Honiara.

came together and literally went out on the streets shaking hands. They visited a number of schools, church groups, women's networks, village chiefs and community organisations.

These visits demonstrated to the local people that the PPF were just normal people with families of their own and had travelled to the Solomon Islands to genuinely offer assistance. The PPF and CTF shared personal experiences from Australia with the Solomon Islanders and began to build some strong bonds.

At that time, many of the locals were sceptical of the PPF's involvement in

the domestic police force and had doubts whether they would stay to continue rebuilding their country after the years of ethnic tension. The *Shakem Han* Team has assured the locals that they will be assisting for as long as it takes.

As time progressed, a team of PPF officers was aligned specifically to the *Shakem Han* program. One of the new team's major tasks was to coordinate and plan the expansion of the operation. The early work was centred in Honiara, the capital and biggest town in the Solomon Islands. As a result of their work, the *Shakem*

The Great Honiara Bike Ride: PPF members shared the cycling event with the local Solomon Islanders.



Han program now extends throughout the main Island, Guadalcanal.

PPF Advisors Gino Gaspari and John Barnes were assigned to manage the *Shakem Han* project immediately identifying key objectives for the project and developing strategies to achieve these. The team also formulated delivery plans and restructured the project. After significant planning, three core functions of *Shakem Han* were established:

- to improve community confidence in the SIPF
- to improve the relationship between the community and RAMSI, particularly the PPF
- to maintain the morale of PPF members.

With the coordinated approach, the *Shakem Han* Team began to cover more territory and as momentum built, the word quickly spread, touting the value of this program. The team received favourable local media coverage and it was evident that the attitude of the local people was changing. They began understanding the role of the PPF as capacity builders and realised that the assistance was needed to create a sustainable domestic police force.

PPF members advising the general duties officers in Honiara noticed an improvement in community attitudes towards police and credited this to the work of *Shakem Han*.

The inclusion of PPF officers from the contributing Pacific Island nations was important to the success of *Shakem Han*, because Solomon Islanders identified with these officers and it alleviated the perception that it was only Australian and New Zealand police serving with the PPF.

The SIPF Community Policing Section is now aligned to *Shakem Han* providing a line of communication to the existing two PPF Advisors attached to SIPF Community Policing. The *Shakem Han* Team can now directly supply valuable input into initiatives aimed at improving the image and community confidence in the SIPF.

Team Leader of *Shakem Han*, PPF Advisor Gino Gaspari, believes the inclusion of the SIPF Community Policing Section under the *Shakem Han* umbrella is a significant achievement.

“The *Shakem Han* Team has been striving to build the image of the SIPF for some time. With a structured approach, we are not only having more success during our visits, we are teaching the SIPF strategies for

community policing. These strategies have been incorporated into the planning of the SIPF and I believe that when the PPF leave, community policing is an area that will continue to achieve great results and hopefully be a future model for policing in the Solomon Islands,” he said.

An event recently organised by the *Shakem Han* Team revealed how the program has evolved from occasional school visits. The Great Honiara Bike Ride was held in September. Members of the PPF, the SIPF, the CTF and civilian members of RAMSI congregated in Honiara to cycle the 18km to Henderson Airport and back. The event attracted a large number of Solomon Islanders. The cyclists left Honiara as just that — cyclists. They were not PPF members, SIPF members or local riders in their own groups, everyone involved did it together. The resulting good will was better than the *Shakem Han* Team could have hoped for and the ride will become an annual event.

The success of *Shakem Han* has led to an over-arching RAMSI community outreach program developed by the Office of the Special Coordinator. The *Shakem Han* Team actively participate in this program too and provide valuable input that assures it is a success. This program is aimed at providing accurate and timely

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As a citizen of Solomon Island, I would like to say my word of appreciation to you and all the members of Ramsi in the Country, for your restless time in ensuring that order is maintain in the Country. Congratulations Ramsi

I visited the RAMSI Community Outreach Stall

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information about the RAMSI mission as a whole. More than 10,000 Solomon Islanders attended the annual Trade and Cultural Show at Town Ground field in Honiara. The RAMSI Community Outreach stall attracted people of all ages who came to ask questions, look at photos and read information about how the mission works.

Solomon Islanders had the opportunity to meet the PPF members, soldiers and civilian advisors from many of

the countries that contribute to the mission. The RAMSI Community Outreach Team gave away 2000 postcards featuring some of the mission's activities over the past three years, and invited people to send the cards for free to friends and family anywhere in the Solomon Islands. What the RAMSI Community Outreach and *Shakem Han* teams didn't expect was that a number of the Islanders chose to send the postcards to RAMSI. Many of the postcards were filled with



heartening messages thanking RAMSI and the PPF for the outstanding results achieved. With the *Shakem Han* program operating smoothly in Honiara, the *Shakem Han* Team is finalising a training package that can be delivered to PPF and SIPF members at the provincial posts. This package will teach the provincial officers about the philosophy of *Shakem Han* and provide a framework to start rolling the program out in the remote areas. The development of this package, combined with the support of *Shakem Han* by the SIPF Executive and the PPF Executive, will help community relationships with the police grow for many years to come in the Solomon Islands.

The SIPF Community Policing Section organise visits to the community at a planning day.

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