



SPEECH BY THE HONOURABLE PRIME MINISTER,

HON. MANASA DAMUKANA SOGAVARE

AT

**THE OFFICIAL CEREMONY COMMEMORATING THE LANDING OF THE
CORAL SEAS SUBMARINE CABLE SYSTEM IN HONIARA**

MONDAY 15 JULY 2019

9:00 – 10.30 AM

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- The deputy Prime Minister
 - Ministers of the Crown
 - Leader of the Opposition
 - Leader of the Independent Group
 - Chairman of Government Caucus
 - Members of Parliament
 - His Grace the Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Church and Representative of SICA
 - Hon Premier of Guadalcanal Province
 - Lord mayor Honiara City Council
 - The Attorney General
 - Chiefs and Representatives of the Traditional landowners of Honiara
 - The Acting Australian High Commissioner & your staff
 - Members of the Diplomatic Core
 - Director of Vocus
 - Chairman of the NPF Board
 - Chairman of Investment Cooperation of Solomon Islands
 - Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Solomon Islands Submarine Cable Company [SISCC]
 - Governor of CBSI and member of the SISCC
 - Constitutional Post Holders
 - CEO of the SISCC
 - Senior Government Officials
 - Representatives of the Private Sector
 - Representatives of Churches
 - Representatives of Civil Society
 - Members of the Media
 - Invited Guests
 - Ladies and gentlemen

A very good morning and warm greetings to you all.

Ladies and gentlemen, almost 50 years ago, on July 24, 1969 Commander Neil Armstrong of the Apollo 11 uttered the famous words ... 'the Eagle has landed'. While not in the same league, today we commemorate our very own historic event ... 'Our submarine cable has landed'.

Today, ladies and gentlemen we create and celebrate history – the commemoration of our country's first-ever submarine cable network that will connect Solomon Islands to the 21st century unlimited, ultrafast, reliable and more affordable communication highway – the internet.

Moments such as these are rare and cannot be cheapened by heavy handed words – so I will be brief and to the point as we savour this moment in the history of our nation, Solomon Islands. Ecclesiastes chapter 3 verse 1 reminds us ... 'there is a time for everything' – this morning is the time to celebrate the landing of our submarine cable.

Firstly let me give thanks to our heavenly Father for the realisation of this moment – the joining by Solomon Islands to the company of nations that have already benefited from this technology that had opened untold economic opportunities for them – in much the same way our new submarine cable system will open such opportunities for us.

Secondly, let me recognise the traditional landowners of Honiara and the foreshore on which this submarine cable has landed.

To the chiefs and the representatives of your tribes that are here today, and to those who may not be able to attend this morning's celebration, I echo with all sincerity and humility, the gratitude conveyed to you by the Honourable Minister of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening, a Son of Guadalcanal Province, upon which Honiara is situated, Hon. Anthony Veke.

Honoured Chiefs and Representatives of your tribes, on behalf of the Democratic Coalition Government for Advancement (DCGA) I thank you and the people of your tribes for joining your government as partners in this historic journey that will help transform and propel our nation into the communication age of the 21st century.

I am immensely proud and honoured that the Democratic Coalition Government for Advancement is the first sitting government since this country's Independence 41 years ago, to formally recognise you, the traditional landowners of Honiara and its foreshores. Today, I pay homage and tribute to you for choosing to be partners with your government in this endeavour, and in doing so helping all peoples of Solomon Islands to benefit from the submarine cable.

The Chupus that we have presented this morning, represent the appreciation of the nation, of which you are part, for your support to this transformational

project. I thank you once again, and may God continue to bless you and the peoples of your tribes, the traditional owners of the land upon which we are standing this morning long into the future.

In relation to the ownership of all our foreshores in the country it is the policy of the DCGA to return the ownership to traditional and customary owners throughout the country. Our seas and foreshores carry values that should not be sacrificed to individual owners. My government is addressing the return of foreshores to customary owners as a matter of priority.

Ladies and gentlemen, on Friday afternoon, the deputy Prime Minister together with other Ministers, Members of Parliament, and other dignitaries visited the Cable ship, the **ILE DE BREHAT** owned by Alcatel, a French company and saw the 5,000 plus kilometre length of cable that will be laid between Honiara and Sydney as well as our very own domestic network connecting Auki, Noro and Taro to Honiara and then to Sydney.

While some provinces are not covered in this project, let me say at this juncture, that my government has already commenced discussions to extend the domestic network to other provinces. I am confident we will secure the resources to expand our domestic superhighway to all provinces with a mix of submarine cable and satellite options within the four-year term of the Democratic Coalition Government for Advancement.

During the weekend, the team from Alcatel Submarine Networks brought the International Coral Sea Cable ashore no more than 100m from this very spot and secured it inside Solomon Islands Submarine Cable Company's beach manhole. The submarine cable is spliced to the land cable that had previously been installed into ducts leading from the Cable Landing Station on Lengkiki Ridge to the beach manhole.

Ladies and gentlemen, the ceremonial Golden Bouy that had been accepted by the traditional landowners and passed on to the government is the first buoy that was used to float the cable ashore. The golden bouy is a national artefact to commemorate this important occasion. We shall treasure it. I am sure you will agree with me that the Golden Bouy will find a rightful place in our National Museum - where many of our own people and visitors alike can be reminded of the significance of the story it tells.

The Cable Ship, Ile de Brehat, is now laying the cable through Iron Bottom Sound and down into the Coral Sea, where she will rendezvous with the cable, she already laid from Port Moresby. After joining the two cables into one, she will proceed to lay the cable to Sydney.

The Ile de Brehat will return to Honiara in September to lay the cable for the Solomon Islands Domestic Network connecting Malaita Province, Western

Province and Choiseul Province to Honiara and bringing the benefits of vastly improved communications to these Provinces.

The submarine cable project is a national development priority, supported by the Democratic Coalition Government for Advancement as part of its commitments to deliver tremendous social and economic benefits to the Solomon Islands people through the availability of fast reliable and cost-effective telecommunications services.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am very pleased to witness firsthand the tremendous progress we are making with this transformational national project. I am confident we will achieve the anticipated commissioning of this ground-breaking innovative project by the end of this year to be handed to and operated by our very own Solomon Islands Submarine Cable Company. We can look forward to the tremendous benefits and opportunities this cable will bring to our economy, our education and health systems and many more, through fast reliable and affordable communications.

In addition to the traditional landowners, I wish to take this opportunity to also thank the Government and people of Australia for funding two-thirds of the cost of both the international and domestic networks with the other third being financed by the National Provident Fund and Investment Corporation of Solomon Islands. This means that members of the NPF are joint owners of this cable network. I also acknowledge Australian government support to assist the us put in place mechanisms to counter and / or minimise the risks that will come with the cable.

I also acknowledge with thanks the professionalism and expertise of the contractors for the cable, Vocus Communications and Alcatel Submarine Networks.

I further acknowledge with appreciation the efforts of SISCC, SINPF and the Investment Cooperation of Solomon Islands.

Ladies and gentlemen let us remember this day as the day in which we welcome to our shores a technological innovation that has the potential to transform our nation.

But remember this is only the beginning. In September and October, we will be celebrating the landings in Auki, in Noro and in Taro, and I am confident the landings in many of our other provinces in due course.

We have been blessed – but let us not take these blessings for granted. Realising the full potential of what this technology can give us, is in our hands as a nation. We must not waste any effort to ensure this submarine cable will help us and our country achieve our development aspirations.

Ladies and gentlemen let me close with a quote from where I began.

On stepping onto the Lunar Surface 50 years ago, Commander Neil Armstrong uttered his other famous line ... ***'one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind'***.

In the same way ladies and gentlemen, today we witness ... ***'one small step for technology, one giant leap for Solomon Islands'***.

I thank you all for your attention.

May God bless Solomon Islands from Shore to Shore.