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8 August 2018

Letter No.: DIR/ADM/22/2018

Dear Mr. Saitala,

*Subject: **UNDP Support for the Biometric Voter Registration***

This letter serves to recap UNDP's engagement thus far in the provision of technical support for the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) and identify the way forward in light of OSIEC's decision to contract another service provider to support BVR activities in Solomon Islands.

As you are aware, UNDP has been providing to the Office of Solomon Islands Electoral Commission (OSIEC) technical support for BVR since 2013 through the first phase of the project on Strengthening the Electoral Cycle in the Solomon Islands (SECSIP). Such engagement has proceeded in accordance with SECSIP's scope and objectives, as established by the Project Document, and the parameters of electoral assistance defined by two UN Needs Assessment Missions conducted in 2012 and 2015. Through the two phases of SECSIP, UNDP has endeavored to achieve a strong partnership with OSIEC based on a clear and transparent communication, as well as coherent electoral support based on coordination amongst relevant actors.

Effective support by UNDP in the field of BVR is illustrated by the following actions that have been carried out with the agreement of OSIEC and which have been duly reflected in respective Annual Work Plans:

- Engagement of a Voter Registration/IT Expert Mr. Mohammed Ali (Nov 2013-June 2014) who contributed to the initial introduction, planning and implementation of the first biometric voter registration in 2014.
- Commission of a data driven evaluation by BVR Expert Mr. Ronan McDermott conducted in May-June 2015 to determine accuracy and completeness of the BVR database.

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Mr. Moses Saitala  
Chief Electoral Officer  
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- Technical assessment of BVR software, identification of software deficiencies and options for the enhancement of BVR sustainability in terms of hardware, software and human/technical needs (Mr. Hamila; April-May 2017, Oct-Nov. 2017 and June 2018). In October 2017, a system failure occurred which severely put at risk the integrity of the BVR data. The risk of loss was mitigated by the timely intervention of SECSIP expert. Nevertheless, this situation again highlighted the needs in terms of replacement of obsolete equipment, software upgrades and training of core staff. SECSIP proceeded to provide support by procuring new equipment that will enable data deduplication to be conducted in Solomon Islands. SECSIP also provided BVR technical support during the BVR provincial update (3 consultants, Dec.2017-April 2018).
- Another long-standing benefit has been the SECSIP procurement of equipment<sup>1</sup> in support of the upcoming BVR actions, with an estimated total value of USD \$ 300,000.

In addition to procuring BVR equipment needed for the upcoming national registration campaign which includes spare parts and batteries for kits and portable generators to be used in the field, SECSIP II proposed a BVR support plan for technical expertise with the relevant terms of reference (ToRs).

Upon your endorsement of the plan in April 2018, the Project proceeded with the engagement of a Senior BVR Adviser (Mr. Hamila) and a Software Developer (Mr. Prajapati). As of early June 2018, work progressed in accordance with SECSIP II Project Document and the endorsed work plans in close consultation with the project board members. Mr. Hamila arrived in Honiara on 14 June and was in the process of doing work on:

- Specifications, architecture and documentation for initial upgrade of software for automatic backups, data quality and integrity and on architecture and guidance for the necessary setup of the data-centre.
- As per your request the consultant also provided a summary input needed to assist the establishment of SMS platforms for voter information as well as its operational support.
- Under the guidance of Mr. Hamila, Software Developer Mr. Prajapati commenced work remotely on software upgrades and was ready to install upgrades during his upcoming in-country mission. As you are aware, Mr. Prajapati was also expected to arrive to Honiara on 11 July.

However, recently the continuance of this technical work was put in doubt by the decision by OSIEC to engage a commercial contractor to substantially do the same work as covered in SECSIP II endorsed plan. The first notice of such plan was communicated in an email to SECSIP from OSIEC Head of Operations on 15 June 2018, which referred to the expected arrival of commercial contractor (identified as "ESI") in early July. As a result, SECSIP II verbally requested information as to what ESI was being engaged to do. A meeting was held on 16 June during which you clarified that you were not aware of what the OSIEC Head of Operations referred to in the email of 15 June. At the Project Board meeting of 22 June questions were raised again as to what work OSIEC had planned to undertake with ESI. On 1 July, Mr. Whelan (ESSP Advisor) sent an email to SECSIP Operations Consultant briefly outlining some possible ESI work options.

From these two emails and some other brief oral information, it has become our understanding that the BVR vendor commenced work on the upgraded version of the BVR software (the same currently being utilized by Fiji EMB) since the arrival on July 19 of the Software Developer. The vendor will also conduct the set-up of the data-centre built by SECSIP, the testing of kits prior to field deployment, the treatment of data utilizing the server equipment procured by the UNDP as well as the sorting out of technical glitches in readiness for the commencement of the national registration campaign.

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<sup>1</sup> I.e. Data-centre server equipment, spare parts and batteries for BVR kits, heavy duty printer, generators, laptops, etc. (2017-2018).

From the perspective of this project, such development was not expected, therefore, requiring it to review the relevance of SECSIP II planned activities. Specifically, given OSIEC's unilateral actions to bring another service provider on board for similar scope of work, the project can no longer continue with the provision of the BVR technical expertise as planned and approved under the Project Document. Such services are funded from donor resources entrusted to UNDP under this project, and UNDP must ensure they derive maximum value and impact without duplication. Accordingly, UNDP has now finalized the necessary steps to terminate the contracts of the consultants engaged on the BVR work, namely Mr. Hamila and Mr. Prajapati. Our position on this has already been communicated to the donors.

Although your decision to engage the BVR vendor as outlined above has brought a close to the continuity of technical support under SECSIP Output 1, we note that the technical advice provided by SECSIP II experts has contributed to the identification of software solutions and guidance on the specific needs for the improvement of the system.

We would suggest discussing these developments and their implications in the next SECSIP II Project Board meeting. Meanwhile, I take the liberty of sharing this communication with SECSIP II Project Board members, including funding partners.

SECSIP remains committed to working with OSIEC and other relevant partners to ensure the implementation of work across other areas detailed in the Project Document and Annual Working Plan.

We thank you for your continued collaboration.

Yours sincerely,



Bakhodir Burkhanov  
Country Director, UNDP Pacific Office in Fiji and  
Head of Pacific Regional Programmes & Policy

cc Mr. George Paula, Permanent Secretary of Home Affairs, Honiara, Solomon Islands  
Hon. Ajilon Nasiu, Chairman, Solomon Islands Electoral Commission, Honiara, Solomon Islands  
Ms. Fiona Hoggart, Australian High Commission Counselor (Political), Honiara, Solomon Islands  
Mr. Christoph Wagner, Head of Cooperation, Delegation of the European Union for the Pacific, Suva, Fiji  
Ms. Azusa Kubota, UNDP Country Manager, Honiara, Solomon Islands