

**STATEMENT - UPR Pre-session - Solomon Islands****Geneva, 10.02.2026****Delivered by: Franciscans International**

Distinguished Representatives,

This statement is delivered on behalf of Franciscans International (FI), an International Non-Governmental Organization with ECOSOC Status. Franciscans International has participated in UPR processes at the national level since 2011. The Joint Stakeholders' Report was prepared in collaboration with Dominicans for Justice and Peace.

Consultations with the Franciscan, Dominican and Sisters of the Church congregations in the Solomon Islands informed the Joint Stakeholders' Report. In addition, field visits were conducted to Verahue, Paru, Marovovo, Tamboko and Ando villages on Guadalcanal Island and to Havihua village on Santa Isabel Island.

This statement addresses the impacts of logging and mining operations on the human rights of local communities through the following thematic areas:

**1. The principle of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) and the legal framework**

Spain and Slovenia raised concerns regarding outdated logging and mining governance frameworks, with particular emphasis on the lack of free, prior and informed consent. Logging activities continue to be governed by the Forest Resources and Timber Utilisation Act of 1969 and the Environment Act of 1998, while mining is regulated under the Mines and Minerals Act of 1990. These laws are outdated as they fail to adequately regulate development project negotiations, allowing for direct negotiations between landowners and companies that exclude affected communities and that are carried out with minimal government oversight. Moreover, these frameworks were not developed through participatory processes and do not guarantee the right to free, prior and informed consent. The current Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) structure under the Environmental Act of 1998 fails to assess the environmental impact of logging operations adequately. Environmental Impact Assessments are often conducted without a site visit and there have been instances where the same assessment was submitted for multiple logging projects.

The Attorney-General's office has been working on a new Forestry Bill intended to replace the 1969 Forest Resources and Timber Utilisation Act governing logging operations. The Forestry Bill has undergone multiple iterations during the drafting process. In 2023, the Ministry of Forestry and Research confirmed that bringing this Bill to Parliament was a key priority. However, to date, the draft Forestry Bill has not been tabled.

The Government introduced a Mineral Resources Bill in 2023. Despite calls from stakeholders to suspend mining activities pending the legal reform, mining operations have continued. An amended Mineral Resources Bill 2025 was introduced to Parliament in July 2025. The Bill, drafted without adequate consultation with affected communities, risks concentrating decision-making power within the Government and weakens landowner participation. The Bill remains under parliamentary review and has not been enacted.

## **Recommendations:**

1. Adopt the latest iteration of the Forestry bill currently pending before the Attorney General's office and the Mineral Resources Bill 2025 currently pending before Parliament.
2. Ensure the Forestry Bill and the Mineral Resources Bill 2025 safeguard the land rights of local communities through equitable benefit-sharing arrangements, inclusive and participatory landowner representation in negotiations, and Free, Prior and Informed consent provisions.
3. Build and strengthen the capacity of the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology so that it can conduct robust and effective environmental impact assessments, including through site visits by independent experts and consistent monitoring throughout the lifespan of logging and mining operations.

## **II. The right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and the impacts of climate change**

Canada and Slovenia highlighted the impact of logging activities on the enjoyment of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. Logging and mining activities have polluted rivers and water sources, causing adverse health impacts, and have impacted food security due to the destruction of mangroves and fishing grounds. Traditional crops, such as taro, can no longer be cultivated due to soil contamination. Toxic runoff, including oil spills during transport, the release of limonite, and toxic tree species entering waterstreams, pose serious risks. Deforestation has led to ecosystem degradation through the displacement of local species, the introduction of invasive species, and the destruction of mangroves, which are critical habitats for marine and terrestrial biodiversity.

Several States, including Fiji, the Marshall Islands and the Philippines, called for the development of policies to address climate impacts and strengthen adaptation and resilience. The impacts of climate change have been exacerbated and accelerated by logging and mining activities. The destruction of ecosystems, particularly mangroves and river systems, weakens climate resilience and increases vulnerability to flooding and other climate-related impacts. Reforestation is not taking place as a remedial measure, further reducing the capacity to adapt to climate change, as natural barriers that protect low-lying islands from sea-level rise continue to disappear.

## **Recommendations:**

1. Ensure that communities on the frontlines are provided with solutions to mitigate and adapt to climate change impacts, including by improving infrastructure to reduce flooding, enhancing early warning systems and restoring coral reefs, mangroves and forests through reforestation and sustainable forest management programmes.
2. Ensure businesses engaged in logging and mining operations respect human rights, including by instituting mandatory human rights due diligence to ensure that adverse human rights impacts, including abuses related to the right to food and the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, are prevented, and that effective remedies are available when abuses occur.

### **III. The rights of women and children**

Women and children are disproportionately affected by logging and mining activities. Women and girls face heightened risks of early and forced marriage, stigmatization, sexual exploitation and violence in and around mining and logging sites. A practice commonly referred to as “log marriages,” in which girls are coerced into marrying foreign logging or mining workers, remains a serious concern. 1 in 5 girls in the country are married before the age of 18. Additionally, informal domestic work as so-called “house girls” has been reported, exposing girls and young women to sexual exploitation and increasing the risk of teenage pregnancy. An increase in domestic violence perpetrated by mining and logging workers has also been reported. Bahamas and Botswana raised concerns regarding the sexual exploitation of girls in the logging industry.

Children playing in rivers and water sources are impacted long after logging or mining activities have ceased. Skin rashes after bathing have been reported. Flash flooding has claimed the lives of two children. Flooding has also disrupted access to education, destroying education infrastructure and interrupting transport services.

The Solomon Islands ratified the Optional Protocol to the Child Rights Convention on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography in 2022. The minimum legal age of marriage remains 15 under the Islanders’ Marriage Act 1945. There are no sector-specific legislative or policy safeguards addressing child labour, sexual exploitation or gender-based violence in the logging and mining sectors. Protection services for victims rely largely on church-run shelters with limited government support.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. Amend the Islanders’ Marriage Act 1945 to increase the minimum age of marriage to 18 years.
2. Establish a complaint mechanism at the provincial level for victims of gender-based violence, child sexual exploitation and human trafficking in the logging and mining industries.
3. Strengthen institutional capacity to support victims of gender-based violence, child sexual exploitation and human trafficking by increasing human, technical and financial resources, in particular through the provision of safe shelters, psychosocial support, counselling, medical care and rehabilitation services.

Thank you for your attention.

## CLOSING REMARKS

Distinguished Representatives,

Logging and mining governance must be urgently reformed to protect the rights of affected communities in Solomon Islands, especially women and children.

Outdated legal frameworks continue to allow extractive activities to be conducted without free, prior and informed consent, with weak environmental oversight, and with minimal accountability. Despite ongoing attempts to pursue reforms, critical legislation on forestry and mineral resources remains either stalled or risks further marginalising affected communities. These gaps leave local communities without meaningful participation, undermine benefit-sharing, and allow the perpetration of environmental harm.

The consequences are severe: Polluted rivers, destroyed mangroves, declining food security, and increased climate vulnerability. These are not abstract risks; they are the lived realities of local communities. Environmental destruction is accelerating climate impacts and eroding resilience, particularly in low-lying and coastal areas.

Women and children bear a disproportionate burden. Sexual exploitation of girls through systems of “log marriages” and “house girls”, and gender-based violence are pervasive and demand urgent, sector-specific safeguards and victim-centred protection mechanisms.

We therefore urge States to recommend:

- The adoption of forestry and mining legislation that guarantees FPIC, equitable benefit-sharing, mandatory human rights due diligence, and strong environmental safeguards;
- Concrete measures to protect children, including raising the minimum age of marriage to 18 and strengthening victim support services.

Thank you.