

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Prime Minister Backs Kolombangara Conservation

Prime Minister, Danny Philip, has backed Kolombangara landholders at the Kolombangara Festival last week, as he pledged to support the island's 400m conservation area.

In the first visit by a Prime Minister to Kolombangara Island, Danny Philip joined the fourth day of the Kolombangara Island Biodiversity and Conservation Festival on Thursday last week. A special ceremony was held at Ringgi to mark the occasion.

Prime Minister spoke before a crowd of about one thousand people and officially dedicated the 20,000 ha Kolombangara conservation area, the largest in Solomon Islands.

Prime Minister Philip said, "It is a wonderful idea to demark a special area for conservation". He said it was "a landmark action that the people of Kolombangara garem."

"In the midst of logging and environmental destruction you have the courage to have a conservation area."

Ferguson Vaghi, KIBCA coordinator, said, "We are grateful for the Government's support. It is now clear that there is broad support for our conservation area above 400m."

"KIBCA is also pleased that the Government said it was close to finalizing the Protected Areas Act that might be an important way to support our conservation area. If there is landholder support after our awareness program and the Government is ready, we hope to be the first to use the new legislation," said Mr Vaghi.

After the official welcome and speeches the Prime Minister visited Imbu Rano Lodge, a specially built lodge for scientific research and tourists on the edge of the conservation area.

At Imbu Rano Lodge the Prime Minister heard from international and local scientists, including local ecologist Patrick Pikacha and botanist Myknee Sirikolo, about the important biodiversity found in the conservation area. He viewed a rare frog found in the area and used the lodge's spotting scope to look for birds.

**Photos:** See attached photos of the Prime Minister's visit.

**Contact:** Ferguson Vaghi +677 60 987 (w) or mob +677 740 1198