

## War of Mobiles in Solomon Islands

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HONIARA, Solomon islands (SOLOMON STAR) ----- The war of the mobile phone operators has begun in Solomon Islands, as the new entrant into the market, bemobile launches its services today. "This is a new era in the telecommunications industry in Solomon Islands," declared bemobile's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Michael Ah-Koy yesterday. "bemobile is extremely proud to announce the launch of its mobile network in the country. "This heralds an unprecedented new era in telecommunication for the people of the Solomon Islands," Mr Ah-Koy said. He stressed that for the first time Solomon Islands will have a choice when it comes to which mobile phone operator they want to use. "For the first time there is competition in the market and this is sure to benefit the people of Solomon Islands," Mr Ah-Koy said yesterday. He said the launch is important because as a company owned by the people of Papua New Guinea (PNG), a fellow member of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), it goes to show what MSG stands for. "And that is investment, trade and development," he said. He said as of today the network will provide coverage up to 28% of the population living in Honiara, Guadalcanal, Malaita and Western provinces. This will be followed by further expansion to take bemobile's coverage to 80% of the country in a few year's time. "Our goal is to provide the people of Solomon Islands with reliable and affordable mobile telecommunication services," he said. Mr Ah-Koy said more than \$200 million have been invested in the network set up. With the launch today more promotions will be done in Honiara, Auki and later in the Western Province. He said their system allows bemobile customers to call a customer from Our Telekom using what is called an inter-connect system. As part of the launch today, Stuart Kelly, PNG bemobile CEO was also in the country to witness the first service which will be used by the customers today. He said the launch is an important step for the telecommunication industry in the country. Mr Kelly said bemobile is here for good to provide local customers a better service with better price. Yesterday, members of the media were also able to tour the base station at Tasahe where the heart of the network system is located. Director Technical Harry Zoloveke said the network plays an important role in the system by connecting the towers located around the provinces. Currently, about 19 towers have been constructed, nine in Guadalcanal including Honiara, six in Malaita and four yet to be constructed in the Western Province. A second network base will be constructed at Munda. Contracting engineers and technicians have been hired and are at work at Tasahe yesterday to ensure that the first hundred customers can start using the network as of today. Today's launch is expected to attract hundreds of customers who want to register with the new company. Yesterday, many members of the public have enquired about the launch. A quick glimpse inside their sales centre saw an Alcatel handset being sold at the cheapest price of \$149.00 and another at \$299.00 This is much cheaper than Our Telekom which sold its handsets at \$299.00 at the cheapest. While Our Telekom is selling SIM Cards at \$50, bemobile is expected to drop their price on SIM Cards. Asked whether the call time will be much cheaper than Our Telekom, the officials said, "you get to find that for yourself when we launch tomorrow (today)."

