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REPORTS ON RECENT IPU SPECIALIZED CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS

(b) REGIONAL WORKSHOP FOR PACIFIC PARLIAMENTS ON "MODERN PARLIAMENTS: THE PACIFIC PERSPECTIVE"

Nuku'alofa (Tonga), 7-8 November 2013

1. This fourth edition of the regional workshop for Pacific Island parliaments was jointly organized by the Legislative Assembly of Tonga, the Australian Parliament and the IPU. The meeting was possible thanks to the financial support of AusAID, the Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI), the IPU and UNDP.

2. Approximately 35 participants¹ gathered in Nuku'alofa at the invitation of the Legislative Assembly of Tonga. They exchanged experiences, took stock of the situation in the region and expressed their opinions on how to ensure the smooth running of a modern parliament in the Pacific. They first examined the importance of professional development for parliamentarians in terms of the skills required to be a modern parliamentarian in the Pacific, as well as how to develop and build on such skills. They also identified and assessed the services currently available to parliamentarians in the region and proposed additional services that should be developed, including access to IT equipment and research support.

3. The participants then discussed key regional issues, in particular an oceans policy, and resolved to pursue the debate on that topic at other regional forums. They also acknowledged and supported examples of regional parliamentary cooperation and development efforts currently underway and agreed to increase the number of direct parliament-to-parliament initiatives.

4. As the participation of both men and women is a core concept of a modern parliament, an entire day was dedicated to developing strategies for parliaments to improve their responsiveness to gender equality. This triggered a discussion on the innovative IPU report entitled *Gender-sensitive parliaments - A global review of good practice*. Published in 2011, the report provides parliamentarians with new tools for assessing and improving the gender sensitivity of parliaments. It defines a gender-sensitive parliament as one with structures, operations, methods and activities that respond to the needs and interests of both men and women. A gender-sensitive parliament is one that embodies gender equality in its structures and functioning and champions gender equality in its work.

5. The participants examined the IPU Plan of Action for Gender-Sensitive Parliaments and debated possible strategies that could be implemented in each Pacific Island parliament. This was done in working groups that focused on a strategy to deliver on specific gender equality issues, mainstreaming gender into the work of parliament and the role of men parliamentarians as champions of gender equality.

¹ Participants included men and women parliamentarians from Australia, Bougainville, Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Island, Timor-Leste, Tonga and Tuvalu.

6. At its last session, the meeting endorsed an Outcome Statement with a set of key points to guide action in support of democratic development in the Pacific region (see Annex). These include the following: support for parliamentarians' skills development through both formal development opportunities, such as workshops and seminars, and more informal channels, such as mentoring; developing the capacity of parliamentary staff to provide research support to MPs; and access to IT equipment as part of the services provided to parliamentarians on their election to parliament.

7. With regard to gender equality, the participants agreed inter alia to enact gender equality legislation or review existing laws with a view to eliminating discriminatory provisions to promote the community outreach strategies of parliaments so as to ensure that all groups in society - men and women - are able to voice their concerns to parliamentarians to foster voter information and awareness campaigns on gender equality, not only to encourage women to vote, but also to empower women and boost their confidence to run for office to encourage men to mentor female candidates and parliamentarians, and to promote cultural attitudes that accept a place for women in parliament.

8. The participants agreed to meet again in a year to pursue the discussion of topics of common interest to Pacific Island parliaments.



OUTCOME STATEMENT

On 7 and 8 November 2013, Speakers, parliamentarians and representatives from the parliaments of Australia, Bougainville, Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga and Tuvalu, together with representatives of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), met in Nuku'alofa, Tonga, to discuss the evolving role of parliamentarians in a modern world. The meeting was possible thanks to the substantial financial assistance of AusAID, the Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI), the IPU and UNDP.

The participants outlined several key issues of relevance to Pacific Island parliaments, including the professional development of parliamentarians, services for parliamentarians, international engagement and regional cooperation, and strategies enabling them to improve their responsiveness to gender equality issues.

The workshop took into consideration the specific cultural circumstances and context of each Pacific Island nation and the changing regional environment in reaching agreement on the following key points to guide action in support of democratic development in the Pacific region.

Professional development of parliamentarians

1. Skills development should be an ongoing process throughout a parliamentarian's career and should be supported through both formal development opportunities such as workshops and seminars and more informal channels, such as mentoring.
2. Development programmes need to take into account the specific circumstances of each parliament and the environment in which it operates.
3. Mentoring should be encouraged so that parliamentarians have an opportunity to seek advice from persons with experience in a particular issue, and mentoring programmes should allow parliamentarians to access a range of mentors.
4. The specific needs of Pacific Island parliamentarians include IT skills development, an understanding of the legal framework in which they operate, and training in the preparation of submissions and proposals to support community projects.
5. It should be recognized that parliamentarians may have specific training needs that are better met through tailored training programmes rather than activities that cater to large groups of parliamentarians.
6. Pacific Island parliamentarians should be encouraged to build networks of advisers within their communities who can help them obtain a better understanding of issues of national significance.
7. Experts in specific fields should be brought in to help parliamentarians gain a deeper understanding of issues they have to deal with.
8. A code of conduct should be developed for parliamentarians to guide their efforts to fulfil their responsibilities as the elected representatives of the people.

Services for parliamentarians

9. Access to IT equipment is vital and should be part of the services provided to parliamentarians upon their election to parliament, including, at a minimum, a phone and computer they can use for official parliamentary business.
10. Governments should involve local parliamentarians in helping to define the priorities for service delivery in local communities.
11. Develop the capacity of parliamentary staff to provide research support to parliamentarians, including through a well-established parliamentary library.
12. Identify mechanisms through which parliamentarians can access suitable support staff to assist with community development in their constituencies.
13. Pursue the proposal for a regional research service supported by the Australian and New Zealand parliamentary libraries, which was first tested following the Meeting of Pacific Parliaments in August 2010.
14. Address the need for a constituency focal point for parliamentarians, such as a constituency office, to provide constituents with a direct access point to their elected representatives.
15. Engage in a frank dialogue with governments with a view to enhancing the limited resources provided to parliamentarians so that they can better fulfil their representative functions.

Regional engagement

16. Parliaments should discuss key regional issues, such as an oceans policy, and adopt resolutions for further consideration at regional forums.
17. Recognize the ongoing support being provided to Pacific Island parliaments through the IPU, UNDP, the CDI, the Australian Federal, state and territory parliaments, the New Zealand Parliament and the aid programmes of the Australian and New Zealand Governments, and encourage continued cooperation among these organizations and institutions to ensure effective capacity-building as part of concerted efforts in the region.
18. Acknowledge examples of regional parliamentary cooperation and development, such as the efforts of the Parliaments of New Caledonia and Timor-Leste.
19. Support the ongoing delivery of direct parliament-to-parliament initiatives through Pacific Parliamentary Partnerships to facilitate a cooperative approach to the development of parliamentary democracy throughout the Pacific region.

Gender-sensitive parliaments

20. Promote the community outreach strategies of parliaments to ensure that all groups in society - men and women - are able to voice their concerns to parliamentarians.
21. Review existing laws so that they foster gender equality. Where no policies or legislation exist, women's associations could be encouraged to draft legislation for parliament's consideration.
22. Foster voter information and awareness campaigns on gender equality, not only to encourage women to vote, but also to empower women and boost their confidence to run for office. Gender equality awareness campaigns could also be promoted through school programmes to showcase women's leadership abilities.
23. Enhance links between parliament and non-governmental organizations, including women's associations. One option could be to appoint a liaison officer to work with these groups.
24. Encourage balanced media reporting of men's and women's parliamentary work on gender equality.
25. Women's caucuses can be effective in providing research and gender analysis of legislation, as demonstrated by the Parliament of Timor-Leste.
26. Existing parliamentary mechanisms should be used to ensure that different groups are invited to make submissions and attend public hearings on proposed legislation with the ultimate goal of establishing strong mechanisms for gender mainstreaming such as dedicated gender equality committees.

27. Men should play a key role and participate in gender equality events, such as International Women's Day.
28. Identify various options to increase women's participation in parliament in the Pacific region, including appointing a woman to parliament (Tonga and the Cook Islands), reserved seats (Bougainville), guaranteed seats (Samoa), and legislative candidate quotas (Timor-Leste).
29. Encourage mentoring arrangements that involve both men and women in supporting women's participation in parliament.
30. Promote cultural values and perspectives that recognize women's place in parliament. The momentum is building for change on gender equality in the region and parliamentarians have a responsibility to maintain it.

8 November 2013