National Interest, Local Concerns: Finding the Right Balance

The 8th Centre for Democratic Institutions Pacific Parliamentary Dialogue

Samoa, 11 – 13 December 2006
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Introduction

The 8th annual Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI) Pacific Parliamentary Dialogue (‘the Dialogue’) took place in Samoa from 11 to 13 December 2006. As in previous years, core funding for the Dialogue came from the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAid), with additional financial support from New Zealand’s Aid and Development Agency (NZAID) and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA).

In 2006, the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Samoa, Hon. TOLOFUAIVALELEI Falemoe Leiataua MP, offered to host the Dialogue in Samoa. Originally the Dialogue was to be held during the Samoan parliamentary sitting week of 11 to 15 December so that participants could observe the Legislative Assembly in session. Unfortunately the parliamentary sittings were subsequently rescheduled to the following week and participants were unable to observe the Assembly in session. The Dialogue was held over three days at Aggie Greys Resort, 45 minutes drive from Apia on the island of Upolu.

This was the second time CDI has held this event in a Pacific Island country and the first time, with the exception of Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Marshall Islands and the French and US territories, that all countries from the region were invited.

CDI invited participants from Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Niue, Cook Islands, Nauru, Kiribati, Tuvalu, New Zealand and Australia. CDI requested that each country nominate one Member of Parliament from the Government and one from the Opposition, and given the Dialogue’s goals and emphasis on public leadership, along with CDI’s ongoing commitment to helping foster young and emerging female and male parliamentarians in the region, CDI encouraged the nomination of two MPs that reflected both youth and experience. Except in the case of Australia, all participants were nominated by the Speakers of their respective Parliaments.

Nominations were received from all the countries approached except Tonga. As has occurred with previous dialogues, the vagaries of politics meant several parliamentarians were unable to attend. The two nominees from Vanuatu, Hon Phillip Boedoro MP and Hon Steven Kalsakau MP, withdrew prior to departure for Samoa because of an impending vote of no confidence during the week of the Dialogue. Two other nominees, Hon. Fabian Dominic Ribauw MP from Nauru and Hon. Peter Oresi MP from Papua New Guinea, also withdrew prior to departure for Samoa.

Despite this, 25 MPs from 11 countries participated in the Dialogue. Seven of these parliamentarians were women. Each delegation had at least one member from the Opposition. The Dialogue was also fortunate to have the expertise of 10 presenters, including two former Speakers of Parliament, H.E. Mr Bernard Narokobi from Papua New Guinea and Mr Paul Tovua from Solomon Islands, the Minister for Women, Community and Social Development in the Government of Samoa, Hon. FIAME Naomi Mataafă MP, and several prominent Pacific women activists and political party officials. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the CPA were also represented. Six of the presenters were women.

For the first time, Members from a provincial level assembly in the Pacific Island region, the Autonomous Bougainville Government House of Representatives, were invited and participated in the Dialogue. MPs from two countries – Kiribati and
Tuvalu - which had not participated in previous meetings also attended.

CDI sought the participation of MPs who had not participated in this CDI event in previous years. Only one MP, Hon. Ben Kiagi from Papua New Guinea, had attended a previous meeting, the 7th Pacific Parliamentary Forum in Fiji in 2005.

The Dialogue provided a forum for parliamentarians from the Pacific Island Countries, Australia and New Zealand to discuss public leadership with colleagues in a practical, non-partisan and dynamic environment. Creating personal networks among MPs and with regional institutions, the Dialogue explored the foundations of public leadership in the Pacific Islands. Participants examined ways of mediating between their constituents’ concerns and the national interest, advancing the representation of women in Pacific parliaments, learnt about parliamentary practice and the political system in Samoa, and gained a better understanding of the regional institutional structures. The Dialogue thereby contributed to improving political governance in partner countries by exposing participants to new ideas and enabling them to engage with fellow political practitioners on issues concerning parliamentary practice, constituency politics and the role of women in political representation, and to managing governance challenges in the Pacific better through regional approaches.

The Dialogue in context

Originally named the Pacific Parliamentary Retreat, the Dialogue was designed to provide a forum for Pacific Island parliamentarians to discuss issues of common interest while showcasing parliamentary practice in Australia, and New Zealand in 2004. The inaugural Retreat was held in November, 1999 in Canberra. The 13 participants from Fiji, Solomon Islands, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea and Samoa discussed the ways in which the inherited systems of parliamentary democracy are functioning in the contemporary Pacific and the impact of local tradition and culture on the parliamentary process.

In 2005, the Retreat was held in a Pacific Island country, Fiji, for the first time and renamed the Pacific Parliamentary Forum, to reflect the need for ongoing dialogue among elected leaders in the Pacific on issues of common concern. Further reflecting these changes, the 2005 Forum was supported by and planned in collaboration with New Zealand's International Aid & Development Agency (NZAID), the New Zealand Parliament and parliamentary parties, and the Parliament of the Fiji Islands. The University of the South Pacific’s Pacific Institute of Advanced Studies in Development and Governance (PIAS-DG) and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) also made contributions.

Since the first Retreat in Canberra in 1999, 120 parliamentarians, including 20 women, from 14 countries in the region have taken part in these meetings. For further information on each Retreat, including detailed reports, consult the CDI website at: http://www.cdi.anu.edu.au
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Partners</th>
<th>No. of Participants</th>
<th>Countries Represented</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8th</td>
<td>11-13 Dec 2006</td>
<td>National interest, local concerns: finding the right balance (focus on Parliament of Samoa)</td>
<td>Legislative Assembly of Samoa, NZAid, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association</td>
<td>37 + 4 CDI staff (25 MPs, 10 presenters, 2 resource people from SI &amp; PNG)</td>
<td>Australia, Cook Is, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, PNG, Solomon Is, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Samoa, Bougainville</td>
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<tr>
<td>7th</td>
<td>5-9 Dec 2005</td>
<td>Foundations of Public Leadership (focus on Parliament of Fiji)</td>
<td>Parliament of Fiji, NZAid; Parliament of NZ; USP Pacific Institute of Advanced Studies in Development &amp; Governance; Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Fiji, Nauru, Cook Is, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Is, Tonga, Vanuatu</td>
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<tr>
<td>6th</td>
<td>15-19 Nov 2004</td>
<td>Tradition and modern parliamentary democracy (focus on NZ Parliament)</td>
<td>Parliament of New Zealand; NZAid</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Fiji, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Is, Vanuatu, Cook Is, PNG, Niue, Tonga</td>
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<td>5th</td>
<td>24-28 Nov 2003</td>
<td>Parliamentary issues, land management, Australian indigenous society &amp; Pacific society (focus on NT Legislative Assembly)</td>
<td>Legislative Assembly of Northern Territory</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Fiji, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Is, Vanuatu, Cook Is, PNG, Niue, Tonga</td>
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<td>4th</td>
<td>25-29 Nov 2002</td>
<td>Accountability &amp; Integrity (focus on the Queensland Parliament)</td>
<td>Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice &amp; Governance, Griffith University</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Fiji, New Caledonia, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Is, Vanuatu</td>
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<td>3rd</td>
<td>3-7 Dec 2001</td>
<td>Accountability &amp; Integrity (focus on the Queensland Parliament)</td>
<td>Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice &amp; Governance, Griffith University</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Fiji, New Caledonia, PNG, Samoa</td>
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<td>2nd</td>
<td>4-8 Dec 2000</td>
<td>Fragility of Westminster Democracy in the Pacific (focus on Federal Parliament &amp; ACT Legislative Assembly)</td>
<td>Centre for the Contemporary Pacific</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Fiji, New Caledonia, Samoa, Solomon Is, Vanuatu</td>
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<td>1st</td>
<td>22-26 Nov 1999</td>
<td>Ways in which systems of parliamentary democracy operate in the post-colonial Pacific (focus on Federal Parliament &amp; ACT Legislative Assembly)</td>
<td>Centre for the Contemporary Pacific</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Fiji, New Caledonia, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Is, Vanuatu</td>
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The Dialogue in 2006

Themes

As CDI Director, Dr Ben Reilly, noted in his opening remarks, the purpose of this annual CDI event is to open a dialogue among Pacific Island parliamentarians and their Australian and New Zealand counterparts on some of the key challenges facing democratic governance in the region in order to make it stronger and better. The 2006 Dialogue also occurred at a particularly urgent time for the region. In 2006, more so than in previous years, the challenges facing the region were particularly acute, with riots on the streets on Honiara and Nuku’alofa, and the coup in Fiji.

However, the events in Fiji should not obscure the fact that across the Pacific Island region, democracy remains resilient. As Dr Reilly noted, Pacific Islanders are natural democrats. Basic freedoms of speech, association, and the ability to change governments at elections are integral elements of Pacific politics. Perhaps it is only when they are taken away that we realise how much we value our freedoms.

Nonetheless it is also necessary to acknowledge the reality that democracy in the Pacific has often not worked as well as it could. That is a key rationale for the Dialogue: to examine how to make these democratic systems work better.

In 2006, the Dialogue focused on two areas in which the democratic systems in the region can be strengthened - enhancing the role of women in politics, and finding the right balance between a parliamentarian’s obligations as a legislator and in safeguarding the national interest, and addressing the often parochial concerns of constituents.

When it comes to the representation of women in parliament, the Pacific Island region in general has a poor record. Most countries have a very small number of female parliamentarians, and five of the eight countries in the world without female representation in the national legislature are in the Pacific. Compared with other regions around the world, the Pacific ranks second last with only 13% female representation in national legislatures. In a number of Pacific Island countries the number of women in decision-making positions has either stagnated or declined since independence. Participants at the Dialogue had the opportunity to examine the reasons for this and consider ways to increase the representation of women in parliament.

Managing the balance between the reciprocal relationship between MP and constituents, and the MP’s national responsibilities lies at the heart of politics in the Pacific. Pacific parliamentarians place great emphasis on constituency work, much of it on their core support base, and very often at the expense of the national interest. In effect, every elected MP in the Pacific, therefore, has a dual identity - that of a local Member, who needs to focus on local issues and deliver goods and services to constituents, and that of a national leader, who needs to represents the interests of the

1 The five Pacific Island countries with no women MPs are FSM, Nauru, Palau, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu. PNG and Marshall Islands each have one. Tonga, Kiribati and Vanuatu each have two women MPs.
2 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2006, A Woman’s Place is in the House – the House of Parliament, pp. x-xi
3 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2006, A Woman’s Place is in the House – the House of Parliament, p. xi
country as a whole. These twin demands are not always easy to balance. Indeed, they are often in tension. For this reason, the 2006 Dialogue focused on the need for public leadership by parliamentarians when it comes to balancing local interests with national concerns, and involving everyone – including women – in political parties, parliaments and government.

Drawing on these themes, the presentations and discussions during the Dialogue examined these key aspects of public leadership, and provided examples of how these challenges are answered in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands.

In 2006, the Dialogue was also structured to allow participants to focus on the host parliament, the Legislative Assembly of Samoa, and to learn how the political system in Samoa functioned. In addition, participants learned about the development of the newest parliament in the region, the Bougainville House of Representatives, and were provided with insights into the December 2006 coup d’etat in Fiji.

The first day of the Dialogue focused on the theme of ‘Including Everyone’ and examined the role of women in political parties, in Parliament and in national leadership generally throughout the region. The second day focussed on the overall theme of the Dialogue for 2007, finding the right balance as MPs between national interests and local concerns. The day ended with a presentation on the situation in Fiji followed by a general discussion on the Fiji coup. On the final day of the Dialogue, participants heard presentations on the role of regional organisations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in relation to Pacific Island legislatures, the experience of building a new parliament in Bougainville, sharing resources among legislatures and the Samoan parliamentary system. Participants then considered the lessons learnt during the Dialogue and agreed on a number of key recommendations for future parliamentary assistance activities.

What follows are overviews of the presentations each day, and the major points of the discussions that followed.

**Day One: Including Everyone**

**Official Opening**

The Dialogue was formally opened by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Samoa, Hon. TOLOFUAI VALELEI Falemoe Leiataua MP. The Speaker welcomed the participants to Samoa and noted that the Samoan experience of incorporating traditional political structures and cultural practices into the contemporary political system provided a useful model for other countries in the region. He pointed out that Samoa has been an active participant in the Dialogue over the past eight years and the Legislative Assembly was pleased to have the opportunity to host the 2006 Dialogue.

Dr Ben Reilly welcomed participants on behalf of CDI and explained the role of CDI and the purpose of the Dialogue. He noted that this was the first time CDI has held the Dialogue in Samoa and acknowledged the invaluable contribution made by the Legislative Assembly of Samoa in hosting the event.

**Keynote Address**

The Hon. FIAME Naomi Mataafa, Minister for Women, Community and Social Development in the Government of Samoa gave the keynote address on women in politics and Samoan experience. She described the political system in Samoa – an
electoral system comprised of two separate rolls, one for the 47 territorial constituencies in which only heads of families or Matais can stand, and the other for two seats reserved for registered individual voters. The Hon. FIAME noted the importance of including women in the political process. For example, as women represent more than half of the population, their exclusion calls into question the legitimacy of the democratic nature of the political system; women often have different interests to pursue that may not be picked up by men; and the nature of politics is changing with the domestic arena, traditionally seen as the preserve of women, increasingly becoming part of public policy.

The Hon. FIAME provided a history of women’s participation in the political process in Samoa. She outlined her personal history of involvement in politics, from claiming her title to her first successful election in 1985 and appointment as cabinet minister in 1991. She examined a number of options for increasing the participation of women in politics from quotas and reserved seats for women to electoral reform. However, she pointed out that having the right attitude and conditions and being fully prepared and winning on your own merits is often the best way.

The Role of Women in Political Parties

Following the keynote address, the next session focussed on the role of women in political parties. Ms Joyce Grant, Secretary of the ruling National Alliance Party in Papua New Guinea, gave a presentation of the numerous challenges facing political party development and the participation of women in party politics in Papua New Guinea. This was followed by a presentation by Ms Maryline Arnhambat Abel, President of the Vanua’aku Pati Women’s Wing in Vanuatu, on the key role played by the Vanua’aku Pati in Vanuatu’s history and the establishment of the women’s wing of the party. Ms Abel noted the importance of personal perspectives in encouraging the participation of women in parties.

The participants then moved into five break-out groups to discuss the presentations. Upon returning to the plenary session, each group made a short presentation on their respective discussions. The discussion groups considered ways of encouraging greater participation by women in political parties in the Pacific Island countries. The groups agreed that in most countries in the region, the political party system is structurally weak and poorly developed. Without a stronger party system in place, it is harder for women to become successfully involved in electoral politics. Cultural barriers to the participation of women in political processes remain an issue. A range of suggestions to overcome these obstacles were made such as encouraging parties to recruit and support female candidates, for parties to engage in voter education on the positive role of women, and establishing list systems and quotas for women candidates.

The Role of Women in Parliament

The first session in the afternoon was on the theme of women in parliament. CDI Program Manager, Ms Daniela Capaccio, gave a presentation on research to advance the participation of women in the political process in Pacific Island countries undertaken by the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat (PIFS). This research was published in 2006 as A Woman’s Place is in the House – the House of Parliament. Ms Capaccio addressed the question of why have women in parliament. Drawing on the PIFS report, she placed this within context by outlining the global and regional statistics on the number of women in legislatures. Ms Capaccio provided an overview
of the research PIFS carried out and possible ways forward. These include:

- the Pacific experience shows that relying on ‘natural’ incremental progress is not adequate;
- despite the well established statistical link between proportional representation systems and higher levels of female representation, this has not generated greater success for female candidates in the Pacific;
- additional reforms are necessary such as quotas; and
- consideration be given to regional examples such as the French Parity Law and reserved seats for women in Bougainville.

**Women in National Leadership**

Chaired by Senator Marise Payne of Australia with panel members, Ms Angela Mandie-Filer of Papua New Guinea and Ms Anna Padarath of Fiji, the final session of the day drew together all the themes of the earlier presentations and discussions by examining women in national leadership more broadly. Participants agreed that the issue raised on the first day have to be contextualised as there are differences between each country. Hon. FIAME Naomi Mataafa summed up the themes of the day by noting that the level of development in each country is a factor as exemplified by the rates of representation of women in the Pacific, but there are ways to involve more women in the political process.

In the evening, participants were driven to Parliament House in Apia. The Legislative Assembly of Samoa hosted a traditional kava ceremony to welcome the visiting parliamentarians, followed by a cocktail reception and then an official dinner. The Prime Minister of Samoa, Hon. TUILAEPA Sailele Malielegaoi MP, attended the function along with several Samoan MPs.

**Day Two: National Interests & Local Concerns**

**Finding the Right Balance**

Mr Bernard Narokobi, former Speaker of the National Parliament of Papua New Guinea, introduced the first session of the second day, finding the right balance between the national interest and local concerns. Drawing on his own experience as an MP for 15 years, Mr Narokobi presented examples of the types of demands placed on a parliamentarian by constituents in the PNG context.

The Hon. Ian Causley MP (Australia) spoke on ways of mediating between local concerns and the national interest. Mr Causley identified several approaches including:

- do not build up false expectations;
- be honest about the extent of one’s capability;
- be aware that, except for taxation, most of the electorate are not interested in national interests;
- listening is the most important service that an MP can provide to constituents;
- with the local media, be seen to be trying to do things; and
- be careful to be seen not to be involved in ‘handing out money’.

Mr Paul Tovua, former Speaker of the National Parliament of Solomon Islands,
concluded the presentations by outlining his observations on the role played by Parliament as an institution in managing constituents’ expectations.

A roundtable discussion involving all participants followed. Hon. Tebuai Uaai MP (Kiribati) noted that there is a need to be very honest when preparing and promoting party platforms. Parliamentarians should consider the implications of promises made to the people. Other points raised included the need to build a sense of nationhood in each country, electoral reform, greater decentralisation and the clash between the inherited political system and indigenous cultural practice.

Mr Bernard Narakobi pointed out that in Papua New Guinea, people acknowledge that custom can clash with the introduced system of governance. In order to minimise this conflict, custom was deliberately left out of the new political system designed at independence. Mr Bob McMullan MP (Australia) noted that this conflict between traditional and introduced political systems is inherent. In most places, they have evolved a new system such as a presidential system to overcome this conflict. The best approach is to investigate which system works in each country.

Hon. Robert Sawa (Bougainville) pointed out that in the case of Bougainville, “people are still expecting too much from us”. Bougainville is heavily reliant on budgetary support from the National Government, and from donors. Each Member has K5000 per year available for constituency work. He argued that it is “very challenging” to meet constituent demands for support with such a limited amount of funding, thus MPs have to use their own resources. Hon. Robert Sawa suggested that traditional forms of governance should be reinforced. Responsibility for governing should be decentralized to village level leaders, with their own administration. This is important as it ensures that people actually decide what happens to their resources.

All agreed that voters in Pacific Islands countries, like their counterparts in Australia and New Zealand, choose their representatives to act in their interests. The understanding is that the MP will be equipped intellectually and morally to deal with the changing circumstances of public leadership. Hopefully, community interests will not become subservient to the personal agenda of the MP and certain checks and balances are placed on the representative to ensure this.

**Experiences in Each Country**

Mr Timothy Barnett MP (New Zealand) introduced the second session of the day. In this session, a representative of each country attending the Dialogue gave a short presentation on their experiences of managing the MP-constituency relationship.

**Does Good Policy make Bad Politics?**

The next session focused on the question of whether good policy makes bad politics. Participants divided into five groups to examine the challenge as an MP of being a leader, legislator, scrutiniser of government and a representative of constituents. In reporting back to the plenary session, participants noted that:

- policy must be fully understood before implementation;
- policy decisions are decided by the government of the day, not the parliament;
- government assumes ownership of policy;
- policy formulation must be done in consultation with different government agencies and with concern for collective interest;
- good policy must be supported by government if it meets government
requirements;
  • good policies are neglected when there is frequent changes of government;
  • people affected must understand the policy; and
  • policy must reflect honesty and transparency.

The Situation in Fiji

In the final session of the day, the two parliamentarians from Fiji, Hon. Monica Raghwan MP and Hon. Asaeli Masilaca MP, gave a presentation on the situation in Fiji. Mr Narokobi summed up the views of the Dialogue participants:

  we should make it clear that we do not support military coups, whether in Malaysia, Thailand or Fiji. We should make it known that we do not support the Army and the Commander, we cannot allow that he can change the government when he doesn’t like it. The Fijians need to show their protest, show that they do not stand for military coups.

Mr Niall Johnston, Programme Manager for the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), conclude the second day with a short presentation on the role and work of the CPA.

Day Three: Working together now and in the future

Regional Assistance & Emerging Parliaments

The theme of the third and final day of the Dialogue was working together now and in the future. The purpose of these sessions was to give participants the opportunity to hear from two different parliaments, discuss sharing resources and reflect on the presentations and discussions over the course of the Dialogue.

Mr McAnthony Keah, UNDP Country Program Manager, Marshall Islands, began the day by giving a presentation on the role of the United Nations Development Programme in relation to Pacific Island parliaments. He concluded by noting the importance of creating partnerships among the many different organisations offering assistance to parliaments in the region, and the need for advice from each of the countries in identifying possible areas for assistance.

The two parliamentarians from the newest legislature in the region, the Bougainville House of Representatives, followed with presentations on the Bougainvillean experience of building a new parliament. The Hon. Robert Sawa gave an overview of the modern history of Bougainville, the creation of the Autonomous Bougainville Government and the first election for the House of Representatives in June 2005. The Hon. Laura Ampa explained how the three allocated seats in the House for women worked and the positive reaction among voters to this innovative arrangement – the first of its kind in the Pacific Islands region.

Mr Paul Tovua and Mr Bob McMullan spoke next on the theme of sharing resources and experiences among parliaments in the region. Mr Tovua noted that many of the issues raised by participants are similar – for example, the aspirations of communities, people being represented and voter education are common themes. In his view, well informed communities elect the best possible candidate to Parliament. On the issue of resources available to parliamentarians, Mr Tovua noted that access to information
through well stocked and maintained libraries and effective parliamentary research services is a major obstacle to better functioning parliamentary systems, especially in Solomon Islands. These resources and the associated networks and links with other parliaments should be available to all parliamentarians in the Pacific, not just their Australian and New Zealand colleagues. Mr Tovua recommended that both the CPA and CDI encourage the development of secretariat links between Pacific parliaments as these could provide vital networks and facilitate the flow of information.

Mr McMullan noted that there are already existing arrangements for sharing of resources and building networks, such as parliamentarians and officials from the region visiting other parliaments in Australia, New Zealand and the Britain. He suggested that perhaps there should be more emphasis on resource and information sharing among the parliaments in the region, rather than with parliaments outside the region. For example, the Solomon Islands Parliament might be able to assist other parliaments by providing advice on its practice and procedure. Mr McMullan noted that effective networks and links means communication between parliaments on issues such as introduction of new legislation – another country may have similar legislation which could be examined for its impact. Centralized research capabilities are good, but might not be practical for smaller island countries; however, this does lessen in any way their need and right to be better informed.

These presentations on the sharing of resources prompted a number of comments and suggestions from the other participants. Mr Tim Barnett MP (New Zealand) pointed out that currently, with the absence of coordination between implementing organisations and the adhoc nature of much of the work, there is considerable duplication and overlap in the area of parliamentary assistance. He called for greater coordination of the training and mentoring programs in the Pacific region. Hon. Terry Coe (Niue) suggested that the CPA conduct an audit of all Pacific Parliaments and then establish an agreed common standard on the provision of support to MPs for all Parliaments. Senator Marise Payne noted that the discussion was focusing more on the possibility of setting up a regional secretariat for Pacific parliaments. Hon. TOLOFUAIVALELEI Falemoe Leiataua (Samoa) suggested it may be more appropriate if the Pacific Island Forum Presiding Officers and Clerks Conference considered such a proposal and made a recommendation on the matter.

The Legislative Assembly of Samoa

The next session of the day, chaired by the Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Samoa, Hon. LAAULI Leuatea Polataivao MP, focused on the political system of Samoa and the practice and procedure of the Legislative Assembly. The Hon. A’EAU Peniamina Leavaiseeta MP, former Speaker of the Assembly, provided an overview of how Samoan customs have been incorporated into parliamentary practice. He was followed by the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, Dr Fetuao Toia Alama, who elaborated on some of the issues raised by the Hon. A’EAU as well as describing the electoral process and other procedures used by the Samoan Parliament.

What Next?

The final session of the third day, and of the Dialogue, chaired by the Hon. TOLOFUAIVALELEI Falemoe Leiataua (Samoa), had the theme of bringing it all together. Participants were asked to divide into smaller groups and consider the lessons learnt during the Dialogue, the ideas shared, on how to advance the political
representation of women and find the right balance as representatives and national leaders as well as areas for future assistance programs for Pacific parliaments. The five groups reported their views as follows:

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<th>Group One</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lessons learnt</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Take note of the diversity of Pacific parliaments; Draw lessons from countries which will suit own situation</td>
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<th>Group Two</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lessons learnt</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dialogue assists MPs and should continue; Constituency relations discussions very useful; Assist MPs identify constituency needs &amp; equitable sharing of resources.</td>
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<th>Group Three</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lessons learnt</strong></td>
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<td>Legislatures need to encourage greater transparency &amp; ethical behaviour by legislating against poor governance practices.</td>
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<th>Group Four</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lessons learnt</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>More detailed discussions needed on these issues - eg. increasing the representation of women in parliament; Note good examples of democracy &amp; that no country should boast of being a best model for democracy as all are working towards the same goal of best democratic practice. All should attend in</td>
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humility and not boast that their system of governance is more advanced.

Group Five

<table>
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<th>Lessons learnt</th>
<th>Role of women</th>
<th>Future assistance</th>
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<tr>
<td>National concerns should always be the first priority for MPs; Developing stronger political party systems will assist in changing the primary focus of elected representatives from constituency matters to a greater emphasis on their roles as legislators and scrutinisers of the executive.</td>
<td>Appropriate to adopt quotas/reserved seats for countries with cultures which hinder greater representation by women - eg. reserved seats in Bougainville - but such special arrangements for women, if successful, should be gradually phased out.</td>
<td>Strongly support ongoing parliamentary assistance programs; A centralized system for research &amp; information sharing, readily accessible by all Pacific parliamentarians is recommended; Questions - who would fund this, what would be the right mechanism (eg. use existing Pacific Parliamentary libraries).</td>
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Conclusion

Despite the serious departure from democratic processes that occurred in Fiji and the violent interruptions to the democratic way in Solomon Islands and Tonga in 2006, participants were steadfast in their commitment to maintaining and enhancing parliamentary democracy in the region. The Samoan participants pointed to the crucial role played by tradition in maintaining the stability of their political system, a theme taken up by many of the other delegations.

Participants acknowledged that the democratic systems in the Pacific region are very young and that, despite a tendency to take these for granted, the political systems in Australia and New Zealand have also taken considerable time to develop. As noted in 2005:

> what is crucial to recognise is that political governance in both Westminster and ‘traditional’ systems is an ongoing process with no end. Despite the prevalence of money politics, the pull of region, ethnicity and family, and the intense localisation of issues, public leadership demands an eye for the national interest.4

All agreed that there is an ongoing need for Pacific parliamentarians to share experiences and ideas on best parliamentary practice and on the role of an organisation such as CDI in facilitating this. The Dialogue provides an important means for this to occur. However, as noted in 2005, ensuring the effectiveness of the Dialogue beyond the actual conference remains the key challenge for CDI. A more formal network arising from the Dialogue is one possibility, although the uncertainties of politics and electoral outcomes in Pacific Island countries means that maintaining such a network beyond the initial post-conference glow would be challenging. Nonetheless, many CDI alumni continue to be involved in CDI activities, including the Dialogue. Paul Tovua, for example, previously attended the 6th Retreat in 2004 in

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Wellington, New Zealand. Mr Tovua drew on his extensive experience and knowledge as a former Speaker of Parliament to provide valuable insight into discussions held during the 8th Dialogue. Others, such as Ham Lini who attended the 4th Retreat in 2002 in Brisbane as a member of the Vanuatu delegation and has since become Prime Minister of Vanuatu, have gone onto successful political careers.

All participants expressed great enthusiasm for the Dialogue and the themes chosen for 2006. Evaluation feedback from the participants has been overwhelmingly positive. It was unanimously agreed that the Dialogue should continue and become a permanent fixture as an annual regional gathering of Pacific parliamentarians. It was also agreed that those countries not invited to attend in 2006 – Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of Marshall Islands – should be invited in 2007. It was also suggested by some participants that consideration be given to inviting parliamentarians from the French and US territories – New Caledonia, French Polynesia and American Samoa – to future Dialogues. Participants were invited to suggest host countries and parliaments for 2007. All agreed that holding the Dialogue in a Pacific Island country was preferable. Four options for 2007 were proposed for consideration by CDI – Niue, Cook Islands, Tuvalu or Kiribati.

The 8th Dialogue would not have been successful without the cooperation of the Legislative Assembly of Samoa. CDI expresses its appreciation to the Speaker of the Assembly, Hon. TOLOFUAIVALELEI Falemoe Leiataua MP, the Clerk, Dr Fetuao Toia Alama, and her staff for their generous assistance, advice and excellent preparations. CDI also acknowledges the assistance and support of the Australian High Commission in Samoa, the Clerk of the House of Representatives, Parliament of Australia, Mr Ian Harris, AusAid, NZAid, the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the United Nations Development Programme in Suva and Aggie Grey’s Resort in Samoa. CDI hopes that the Dialogue has better equipped participants and further encouraged them in the long process of building better and stronger systems of democratic government across the region.

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5 Nine Members of the Congrès de la Nouvelle-Calédonie in all have attended the first four Retreats from 1999 to 2002.