BOUGAINVILLE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

REPORT ON THE ASPG CONFERENCE AND VISITS TO AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENTS – AUGUST 2007

BOUGAINVILLE’S INTEREST

- To observe the conduct of the ASPG and use the Conference as a learning opportunity since Bougainville attended the Conference for the first time
- Visit the Australian Parliaments and compare the parliamentary practices in a bi-cameral parliament with the unicameral system being practiced in the New Zealand Parliament. The Bougainville House of Representatives is a single chamber legislature
- Meet the profession staff in the Australian Parliament and practically see how they perform their roles and responsibilities in supporting the Office of the Speaker and Members of the Parliament in their constituencies and while attending sittings of the House and participating in Parliamentary Committee work.

AUSTRALASIAN STUDY OF PARLIAMENT GROUP CONFERENCE (ASPG) 23RD TO 25TH AUGUST 2007

Bougainville’s attendance was acknowledged and is on record as its first time to attend the Conference. It was a unique experience for us to discover the purpose of the Conference and the kind of audiences and participants it draws together.

Being a small and newest Parliament in the Pacific Region, Bougainville’s attendance provided an opportunity to:-

- Be introduced as a post conflict parliament that is keen to uphold parliamentary democracy in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville and Papua New Guinea
- Observe the entire days’ program involving Parliamentarians, former Members of Parliament and chairman of Parliamentary Committees, Academic and students who presented papers on various subject matters relating to Parliament and Government
- Receive copies of papers and documents discussed by participants in the Conference

Lesson Learnt

The ASPG annual conference exposes existing parliamentary practices, concerns and problems experienced by parliament in member countries, and highlights ways in improving such practices and suggests options for improvement based on experiences and outcome of academic researches.
The Annual Conference places the parliament on the screen and invites Members, former Members and academics to critically look at parliamentary issues and provide views accordingly.

Bougainville is also able to improve and be transparent about what it is establishing by inviting interested people to look at what has happened since the ABG Inauguration in June 2005 and critically look at what has been done so far and provide options for improvement.

Visit to Australian Parliaments

a) Adelaide, South Australia (prior to the ASPG Conference 21st – 22 August)
b) Australian Federal Parliament (28-30th August)
c) Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly ACT (31st August 2008)

Visit to the Adelaide House of Representatives, the Federal Australian Parliament, and ACT also provided a good opportunity for Bougainville to look at the performance of the staff and systems and practices that have been put in place.

The fact is that the Australian Parliaments have a long history and their existing parliamentary practices have been developed over a long period of time compared with our two years short experience on parliamentary matters and practices.

I was able to confirm the following:-

- The parliamentary practices and structures are common but vary in some areas as far as procedural matters are concerned.
- A lot have been documented about the Australian Parliaments. This is an ongoing task which uses a lot of resources and demands expertise
- Parliaments in Australia are so advanced and well resourced. This reflects the modern parliaments which strongly protects and upholds the principles of parliamentary democracy, good governance and government accountability.
- The support given to the Members and how members attend to their constituency responsibilities.

Relating what was learnt during the ASPG Conference and visits to the South Australia Parliament, the Australian Federal Parliament and the Australia Capital Territory Assembly to what has been done so far in setting up the Bougainville House of Representatives has added value and raised confidence in moving forward with our main objective which is to fully establish a legislature that is able to perform its constitutional responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

I wish to thank the Centre for Democratic Institutions for facilitating our attendance and which has made it possible to meet very helpful staff and parliamentarians who have demonstrated their willingness to assist Bougainville and the Solomon Island with their endeavours to build and strengthen their respective parliaments.
What we have seen and learnt from the ASPG Conference and visits to the Parliaments will go a long way in our effort to put together resources required to assist the staff and members perform their responsibilities in the Bougainville House of Representatives.

All the materials collected have been used as reference materials and have been added onto our library collections.

I have a lot confidence in what I do because of the questions and answers exercise which was part of our visits to the staff and members of the Australian Parliaments.

Special words of thank you to the Clerks of the South Australian Parliament, the Australian Federal Parliament, and the ACT for a successful tour of their parliaments.

The Centre for Democratic Institutions involvement in the infant stages of establishing the Bougainville House of Representatives is very timely and I truly admire and acknowledge the efficient and effective support that were rendered to us during that period of engagement in Australia.

I know that the next ASPG Conference to be staged in Brisbane this year will provide another opportunity to discover and learnt more about the parliament in today’s modern society.

Robert Tapi
Clerk