The Centre for Democratic Institutions’ Political Party Development (PPD) course was conducted from 12 to 23 May in Canberra. This was the third running of the course, following on from courses in October 2006 and May 2007. The two-week course is based at the Crawford School of Economics and Government at the Australian National University, and is presented by Norm Kelly.

The PPD course is designed to provide senior political party officials from the Southeast Asia – South Pacific region with the skills to strengthen their parties and party systems, with the objectives being improved governance and more stable democracies. The intention of the course is to provide participants with:

- Information on the Australian political system, with insights into how Australian political parties administer and organise themselves;
- An understanding of party theory and the factors that influence the development of party systems;
- A better understanding of parties and party systems in the region;
- Opportunities to develop contacts and networks with other parties in their own countries and throughout the region; and
- Development of links with Australian parties and institutions.

This course was again well supported by Australia’s main political parties, with requests for site visits and guest presenters positively received.

Course Participants

Nineteen senior party officials from five countries attended the course, being from:

- Indonesia (nine),
- East Timor (two),
- Papua New Guinea (four),
- Solomon Islands (two), and
- Vanuatu (two).
All participants hold senior positions in their respective parties. Two participants are current Members of Parliament (from Indonesia and Vanuatu).

There continues to be significant interest from the target countries to participate. Participants were required to be fluent in written and spoken English, and this was generally the case, with only one or two participants having difficulties in understanding presenters or in making themselves understood.

CDI is keen to encourage women’s participation in regional politics, and this year saw five women participating – a higher number than previous years. The course included specific sessions on women in politics, with a focus on how Australia’s main parties encourage women’s involvement in administrative and campaign aspects of party work.

**Structure**

The PPD course is composed of lectures and guest speakers, visits to Australian political institutions, and participant presentations. In addition, two social events are held – a welcoming event where participants met Australian government and party officials, ANU academics, and their countries’ embassy and high commission staff. At the end of the course, a dinner is held, with presentations to each of the participants.

As part of the course, the participants were required to give two presentations – a short introductory talk on their party and its place in their country’s political system; and, at the end of the second week, a longer talk on one of six topics. These topics were – Internal Party Democracy; Recruiting and Maintaining Members; Party Law; A Voice for Women; Party Financing – Fundraising; and Campaigning.

The standard of these presentations was high. These presentations were valuable for the group to recap on what they had learnt during the course, and to provide a better understanding of regional differences in these topic areas.

The course covered the following topics:

| Functions of Political Parties | Membership |
| Party Systems & Democratic Development | Policy |
| Australian Political Parties | Campaigns |
| Electoral Systems | Pre-selections |
| Parliamentary Wing | Finances |
| Women in Politics | Media |
| Regulation of Parties | Coalitions |

These topics were covered by a mix of lectures and institutional visits. Sessions with guest presenters included time for discussion/Q&A.

**Presentations from Institutions**

The following institutions made presentations to the group:
Party secretariats – Liberal Party, Labor Party, Australian Greens. These presentations included information on administrative structure, campaign strategies, and the participation of women.

Australian Electoral Commission – Shawn O’Brien, Sue Sayer, and Alan Page provided information on the administration of Australian elections, with a particular emphasis on party registration, and funding and disclosure regimes.

ACT Legislative Assembly – a visit to the Assembly included presentations from the Clerk of the Assembly, Tom Duncan, and the Speaker, Wayne Berry.

Australian Parliament House – two visits were made, meeting with Members and Senators (covered below) and the Clerk of the House of Representatives, Ian Harris.

Australian Party Involvement

The success of the course relies on the active involvement and support of the main Australian political parties, and this was forthcoming when requested, both from the administrative and parliamentary wings of the parties. Special acknowledgement and thanks go to Michael Morgan (Labor), Bruce Edwards (Liberal), and Lesa de Leau (Greens) for assisting this level of access and involvement. Unfortunately, it was not possible to have input from the Nationals, with a planned talk from Kay Hull MP, the Nationals’ party whip, being cancelled due to parliamentary divisions being called during the Budget sitting week.

At the parliamentary level, the willingness of parliamentarians to meet with the group, especially during the Budget week, was very much appreciated. The group met with the following Federal Members and Senators:

Labor: Bob McMullan MP, Anna Burke MP, and Senator Kate Lundy.

Liberal: Senator Marise Payne.

Greens: Senator Rachel Siewert.

The sessions with these representatives were very useful for understanding the relationships between the parliamentary and lay wings of parties, as well as the group getting an appreciation of the government’s and opposition’s views on regional issues.

The experience and expertise of party officials added much value to the course. Of particular importance were the presentations from:

Tony Eggleton – on the role of a major party secretary,
Michael Morgan – ALP international development and campaigning,
Bruce Edwards – Liberal party structure and policy development,
Linda Reynolds, Liberal Deputy Federal Director – campaigning,
Natalie Colbert – women in the Liberal party,
Matthew Cossey – Labor branch level structure fundraising and campaigning, and
Graeme Dobell – an ABC journalist with more than 20 years experience covering regional politics, gave a presentation on the role of the media in covering politics, with particular reference to states in conflict.
CDI lectures were conducted by Norm Kelly, on the Australian party and electoral systems, and campaigning principles; and CDI Director, Professor Ben Reilly, on the functions of political parties.

Conclusion

This third running of the PPD course has built on the first two courses. Minor adjustments to the course structure continue to improve content. There was a high level of camaraderie and rapport within the group, and a development of contacts intra- and inter-nationally across the region.

Administratively there were no significant issues. One accepted participant withdrew a couple of weeks prior to the course beginning, but otherwise all participants arrived in Canberra on time. Another participant had to fly home two days before the end of the course due to personal reasons.

Administrative support was excellent, and lecture room facilities were adequate. The course programme worked well, resulting in a useful mix of presentation and participation. The two week model remains a preferred format, both for conducting the course, and for attracting preferred participants.

Many participants used the opportunity of visiting Canberra to further their links with Australian parties and organisations, as well as interacting with their diplomatic and expatriate communities. All participants exhibited a genuine desire to learn, and to put that learning into practice on their return to their respective countries. Due to the overall political party development programme, CDI is establishing very strong links with parties in the region, which is beneficial for identifying suitable applicants for future PPD courses, and other potential in-country CDI activities.

The enthusiastic support and involvement of the Australian political parties and their parliamentarians was critical to the success of the course, and CDI acknowledges the willingness of the parties to support and actively participate in the various sessions. The PPD sessions also help Australian parties to gain a better understanding of some of the issues and challenges that confront political parties throughout the region.

Three Years of PPD

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