1st June 2005

MEDIA STATEMENT

AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSIONER EMPHASISES IMPORTANCE OF POLITICAL GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN SI.

The Australian High Commissioner, Mr Patrick Cole has emphasised the importance of political governance, leadership and accountability in Solomon Islands.

Speaking at the opening of the three-day workshop on Political Governance: Leadership and Accountability for Members of Parliament and provincial premiers in Honiara today, Mr Cole said political governance, leadership and accountability are linked tightly together.

“These three notions are intrinsically linked tightly together: we can have no governance without leadership, no leadership without accountability and no effective accountability without governance structures to back it up,” Mr Cole said.

He said the workshop will not be promoting big changes or dramatic innovation, “but rather provide a basis for reminding us of the inbuilt strengths of the Solomon Islands system and constitution.

“The state of the law and regulations here is fundamentally sound, its just that perhaps we have forgotten them and put them to one side. The challenge is to remind ourselves of the value and purpose of the institutions and regulations which we have.”

Mr Cole explained that over the past five years, “we realized all too clearly what we had lost when it was too late.”

“If we are not equally careful about maintaining the pillars of our democratic home, we risk the roof falling in and losing our comfort and protection, as the time of the tension reminded us.”

Mr Cole also pointed out that the country needed to resource its institutions properly.

“But we need to see the organs of accountability and the accountability mechanisms built into public life as aids to leadership. They are in a sense the road-signs along our paths which keep us safe as leaders, help us avoid danger and to navigate wisely, reminding us of the limits of safety.”

Mr Cole said it is not a matter of getting a lot of information but developing habits “that will make us stronger, better, more effective and more accountable leaders.”
“Particularly in the run-up to national elections in Solomon Islands, voters are looking for candidates and MPs with track records of integrity and honesty and hard work, leaders they can admire and trust to lead the nation forward. They want to see institutions also which they can trust,” he said.

The Australian High Commissioner said: “There are plenty of stories of untrustworthiness and refusal to account for actions out there in the communities of Solomon Islands, and considerable anger at that.”

But on the plus side Mr Cole said: “I have been struck by the amount of thinking and talking about leadership out in the rural communities of Solomon Islands.”

Mr Cole reminded the MPs and provincial premiers that “being truly accountable also means applying the spirit of honesty and accountability, and not just abiding by the very minimum required by the letter of the law and regulations.”

“It should be a matter of the heart as well as of outward observance, reflecting the spirit of leadership by service, and honesty, on which Solomon Islands is founded.”

The workshop is organized by the Office of the Ombudsman of Solomon Islands, the Centre for Democratic Institutions of the Australian National University and the United Nations Development Program Parliamentary Strengthening Project.

The workshop is expected to deal with issues and processes of leadership, accountability, transparency and parliamentary oversight within the context of constructive national and provincial relations.

ENDS.

Johnson Honimae
Executive Director.