The Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI) conducted a workshop for Members and staff of the National Parliament of Timor-Leste at Parliament House in Dili on 6th and 7th March 2008. Held in conjunction with the International Republican Institute (IRI), the workshop focused on the role of parliamentary committees with an emphasis on engaging the community through committee work. This workshop followed on from the successful workshop on holding public hearings for Committee A of the Timorese Parliament that CDI and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) ran in November 2007.¹

The workshop was held at the request of the President of the National Parliament of Timor-Leste, Mr Fernando Lasama de Araujo. The idea for the Workshop came from discussions between CDI Deputy Director, Mr Quinton Clements, the President of Parliament, his senior officers and Committee Chairs on future strengthening activities for the second National Parliament that CDI could facilitate. One aspect of these discussions was both the President's strong interest and that of Committee Chairs in assisting the newly appointed Chairs with training on working with Parliamentary Committees. Mr Clements described the previous CDI workshops on Parliamentary Committees for the Bougainville House of Representatives and the National Parliament of Papua New Guinea in 2007. The President and Committee Chairs believed that type of specialized training for both Members and staff would be valuable.

This was the fourth in an ongoing series of in-country training workshops for Members and staff of national and sub-national legislatures that CDI has been conducting.² The successful formula involves:

- addressing a specific capacity building need – in this case, committee work;
- tailoring the program to specific local circumstances;
- using a combination of Australian, New Zealand and Pacific Islands parliamentarians/parliamentary officers as presenters; and
- developing a highly interactive program focused on practical outcomes.

¹ Committee A (Committee on Constitutional Affairs, Justice, Public Administration, Local Government & Government Legislation). The workshop was held in Dili on 15-16 November 2007.
² Previous workshops on the work of parliamentary committees were conducted for the Autonomous Region of Bougainville House of Representatives, Buka, 28-29 June 2007; National Parliament of Papua New Guinea, Port Moresby, 9-10 November 2007; and Committee A, National Parliament of Timor-Leste, Dili, 15-16 November 2007.
The reason both CDI and the parliaments it assists have chosen to focus on developing their committee systems is that like parliaments all over the world they have realised that a strong and effective committee system is one of the best means through which they can play meaningful roles in the governance of their countries. The aim of this workshop, therefore, was to assist the National Parliament with ensuring that its parliamentary committees can perform their proper roles. Members gained a greater appreciation of the value of parliamentary committees:

- as a means of ‘taking Parliament to the people’, thus enabling them to be better informed about community views;
- of providing a bridge between their constituents’ concerns and the broader community interest;
- of promoting public debate; and
- of scrutinising the Executive and contributing towards better government through a more informed administration and policy making process.

**Workshop Participants**

CDI Deputy Director, Quinton Clements, convened the workshop, together with:

- Mr Tim Barnett - MP for Christchurch Central and Chief Government Whip, Parliament of New Zealand;
- Mr David Kusilifu – Committee Secretariat, National Parliament of Solomon Islands; and
- Mr Repe Rambe – Committee Secretary, Public Accounts Committee, National Parliament of Papua New Guinea.

Mr Chris Wyrod and Mr Karlito Nunes of IRI provided the on-the-ground logistical support.

45 of the 65 Members of Parliament participated in the two day workshop with good representation from both government and opposition parties. The media were invited to attend the first day.

**Background**

The Timor-Leste Parliament has two types of parliamentary committees – standing committees and ad hoc committees – provided for in the Rules of Procedure of the Parliament. Standing committees are established for the life of the Parliament. The role of the standing committees is to examine and advise the Plenary on draft legislation, amendments and treaties, consider petitions, and undertake inquiries. There are currently nine standing committees. These are:

- Committee A – Constitutional Affairs, Justice, Public Administration, Local Government & Government Legislation
- Committee B – Foreign Affairs, Defence & National Security
- Committee C – Economy, Finance & Anti-Corruption
- Committee D – Agriculture, Fisheries, Forests, Natural Resources & Environment
- Committee E – Elimination of Poverty, Rural & Regional Development & Gender Equality
- Committee F – Health, Education & Culture
- Committee G – Infrastructure & Social Equipment
- Committee H – Youth, Sports, Labour & Professional Training
- Committee I – Internal Regulations, Ethics & Mandate of Deputies
Ad Hoc committees are established to perform a specific task and once the task is completed, the committee is dissolved.

Under the Rules of Procedure, Committees meet every Wednesday and Thursday when Parliament is in session. This has posed some constraints to the current Parliament, since MPs from smaller parties belong to more than one Standing Committee and therefore are not able to attend all meetings at the same time. This has implications for achieving quorum at meetings.

The Workshop
The workshop program was based on sharing the experiences of other parliaments in the region, specifically those of Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, with the East Timorese parliamentarians. The first day was devoted to presentations on the Australian, New Zealand and Pacific Islands experience of working with parliamentary committees followed by question and answer sessions. The parliamentarians then broke up into small groups to consider three themes – what makes effective committee membership, are the current operational processes for the Timorese parliamentary committees best serving the needs of those committees, and procedural issues such as the powers of committees and protecting witnesses.

The Vice President of the National Parliament, Mr Vicente da Silva Guterres, officially opened the workshop. He outlined the reasons why the Workshop was being held, and the benefits to individual Members and to the Parliament he expected from it. Mr Clements then spoke about the role of CDI, introduced the members of the team and outlined the program. All of the Members present were then asked to introduce themselves.

Mr Barnett then gave a presentation on the business of Parliament from a New Zealand perspective. He started by outlining his own experience as a politician. He then proceeded to identify the key eternal outcomes of a Parliament, the key current trends in the NZ parliamentary process and the factors that prevent high quality parliamentary democracy being delivered. Mr Barnett’s presentation was followed by the screening of a short video provided by the Australian Parliament – “Committees in the Community”.

Mr Kusilifu introduced the next session on the elements that underlie effective committees. He began by describing the role committees can play and the challenges they will face in trying to do so. He then outlined several key points about the parliamentary committee system in Solomon Islands. He explained how committees can be informed and productive, be heard and seen, give the public the confidence to have their say, debate well and reach consensus and be high-profile and integrated with the House.

Mr Rambe spoke of the experience with committees in the PNG National Parliament, in particular how the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has become more active in recent years. He described the work undertaken to strengthen the Public Accounts Committee, the achievements so far and the challenges they currently face.

It was clear that these sessions focusing on the parliaments and committee systems of Solomon Islands and PNG particularly impressed the East Timorese participants. They provided a concrete, regional example of what was possible and practical in strengthening Parliament and its committees. The presentations by Mr Kusilifu and Mr Rambe provoked numerous questions and considerable discussion.
The next session involved the participants breaking into smaller groups to consider the potential contributions of committees to the work of the Parliament and the obstacles committees face in their work. In the general discussion that followed, participants shared a range of ideas on the value of parliamentary committees and how to make their committees work effectively including:

- The need for appropriate funding and resources;
- The need for well trained staff;
- A greater commitment from all Members; and
- The need to develop effective procedures for all committees.

The final session of Day One involved all the presenters describing good practice in a range of areas of committee work. The presenters noted the importance of bipartisanship and consensus in committee work, the role of the Committee Chair, holding manageable inquiries, using external assistance for inquiries, properly preparing for hearings, and producing evidence based reports.

The day two sessions were focused on taking the Timorese parliamentarians through a typical inquiry process – establishing an inquiry, planning, collecting written and oral evidence, and reporting back to the Plenary. Each session involved a practical exercise including the holding of a mock public hearing using a script prepared by the Legislative Council of New South Wales. Participants were shown examples of good committee practice including television footage of public hearings as part of the Solomon Islands Public Accounts Committee’s inquiry into the 2007 budget appropriations. Mr Clements also discussed the issue of witness protection, using the example of the David Kelly Affair in the UK to illustrate how committees can potentially affect the lives of witnesses.

Conclusion

CDI worked closely with the IRI Dili office in preparing for the workshop. IRI in effect represented CDI on the ground in Dili and liaised closely with the Director of the Parliament Secretariat, Mr Joao Rui Amaral, and the Chief of Staff to the President of Parliament, Mr Marcelino Magno, on CDI’s behalf.

There were a number of challenges CDI faced in organising and conducting this particular workshop. Firstly, unlike Pacific region parliaments which are modelled on the Westminster system, the East Timorese Parliament has a different structure, procedures and political culture. Accordingly, in designing the workshop, CDI had to tailor the program to these local circumstances. Mr Clements had to ensure the presenters were aware of the different context in which the audience they were working with operated. Secondly, the workshop had to be conducted in the local language, Tetum. All presentations and handouts were translated into Tetum and simultaneous translation into Tetum was provided for all sessions.

One of the lessons learnt from this workshop is that the scenarios for practical exercises should be drawn from local examples. Unfortunately, the participants had difficulty using the script from the Legislative Council of NSW for the public hearing role play exercise. Although it had been translated into Tetum, the scenario involving an inquiry into the Cross-City Tunnel in Sydney and the procedural issues it raised were not well suited to the East Timorese situation. Nonetheless, it did provide one example of how committees in another jurisdiction operate.
The other challenge CDI faced was the lack of cooperation from the major parliamentary strengthening organisation present in Dili, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The UNDP have a Parliamentary Support Project located at the National Parliament, funded in large part by AusAid. Mr Clements had discussed the possibility of a joint CDI-UNDP committees training workshop with the UNDP Project Manager, Ms Marcia Monge, in 2007. Early in 2008, Ms Monge informed Mr Clements that the UNDP Project would be unable to partner CDI in the planned workshop but welcomed CDI’s initiative and offered to assist where possible. However, upon arrival in Dili CDI learnt that all UNDP Project staff had been instructed not to cooperate with or assist either CDI or the Parliament Secretariat with this workshop. Although Mr Clements subsequently met with Ms Monge to discuss CDI-UNDP collaboration on this and future activities, it was most unfortunate that the UNDP chose to adopt that position on this occasion.

Notwithstanding these challenges, the workshop was extremely well received by the parliamentarians and staff. Feedback from participants was that the workshop addressed the many operational and procedural issues they were grappling with. There were many achievements including encouraging all the Timorese parliamentarians to sit together outside of their party groupings for the first time to discuss the issues and problems confronting their parliament. Having Mr Kusilifu and Mr Rambe involved in the workshop proved invaluable as there is considerable interest on the part of the East Timorese parliamentarians in the way the Papua New Guinean and Solomon Islands parliaments work.

Once again, CDI used a highly interactive program very much based on the input of the Timorese Parliament as to the issues Members wanted addressed. Each of the presenters used an inclusive approach in getting their messages across and engaging with the audience. As a result, the sessions generated lively discussion and numerous questions from participants. All participants exhibited a genuine desire to learn about committee practice and procedure and gain a better understanding of how to make the East Timorese parliamentary committees function more effectively.

The participants expressed great enthusiasm for the workshop and the approach taken. Feedback from the participants has been overwhelmingly positive. It was evident that the Members could see the benefits of committee work and would implement many of the lessons learnt in their own committees.

At the conclusion of Day Two, the Vice-President of Parliament, Mr Vicente da Silva Gutierrez, expressed his gratitude to CDI for organizing and conducting the Workshop. He thanked CDI for putting together a professional team of facilitators with many years of parliamentary experience.

This was the second CDI activity in Dili for the National Parliament. The successful delivery of this program will greatly assist in future CDI Timor-Leste focused activities.

Acknowledgements
The workshop would not have been successful without the active involvement and support of the Members of the Timor-Leste Parliament, the Parliament Secretariat and the office of the President of Parliament. CDI extends its deepest appreciation to the President of Parliament, Mr Fernando Lasama de Araujo, the Director of the Parliament Secretariat, Mr Joao Rui Amaral, the Chief of Staff to the President of Parliament, Mr Marcelino Magno, and their staff for their generous assistance, advice and hospitality.
CDI is especially grateful for the enthusiastic participation of the Members of Parliament. CDI also acknowledges the kind assistance and support of the Parliaments of Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and New Zealand. A special note of appreciation goes to Mr Chris Wyrod and Mr Karlito Nunes of IRI and their staff for managing all the logistical arrangements.

CDI greatly appreciates the involvement of the presenters – Mr Barnett, Mr Rambe and Mr Kusilifu - in the workshop. Without their genuine interest, enthusiasm, patience, extraordinary skill as facilitators and presenters and deep knowledge of parliaments, the workshop would not have been the success it clearly was.