MPs attend parliamentary governance forum

Members of parliament, their political advisers, NGOs and chiefs participated in the Stable and Effective Parliamentar Governance Forum held at Parliament House, and planned to issue a unanimous communique encouraging all ni-Vanuatu to support stable parliamentary governance in Vanuatu.

Organized and initiated by the Speaker of Parliament, Sam Dan Avok, and the Clerk of Parliament, Lynu Rikelikul Raskiak, and supported by the Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI) at the Australian National University, the workshop brought together some 30 members of parliament, including many new members, with representatives of Vanuatu's civil society organizations, including chiefs, churches and NGOs.

On Friday participants worked on a communiqué following extensive discussion on the effects of changes of government changes, floor-crossings and party splits on parliamentary functioning.

It was recognized that the costs of these were eventual-

ly borne by the Vanuatu people.

The two-day workshop included technical briefings for MPs on the rules and functions of the parliament and its officers.

Presentations during the forum covered the duties of the Offices of the Clerk and the Speaker, principles of the Westminster system (Deputy Director of CDI, Dr Michael Morgan), the committee system (Simon Pentaneu, former Clerk of the PNG Parliament), the role of the presiding officer (Margaret Reid, the former President of the Australian Senate), and on legal drafting practices (Angeline Seal from the State Law Office). The Speaker of Parliament and the Clerk of Parliament stated their desire to hold induction programs for MPs for all future parliaments.

CDI receives core funding from the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) for their work promoting democracy around the Asia-Pacific region.

Women still long way to close gap in parliament

By Rosanna Wilke

One of the areas that the government needs to consider seriously is to look at establishing a central data base system for the country.

The Director General to the Prime Minister's Office, Jean Sese, said this is one area that the country lacks.

He said while the National Statistics Office has some of these data, it would be best if a central database is set up to hold every data for all sectors.

Sese said this would improve and ensure a consistent system of monitoring development progress of the country in relation to the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). As Chairmain of the MDG Committee, Sese said the final country report will be submitted sometimes this year or early next year.

Meanwhile, performance indicators show that while Vanuatu has achieved much of the targets set out under the eight goals of the MDG, there are areas that the country still needs to improve on.

One particular area is that of promoting gender equality and empowering women.

The target for this goal is to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and to all levels of education no later than 2015.

The ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary for 1999 had shown that this has improved beyond 90 percent.

The ratio of literate females to males of 15-24 year-olds in 1999 was 99 per cent.

Meanwhile the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector in 1995 was at 50 percent.

However, one area that the country has another 10 years to work on is to improve seats held by women in the national parliament to reach the 50 percent mark.

In 2003 only 2 percent of the seats were held in parliament by women.

Vanuatu to benefit from increased NZ aid

New Zealand's spending on overseas aid is expanding by 21 per cent, the largest increase in recent decades.

"Poverty is one of the greatest challenges facing the world and New Zealanders tell us it is important that we do our share to help," says Associate Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Marita Hobbs. "Reflecting this, the aid budget is increasing by $59.4 million in 2005-06."

The increase will take New Zealand's spending on official development assistance to an estimated total of $333 million in 2005-06, representing 0.27 per cent of gross national income (GNI). The government will increase the aid budget in 2006-07 to maintain spending at 0.27 per cent of GNI and again in 2007-08 to increase it 0.28 per cent.

"Last month the OECD reported that New Zealand's refocusing of aid delivery has paid off," Marian Hobbs said. "NZ Aid, our international aid development agency, is now acknowledged as leading global good practice in areas like trade and development and with programmes designed to make a significant impact on reducing poverty."

However, the OECD did recommend that the government consider ways to further increase overseas aid.

"Today's funding increase of $33.87 million for aid to the Pacific will expand significant programmes with Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Fiji," Pacific programmes targeting governance and leadership, economic growth and livelihoods, and education and health will also get more support.

Bilateral programmes with Indonesia and Vietnam will be strengthened significantly, reflecting our increasing partnership with Asia in trade, security and travel."

"This year we have been reminded of the importance of being able to respond quickly and effectively to natural disasters. The budget provides an extra $15 million for disaster and emergency relief over the coming three years."

"New Zealand also has a long history of working closely with key multilateral partners, such as the UN's Population Fund and UNICEF. We will double our funding to these partners with an increase of $23.8 million over three years."

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