The Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI) conducted a workshop for Members and staff of the National Parliament of Papua New Guinea at Parliament House in Port Moresby on 9th and 10th November 2007. The workshop was held at the request of the Speaker of Parliament, Hon. Jeffrey Nape MP. The idea for the Workshop came from discussions between CDI Deputy Director, Mr Quinton Clements, the Speaker and the Clerk of Parliament, Mr Don Pandan and his senior officers on future strengthening activities for the National Parliament following the successful induction program for Members of Parliament in August 2007. CDI was instrumental in assisting the Papua New Guinea Parliamentary Service design and deliver the induction program. One aspect of these discussions was the Speaker’s strong interest in assisting the newly appointed Committee Chairs with training on the working with Parliamentary Committees. Mr Clements described the successful Parliamentary Committees Workshop that CDI had conducted for the Autonomous Region of Bougainville House of Representatives in June 2007. The outcome was that CDI would provide specialized training for both Members and staff of the Parliamentary Service on the role of committees.

The aim of the workshop 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

Mr Peter Loney, former Chairman, Public Accounts Committee, Legislative Assembly of Victoria, was the convenor for the workshop. The other facilitators and presenters were:

- Ms Metiria Turei MP - List Member, Green Party, Parliament of New Zealand;
- Hon. Nick Peniai – Speaker, Autonomous Region of Bougainville House of Representatives;
- Mr Floyd Augustine Fatai – Auditor-General & Secretary, Public Accounts Committee, National Parliament of Solomon Islands;
- Mr David Kusilifu – Committee Secretariat, National Parliament of Solomon Islands; and
Mr Quinton Clements – Deputy Director, CDI;

31 Members of Parliament attended the two day workshop together with a large number of parliamentary and Members’ personal staff. The media were invited to attend the first day.

**Background**

Sections 118-123 of the Papua New Guinea Constitution provide for permanent parliamentary committees. In the mid 1990s this constitutional provision was further consolidated with the introduction of the *Permanent Parliamentary Committees Act 1994*. Part 24 of the Standing Orders provides for the establishment of select committees.

Permanent Parliamentary Committees are appointed by Parliament at the beginning of each parliamentary term or at such times as it decides. The membership is drawn from among Government and Opposition backbenchers. Ministers cannot be appointed to committees. These Committees are divided into two categories - standing or permanent committees and ad-hoc or select committees.

Standing or permanent committees are appointed for an indefinite period of time. Once the Parliament has made the decision to establish such a committee, and where the committee is deemed to have an important role to play in the affairs of the parliament (and the nation), that committee continues unless Parliament decides otherwise. The roles and responsibilities of parliamentary referral committees correspond to the activities of the government departments and related activities.

Ad-hoc or select committees are appointed by the Parliament to undertake very specific task(s) over a specific period of time. The Committee is dissolved once it has completed its given tasks and has presented its report to Parliament.

There are currently 34 Committees of the National Parliament:

- Permanent Parliamentary Committees 17
- Parliamentary Referral Committees 14
- Special Parliamentary Committees 3

**Total:** 34

The committee system has been ineffective for some years with a lack of financial resources identified as the key reason. However, corruption and mismanagement of existing resources, the proliferation in the number of committees, many of which duplicate the work of other committees, the lack of understanding of the role of committees by Members, and the absence of dedicated, qualified and experienced committee secretariat staff are more salient reasons. Most committee members have little or no understanding of the role of committees or the process for conducting an inquiry. Committee secretariat staff have little or no experience in committee work and are, therefore, unable to provide committees with the necessary support and advice.

**The Workshop**

Following the opening prayer, the Speaker officially opened the workshop. He noted that PNG has a long history of parliamentary committees. The first ever Parliamentary Committee was established in the Legislative Council in 1963, and in 1964 the Standing Committees on Public Works and Public Accounts were established in the House of Assembly. The Speaker also noted that he had been
conscious of the need to provide training to Committee Chairs and Members on their special role and responsibilities. He had therefore asked CDI to organise this training workshop for Members in conjunction with the Parliamentary Service. He expressed his appreciation to CDI for agreeing to his request and for CDI’s ongoing assistance to the National Parliament. The Speaker also made a special mention of the involvement of the Hon. Nick Peniai, Mr Fatai and Mr Kusilifu.

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. The Acting Deputy Clerk, Mr Simon Ila, then provided an overview of the committees of PNG Parliament, their structure, functions and resources.

Mr Peter Loney began the workshop proper by providing a presentation on the history and structure of the Westminster parliamentary model. He outlined the key principles underpinning the Westminster model – the separation of powers, ministerial responsibility, scrutiny of the executive and participatory democracy.

Hon. Nick Peniai outlined the importance of a good relationship between parliamentarians and their constituencies and how this can be enhanced through effective parliamentary committees. The Members were then asked to discuss their experiences and ideas on how they relate to their constituents, and indeed to think of a broader definition of ‘constituents’ - particularly in relation to their committee work - that goes beyond electoral and geographic boundaries and concerns.

Ms Turei then introduced the next session on the elements that underlie effective committees. She began by describing the role committees can play and the challenges they will face in trying to do so. She outlined several key points about the parliamentary committee system in New Zealand. Ms Turei 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. In the general discussion that followed, participants shared a range of ideas on the value of parliamentary committees and how to make the PNG committees work effectively including:

- The need for appropriate funding and resources;
- The need for well trained staff;
- A greater commitment from all Members; and
- Better understanding of committee processes such as terms of reference.

Mr Floyd Fatai spoke of the experience with committees in the Solomon Islands National Parliament, in particular how the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has been revived in recent years. Mr Fatai described the work undertaken to strengthen the Public Accounts Committee, the achievements so far and the challenges they currently face. He made a number of recommendations including the need to have an effectively functioning Audit Office to complement the work of the PAC.

Mr David Kusilifu followed with a presentation on the process for conducting an inquiry. He described how and when an inquiry should be initiated. He went on to explain the benefits of inquiries including involving the public in the work of parliament. As part of his presentation, the workshop was shown television footage of public hearings held in early 2007 as part of the Public Accounts Committee’s inquiry into the 2007 budget appropriations.
It was clear that these sessions focusing on the very successful revival of the committee system in recent times in Solomon Islands particularly impressed the PNG participants, providing a concrete, local Pacific example of what was possible and practical in strengthening Parliament and its 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, holding manageable inquiries, using external assistance for inquiries, properly preparing for hearings, producing evidence based reports, and avoiding “re-inventing the wheel”. One of the issues canvassed was the need to agree on the appropriate role of committees. Parliamentary committees are extensions of the Parliament and as such they inquire into issues on behalf of the Parliament and report their findings to the Parliament; their role is not to develop and implement government policy.

If the first day could be characterised as the theoretical and listening part of the workshop, the second day was about the practical — ‘learning by doing’. Accordingly, the second day was centered on role playing a committee meeting and planning mock committee inquiries in which the lessons of Day One were put into practice. Members and staff were grouped into two committees – the Permanent Parliamentary Committee on Law & Order and the Permanent Parliamentary Committee on Public Accounts. Each committee elected a Chair, chose a Member to act as secretary, selected an inquiry topic, prepared terms of reference for the inquiry and then planned how they would conduct the inquiry. In planning their inquiries, the committees considered such aspects as:

- The cost of conducting the inquiry;
- Who to invite to provide evidence;
- A list of questions the Committee intends to ask witnesses;
- Planning the inquiry visits – eg. which centres to visit, whom to call in as witnesses;
- The inquiry timetable;
- How to publicize the inquiry;
- Research and analysis support; and
- A risk management strategy.

Each committee chair then presented his committee’s inquiry topic, terms of reference and inquiry plan to the workshop. These sessions highlighted to the participants the importance of planning an inquiry and ensuring adequate resources are available to complete the inquiry.

**Conclusion**

At the insistence of the Speaker, the Workshop was rescheduled at the last minute from its advertised starting date of Thursday 8 November to Friday 9 November and then concluded on Saturday 10 November. Although the second day was held on a Saturday, there was still a very good turnout of Members and staff. Despite this, the administrative support provided by the PNG Parliamentary Service was excellent. The workshop program was extremely well received and very effective in delivering the right mix of presentation and participation. Rather than being overly academic, the program was interactive and needs-focused. Each of the presenters used an inclusive, friendly and sharing 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 PNG’s parliamentary committees function 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.

The Speaker, Hon. Jeffrey Nape MP, expressed his gratitude to CDI for organizing and conducting the Workshop. He noted the success of the Workshop and the close collaboration between CDI and the Parliamentary Service in putting together the Workshop. CDI has developed strong links with the National Parliament of Papua New Guinea which will greatly assist in future CDI Papua New Guinea focused activities. He thanked CDI for putting together a professional team of facilitators with many years of parliamentary experience. The inclusion of presenters from the Solomon Islands and New Zealand proved to be invaluable. The participants were especially interested in the lessons learned from the Solomon Islands experience of reforming its committee system. This was the second workshop of this type that CDI has organised. It proved again to be a successful formula that is transferable to other parliaments in the region.

Acknowledgements

The workshop would not have been successful without the active involvement and support of the Papua New Guinea Parliamentary Service. CDI extends its deepest appreciation to the Speaker, Hon. Jeffrey Nape MP, the Clerk of Parliament, Mr Don Pandan, and his senior officers, in particular, Mr Simon Ila, Mr Podi Kohu, Mr Lalai Vali, Mr John Balagatuna and Mr Lawrence Daveona for their generous assistance, advice and excellent groundwork.

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 and New Zealand, and especially Mrs Taeasi Sanga, Clerk of the Solomon Islands Parliament, and Mr Tim Barnett MP of the New Zealand Parliament.

CDI greatly appreciates the involvement of the presenters – Mr Loney, Ms Turei, Mr Peniai, Mr Fatai 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.