The Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI) conducted a training course for staff of the National Parliament of Papua New Guinea and Provincial Assemblies at Parliament House in Port Moresby from 19th to 21st May 2008. The workshop was held at the request of the Clerk of Parliament, Mr Don Pandan. The genesis for the Course came from discussions between CDI Deputy Director, Mr Quinton Clements, Mr 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 Mr Pandan’s interest in reviving the PNG Clerks Association, a body comprising all PNG parliamentary clerks at the national and provincial levels that has become inactive. The outcome was that CDI would provide specialized training for the staff of the Parliamentary Service and offer places to staff of the Provincial Assemblies as a means of gauging their interest.

The purpose of the course was to enable PNG parliamentary officials from the different Divisions of the Parliamentary Service and the Provincial Assemblies to learn about different aspects of parliamentary work, further develop their professional skills and thereby raise the standards of service they provide to Members of the National Parliament and the Provincial Assemblies.

The course focused on developing staff capacity in the following core areas of parliamentary work:
- Understanding the Westminster Parliamentary Model;
- Parliamentary Privilege and contempt;
- Research and analysis;
- Planning and budgeting;
- Writing; and
- Committee work.

Workshop Participants
Mr Clements was the convenor for the workshop. The other facilitators and presenters were:
Ms Helen Minnican, Committee Manager, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of New South Wales;
Ms Beverly Duffy, Committee Manager, Legislative Council, Parliament of New South Wales; and
Mr Derk Swieringa, Australian Business Volunteers.

Mr Simon Ila, Acting Deputy Clerk, assisted by chairing some of the sessions. Mr Podi Kohu, First Clerk Assistant, co-presented with Ms Minnican the session on ‘Understanding Parliamentary Privilege’; and Mr Lawrence Daveona, Director of the Committees Secretariat conducted the sessions on ‘Holding a Public Hearing’.

63 participants attended the first day of the course including 12 Provincial Assembly Clerks and staff from East Sepik, Simbu, East New Britain, West New Britain, New Ireland, Manus, Madang, Morobe and Sandaun Provinces. As Parliament was in session on the second and third days of the Course, participant numbers were 53 and 50 respectively. The media were invited to attend the first day.

The level of attendance far exceeded the original estimate of a maximum of 30 participants. A notice was distributed to all Division Heads in the Parliamentary Service asking interested staff to nominate to attend. Similarly, Mr Clements and Mr Ila wrote to all 20 Provincial Governors informing them of the Course and inviting them to nominate their Assembly Clerks and other staff. The cost of attending the Course in Port Moresby was met by the respective Provincial Governments.

The Workshop
The first day of the Course was devoted to testing participants’ knowledge and understanding of the core functions of Parliament, the different roles MPs play, and the various ways parliamentary staff support MPs. As part of preparation for the sessions on Day Two, participants also completed a survey of their writing skills. Mr Clements commenced the Course by stressing the importance of a good Parliamentary Service to the effectiveness of Parliament in fulfilling its role in the political system. Participants were then required to answer in writing three questions:

• What are the core functions of Parliament?
• What different roles do MPs play?
• How do parliamentary staff support MPs in their work in Parliament?

Following discussion of some of the answers, each of the Division Heads gave an overview of role and structure of their respective areas. The Provincial Assembly Clerks were also invited to give a brief outline of their Assemblies and the issues they face.

This was followed by presentations and discussion on the basic principles of the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy and the concept of parliamentary privilege. Ms Minnican provided a presentation on the history and structure of the Westminster parliamentary model. She outlined the key principles underpinning the Westminster model – the separation of powers, ministerial responsibility, scrutiny of the executive and participatory democracy. Ms Minnican and Mr Kohu then explained the concept of parliamentary privilege – the powers and immunities possessed by Parliaments, their Members and other participants in parliamentary proceedings. They used case studies from PNG and NSW to illustrate how privilege works in practice. The afternoon sessions involved an exercise on the skills needed to provide sound
administrative and procedural support to MPs, a presentation on negotiation skills, and an introduction to researching and analysing procedural issues.

The first part of Day Two focused on planning, preparing a budget and monitoring expenditure. These were practical sessions led by Mr Swieringa which involved participants planning and preparing budgets for several hypothetical committee inquiries. In the afternoon sessions, Ms Duffy focused on good writing skills. She began by looking at the elements of plain language writing and then examining various parliamentary documents. Participants completed a number of practical exercises including ‘How to write a case study’. Participants were then given an assignment on report writing to complete overnight.

The third and final day of the course was devoted to the second part of the writing skills sessions. In this session Ms Duffy took participants through the process of committee report writing. The completed assignments were marked by the other presenters and then feedback was given to all participants.

The final sessions were focused on preparing for and running a public hearing. Ms Minnican gave a presentation on ‘things to consider’ such as planning properly, administrative issues and procedural matters. Ms Duffy gave a presentation on witness protection using the David Kelly Affair in the United Kingdom and television footage of the NSW Treasurer at an Estimates hearing as examples of contrasting approaches to witnesses. Mr Clements spoke of the experience with committees in the Solomon Islands National Parliament, in particular how the Public Accounts Committee has been revived in recent years. Participants were then shown television footage of public hearings in NSW and Solomon Islands.

Mr Lawrence Daveona, Director of the Committees Secretariat, then led the participants through the planning and preparation for a mock public hearing. The purpose of this last session was to put into practice the lessons of the Course. Mr Daveona explained 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.

The topic chosen for the mock public hearing was a hypothetical inquiry by the Parliamentary Committee on Education into the use of mobile phones in educational institutions. Participants were divided into three groups – Committee Members, witnesses, and Secretariat. Each group then prepared for its part in the role play exercise. What followed was a very successful role play in which a number of useful administrative and procedural issues arose to challenge the participants.

Overall, participants were involved in a very practically oriented and highly interactive program that challenged them and stimulated their interest in improving their professional skills. The evaluation feedback has been overwhelmingly positive and strongly suggests that this type of course that addresses specific skills development is greatly needed in PNG at both the national and provincial levels. According to the feedback, the writing skills and planning and budgeting sessions were the most useful. There was a clear consensus of opinion that these areas could be expanded in future courses. A majority noted that more time was needed and the future courses should be expanded accordingly. There were numerous requests to repeat the course later this
year. The Provincial Assembly participants also requested that a similar but more intensive course be developed for provincial assembly staff in 2008-09.

**What Next?**

This course is part of an ongoing series of CDI activities for Members and parliamentary staff of the 8th National Parliament that began with the induction program in August 2007. A key question raised by participants, especially the Provincial Assembly Clerks, was therefore what next?

In a separate meeting with the Provincial Assembly Participants, Mr Clements outlined CDI’s program of parliamentary strengthening activities and discussed the possibility of developing a training course specifically to address the needs of Provincial Assembly staff. The Provincial Assembly Clerks described their roles as “jack-of-all-trades” and thus emphasised their need for more comprehensive skills development programs. They proposed that CDI develop and deliver a week long training course expanding on the areas covered in the current Course – planning and financial management, writing skills, parliamentary procedures and committee work. To alleviate the costs of conducting such a Course, the Clerks, using the “if you build it, they will come” analogy, proposed that the costs of attendance be borne by the Provincial Assemblies themselves. As an indication of their seriousness in taking advantage of such training opportunities, they noted that their respective Provincial Governments had met the costs of their attendance in the current Course.

The Parliamentary Service also requested that an identical course be held later in 2008 to cover those staff who were unable to attend due to Parliament being in session. It was suggested that computer skills training be included, either as part of the next Course or as a separate program.

**Conclusion**

The administrative support provided by the PNG Parliamentary Service under the coordination of Mr Ila was excellent. The Course 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 highly interactive and needs-focused. Each of the presenters used an inclusive and friendly approach in getting their messages across and engaging with the audience. All presenters had the view that the Course was about sharing experiences as opposed to dictating to the participants. As a result, the sessions generated lively discussion and numerous questions from participants. All participants exhibited a genuine desire to learn about the different topics and further develop their skills. They expressed great enthusiasm for the Course and the approach taken.

The Speaker, Hon. Jeffrey Nape MP, expressed his gratitude to CDI for organizing and conducting the Course. He noted the success of the Course and the close collaboration between CDI and the Parliamentary Service in putting together the Course. 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.

This was the first Course of this type – one focused on practical skills development - that CDI has organised. It was also the first of its kind in that it combined both National
Parliament and Provincial Assembly staff. Conducting the Course in-country enabled CDI to target a larger audience in one setting. It proved not only to be a successful formula in the PNG context, but is clearly 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 Balagetuna and Mr Lawrence Daveona for their generous assistance, advice and excellent groundwork.

CDI is especially grateful for the enthusiastic participation of the staff of the National Parliament and those from the Provincial Assemblies. CDI also acknowledges the kind assistance and support of the Parliament of New South Wales and especially the Clerks, Mr Russell Grove of the Legislative Assembly and Ms Lynn Lovelock of the Legislative Council, and their senior officers.

CDI greatly appreciates the involvement of the presenters in the Course – Ms Minnican, Ms Duffy and Mr Swieringa. Without their genuine interest, enthusiasm, patience, extraordinary skill as facilitators and presenters and deep knowledge of their subject areas, the Course would not have been the success it clearly was.