Introduction

The office of the Ombudsman in Solomon Islands has been conducting a series of workshops on good governance and public accountability, targeting politicians, executives at all levels within the public sector.

This report covers the fourth workshop, which was held at Kirakira the capital of Makira and Ulawa Province. Participants from both Temotu and Makira/Ulawa Provinces were invited to attend.

The resource personnel have come from various Ministries and Departments including RAMSI officials. It is the biggest workshop in terms of participants and resource people.

Originally the fourth workshop was supposed to be held in Auki, the capital of Malaita Province, but due to the closure of the Gwuanaru airport, the workshop was rescheduled to Kirakira. Despite transport difficulties, my office was very fortunate to be assisted with a helicopter by a joint cooperation between RAMSI and Participating Police Forces (PPF)

On behalf of my staff and myself I wish to thank the Centre for democratic Institutions (CDI) for its support and commitment in trying to make better the services provided by the government.

Rationale

The Solomon Islands is recovering from very significant ethnic tension. The confidence of the people in the leadership of the nation, the enforcement of law and order and the functions and duties of public servants, seemed to be undermined during this period of the crisis because of a number of factors including corruption, maladministration, nepotism and unethical practices by responsible officers both within the government and private sectors. Unless public confidence is restored and
the problem of corruption and maladministration and unethical practices tackled, the recovery process may not be that effective and the rate of goals achieved may not satisfy the wishes and aspirations of the people of this country.

To have an effective public service and quality and reliable leaders needs everybody's participation and commitment as citizens of Solomon Islands. RAMSI has had an immensely positive impact on attitudes to corruption by providing the police, the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Judiciary with a kind of assistance to deal with high profile criminals and some prominent business people, who have been enjoying such a free ride. Just recently and after a long debate on the issue, the Cabinet has approved the Canberra proposal to assist the Ombudsman, the Leadership Code Commission and the Auditor General with capacity to deal with respective issues addressed to the respective offices.

Observing and compliance with the principals of good governance is the only way an institution can promote effective, just and professional services to people who are expecting these services.

The Ombudsman, under section 97 of the Constitution is mandated to carry out activities of this similar nature to improve the practices and procedures of public offices. It is the intention of the Ombudsman to be more proactive than reactive and more so to deliver the right messages to as many people as possible.

**The Workshop**

**Venue:**
Kirakira, the Provincial Capital of Makira Ulawa Province.

**Duration:**
2nd - 4th September 2004

**Official Opening**
The workshop was officially opened by the Premier of Makira/Ulawa Province - Hon. Stephen Piringisau.

**Participants**
The workshop is one of the best workshops because of the following elements:

1: the highest number of participants (38 in all);
2: the highest number of female participants (8 in all);
3: a total of 9 provincial members from both Provinces;
4: an extension of the invitation to other government Ministries and Departments;
5: the involvement of RAMSI personnel;
6: the assistance offered by RAMSI in terms of transportation (helicopter) which transported other resource personnel.
7: Sixteen participants came from Temotu Province and twenty two came from Makira/Ulawa Province.
Resource Personnel

The intention is to cover as wide as possible the functions and roles of all government agents, departments and ministries. In that, the following have been committed to this workshop:

The office of the Ombudsman:
Mr. John Smith Pitabelama - Ombudsman
Mr. Daniel Damilea - Legal Officer
Mr. Jay Waura - Administrator

Ministry Of Finance
Ms. Merilyn Kodoleke - Assistant Accountant General (Budget)
Mr. Ontona Riringa - Assistant Accountant General (Accounts)
Mr. Steve Thomas – Economic

Attorney General's Chamber
Mr. Jeffery Deve - Senior Crown Counsel

Public Service Department
Ms. Susan Hayes - Advisor - Public Service Department
Mr. Gregory Rofeta - Chief Admin Officer

Ministry of Education & Human Resources Development
Mr. Tom Rarakani - Director (A/g)

Leadership Code Commission
Mr. Emmanuel Kouliota - Chairman

Department of Labour
Mr. Selson Fafale - Principal Labour Officer

Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI)
Mr. Peter Noble - Deputy Co-ordinator

Mode of Transportation:

Kirakira is situated on the island of Makira, further in the east, approximately forty five minutes from Honiara by plane. All resource personnel from Honiara travelled to Kirakira by plane and others were transported by RAMSI helicopter. Special thanks to RAMSI, in particular the in-charge of PPI for the assistance offered to the Ombudsman.

On return, the plane did not arrive as per normal schedule due to only one aircraft serving the whole country. Therefore, the resource personnel from Honiara stayed overnight while Ternotu participants spent an additional three nights.


**Accommodation**
All resource personnel and participants from Temotu Province were accommodated at three different guest houses.

**Meals**
Meals were met by individuals since they were all paid allowances to cater for the duration of their stay in Kirakira.

**Presentations**
Presentations were of a very high standard and of top quality. Resource personnel are very professional in their own field and confident in performing their tasks.

**Discussions**
The level of discussions throughout the workshop was very high, especially as politicians were also participating. For the duration of the workshop, both political and administrative issues and matters were discussed with constructive arguments and comments. Practical cases were raised which assisted resource personnel to see the importance of the need to make regulatory or statutory changes to suit the present and future situation.

There is a need to draw clear political boundary so as to avoid politicizing administrations within the public service, and other government agencies.

The General Orders - the Public Service bible - is rather out of date and most of the provisions could not accommodate the present working environment. There is an urgent need for responsible authorities to work on these instruments and put them through to become legal instruments governing all respective institutions.

It was heavily discussed that mal-administrations and non-compliance with regulatory or statutory provisions by public servants seemed to be a common practice and a common problem. Failing to acknowledge or reply to correspondence by the recipients is an indication of ineffectiveness and unreliability on the part of those offices.

**Syndicate Exercise**
This is the most interesting part of the workshop. Participants were divided into four groups. Each group was allocated with a question to discuss and present before a panel. The questions were based on practical examples of cases often reported to the Ombudsman for investigations, using fictitious names.

**Panel Members**
Sitting on the panel was the Chairman of the Leadership Code Commission Mr, Emmanuel Kouhota; Legal Officer, office of the Ombudsman; Mr. Daniel Damilea, Assistant Accountant General (Budget); Ms. Merilyn Kodoleke, Assistant Accountant (Finance); Mr. Ontona Riringa; and Chief Administration Officer (Public Service) Mr. Gregory Rofeta.

**Finance**
The assistance offered to the office of the Ombudsman by the CDI based at the
Australian National University in Canberra, has continued until the recent workshop
at Kirakira. A submission was made to CDI early this year proposing Malaita
Province workshop, however due to a land dispute by the locals, the only airfield at
the area was closed. Ms. Felicity Pascoe who was here at that time to observe the
workshop could not make it because of the above reason. She returned to Canberra
after spending a week in Honiara.

When the workshop was shifted to Kirakira in the Makira/Ulawa Province, further in
the east, the budget could not fully meet the full cost, taking into account its
geographical position, distance and other costs. However, additional funds were
drawn from the local government and the assistance offered by RAMSI by airlifting
some of the resource personnel met the budget shortfall.

At the end of the workshop, the schedule to transport all participants and resource
personnel failed to arrive because of bad weather which added additional days for
both participants and resource personnel who were forced to remain at Kirakira at
additional cost.

The official opening and closing of the workshop, accommodation and other expenses
were met by our local government. The additional cost came about because of the
distance, and other contributing factors.

On behalf of my staff, the government of Solomon Islands, which is now realising the
importance of this task, we would like to thank CDI for its continued support for these
workshops. As a result of CDI’s support we will be holding another workshop in
Malaita, which will be conducted in early December 2004.

John Smith Pitabelama
OMBUDSMAN
HONIARA SOLOMON ISLANDS