



CPA/CHRI PACIFIC WORKSHOP ON FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

**With the Support of the Parliament and Government
of the Fiji Islands and NZ Aid
1-2 September 2005, Nadi, Fiji Islands**

More than 40 Parliamentarians, including government Ministers, and senior parliamentary officials from seven Commonwealth Pacific countries met in the Fiji Islands on 1 and 2 September 2005 with a team of experts assembled by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association to discuss issues related to freedom of information, especially in the context of the specific needs of Pacific societies.

At the conclusion of the Pacific Workshop on Freedom of Information, the following points were drawn up as reflecting the discussions and exchange of ideas between participants:

1. A freedom of information system will above all be aimed at – and beneficial to – members of the public, it is not something only for the media to use. The system must be designed to help members of the public have access to the basic kind of information that they need in their own everyday life, e.g. about the activities of local schools, local hospitals and nearest government institutions.
2. Free public access to information held by government and public institutions is good for economic and social development because it leads to a more efficient economy and better public sector performance, increasing investor confidence in the country's economy and reducing waste and corruption. It also promotes government accountability and public participation in governance and development.
3. The exact details in any FOI law and system are decided by lawmakers to reflect the needs of their countries, and therefore they can differ from country to country. There should not be one single model that can be imposed in all countries. FOI legislation can be designed to reflect both universal principles and local conditions and traditions.
4. In all countries where FOI legislation has been or is being introduced, the process is dependent on the existing environment. In Pacific countries too, the debate on drafting and introducing FOI laws can be complicated by political conditions, e.g. the demands of coalition government or the relationship between the government and the opposition, or between the government and the media. Even where such conditions create difficulties, they should not stop efforts toward greater openness in governance. In fact, greater openness in governance can help solve the underlying problems.



13. Delegates at the Workshop also discussed whether when drafting an FOI law consideration should be given to permitting access to information held by private bodies (either commercial or non-governmental), at least where those bodies receive any public funds. Pacific countries might consider the different provisions to that effect in the FOI regimes of such Commonwealth countries as South Africa, Jamaica, India and the United Kingdom.
14. The representatives of the different Pacific Countries meeting at the Workshop called on all the relevant Commonwealth bodies and international organizations to provide them with technical and other forms of assistance to help them draft FOI legislation and implement any FOI regime following the passing of such laws by their Parliaments.

Nadi, Fiji Islands, 2 September 2005

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