

PRESS RELEASE
Tuesday, June 21, 2005
Suva, Fiji

Representatives of the Pacific Islands media are calling for the adoption of Freedom of Information legislation throughout the Pacific as part of the Pacific Plan.

Members of the executive of the Pacific Islands News Association, PINA, and other media practitioners from various Pacific Forum countries have been meeting at the Forum Secretariat in Suva over the past two days as part of the Forum's regional consultations in the preparation of the Plan.

Chairing the consultation, the President of PINA, Faumuina Lance Polu, said the media appreciated the opportunity to provide input to the Pacific Plan because early drafts failed to mention any role for the media. "The Regional Media Consultation group has suggested this oversight can be easily fixed by official acknowledgement of how the media can help the region achieve one of the four key goals of the Plan, Good Governance," Mr Polu said.

"We have proposed that the Plan recognise the vital role a free, independent and responsible Pacific media plays in promoting transparency and accountability and keeping the people of the Pacific Islands informed."

Mr Polu said the Regional Media Consultation group had proposed seven specific targets [that] that the media in the Pacific and governments could achieve within the first three years of the adoption of the Plan.

"One of these 'Early Practical Benefits', as the Pacific Plan calls them," Mr Polu said, "is a PINA initiative for the adoption of industry approved accredited training standards for journalists in Pacific Island Countries within the first year. Another would be for PINA to help media in the region develop Codes of Ethics and establish independent media complaints procedures."

Others include:

- recognition of the vital role of public service broadcasting in the Pacific and the development of model legislation to enhance its independence;
- the endorsement of moves towards an exchange of television and radio programs between Pacific Island countries using satellite technology; and
- regional recognition that government information is the property of the people and in the interests of transparency and accountability Pacific Island Countries develop and adopt Freedom of Information legislation.

In opening the Regional Media Consultation on Monday, the Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum, Greg Urwin, said he wanted a practical focus to the media's input into the Plan. "A free and competent media has a real role," Mr Urwin said, "but tell us how."

Mr Polu said the Regional Media Consultation group felt it had met Mr Urwin's challenge.

The media targets will be distributed to the regions media outlets for feedback, before a final submission to the Pacific Plan Task Force for inclusion in the Plan.

The Plan will be presented to the sixteen Pacific Islands Forum Leaders when they meet in Papua New Guinea in late October.

MEDIA PROPOSALS FOR INCORPORATION INTO THE PACIFIC PLAN

Regional Media Consultation
Monday, June 20 & Tuesday, June 21, 2005

In paragraph 10 of the Draft Plan add the words in red (final part beginning “; and by acknowledging ... people informed.”):

“10. The key prerequisite for economic growth and sustainable development is **good governance** – the effective management of a country’s resources in a manner that is transparent and accountable. The provision of common services in governance will be supported by strengthening: *justice systems* at the national level, through assisting establishment of human rights mechanisms and regional judicial training and education; key *national integrity institutions* or initiatives, such as the Audit, the Ombudsman, Leadership Codes, anti-corruption institutions and Attorneys General; full adherence to the *Forum Eight Principles of Accountability*; and by acknowledging the vital role of a *free, independent and responsible Pacific media* in promoting transparency and accountability and keeping the people informed.”

In paragraph 14 of the Draft Plan add the words in red (beginning “; the promotion ... region;”):

14. ... national integrity institutions; the promotion of the adoption of *Freedom of Information Acts* throughout the region; common standards of accountability

EARLY PRACTICAL BENEFITS

In Attachment C add to the Good Governance section:

III Good Governance

Regional recognition that government information is the property of the people and in the interests of transparency and accountability the development and adoption by Pacific Island Countries of Freedom of Information legislation.

Regional action to support the delivery of radio services to all the people of the Pacific irrespective of their isolation.

Regional recognition of the vital role of public service broadcasting and development of model legislation to enhance its independence.

Regional support for the initiative by the regional media organisation, PINA, to take the lead in vocational training and its plan to adopt within a year accredited training standards for journalists and other media personnel in Pacific Island Countries.

Regional recognition that PINA will assist the region's media to develop Codes of Ethics and the establishment of independent media complaints procedures.

Regional support for the drafting of a Regional Media Communications Strategy to be proposed by PINA and implemented in association with the Pacific Plan's Regional Digital Strategy.

Regional endorsement of an exchange of television and radio programs between Pacific Island countries using satellite technology.