



PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SECRETARIAT



Pacific Centre

“REGIONAL FREEDOM OF INFORMATION WORKSHOP FOR PACIFIC POLICY-MAKERS”

30 June – 2 July 2008

Final Outcomes Statement

Official representatives from Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, gathered in Honiara, Solomons Islands for a three-day meeting to discuss the value and relevance of freedom of information for Forum Island Countries, a milestone for implementation in the Pacific Plan endorsed by Pacific Islands Forum Leaders in 2005. The meeting was hosted by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat in partnership with the UNDP Pacific Centre.

The workshop was designed for Pacific senior officials to identify arguments in favour of freedom of information, good practice standards on freedom of information law-making and practical issues for consideration when implementing freedom of information and to promote the development of freedom of information regimes in the region. This workshop complements other activities which support Initiatives 12.1 (support to key integrity institutions), 12.2 (Forum Principles of Good Leadership and Accountability), 12.3 (enhancing governance mechanisms) and 12.6 (supporting participatory democracy) of the Good Governance Pillar of the Pacific Plan.

Participants noted the Opening Statement by the Honourable Prime Minister, Dr. Derek Sikua in support of freedom of information and how its value could contribute to the social and economic development in the region. Participants specifically noted that the Prime Minister’s statement committed the Government of the Solomon Islands to “work closely with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and other stakeholders in considering a possible freedom of information policy and legislation that could give effect to the realisation of freedom of information – one of our fundamental human rights”.

Participants acknowledged that taking steps towards freedom of information is a key milestone for enhancing good governance in the region. In supporting the implementation of freedom of information participants recognised that:

1. Freedom of information is an important tool for empowering Pacific people to engage in their own development as equal partners with their governments. In the Pacific, freedom of information can be harnessed as a tool for promoting participatory development, strengthening democratic governance, facilitating better government service delivery, supporting decentralisation, fostering economic development, promoting public accountability and transparency, supporting responsible and effective media reporting, and promoting and protecting human rights.

2. Governments should be encouraged to consider developing freedom of information policies, laws or regulations. Access to information policies, laws or regulations and processes need to be designed to serve the public, in urban, rural and outlying island areas and should be simple, cost-effective and user-friendly.
3. In the absence of legislation, Governments bodies and members of the legislature should proactively and routinely disclose and disseminate more information to the public that would enhance their transparency.
4. Governments should recognise and work with the media and non state actors as partners in developing and implementing access to information.
5. Development partners should work with Governments and other non state actors to ensure that legislative drafting assistance is available, upon request, to support Governments that wish to develop an access to information policy, law or regulation.
6. Development partners should work with Governments to ensure that technical assistance, funding and/or other needed resources are available, upon request, to support Governments and other national implementing bodies who are working to implement an access to information policy, law or regulation.
7. Efforts should be made to harness information and communication technologies to promote access to information for Pacific peoples, including the radio, internet and television. Initiatives like the information partnership being implemented by the Solomon Islands Government and People First Network provide good models for consideration by Pacific Governments.
8. The important role that public service broadcasters can play in promoting freedom of information to the public should be recognised and supported with political will and financial resources.
9. The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat in partnership with development partners such as the UNDP Pacific Centre and other organisations should continue to work with Forum Islands Countries to support work on developing freedom of information in the region.

Honiara, Solomon Islands
2 July 2008