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(1) Tonga Parliament and the Media Workshop

His Royal Highness Prince Tui Pelehake, the Acting Prime Minister Hon. Aiaosi 'Aho, nobles, cabinet Ministers and people's representatives were a few of the participants who attended the Media Workshop organized by the CPA and the Parliament of Tonga in Nuku'alofa in September. Participants discussed a wide range of issues, such as the role of the media as the "fourth estate", coverage of the National Assembly by the media and principles of Freedom of Information (FOI) law-making and FOI challenges for small island countries. Participants strongly recognized the importance of FOI in promoting good governance, participatory democracy and effective development, and called on the government of Tonga to develop, enact and implement FOI legislation in accordance with international good practice.

As the workshop drew to a close, participants encouraged the Tonga Legislative Assembly to ensure that its proceedings were more open to the public and the media. The Parliamentary Secretariat was also encouraged to make more information available, by designating post-boxes for media, setting up a public notice board with details of House business, and routinely uploading key parliamentary documents on its website.



Participants at the CPA and Parliament of Tonga Media Workshop.

(2) The Use of Democratic Benchmarks by Parliament

A September meeting on the use of democratic benchmarks by Parliaments has led to a new CPA initiative on parliamentary strengthening. The meeting from 21 to 24 September at Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia, led to the CPA developing plans to encourage Commonwealth Parliaments and Legislatures to measure their procedures and practices against the CPA Benchmarks. The Association is also now planning to promote the development of regional variations on the Benchmarks, which were initially drafted by a CPA Study Group in Bermuda in late 2006. The Brisbane meeting was attended by representatives of the Queensland and Australian Capital Territory Branches and the CPA Secretariat, as well as by other organizations and academics working in the field.

(3) Lesotho Post-Election Seminar

A Post-Election Seminar for the Parliament of the Kingdom of Lesotho was held from 16 to 20 September in the Parliament Chamber in Maseru. The seminar covered topics such as: the development of the Commonwealth and the Role of the CPA; Parliamentary Democracy; Ethics and Accountability of Members of Parliament; Women in Parliament and Practice and Procedure in the House including Standing Orders.

Members of the resource team were Hon. Lindiwe Maseko, MPL, of Gauteng, Hon. Mike German, AM, of Wales, Hon. Eziuche Chinwe Ubani, MP, of Nigeria, Mr Herlu Smith of South Africa, Dr Baffour Agyeman-Duah of the UNDP and the CPA Secretary-General, Dr William F. Shija.



Ms Lily Faavae, Clerk of Parliament (left), and Mrs Lakaaga Uniuni, Acting Assistant Clerk of Parliament, represent Tuvalu in the Parliamentary Staff Development Workshop in Tonga.

(4) 29th CPA Australian and Pacific Regional Conference

The Secretary-General of the CPA, Dr William F. Shija, travelled to Tasmania at the beginning of October for the 29th CPA Australian and Pacific Regional Conference. The Secretary-General gave a presentation on the work of the CPA and met Members from across the Australia and Pacific region.

(5) Parliamentary Staff Development Workshop, Tonga

In September, Clerks and senior officials from Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Tuvalu attended the Parliamentary Staff Development Workshop for the Pacific Region. The workshop explored regional issues, the importance of procedural rules, parliamentary committees, parliamentary administration, staff and capacity building, media coverage of parliamentary proceedings and raising awareness of parliamentary staff on gender issues.

While the UNDP and the Centre for Democratic Institutions are working with a number of Parliaments, the CPA is still strong in the Pacific given its vast support to the Parliaments under the CPA Australia Trust Fund, the twinning arrangement that exists between Pacific Islands and Australian states and territories and the assistance the region receives from the Parliament of New Zealand.

(6) Wilton Park Conference

In association with the Parliamentary Centre and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, and in co-operation with the CPA, the Department for International Development and the World Bank Institute, the 934th Wilton Park Conference will take place from 27 to 30 October in Wilton Park, United Kingdom.

The conference will be an opportunity for participants to discuss issues surrounding the theme of "Enhancing the Effectiveness of Parliaments: Challenges and Opportunities". Key speakers include: Mr Mark Robinson, the Acting Director of Governance and Social Development Group, Department for International Development (DfID) in London; Mr Keith Schulz, Legislative Strengthening Adviser from the Office of Democracy and Governance, USAID in Washington, and Mr Rasheed Draman, the Director of the Africa Programme, Parliamentary Centre in Ghana.

Over the four-day conference, participants will explore: "Parliaments strengthening initiatives: lessons learnt and good practice", "Comparative regional perspectives on parliamentary effectiveness" and "Understanding and engaging with political parties".

(7) Secretary-General Branch visits

Dr William F. Shija took a 10-day tour to visit CPA Branches in Namibia, Botswana, Tanzania and Mozambique in September. The trip was an opportunity to meet with local Members of the CPA and discuss the work of the organization.

(8) Parliamentary Conference of the WTO

Participants gathered in Geneva on 11 and 12 September for the 2008 session of the Parliamentary Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Jointly organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the European Parliament, the conference discussed themes of "Looking beyond Doha" and "Can international trade help mitigate climate change?"

Over 80 countries were represented at the conference, many of them Commonwealth countries such as India, Canada, Kenya, South Africa and the United Kingdom.

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