

Press Releases

Freedom of Information Tabled for Inclusion in the Nauru Constitution

PRESS RELEASES:

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[Suva -20 February] A four day workshop aiming to raise awareness about the value of the right to information could be Nauru's journey towards realising freedom of information (FOI).

His Excellency the President of Nauru, Hon Marcus Stephen MP, said it was an opportune time to have a FOI workshop as Nauru is in its final stages of the constitutional review process, and is considering including the right to information in the Constitution.

"This workshop will hopefully give all participants an in depth understanding of what freedom of information means and how it would work in Nauru, and this in turn may well increase the likelihood of the right to information being approved by Parliament and by the public in Nauru," he added.

The workshop organised at the request of the Nauru Government, with support from the UNDP Pacific Centre, in collaboration with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) is attended by representatives from parliament, government officials, civil society, and the media in Nauru.

Charmaine Rodrigues, Legislative Strengthening Specialist at the UNDP Pacific Centre said it was encouraging to see that Pacific leaders have recognised the benefits that freedom of information can bring to the Pacific.

“The right to information is a tool which can be used to empower ordinary members of the community to better participate in their own governance and development,” she added.

The right to information was raised by some members of the public during the public consultation and over the next few weeks will be considered by the Select Committee on Constitutional Amendment Bills to include FOI in the Nauru Constitution.

However, the President emphasised that inserting the right in the text of the Constitution does not in itself mean that the public’s right to information will be satisfied.

“It would be necessary to also pass more detailed implementing legislation, spelling out precisely what kind of information is encompassed by the right, and what kinds of information, if any, are excluded from the FOI laws,” he said.

The President said it was too early to determine what the outcome of the FOI decision would be and that it was not for Cabinet but for Parliament and the people of Nauru to decide the fate of the proposed introduction of the right to information.

“But I think it is very positive that this workshop is taking place, and it should assist members of Parliament and members of the public to make informed decisions when the time comes,” he concluded.

The Nauru workshop which ended yesterday was intended to build on the outcomes of the “Regional FOI Workshop for Pacific Policy-Makers” conducted by PIFS and the UNDP Pacific Centre in Solomon Islands in July 2008.

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For more information please contact:

Snehal Morris, Communications Officer on (679) 3227507 Email
: snehal.morris@undp.org or

Charmaine Rodrigues, Legislative Strengthening Specialist, on
(679) 3227508 Email : charmaine.rodgrigues@undp.org

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