



**COMMONWEALTH
SECRETARIAT**



Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat

**Commonwealth Pacific Regional Workshop on the Ratification of
International Human Rights Instruments under the Pacific Plan**

*Hosted by the Government of Papua New Guinea
Port Moresby, 28th – 30th March 2007*

Concluding Statement

At the invitation of the Government of Papua New Guinea, and in the context of the Pacific Plan 2005, government officials from PNG, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu met as Commonwealth Pacific countries in Port Moresby (28-30 March), in a regional workshop on ratification of human rights instruments in the Pacific. The workshop was convened and supported by the Commonwealth Secretariat (Human Rights Unit), with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. Also in attendance were experts from the Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT/UNDP) and the UNDP Pacific Regional Centre (which also represented the Pacific region representative of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, OHCHR).

The workshop took place in the particular context of the following:

- The 40th anniversary in 2006 of the promulgation of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* 1966 and the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* 1966 (ICCPR & ICESCR).
- The value of a rights-based approach to national efforts to pursue Millennium Development Goals and other objectives.
- The Good Governance pillar of the Pacific Plan 2005, in particular Initiative 12.5 of the *Kalibobo Roadmap*, which provides “Where appropriate, ratify and implement international and regional human rights conventions, covenants and agreements and support reporting and other requirements.”
- The agreement of Forum leaders in Nadi in October 2006 to give greater attention to the issue of ratification and implementation as an essential element underpinning institutional governance.
- The Commonwealth Secretariat’s commitment to assist Pacific member countries in taking forward elements of their Pacific Plan and national

objectives, in fulfilment of its mandate to respond to requests for the provision of technical advice and assistance to member countries, in particular to support the capacity building efforts of small states. In relation to ratification of human rights conventions, this represents the mandate of the Commonwealth Secretariat to assist governments in the better protection and promotion of human rights, consistent with Commonwealth values as expressed in the *Harare Declaration* 1991 and other declarations.

- The role of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat in supporting Forum member countries in the fulfillment of the Pacific Plan.
- The duty of the OHCHR and other UN agencies to support countries in their efforts towards national level protection and promotion of human rights.
- The measures taken by the host government towards revising its ratification status of the ICCPR and ICESCR.

The objectives of the workshop included:

- Consolidating understanding of the main provisions of core human rights conventions, the process of ratifying these, and the consequences of ratification (including implementation and reporting obligations);
- Providing an opportunity for participant officials from Pacific Commonwealth governments to share national experiences in relation to the problems and possibilities of ratification, to discuss conceptual, substantive, and administrative / procedural aspects of ratification;
- Exploring the benefits of initiating national level reviews of ratification status consistent with constitutional and other procedural requirements, of ensuring close cooperation between relevant departments and ministries including the designation of a lead agency and establishing an inter-agency work group to consider issues involved in ratification, and of initiating requests for technical advice and assistance from development partners;
- Providing an opportunity to clarify the concrete assistance available to Pacific Commonwealth countries including from the Commonwealth Secretariat, OHCHR and UN country and regional teams, in relation to reviewing ratification status, ratifying, the ongoing process of implementation, and the reporting cycle, as well as other forms of technical cooperation.

The workshop was formally opened on 28 March by the Minister for Community Development of PNG, the Hon. Dame Carol Kidu, alongside Ms Rabab Fatima, Head of Human Rights, Commonwealth Secretariat. A supporting statement by Mr Greg Urwin, Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum, was read on his behalf. The full report on the workshop and its outcomes will be circulated in due course. Participants expressed their thanks to the Commonwealth Secretariat for its support in bringing together officials from across the region, to the Pacific Islands Forum for its assistance with planning the meeting, and to attendant resource persons. Especial thanks and gratitude was expressed on the part of the Commonwealth Secretariat and all participants, to the Government of Papua New Guinea for its warm hospitality in hosting this important regional meeting.