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A regional workshop is being held this week in Rarotonga for judicial officers. 13050801

Justice system our highest priority: PM

Prime Minister and Minister of Justice Henry Puna told a regional gathering of lay magistrates yesterday morning the administration of the justice system is high priority and requires adequate resources.

“We need to stay vigilant and attentive to the needs of the judiciary and ensure that its services are preserved and strengthened where required,” he said at the opening of the Lay Judicial Officers and Decision-making Workshop.

The workshop is being run this week at Edgewater Resort & Spa with the support of the Federal Court of Australia and the Pacific Judicial Development Programme (PJDP).

Judicial officers from around the Pacific are participating, including several from Rarotonga. The key facilitators are Professor Raymond from the University of Alabama in the United States, and Justice Neil McKerracher from the Federal Court of Australia.

Puna welcomed the delegates and programme facilitators, telling them he was an Australian law graduate himself. He quipped he had left the legal profession behind only to end up in an equally unpopular profession – as a politician.

Puna acknowledged the dedication and service of the lay magistrates and thanked the PJDP for strengthening the judicial officers' professional capabilities.

"It is important that your responsibilities reflect the highest levels of competencies in the administration of justice and that confidence and integrity are sustained in the eyes of the public."

The Cook Islands is facing a wide-range of pressures that are impacting upon the judiciary, as with many other sectors, he said. These include ongoing community-sensitive issues such as burglaries and domestic violence, drink driving and drug use among the youth.

The administration of land claims and the extent to which these cases have been taken to in recent years is adding burdens upon court services, Puna added.

"Law and order and the security of our homes are common concerns and the administration of the justice system requires our highest priority and adequate resources."

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