

Law

Training to strengthen Tonga's judiciary

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Nuku'alofa, Tonga

A four-day local training program for Magistrates, prosecutors and legal professionals began on Tuesday, 18 August with the aim of strengthening and improving the judiciary in Tonga.

In opening the workshop held under the Pacific Judicial Development Program (PJDP), Tonga's Lord Chief Justice Owen Paulsen said this program has supported Pacific Island countries to enhance the professional confidence of their judicial and court officers, while improving court process and systems.



Lord Chief Justice Owen Paulsen

He said this course is tailored specially for Tonga to suit the requirements of the Magistrate's Court.

"The idea of the program was for Magistrates but it opened up to lawyers and others in the justice system who might be interested at some stage in applying to be magistrates or who might benefit in their role from a better understanding of relevant laws and principles and methods in the Magistrate's Court."

Increased salaries

The Minister of Justice Hon Vuna Fa'otusia said he understood there is a problem in government as some of the amendments to the Constitution were turned down by the King due to advice of his councillors.

He said the current government would make sure that the salaries of the judicial officers would be improved because the duties and responsibilities of judges are huge. Two magistrate positions were currently being advertised.

Good governance

The New Zealand High Commissioner HE Sarah Walsh said their international development policy recognised that good governance and the primacy of the rule of law is maintained through an accessible, impartial and effective legal system, which is a critical enabler for sustainable economic development.

She said evidence showed there was significant correlation between improved rule of law and improved income of nations, improved rule of law and improved literacy rates, improved rule of law and reduced infant mortality, "so there are huge benefits that go beyond just the legal system when you have improved rule of law."

"An independent judiciary and an effective and responsive legal system helps to safeguard the rights of people," she said.



HE Sarah Walsh

Judicial Development

PJDP started in the mid-1990s to promote the rule of law and strengthen the capacity of courts across the Pacific under the oversight of the Pacific Judicial Conference, which is made up of Pacific Chief Justices.

The current phase of the program 2010-15 is funded by the New Zealand government with technical assistance from the Federal Court of Australia. A new five-year phase will start in early 2016.

Dr Livingston Armytage is conducting the training at Tungi Colonade, attended by the Acting Attorney General and Director of Public Prosecutions 'Aminiasi Kefu, lawyers and local Magistrates.



Centre, Principal Magistrate Paula Tatafu, and right, Law practitioner Siosifa Tu'utafaiva

Matangi
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