



Administration of justice system requires highest priority : PM Puna

By Online Editor

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Cook Islands Prime Minister and Minister of Justice Henry Puna addressed a regional gathering of lay magistrates this morning saying that the administration of the justice system requires our highest priority and 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 during the opening of a Lay Judicial Officers and Decision-making Workshop.

The workshop is being run this week under the support of the Federal Court of Australia and the Pacific Judicial Development Programme. 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.

Prime Minister Puna welcomed the delegates and programme facilitators, remarking that he himself was a lawyer – a graduate from Australia. The Prime Minister quipped that he had left the legal profession behind only to end up in an equally unpopular profession: as a politician.

The workshop focuses on a very important role in our system of justice, the Prime Minister told participants – the skills required as judicial officers and the professional methods involved in the writing and reasoning of decisions taken by the court.

"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."

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

The Cook Islands he said was facing a wide-range of pressures that are impacting upon the judiciary, as with many other sectors. These included 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 in recent years is adding to the burdens upon our court services, the Prime Minister said.

"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.

SOURCE: CKI GOVT/PACNEWS