



PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

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Internal Memorandum

From: Hon. Rick Nelson Houenipwela, Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, MP Small Malaita

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To: The Clerk to the National Parliament of Solomon Islands

Date: 16th November 2015

Subject: Meeting of the Public Accounts Committee in the Pacific Region – Participants Report, Wellington New Zealand

Greetings Sir,

1. Introduction

I was honored and privilege to have attended to the Second Meeting of the Public Accounts Committee in the Pacific Region from the 26th August to 27th August 2015 in Wellington, New Zealand.

The Solomon Islands Delegation to the meeting comprises of myself as the current Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee; and the secretary to the Public Accounts Committee from the Committee Secretariat, Mrs. Jasmine Waleafea.

The Meeting was cooperatively hosted by the Commonwealth Parliament Association, the World Bank and the New Zealand House of Representative. The countries participating at this meeting were; Cook Islands, Fiji, New Zealand, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu.

2. Objectives

The objectives of this meeting are in threefold;

- 1. To share knowledge and practice on financial oversight in the Pacific Region**
- 2. To further develop a strategic vision for the proposed Pacific PAC network and the conditions for its success**
- 3. To explore how PACs and development partners can support key aspects of the vision**

All this objectives of this meeting aspires to the establishment of a network geared towards improving the capacity of parliaments in the pacific to hold governments to account for their use and management of public finances. Hence in doing so, collative good practices disseminated through such networks will contribute to better public administration and greater public confidence in the institutions of government.

Over the two days intensive deliberations, PAC Chairmen and Committee Clerks from these eight pacific legislatures discussed their common challenges and experiences in performing their parliamentary scrutiny roles.

The participants were able to ascertain that PACs in the Pacific region do have challenges specific to their size, capacity, and geographical isolation and do share common challenges in conducting their scrutiny role in their various legislatures. Thus tend to appreciate that peer – mentoring and exchange of information is vital for capacity strengthening.

3. Wiki link Site PaNPAC

At the end of the meeting, a new network was established. The network is referred to as **PaNPAC**. The network is the newest to have joined other PAC Networks and Associations amongst Commonwealth Parliaments around the world.

The network aims to set a platform whereby the pacific community of PACs and their stakeholders such as the Supreme Audit Institutions, can share information and draw on the best practices for financial scrutiny that contributes to a better public administration and greater public confidence in the institutions of government.

Some of the activities identified to bolster the performance of Pacific PACs include;

- a. Peer to peer knowledge transfer and skill development (potentially evolving peer –exchange and peer-assist support)
- b. Discussions of common challenges
- c. Development of work practices, including publications of templates for review and reporting
- d. Practical research on PAC mandate, powers and membership, with a view to setting Pacific benchmarks and
- e. Advocacy for accountability , transparency and anti-corruption issues

These activities will be directed at:

- Strengthening the understanding and capacity of PAC members and parliamentary support staff
- Strengthening connections between PACs and Auditors- General; and
- Strengthening the accountability performance of Parliament.

4. *Public Accounts Committee, Solomon Islands*

As Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, below are the directives that I wish to pursue to ensure that the knowledge and insights gained from the meeting are implemented, conducive to our setting.

A. Chairman’s Report to the Clerk to the National Parliament of Solomon Islands

This is Chairman of the PAC’s Report on the Meeting of the Public Accounts Committee of the Pacific Region. This Report contains the details of the meeting, and recommendations as per the new knowledge and benefits gained from this experience. Members of the Committee will also have access to this report, as the content will ensure that we are all on the same page in understanding our Committee role.

B. Peer-To-Peer Mentoring for Solomon Islands and Vanuatu

In the course of sharing during the deliberation, the Committee secretaries for the National Parliament of Solomon Islands and the Vanuatu House of Representative have registered their intention to try out a Peer-To-Peer Mentoring and exchange relationship. The Vanuatu House of Representative acknowledges that they may best learn from the Solomon Islands Parliament as a mentor. Correspondences are underway. However, this does not restrict the scope for Solomon Islands to farther reach-out by assisting the Committee Clerk from Niue and others on information regarding on-line training courses and other means for professional capacity building; this inevitably done with the consensus of the PAC Chairs of concerned Legislatures.

C. PanPAC Network - a PAC Space for Pacific Region

The underlining objective of this workshop is to establish such a PAC Network for the Pacific Region. Such networks have already being established amongst Commonwealth Parliaments around the world. Thus, at the end of the meeting, PanPAC was created and participants were commissioned to extend this network to their PAC Committee Members and stakeholders. Thus upon arrival, the PAC Chairman contacted all the PAC Committee members, ex-officio member (Director Committees), secretary and our prime stakeholder- the Auditor General; to consent their registration onto the network. By far Solomon Islands was the first to get all its members registered.

D. Parliamentary Calendar

The Parliamentary Committees and the National Parliament Office have witness the desperate need for a Parliamentary Calendar. However to pursue such cause depends on the Autonomous position of a Parliament. At present, the Office of the Prime Minister determines the Parliamentary schedules. Thus, is often an awful situation for the Committee to thoroughly consider - especially the Appropriation Bills; given the short notices and the Committee Secretariat is under a lot of pressure to get the Committee Reports tabled before Parliament envisages a Second Reading on the Bill.

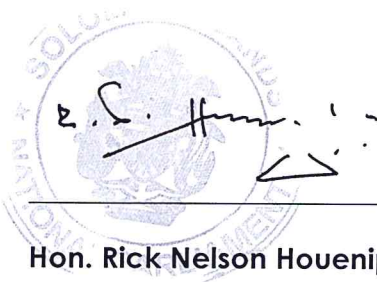
E. Under-utilizing Procedural Tools

It is also being identified with many Houses gone by; Members of Parliament have underutilized procedural tools for the purpose of oversight. This is because members themselves are not being guided well on the availability of these tools. Therefore, there is a farther need for in-house trainings on this area. As a simple strategy possible, the Secretary is planning to design and publish an Information Fact Sheet that contains **Definitions, Instructions, and Procedural Guidance** on how to utilize these procedural tools. However I strongly encourage the Procedures Department through your good Office to hold short on-going workshops to enlighten us Parliamentary Committee Chairmen and our members farther on our roles in Parliament; hence the appreciation of our national duty.

Hence the Public Accounts Committee wishes to note here that we will farther pursue;

1. That the Office of the Clerk to the National Parliament will continually support in our efforts in performing parliamentary oversight as mentioned in the activities above.
2. Clarifying the disparity on the Terms of References in the Standing orders for the Public Accounts Committee and the Public Expenditures Committee. A farther wider consultation will be required for this cause and we are envisaging it in our work plan for the New Year.

On this note I hereby submit my report.

A handwritten signature in black ink is written over a circular official stamp. The stamp features the coat of arms of the Solomon Islands and the text "NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS" around the perimeter. The signature is written in a cursive style and is partially obscured by the stamp's border.

Hon. Rick Nelson Hoenipwela

Chairman, Public Accounts Committee

National Parliament of Solomon Islands