



Press Release

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Support Urged to Assist Pacific Countries Ratify Human Rights Instruments

PORT MORESBY ,3 April 2007— Technical assistance and other support should be provided to countries in the Pacific region to enable them to carry out the steps necessary for ratification of the nine core international human rights treaties.

The countries also need support to raise awareness about the importance of these treaties, said participants at a three-day regional workshop on the Ratification of International Human Rights Instruments held in Port Moresby last week.

The workshop, which was convened by the Commonwealth Secretariat in collaboration with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, had the support of the United Nations, including UNDP and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). It was organized at the invitation of the Government of Papua New Guinea and held in the context of the Pacific Plan 2005. Participants included senior government officials from Papua New Guinea and six other Commonwealth Pacific countries.

Participants gave particular focus to the ratification of the two foundational human rights instruments - the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). By ratifying these two covenants, countries legally commit to adhere to the principles found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Currently, the Pacific, as a region, has the lowest adherence rates in the world for the twin conventions, which last year marked the 30 th anniversary of their coming into force.



Addressing the participants on behalf of the United Nations, Suki Beavers, Human Rights Specialist with the UNDP Pacific Centre in Suva, Fiji, outlined the type of support that UNDP and OHCHR can provide to countries that have ratified or are considering ratifying international human rights treaties. Ms. Beavers announced that OHCHR was in the process of recruiting a human rights advisor for Papua New Guinea, explaining that the advisor would be able to assist the government in its efforts to ratify international human rights treaties and fulfill its obligations under those treaties it had already joined.

At the same time, UNDP is finalizing a project to support the proposed National Human Rights Commission which the Government of Papua New Guinea is planning to establish, added Ms. Beavers.

In his own message, Greg Urwin, Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, said that the deliberations were aimed at helping “us understand better how we can all work together to increase the region’s ratification of international human rights instruments under the Pacific Plan,” particularly Initiative 12.5 of the Kalibobo Roadmap of the Governance Pillar which states, “where appropriate, ratify and implement international and regional human rights conventions, covenants and agreements and support reporting and other requirements.”

Mr. Urwin attributed the low ratification rates of human rights instruments in the Pacific region to “perceived incompatibility of human rights and customs” particularly in relation to the inherent communal nature of the cultures in the Pacific region. “However, I don’t believe human rights and Pacific cultures are different. There are countless similarities between the so-called western human rights tenets and how we live our daily lives within our respective cultural contexts,” he stated.

Also contributing, Rabab Fatima, Head of Human Rights at the Commonwealth Secretariat, said that the universality, interdependence and indivisibility of human rights as embodied in the ICCPR and ICESCR was recognized today as a global imperative on states to promote adherence to these human rights treaties. “Human rights is no longer defined only in reference to domestic laws but, increasingly, by reference to all international human rights instruments, whether or not acceded by a relevant state.”



In addition to the ICCPR and the ICESCR, the workshop also covered such other international human rights instruments as the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, the Convention Against Torture and the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, among others.

Also participating in the workshop was Sean Fraser from the UNDP country office in Papua New Guinea.

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