

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSIONS

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Solomon Islands

INTRODUCTION OF THE NATIONAL LEGISLATURE

The national legislature of Solomon Islands consists of a single chamber and is called the National Parliament of Solomon Islands with 38 elected members. Political institutions and practices broadly follow the Westminster pattern of Government with the Queen as Head of State, who is represented in Solomon Islands by a Governor-General, and the Prime Minister as the Head of the Government. The normal life of Parliament is four years but it may be dissolved before that period by the Head of State if Parliament decides to do so by an absolute majority vote.

Only Solomon Islanders who are of the age of 21 years, are qualified for election to Parliament. The Speaker is elected by Parliament from among those qualified to be a member. If he is chosen from among the sitting members, then the seat is declared vacant and a by-election is held.

The function of Parliament is to make laws for the peace, order and good government of Solomon Islands. Under the constitution, Parliament must meet at least once in every 12 months (but in practice it does so more often).

Within the Parliament there are select, special and standing committees appointed under its Standing Orders to consider or examine matters or bills referred to them from time to time and report the results to Parliament.

ORGANIZATION OF NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OFFICE

National Parliament, is at this stage, not on its own as

an independent government body. It is still under the umbrella of the Office of the Prime Minister.

Also up to this stage the National Parliament has not yet owned a parliament house as its permanent home.

However, there is the National Parliament Office which is administered by the Speaker through the Clerk who reports to him (Speaker). The Parliament Office is then organized into four divisions which do provide services to the Parliament. The administration is headed by the Clerk who reports to the Speaker. The finance division is headed by the Chief Accountant who reports to the Clerk. The Hansard division is headed by the Principal Editor who reports to the Clerk. And the Parliamentary Library is headed by the Sergeant-at-Arms/Librarian who is also responsible to the Clerk.

BACKGROUND OF THE PARLIAMENTARY LIBRARY

The Parliamentary Library was set up during the Legislative Council days, beginning with a small collection of books. Processing of books could only be done by a qualified staff from the National Library during the early stages of the Parliamentary Library.

The Library had been without a librarian to maintain it for a number of years up to the time when I took up employment as a Sergeant-at-Arms in the Parliament, I at the same time was also given the task of maintaining it.

With the assistance received mainly from the Australian Parliamentary Library and a few donations from other overseas Parliaments and Organizations the Library was steadily able to develop its collection.

COLLECTION AND ACQUISITION

The Library contains a general collection of approximately 500 titles on various subjects including politics, economics, laws, education and all other publications acquired from various ministries of our Government.

Also we receive 21 journal titles and 2 local newspaper titles through subscriptions and donations.

LIBRARY'S OBJECTIVE

The Library's main objective is specifically to serve the needs of the Members of Parliament and also their parliamentary associates. Also senior government officers and students from higher educational institutions may use the Library through permission but no borrowing privileges.

LIBRARY SERVICES

Due to lack of facilities and inadequate resources and manpower the Library is not in a position, at this stage, to provide research services. But simple queries and questions on government or parliamentary matters are adequately dealt with by the Librarian.

Very often Members use other available sources like government ministries, statutory bodies, political parties and other interested lobby groups, to obtain what informations they want.

FINANCE

Due to its present stage of development, the Parliament annual budget is amounted to 2 million, 42 thousand and 2 hundred and fifteen S.I. dollars (\$2,042,215). Out of this, the Library was allocated with a portion of \$3,000

just to cover the cost of a few books, annual subscription to journals and newspapers, printing and binding of books and newspapers.

FUTURE REQUIREMENTS

The Library is essentially in need of professional librarians to develop it to a higher level of providing effective informations to Members.

Recruitment is now in hand for potential candidates to be sent for training and eventually to obtain Diploma/Degree in librarianship to meet the Library's essential need.

The need to develop research services in the Library is very vital, but this can only be done with professional skill and knowledge in librarianship.

With the expected completion of the Parliament House in a year's time, we hope the Library will be in place.

CONCLUSION

It is quite unusual that most of our Members do not use the Library as much as they should. It appears that some of them rely on outside courses.

With the creation of the Association of Parliamentary Librarians of Asia and the Pacific (APLAP) it is confident that we the small parliaments will be in a good position to be developed by our big and mature colleagues.

Lastly I wish to express my sincere thanks to The Asia Foundation who generously offered financial help which

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enable those of us in the South Pacific Parliaments to attend this and the last (APIAP) conferences. Thank you very much.