CWP Pacific Region Gender and Democracy Seminar: Report for the CPA

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and the CPA New Zealand Branch hosted the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Pacific Region Gender and Democracy Seminar in Wellington, New Zealand from 27 to 30 March 2011. The theme of the seminar was Women as Agents of Change.

The Pacific Region's rate of women in parliament are the lowest in the world, and they have decreased at recent elections. The purpose of the CWP Pacific Region Gender and Democracy Seminar was for women from across the Pacific region to meet and discuss the barriers that impede women from being elected to parliament.

Participants from all CPA Pacific Region member countries were invited to nominate either a member of Parliament, for countries that have women parliamentarians, or a parliamentary candidate if they have no women members of Parliament. A full list of participants in the seminar is attached. Hon Alix Boyd Knights, Chair of the CWP, and Rt Hon Rebecca Kadaga, Deputy Chairperson of the CWP, as well as members of the Australian REgion and international NGOs also participated in the seminar.

The seminar programme consisted of seven sessions. Each session had an appointed chairperson and three presenters, who were either recognised experts in the area and/or seminar delegates. Following the presentations and a questions and answers session, delegates then broke into three workshops.

During the workshops participants discussed the session topic and made recommendations. Each workshop appointed a rapporteur from amongst the delegates, whose role was to record discussions and report back to the overall seminar. Following the 30 minute workshops, all delegates reconvened, and the rapporteurs from the 3 workshops reported back on discussions and recommendations.

The topics of the seminar sessions were:

1. Gender and democracy in the Pacific – why do we need to increase women’s parliamentary representation in the region?
2. Strategies to increase women’s representation in parliament, such as Temporary Special Measures, the millennium Development Goals, and CEDAW (the cultural issues and means to deal with them)
3. Campaigning for women candidates: logistics, funding, support, and training
4. Working with Parliament: split session
   • Members of Parliament: Notices of motion and drafting Members’ Bills
   • Parliamentary Candidates: making effective submissions to parliament
5. Working with the media
6. The role of NGOs, specifically in promoting women candidates and women members of Parliament
7. Supporting Pacific women as agents of change: open-floor discussion on conclusions and recommendations for the seminar report.

The discussions that took place throughout the seminar on the above topics allowed for current members of Parliament and parliamentary candidates to share their experiences, advice and to discuss what action can be taken by the whole region to positively influence in the rates of women in parliament.

The first meeting of the CWP Pacific Region Steering Committee took place to establish the group and elect Hon Elizabeth Burain, Member of Parliament from Bougainville, as Chairperson and Tangariki Reete, Member of Parliament from Kiribati, Deputy Chairperson.

A report of the discussions and recommendations from the seminar will be published by the CPA Pacific Region Secretariat.

Participants at the CWP Pacific Region Gender and Democracy Seminar outside Parliament House, Wellington, New Zealand.