Remarks by Mr Clezy Rore, Clerk to the National Parliament of Solomon Islands, on behalf of Mr Akbar Khan, Secretary-General, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

7 November 2016
Kia ora!

Firstly I would like to say how delighted I am that the CPA Solomon Islands Branch is hosting this very important gathering. Welcome to you all, to all the participants including the PAC Chairpersons, PAC Members and Clerks and also to the World Bank. We look forward to all of your active participation.

I have worked for parliament as a Deputy Clerk from 2001 to 2004 after which I left to pursue my undergraduate studies and then returned to work with the Public Service. I was then appointed as Clerk to the National Assembly in March 2015.

I know that the CPA, in cooperation with the World Bank Group, is delighted to be part of this meeting. The Secretary-General, Mr Akbar Khan, also wishes to express his thanks to the World Bank for its partnership and collaboration in this crucial area of parliamentary business. He also wanted me to thank the Solomon Islands Branch for its willingness to host this meeting. It demonstrates the commitment of the Parliament of Solomon Islands to promote the parliamentary democratic values to which we all subscribe; the CPA is very grateful for your continuing support. He is keen that this gathering is a great success and of value to you all.

Since assuming office as Secretary-General, in January 2016, Mr Khan has visited a few Branches in the Pacific Region as well as participated in the 47th Presiding Officers and Clerks Conference in Nuku’alofa Tonga in June 2016. He has been encouraged to learn how the region is seeking to implement the enduring political values of the Commonwealth such as:
• just and honest government;
• the alleviation of poverty;
• fundamental human rights;
• international peace and order;
• global economic development;
• the rule of law;
• equal rights and representation for all citizens regardless of gender;
• the separation of powers and;
• the right to participate in free and fair elections, amongst others.

In this regard, the CPA deems it of the utmost importance that these values are underpinned by the separation of powers when it comes to the relationship between the three branches of government: the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. In their respective spheres, they are the guarantors of the rule of law, the promotion and protection of fundamental human rights and a country’s adherence to good governance.

In this regard, the CPA has been working tirelessly to strengthen Parliament’s oversight functions over the executive. Committees and their role of overseeing government departments and agencies play a crucial role in this process. This does specifically apply to the oversight process of whether public funds are spent effectively and honestly.
This is why in today’s modern democracies, enabled and well-resourced Public Accounts Committees are of the utmost importance. In fact, Professor Peter Hennessy, an English historian and academic specialising in the history of government from the Queen Mary University of London describes Public Accounts Committees as “the queen of the select committees which by its very existence exerts a cleansing effect in all government departments.”

Ladies and Gentlemen, this quote does stress how important the function of the Public Accounts Committee in your respective Parliaments is. This programme could therefore not be more timely and it gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to this Meeting of the Pacific Network of Public Accounts Committees here in Honiara, Solomon Islands.

This meeting builds on the outcomes of the Pacific Network of Public Accounts Committees (PaNPAC) meeting in Wellington, New Zealand in August 2015 and aims at further strengthening the cross-parliamentary cooperation between the PACs of the region to develop parliamentary capacity for effective financial scrutiny.

Despite their importance within the parliamentary setting, PACs face a variety of challenges to carry out their duties effectively.

In the Association’s publication “The Overseers”, a report written by David McGee, former Clerk of the Parliament of New Zealand, it was assessed how PACs work in practice and whether they are fulfilling expectations as important guarantors of good governance. The report identified that there is a need to improve institutional
capacity, that is, the ability of Parliaments, PACs and Auditors General offices to carry out their functions by being provided with sufficient resources and having adequate training and access to the expertise they require.

Subsequently, the CPA and the World Bank Institute published a second book by Mr McGee, named The Budget Process. This publication takes a wider and deeper look at the role of Parliaments in financial management, examining in detail every step of how Parliament fulfils one of its most fundamental authorities – the approval of spending of public money. It also shows how Parliaments across the Commonwealth are developing practices and procedures to strengthen the effectiveness of this approval process to become a major contributor to good governance and development. Mr McGee’s work clearly shows that Parliaments are moving beyond their role as spending scrutineers to a more active role, thereby contributing to the overall financial management of their countries.

PACs in particular need, in order to succeed, to have the means to exchange information and ideas to enable them to keep up-to-date with important developments, changing standards and best practices as they emerge.

This meeting aims at doing exactly that: With 10 Branches across the Pacific region of the Commonwealth, the CPA offers a vast opportunity for Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff to link up on issues of mutual concern. It is hoped that, through this programme, the CPA can contribute to the ongoing interchanges on PAC matters which can only strengthen and develop the capacity of each committee. We at the CPA believe that the most effective way in which PAC performance in every
jurisdiction can be improved is by developing ways to exchange information. Information is a key resource in building capacity for the PAC to function well. Even well established PACs need to keep abreast of developments, identify trends and try to anticipate the varying range of audit issues which it will eventually have to deal with.

In particular, this meeting aims to:

1. Identify where the region sees the application of good practices

2. Explore how the region can learn from each other’s successes and failures; and

3. Build consensus as to what progress looks like- for individual jurisdictions and the region as a whole.

Hon. Chairperson, Members, Clerks and our partners, let me end by wishing everyone present, on behalf of the CPA, a very successful meeting and we look forward to the outcomes and action plan that will be generated for the PAC Committees represented here, in the Pacific Region.

Thank you.

-ENDS-