



## ***NEWS RELEASE***

### **Pacific Parliamentarians Exchange Views and Ideas on the World Trade Organization (WTO) and Key Issues on the International Trade Agenda**

#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

KOROLEVU, FIJI ISLANDS — Members representing a cross-section of Commonwealth Parliaments in the Pacific have met in Fiji Islands to discuss the WTO and the Multilateral Trading System and exchange views and ideas on trade-related and development-related issues of particular relevance to the Pacific region.

The meeting, a CPA/WTO Regional Trade Workshop for Pacific Parliamentarians, was organized by the CPA, the WTO Secretariat and the Parliament of Fiji. It brought together approximately 30 participants including Parliamentarians from the Pacific region, CPA and WTO staff, guest speakers and invited observer organizations.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, the CPA Secretary-General, Hon. Denis Marshall, QSO, said the Workshop was important as “parliamentarians need to be informed about the role of institutions such as the WTO to appreciate the benefits of liberalization of international trade”.

The Workshop discussed ways for more FICS to participate in the Multilateral Trading System. To date, three Forum Island Countries (FICs) have full Membership – Fiji, PNG, and the Solomon Islands. Tonga has to ratify its membership arrangements and Samoa and Vanuatu have applied for full membership. Members noted that full membership would open up access to all of the WTO’s facilities including its formal dispute settlement provisions and technical assistance, but also would entail obligations and financial costs.

Members agreed a request for observer status at WTO was an extremely low-cost option that opens some training and technical assistance doors and, given the unusual position of smaller FICs, need not be seen as an implied commitment to take the next step of full WTO membership, with all the obligations this involves. At the same time this would not rule out the option of full WTO membership in the future.

The Workshop also discussed the opportunities of making use of the Forum Geneva Office and the Commonwealth Secretariat ‘Hubs and Spokes’ Project. In the Pacific, the Forum Secretariat in Suva is the ‘hub’ for the Pacific region and coordinate networks of analysts (the ‘Spokes’) currently attached to Trade Ministries in PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Participants agreed FIC should also make use of informal coordination with a range of existing WTO members on issues of common concern.

The Workshop also agreed that all FIC countries should be aware of WTO rules and principles since trade negotiations with their main export destinations are inevitably conducted in the sophisticated language of the WTO.

The Workshop was opened by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Hon. Pita Nacuva, MP, and included statements by the Fiji Minister of Commerce and Trade, Hon. Sivia Qoro, MP; Hon. Pio Tabaiwala, Minister of State, Fiji; the Minister of Agriculture, Tonga, Hon. Peauafi Haukinima, MP; and the Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Rt Hon. Don McKinnon. Workshop participants also received input from Tim Grocer, MP, New Zealand and the former Chair of WTO Agriculture negotiations; Joanne Young from the Pacific Islands Forum and representatives of the CPA and WTO Secretariats.

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