



MEDIA RELEASE

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Starting the year as we mean to carry on — advocating for good governance

The Pacific Association of Supreme Audit Institutions (PASAI), in coordination with the Tonga Parliament and the Tonga Audit Office, started the new year in Tonga with a three-day, high-level workshop for parliamentarians of Tonga on the role of a Public Accounts Committee of Parliament.

The workshop was facilitated by PASAI Advocate Mr Eroni Vatuloka and Siosua Utoikamanu (and former Tonga Minister of Finance), with Chita Marzan and Savenaca Narube from the Pacific Financial and Technical Assistance Centre. The workshop was attended by Cabinet Ministers, People's Representatives and Nobles Representatives.

Lord Tu'ivakano, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Tonga noted, "the major role we play in ensuring that financial scrutiny is carried out. We, as Members of Parliament, can do this by ensuring that public funds are used wisely, with the intention of improving the lives of the Tongan people".

Key government officials came together to talk about the role of Members of Parliament in overseeing how public funds are spent and the role of the Public Accounts Committee within the Tongan Parliamentary processes. It was acknowledged that the Public Accounts Committee is challenged by limited time to review budgets, estimates and reports and there is a need for better coordination and planning.

Mr Vatuloka said, "The Office of the Auditor-General is one of a number of anti-corruption agencies that has found it hard to get its recommendations implemented. The intention of the workshop is to build a working relationship with the Parliament Committees.

"Given delays in processing financial audits in the Pacific region, this relationship will support the government officials responsible for preparing government accounts and for scrutinising those accounts after they are audited."

PASAI is able to bring a regional perspective to their workshops, sharing Pacific-wide experiences and circumstances. This is the second workshop that PASAI has run under its new advocacy program and they hope to run more across the Pacific. Key discussions are likely to include the level of participation of the private sector in the scrutiny of government budgets, whether the Public Accounts Committee should engage civil society and non-government organisations, and whether the independence of Parliament has an impact on the independence of the Audit Office.

The workshop was run with funding support from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). PASAI is the official association of supreme audit institutions (government audit offices and similar organisations, known as SAIs) in the Pacific region. PASAI promotes transparent, accountable, effective, and efficient use of public sector resources in the Pacific. It contributes to that goal by helping its member SAIs improve the quality of public sector auditing in the Pacific to uniformly high standards. PASAI is supported by the Asian Development Bank, the Governments of Australia and New Zealand, the International Association of Supreme Audit Institutions Development Initiative, and the World Bank.

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Enc: Photo of participants



Participants of the Accountability and Transparency workshop held in Nuku'alofa 19–21 January 2016