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**VISIT TO KIRIBATI BY A DELEGATION FROM THE ACT
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

11-14 APRIL 2011

REPORT

May 2011

Background

In 2007 the Australian Region Management Committee of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) agreed that Australian Branches of the CPA would be twinned with the Parliaments of Pacific Branches. The aim of the arrangement is to promote cooperation and support between developing and developed Branches and to foster sustained relationships between the twinned Branches.

Under the arrangements the following Branches are twinned:

- Australian Capital Territory with Kiribati
- New South Wales with Bougainville and Solomon Islands
- Northern Territory with Niue
- Queensland with Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu
- South Australia with Tonga
- Victoria with Fiji, Nauru and Tuvalu
- Tasmania with Samoa
- Western Australia with Cook Islands

Since its inception, the ACT Branch has been very active in the provision of support and assistance to the Kiribati Branch, facilitating training of staff both in Australia and Kiribati, hosting visits by the Speaker and members of the Public Accounts Committee of the Parliament of Kiribati, and the provision of equipment, notably an upgrade of the Hansard recording system in the Parliament.

Following an inaugural visit to Kiribati during the 6th Assembly by the then Speaker and Deputy Speaker, the ACT Branch resolved that a similar delegation visit be conducted once each Assembly. This delegation visit is in fulfilment of that objective in the 7th Assembly.

Planning for the visit was undertaken in consultation with the Kiribati Parliament and the Australian High Commission in Tarawa. The delegation received a briefing from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade before it left.

Visit to the Kiribati Parliament 11-14 April 2011

Monday, 11 April 2011

The delegation comprising of Mrs Vicki Dunne MLA, Ms Caroline Le Coutuer MLA and Mr Max Kiermaier, Deputy Clerk travelled overnight from Brisbane to Tarawa, via the Solomons and Nauru. It was met by staff of the Parliament upon arrival at 7 am and was accorded VIP status while undergoing entry formalities.

The official program commenced in the afternoon with a meeting with the Clerk of the Parliament, Mr Eni Tekanene, who briefed delegates on their program while in Kiribati. Then followed a tour of the parliamentary building, culminating with the honour of being granted a seat on the floor of the House while the Parliament was in session.

During the walk around, delegates had the opportunity to meet several members and staff, and to view accommodation arrangements. Delegates learnt that:

- There are 3 political parties represented in Parliament, namely the Ruling Party Boutokaan te Koaua with 24 members, and two Opposition parties, the Karikirakean Maiuraoin te I-Kiribati with 12 members and the Maurin Kiribati party with 7 members. There are also 2 independent members. There are 3 female Members of Parliament.
- A general election is due September/October this year, following the expiry of a 4 year term.
- Following the election, up to 4 candidates from the elected MPs will stand for President (*te Beretitenti*) in a separate election.
- The Parliament meets 3 times a year, in Monday to Friday sitting fortnights.
- There are party rooms for each of the 2 Opposition parties.
- All members have a (very) small room, with space for a bench and desk only.
- Proceedings are interrupted at 4 pm for an afternoon tea break

Call on the Speaker of the Parliament of Kiribati

During the afternoon tea break, the delegation called on the Speaker of the Parliament, the Hon Taomati Iuta MP. A wide ranging discussion took place in which the Speaker briefed the delegates on aspects of Kiribati political life and some of the issues facing the Parliament. He particularly made mention of his desire to strengthen the support capability of the Library. As the ACT delegates also take the Chair as Assistant Speakers, there was also a discussion on the role of the Speaker and control of Chamber proceedings. Interestingly, the Speaker presides over the entire proceedings. As well, there is no position of Deputy Speaker in Kiribati; if the Speaker is absent another Member may be elected temporarily to that position.

Above all, the Speaker was keen to express his thanks for the assistance that had been accorded his Parliament through the twinning arrangement. The delegation was pleased to be able to inform the Speaker that recently the ACT Legislative Assembly had formally requested that a number of computers which had been replaced following a refreshment program be donated to the Kiribati Parliament under the *Chief Minister's PC Donation Scheme*.

Welcome reception

In the evening the delegation was afforded a Welcome Reception in the grounds of the Parliament. Besides several Ministers and members of Parliament, also in attendance was the Australian High Commissioner, His Excellency Brett Aldam, as well as representation from the Cuban and Taiwanese embassies. Several members of NGOs working Kiribati were also present.

In his welcoming speech to the delegation, the Speaker indicated his gratitude that the delegation had been able to travel to Kiribati to see first hand the operation of the Kiribati Parliament. Both delegates responded, indicating their appreciation of the hospitality being extended to them. Then followed several dance performances by an islander dance group, during which the delegation was honoured by a garlanding ceremony.

Tuesday, 12 April 2011

Tuesday morning provided the delegation with an extended opportunity to observe proceedings in the Kiribati Parliament. The Parliament is broadcast on radio throughout all the islands and is keenly listened to. Before commencing proceedings, the Speaker advised Members of the presence of the delegation and extended the Parliament's welcome. Although the proceedings were conducted in I-Kiribati, the Clerk kept the delegation informed on what was happening.

Question Time

Proceedings commence with Question Time, which can last until lunch time. Question Time takes the format of a Member asking a written question (the standing orders requiring at least 4 days notice to be given) and a Minister reading a written reply. Both the question and the answer are printed on the day's Order Paper, both in English and I-Kiribati. Following the Minister's answer, there is then the opportunity for 3 supplementary questions to be asked. More often than not, the Member who asked the original question takes up this opportunity to ask further questions, although other Members may also ask one of the supplementaries. There are no time limits for questions or answers. On the morning of the delegation's visit, 20 questions were listed on the Order Paper and all were asked and answered.

One thing that struck the delegation was the deferential silence in which proceedings are conducted.

After Question Time, a report from the Public Accounts Committee was debated at length. The subject matter was of such interest to Members that the debate was still continuing at the afternoon tea break.

Meeting with Australian High Commissioner and staff

HE Brett Aldam, Australian High Commissioner to Kiribati, hosted the delegation to lunch at his residence. Also attending were other High Commission and AusAID staff. The delegation was briefed on Australian activity in Kiribati, many of which the delegation would witness first hand during its program the following day.

Meeting with UNDP Project Officer

As part of a joint initiative of the CPA (Australian Region) and the United Nations Development Programme, a Pacific parliamentary partnerships program, involving Kiribati, was launched in late 2010. The aim of the program is to develop parliamentarians professionally, enhance corporate capacity building in the Parliament and expand community outreach by Members of Parliament. The delegation was due to meet the UNDP Project Officer for the program but, unfortunately, he had not arrived back in the country as had been expected. The Clerk briefed the delegation secretary on progress under the program.

Wednesday, 13 April 2011

Kiribati Education Improvement Program (KEIP)

The delegation met with Kevin Rouatu, Kiribati Ministry of Education, Ian Cosier, Senior Management Education Specialist and Libby Hegerty, KEIP Team Leader and were briefed on the Kiribati Education Improvement Program. The goals of KEIP are for:

- All children to achieve functional literacy and numeracy after 6 years of basic education and are equipped with the skills to continue to the next stage of education; and
- A comprehensive, inclusive education sector adequately funded and effectively managed providing quality education to all children.

Donors to the program, which is conducted in partnership with the Kiribati Government are AusAID, UNESCO and UNICEF.

The delegation learnt that the program had only recently commenced and was in its pilot/design stage and will be rolled out in phases over the next 10 years with the focus on 4 main areas, namely facilities improvement, policy and legislation, workforce development and improving curriculum and assessment.

Visit to School and Centre for Children with Special Needs

A highlight of the visit was meeting the staff and students of the School and Centre for Children with Special Needs. It is the only institution in Kiribati that provides for the needs of disabled children and their families and provides access to education for 80 disabled children. Support is provided by dedicated Australians from Australian Volunteers International.

Kiribati Institute of Technology

The aims of the Kiribati Institute of Technology are twofold – not only to provide trade skills training to students to the Australian Cert II level standard (ie, school level), but to also train the lecturers to an appropriate standard whereby they can deliver courses. The goal is to move to an Australian curriculum under which staff and students will be able to perform at an Australian standard. Three trades are offered (carpentry and construction, automotive, and electro-technology) but they also offer short courses in “soft” trades such as business and accounting, and IT.

Australian expertise to run the courses is sourced from South Australian CITs, under a contract.

Marine Training Centre

Captain Boro Lucic, Superintendent and Captain Peter Lange, took the delegation on a tour of the Marine Training Centre. The Centre was established 40 years ago by a consortium of German shipping companies to train Kiribati sailors for their (mainly) container vessels. There is a competitive selection process from among young men throughout the Kiribati islands, and two intakes totalling about 150 students are taken each year. Upon successful completion of their course, Kiribati sailors are offered 1 year employment contracts with German shipping lines. Approximately 95% are offered re-employment at the conclusion of their initial contracts. Seamen receive

training in all aspects of life at sea, including safety, engine mechanics, and bridge operations. Their remittances - \$10 million annually or 15 per cent of GDP - contribute significantly to national economic development

Climate Change Project Management Unit

The Secretary to the President, TangTang Kaureata, briefed the delegation on what Kiribati had been doing in relation to climate change, of which the President was a keen advocate. Interestingly, and despite evidence of sea rising (and the highest point on Tarawa being 3 metres above sea level), most I-Kiribati are reluctant to leave their islands, retaining a fatalist attitude that they would prefer to die where they are.

Of more immediate concern is the increasing brackishness of the water supplies, not only causing drinking water problems but also killing crops. Older persons had observed that it was no longer possible to grow crops in areas where once the crops were bountiful, and many in the outer islands were now complaining that their drinking water was too salty. However it was too expensive to provide water tanks to the outer islands.

Power supplies on Tarawa are provided by diesel generators, and the European Union was providing solar panels to outer islands to augment the diesel power, mainly used in ice plants to refrigerate fish.

The Secretary told the delegation that, rather than encourage people to relocate elsewhere in Kiribati, their strategy was to upgrade the skills of the people so that they could move away from Kiribati completely, and remit funds back home.

Kiribati Adaptation Program

The Kiribati Adaptation Program (KAP) is an initiative of the Government of Kiribati, led by the Office of the President and is supported by the World Bank, the Global Environment Facility, AusAID and NZAID. Its goal is to reduce Kiribati's vulnerability to climate change, climate variability and sea level rise through adaptation. Phase 1 of the KAP, funded by the Japanese Government and completed several years ago involved the collection of information to facilitate planning. The current Phase II of KAP involves implementation of a number of pilot programs, including:

- Construction of seawalls in South Tarawa
- Freshwater supply and sustainability, including development of a Tarawa Water Master Plan and a national Water Resources Policy and implementation plans, monitoring of bore holes, hydrogeographical surveys on North Tarawa and rainwater harvesting.,
- Mangrove planting
- Education
- Water supply and leak detection; and
- Climate monitoring.

Importantly, much of the work is being conducted irrespective of climate change. Drinking water is an example. Tarawa's rainfall is irregular and expensive to harvest.

However, up to 50% of the water is lost to leakage and waste, so programs are in place to address this. For example floats are put on tanks to counter overflows (but it has been found that many of the floats, taps and valves are being removed, necessitating a public information campaign.) Also, the prevalence of solar powered pumps in the outer islands has degraded the underground freshwater lens which lies between the soil and the saltwater.

The construction of a desalination plant is actively being considered as a solution.

Summary and recommendations

This first ACTLA delegation visit to Kiribati was undertaken following a recommendation made to the ACT Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association by the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the 6th Assembly, namely:

“That the Branch agree to regular visits between the two Branches at least once every Assembly by Members and officers of the respective Parliaments. Such visits would enhance the relationship and:

- *provide a greater understanding of how the two parliaments operate and*
- *allow for an information exchange between Members and Officials.”*

The delegation was warmly received by Members of the Kiribati Parliament and there was genuine appreciation of the fact that the ACT legislature had visited Kiribati. Not only did this visit allow the delegation to meet and confer with Members of the Kiribati Parliament, but also it provided an opportunity to observe proceedings first hand.

Importantly, the visit also allowed the delegation to witness and appreciate the problems and issues faced by an impoverished Pacific country, and one especially subject to the affects of climate change. The delegation returned with a greater understanding of Kiribati, its parliament and its people.

The delegation **recommends:**

That the program of a visit by a delegation from the ACT Legislative Assembly to its twinned parliament continue in the 8th Assembly.

The twinning arrangement has been a great success. To help promote a greater awareness among Members and ACT residents of the relationship and the benefits it has achieved, particularly for Kiribati, the delegation **recommends:**

That a link be established on the ACT Legislative Assembly website to a page detailing the twinning relationship with the Parliament of Kiribati and the activities and achievements of the program.

Thanks and acknowledgments

The delegation thanks the Speaker, the Hon Taomati Iuta MP, Members, the Clerk and staff of the Kiribati Parliament for their generous and warm hospitality during the visit.

The delegation wishes to give special thanks to His Excellency Brett Aldam, the Australian High Commissioner, his staff and AusAID staff for the assistance provided before and during the visit. The delegation especially appreciated the opportunity to witness Australian involvement in the development of skills and infrastructure in Kiribati.

Vicki Dunne MLA

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