Cooks seek to become fourth GOPAC nation

COOK ISLANDS Parliamentarians, government officials, and Pacific region dignitaries gathered yesterday for the opening of a regional anti-corruption conference.

The meeting has been organised by the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC), a Canadian-based organisation with roughly 50 chapters on six continents.

The two-day meeting held at the Edgewater Resort and Spa has brought together traditional Cook Islands leaders, elected officials, and legislators from parliaments throughout the Oceania region to develop the capacity of parliamentarians to support anti-corruption efforts.

Prime Minister Henry Puna opened the conference with a speech that focused on a theme “... of adopting three R’s” - recognising corruption, responsibility to take action against it, and a resolve to work “collectively and co-operatively for better practices”.

“The Cook Islands is the right place to host this meeting as I believe this country is a leader in the region for transparency and accountability,” reads an excerpt of Puna’s speech.

“According to the United Nations Convention Against Corruption, just over two years ago, the Cook Islands Government is firmly committed to the development and strengthening of public accountability and oversight, both at the national level and in the building of regional and international co-operative networks and frameworks to fight corruption and other criminal activity.”

GOPAC’s Oceania chair John Hyde said the Rarotonga meeting “is about empowering Parliamentarians to take a stronger role in overseeing anti-corruption in their governments and countries”.

Co-ordinator Tangata Vainerere of Pacific Legislatures for Population and Governance (PLPG) said the Cook Islands is aiming to become the fourth nation in the region with a national GOPAC chapter, joining New Zealand, Kiribati, and Australia.

“Discussions have already taken place to start this process,” he said.

Over the course of the conference, attendees are scheduled to participate in various sessions on oversight, the United Nations Convention Against Corruption, strategy development, and discussions on drafting plans of action.

GOPAC is funded by the Government of Kuwait through a $3 million dollar project, which includes financial assistance for a period of five years.

The conference concludes today.

- Emmanuel Samagiou

GOPAC’s Oceania Chair John Hyde addressing dignitaries at yesterday’s opening of the anti-corruption conference.