

Tonga joins global anti-corruption group

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TRANSCRIPT

The United Nations is singing Tonga's praises after the country's recent steps towards developing stronger anti-corruption mechanisms.

The nation's MPs have signed on to the Global Organisation of Parliamentarians Against Corruption, or GOPAC, and set up a standing committee on anti-corruption - the first of its kind in the Pacific.

GOPAC chairperson John Hyde told Koroi Hawkins, considering Tonga's recent transition to democracy it has made great strides fighting corruption.

JOHN HYDE: GOPAC is a non-partisan organisation of parliamentarians who appreciate that corruption is one of the most important issues in terms of holding back development and stopping our communities all over the world from enjoying their full freedoms and proper development.

KOROI HAWKINS: And what do you do, what do these parliamentarians do once they have signed onto this?

JH: Well as anti-corruption advocates they work to promote anti-corruption policies in their own parliaments and a key part of that is to encourage their governments and their parliaments to have an active role in signing on and ratifying the UN convention against corruption.

KH: Just how bad is corruption in Tonga? Are there any studies on that are there any figures that we have to compare with the region?

JH: Well Tonga probably comes out in most reviews as being on the same par with other Pacific countries and there is a consistent figure from small business people, when they are being interviewed and that comes out that about sixty percent of small business people expect that in the coming year, to do business they'll be either paying some sort of bribe or some sort of incentive to government officials to be undertaking business. So it's a very, very serious issue.

KH: Now that Tonga is starting down this path what is the next step?

JH: If we look at Tonga it's virtually in less than seven years moved to a functioning democratic parliament and government. So what they have achieved in seven years is quite incredible. The other issue in Tonga is that they established an anti-corruption commission. So that has been in legislation, the issue has been that the position hasn't been filled. So they have got a very strong ombudsman's position as known as a public relations officer. But they haven't been able to fill or had the political will to fill this anti-corruption commissioner position. So after they formed the GOPAC chapter the next Monday in parliament last week they actually formed the first standing committee in any parliament in the Pacific. So we don't even have one in New Zealand of that. So that is a really big step forward.

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