

More inclusive anti-corruption strategy for Pacific

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The Global Organisation of Parliamentarians Against Corruption is calling for a more inclusive approach to tackling the problem in the Pacific.

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TRANSCRIPT

The Global Organisation of Parliamentarians Against Corruption, or GOPAC, is calling for a more inclusive approach to tackling corruption in the Pacific.

Tonga is the latest country to sign onto GOPAC after the Cook Islands and Kiribati.

Its chairperson, John Hyde, spoke with Koroi Hawkins.

JOHN HYDE: GOPAC acts as a motivating force for parliamentarians and it is very important in terms of South-South Cooperation and inter-pacific cooperation. In, when we had the Anti-Corruption meeting in Tonga with GOPAC, UNDP and UNODC we also had Nandi Glasse the minister in the Cook Islands and other MPs from the Pacific who were there to talk about their experiences in being advocates in their home countries for corruption. So I think GOPACs got a very important regional role. It also involves New Zealand MPs and Australian MPs who have GOPAC chapters as well. And it is really helping I think, particularly smaller Pacific countries to see that with a few champion MPs you can actually make real inroads into corruption.

KOROI HAWKINS: And this is on a much bigger scale in countries in Melanesia like Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands and Vanuatu where the corruption is so systemic that it affects every aspect of life and takes away from the normal people. Is there any hope of making inroads into those areas where the corruption, the effect of it is so pronounced?

JH: Well yeah, clearly PNG and Solomons have got much bigger populations but the United Nations Pacific Regional Anti-Corruption team is actually in Solomons all this week doing a very big workshop with the Prime Minister, members of parliament, transparency international, some civil society members and government. The PM there has made a commitment to set up an anti-corruption commission. I think most leaders most parliamentarians understand that if you don't tackle corruption the opportunity costs is hospitals, its schools, its police. We see that Papua New Guinea is having trouble funding enough police. If you are able to cut corruption that means that you have got more money to pay for these basic services and to increase the quality of life. So no, I would certainly say that over the last eight years there has been a huge awareness of the damage of corruption but also there has been an increase in non-acceptance. So I think parliamentarians, business people and others are saying we actually don't have to accept, we don't have to tolerate corruption we can do something about it.

KH: That's all good and well but for instance this team that you are talking about in Solomon Islands I asked to speak to them about what they are doing there and they saying its too sensitive. So when push comes to shove you are asking people to incriminate themselves and basically lock themselves up if they are taking part in corruption. That is a bit harder than the principles and the awareness that you are talking about.

JH: Um yea, well I mean I have never come across a Mafia boss or anybody who is actually really a king pin in corruption dobbing themselves in and doing that. What you are doing is you are working with the people who can make change to actually work with them. So as at the appropriate time and the appropriate time that they can bring it in. We have all seen that you can have well meaning activists that say we have got to do this, got to do this. But if you don't bring, the government, if you don't bring the elite in some countries, the decision makers, the big business people that control the economy. If you don't bring them on board, enable them to see what corruption is actually causing the country. Then you are not going to succeed. Its a fallacy that all politicians all parliamentarians are corrupt. Or that all big business or all media are corrupt. There are corrupt people within each strata of society and each part of the economy and each part of the government. So what you have got to be able to do is to set up the system so as you can tackle systemic corruption, so as you can make it that the police service, the hospital, the prisons, the treasury the finance departments that are awarding lucrative contracts. That there is transparency in those ways. And it is not easy and it does take time but it is about being, being able to make an intervention and to make a change at the appropriate time. And you have got to bring the community with you as well.