



PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI

**REPORT ON STUDY VISIT TO UK PARLIAMENTS (WESTMINSTER,
PARLIAMENT OF SCOTLAND AND THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF WALES)**

JANUARY 21ST – FEBRUARY 4TH 2015

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BACKGROUND

Following Fiji's General Elections on September 17th, 2014, fifty (50) Members of Parliament were sworn in on October 6th, 2014. Out of this number, only six (6) had previously been Members of Parliament.

After a lapse of eight years, it was important for Members of Parliament even those who had been members previously to learn Parliament procedures. More importantly specific appointments such as the Speaker, Deputy Speaker, Whips, Leader of the Government in Parliament, Leader of the Opposition and the Secretary General needed to learn what their roles were in Parliament.

For this purpose, a study tour to the UK Parliaments of Westminster in London, Scotland and the National Assembly of Wales by a Fiji Parliament delegation took place from January 21st to February 4th 2015.

INTRODUCTION

To assist Members of Parliament in their understanding of Parliament processes a Fiji delegation travelled to the United Kingdom (UK) to undertake a study tour of the Westminster Parliament in London, the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly of Wales. The whole purpose of the tour was to expose members of the delegation to systems of Parliament in the UK.

This kind of exposure was necessary for the Fiji Parliament, as it allowed members of the delegation to see first-hand how Parliaments operated in the UK and equally important to compare their systems and processes with those adopted in Fiji. In addition, it was important for the Fiji Parliament to develop new networks and re-engage as well as strengthen old ties with former Parliamentary partners.

The delegation was led by the Speaker of the Fiji Parliament, the Hon Dr Jiko Luveni, and comprised the Leader of the Government in Parliament, Hon Pio Tikoduadua, Leader of the Opposition, Hon Ro Teimumu Kepa and the Secretary General, Viniana Namosimalua.

The study tour was made possible by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Parliament project through funding support from the European Union (EU). The initiative by the UNDP Parliament project is part of assistance to the Fiji Parliament by the project donors (EU, New Zealand, Australia and Japan) since January 2014.

THE UK PARLIAMENT - WESTMINSTER

The Westminster is made up of the House of Commons, the House of Lords and the Crown. There are 650 Members of Parliament (MPs) in the House of Commons. The House of Lords is made up of close to 790 Members generally known as Peers. They work on behalf of the UK as a whole, rather than for single constituencies. The House of Lords has close to 450 staff and the House of Commons around 1,550 staff.

Before embarking on its official visit to Westminster, the delegation first met with the European Parliament Information Office and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy in London before its tour of the Westminster Parliament. The delegation gained insight into how the European Parliament operated and of particular interest was how it engaged with the public through its outreach programs.

The Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) informed the delegation of the kinds of work it was undertaking in various parts of the world in regard to supporting the work of Parliaments and the political parties. Such programmes included strengthening the research capabilities of Parliament and assisting in developing networks, so that like-minded parties linked. The delegation explored with WFD how the Fiji Parliament could be assisted in this regard.

In addition the delegation had the opportunity to meet with high representatives of two major networks of global parliaments; Mr Joe Omorodion, Acting Secretary General of the

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and Mr Martin Chungong of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Both representatives expressed interest in having Fiji re-join the CPA and the IPU to take advantage of the interactions gained from such associations. This was a welcome sign as it set the tone for re-engaging with Fiji's former Parliamentary partners and developing new networks with other Parliaments.

In the Westminster Parliament, there were meetings with delegation counterparts, ie the UK House of Commons Clerk, Mr David Natzler to discuss how the Secretariat operated, the Shadow Foreign Affairs Minister, Rt Hon John Spellar and the Hon Simon Danczuk MP who discussed the role of an opposition MP and operations of the Westminster Parliament. These included determination of Members/Opposition Offices pay and allowances.



Madam Speaker, Hon. Dr Jiko Luveni with the Speaker of the House of Lords, the Lord Speaker Baroness D'Souza

The Speaker had the opportunity to meet with the Speaker of the House of Lords, the Lord Speaker Baroness D'Souza and discussed the role of the Speaker. In a chance meeting, the Speaker also met the first woman Speaker of the UK House of Commons Rt Hon Boothroyd. She was a Member of Parliament from 1973 to 2000 and was the first and only female Speaker from 1992 to 2000.

Meetings with the Opposition Chief Whip Rt Hon Rosie Winterton and the Legislative Clerk in the House of Commons, Ms. Kate Ems, focused on the role of the Whips and the legislative processes in the UK Parliament respectively.

The delegation had the opportunity to meet the Commonwealth Secretary General His Excellency Kamallesh Sharma at the historic Malborough House, where Fiji's independence documents were signed. His Excellency paid keen interest to Fiji's restoration to Parliamentary democracy and encouraged the delegation to ensure that parliamentary processes were well facilitated.

Briefings were also received from the House of Commons staff on the Prime Minister's Question Time, where the Prime Minister is asked questions without notice by Members of Parliament. The delegation also had the opportunity to hold discussions with Women Parliamentarians and amongst other issues, focused on the challenges of being female politicians.

The Speaker also met with the Speaker of the UK House of Commons, Rt Hon John Bercow. The two Speakers discussed issues including those surrounding the role of Speaker in ensuring order in the Chamber during proceedings.

There were also discussions surrounding the wider role of the Speaker being the face of Parliament and opportunities available to this role in taking Parliament to the people.

THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

The Scottish Parliament is the law making body in Scotland and is made up of 129 Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs). The first elections to the Scottish Parliament took place in May 1999 and full powers were taken up on 1st July 1999. Under a unicameral system the Parliament employs close to 450 staff.

The Speaker and the delegation travelled to Edinburgh, Scotland on the 30th of January and were hosted by the Scottish Parliament, Presiding Officer (Speaker) Ms. Tricia Marwick. They had the opportunity to sit in the Presiding Officer's gallery to observe proceedings which included questions to the Scottish First Minister (Prime Minister).

The delegation was also given an in-depth briefing by the Committees Office on its role and how it was administered. Of particular interest was the way in which the Committees engaged the public in fulfilling their role of scrutinizing bills, documents, reports etc. through the use of the social media and technology. The Scottish Parliament has 17 Committees and is one of the most active Parliaments in the world in this regard.

As part of the programme, the delegation also met with the Scottish Parliament Clerk and Chief Executive Mr. Paul Grice. He briefed the delegation on issues determining staff recruitment and salaries.



Madam Speaker Hon. Dr Jiko Luveni and the delegation inside the Scottish Parliament chambers.

An important feature of the Scottish Parliament was the Parliament Bureau, which is similar to the Business Committee in the Fiji Parliament. The delegation was also given a briefing on how Committees worked and the role of the Parliamentary media in disseminating this process.

The Speaker had the opportunity to meet the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, who was also visiting the Scottish Parliament. The two Speakers used the opportunity to share their experiences briefly.

An important part of the programme in Scotland was travelling to the City of Stirling in Scotland to meet the local member of Parliament, the Rt Hon Dame Anne McGuire. This allowed the delegation in particular the politicians in the delegation to see firsthand how constituency work was being undertaken. The delegation visited her office and were introduced to staff and briefed on the nature of work and processes in place in serving that constituency.

The linkage between formal administrative structures in place was also reflected during the visit to the Stirling Council Provost (Mayor) Mr Mike Robbins. During this briefing he explained how the local councils connected with the Members of Parliament in their programmes. This was also the case with the visit to the NGO 'Volunteer Scotland' where the briefing allowed the delegation to gain insight into how NGOs worked closely with Members of Parliament.

THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES (SENEDD)

The National Assembly for Wales is the democratically elected body that represents Wales and its people. It has 60 members and is supported by close to 300 staff. The first meeting of the Assembly was held on 1st July, 1999 and officially opened by the Queen on 26th May 1999. There are 40 Constituency AMs and 20 represent the five regional areas.

The delegation had the opportunity to meet with the Speaker's counterpart i.e. the Presiding Officer and was briefed on her experiences as Speaker. She shared hints on how best to address challenges in the position.



Madam Speaker, Hon. Dr Jiko Luveni and Secretary General to Parliament, Mrs Viniana Namosimalua inside the Wales Chambers

The delegation was also able to gain insight into how Members and their offices were resourced. In Wales, similar to Scotland and Westminster, decisions for the resourcing of MPs and staff are made independently and are not made by Government or by the Secretary General.

The delegation also had the opportunity to meet with representatives of parties that were part of the Legislative Affairs Committee; a committee that scrutinised all bills of the Parliament. In addition, the delegation also sat in during committee deliberations and experience their state of the art facilities. The delegation also sat in Chambers on a session for the Prime Minister's question time.

The Secretariat briefed the delegation on funding allocations and processes involved. The delegation was further briefed on electronic voting and challenges with services that were available to assist Members of Parliament when things went wrong.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

(i) Determining Parliament Funding

(a) Westminster

- **The Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA)** is created by Parliament and empowered to introduce independent regulation of Members of Parliament business costs/expenses and subsequently pays and pensions;
- The Authority is transparent and provides online information on what Members of Parliament claim and what they are paid;
- No staff allocation per MP, but funding allocation to each MP for staffing provided;
- Paid staff employed by MP - on salary scales and have standard contracts prepared from within;
- MP recruits staff assisted by the IPSA; and
- Short Money - Finance for Opposition Parties –to redress imbalance between support given to opposition parties and that available to government. It is to assist the Opposition parties carry out their Parliament business, but conditions for which parties qualify are set out. The formula is based on the number of seats and votes won. It is not to fund political activities but used for research support, assistance in whips office and staff for Leader of Opposition.
- There are three components:
 - (a) Funding to assist an Opposition Party in carrying out its Parliamentary business;

- (b) Funding for the Opposition Parties' travel and associated expenses; and
- (c) Funding for the running costs of the Leader of Opposition's Office.

(b) Scottish Parliament

- The **Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body** makes decisions about how the Parliament is run, including funding allocation of Parliament etc;
- Members of the Corporate Body are elected from within Parliament with representation from all parties. The body is independent of Government and acts impartially;
- Staff employed by this Corporate Body are not civil servants but Parliament Staff. Members of Parliament are responsible for recruiting their own staff; and
- Presiding Officer (Speaker) salary on same band as Minister.

(c) National Assembly of Wales

- Determination on Members' Pay and Allowances is made by the Remuneration Board of the National Assembly of Wales. This independent body is responsible for setting the pay, pensions and allowances of Assembly Members and their staff. The Members' Business Support Team plays a crucial role in the application of this Determination.
- The Board is established by the National Assembly Commission which is the corporate body for the National Assembly of Wales;

- Annual salary payable to Members provided together with an additional office holder's salary if he/she holds an office as Chair of Committee etc.; and
- Presiding Officer (Speaker) salary on same band as Deputy Prime Minister/Minister.

(ii) Independence of Parliamentary Services

- As with the staff of Westminster (House of Commons) and the Scottish Parliament, staff of the National Assembly of Wales are not civil servants. They are employees of the Parliament;
- Terms and conditions and salaries not same as civil servants;
- Own broadcasting services with qualified staff; and
- Own security staff.

(iii) Business Committee – Parliamentary Bureau

- The Parliamentary Bureau of the Scottish Parliament has the same role as the Business Committee and has its own guidelines;
- It is central to the running of Parliament;
- The Minister for Parliamentary Business equivalent to Leader of the Government in Parliament outlines his 2 week programme for business and is decided on by the Bureau;
- The Bureau looks at management of time, length of speeches, timetabling legislation etc.; and

- Link to Tables, Committees, Secretary General's Office.

(iv) Standing Committees

- Committees in the UK are important forums for allowing MPs to discuss issues in detail and there are more consensus between MPs in committees than in the Parliament Chamber;
- They are well resourced with funds and staff that provide quality service to committees, (staff in the form of clerks, lawyers, researcher, report writer);
- Issues raised in committees are broadcasted to all media; media and members of public do not interact with committee members, during meetings, however, are provided a sitting space to hear and see proceedings and also in some cases, the proceedings can be seen on screens or through glass wall;
- Committees can meet on a regular basis to scrutinize policies of Government, conduct enquiries into subjects and examine legislation; and
- Use of social media (Facebook, twitter, website, you tube etc.) to promote work of committees.

(v) Women in Politics

- Identifying mechanisms of encouraging women to be interested in politics - seminars hosted by the Speaker; national conference where panels of experts offer practical solutions to encourage the representation of women in public life; and
- Organization of Women Members of Parliament Caucuses on common issues of interest.

(vi) Constituencies

- Constituency offices are adequately supported with funds and relevant staff recruited by the Member;
- A Member connects to the Local Government Structure and NGOs as stakeholders in the parliamentary process; and
- Database of people, needs and referrals.

(vii) Parliament Outreach

- Education programs for all age groups;
- Taking Parliament to the people;
- Mini Parliament;
- Gift shop with Parliament memorabilia; and
- Radio/IT.

(viii) Library Research Capacity

- Provide high quality impartial service (analysis, advice, briefing) to Members;
- Specialist staff service committee needs, speeches, policy development, research etc.;
- Use of IT capacity for accessing information; and
- Regular and fresh issues/updates daily to help in information for debates.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is recommended that the Fiji Parliament encourages ties and twinning arrangements and exchange programmes with other Parliaments for the purposes of peer learning and exposure to best practice in parliamentary procedures; and
2. It should be worth considering options that allow for funds that directly support the work of Members of Parliament (as opposed to Parliament Secretariat) to be determined by an independent body or committee;
3. It is recommended that in light of Parliamentary best practices, a study be undertaken to examine the roles, functions and powers of a fully independent parliamentary service structure in Fiji; and
4. It is recommended that the Parliament Secretariat develop improved research services available to PMs.

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ANNEXURES