

22 April 2013 **The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has today signed an agreement with the Government of Tonga to support governance and promote democracy in Tonga.**



The Tonga Governance Strengthening Programme will work with the Tongan Parliament, the Electoral Commission and civil society to increase their effectiveness and build community understanding of their roles.

The A\$3.8 million programme, funded by AusAID, will develop the skills of parliamentarians to improve lawmaking processes and strengthen the ability of the Electoral Commission to manage free and fair elections. It also will produce public education materials about the workings of the Parliament, the role of the Electoral Commission and elections, as well as the responsibility of civil society to help promote democracy.

Knut Ostby, the UNDP's Resident Representative, thanked Australia for its ongoing support and commended the Government of Tonga for its commitment to strengthening its democratic governance institutions.

"More countries than ever before are working to strengthen democratic governance. Tonga is no exception. Just like other countries working to build democracy, Tonga's challenge is to

develop institutions and processes that are responsive to the needs of ordinary citizens and that promote sustainable human development," Mr Ostby said.

"Through the Tonga Governance Strengthening Programme, the UNDP will support the role of Tonga's parliament in spurring and sustaining national human development. We also hope that through this programme community understanding of the role of the electoral process, the role of members of Parliament, and the relationship between the Government and Parliament can be increased."

The Australian High Commissioner to Tonga, Mr Brett Aldam, said the programme builds on previous support provided by the Australian Government for Tonga's political reform process.

"This program will focus on the role of governance and parliamentary processes in promoting sustainable development. Australia is very pleased to be working with the UNDP and the Government of Tonga in support of Tonga's development goals," HE Mr Aldam added.

The Minister for Finance and National Planning Hon. Lisiate 'Aloveita 'Akolo thanked both the Government of Australia and the UNDP for the continuous support and effort provided to Tonga.

"It is not only very timely, with the upcoming elections of 2014, but also very important to strengthen processes to ensure mutual accountability is observed which can be achieved through improved awareness and understanding," Hon. 'Akolo said.

An inaugural programme workshop including participants from the Government of Tonga, the Tongan Parliament Secretariat, the Tongan Electoral Commission, and civil society organisations will be held in Nuku'alofa on 26 April 2013.

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