

Australia's Solomon Islands Justice Program

e-nius

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SIJP supports sector as it faces C19 challenges

Justice systems globally continue to face many challenges in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, but they are also a vital part of the response and the efforts to mitigate its worst effects. With this in mind, SIJP has continued to support the Solomon Islands justice sector to scale up its Covid-19 preparedness and mitigation planning throughout September. Working closely with MJLA Permanent Secretary, Paul Mae and the Australian Government, SIJP supported the procurement of equipment for the High Court to enable a remote virtual court to be established. A high priority for the National Judiciary in these uncertain times which increasingly demand new ways of working, the Program is very happy to have been able to progress this – see story below.

We recently added a new section to our eNius that enables us to share recent articles, upcoming webinars and websites such as the newly launched Pacific Islands Legal Officer's Network site, or items like this month's great issues briefings on Justice in a Pandemic and Women and Customary and Informal Justice Systems.

SIJP continues to be grateful to our colleagues in the justice sector for your ongoing close collaboration, as we work together to promote accessible, inclusive, and efficient justice in Solomon Islands.

Alice McGrath

Head of Program



Virtual Court a 'huge leap' for Access to Justice

The Chief Justice has welcomed the Australian Government's gifting of digital equipment to the High Court of Solomon Islands, as a 'huge leap' for access to justice in the country particularly in the context of the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic.

"While it is a small step in digitalising our operations, it is a huge leap in overcoming the odds towards maintaining and achieving access to justice for litigants and parties with cases in the Court of Appeal. It will enable us to overcome what seemed to be insurmountable difficulties that Covid-19 has caused," Chief Justice Sir Albert Palmer said.

Provided through SIJP, the equipment was officially handed over by the deputy Australian High Commissioner, Sally-Anne Vincent, who said that Australia was committed to assisting Solomon Islands deliver a credible justice system that supports the rule of law and strengthens access to justice for all Solomon Islanders.

The equipment which includes a TV screen, heavy duty portable TV cart, projector, cabling equipment, microphones, monitors, laptops, a multi-function printer and other hardware, has already been installed in Court Room 1 of the High Court, giving the National Judiciary the capacity to conduct remote hearings from Honiara for the first time.

"This gift enables the Court of Appeal to hear appeals even though the President and other members of the Court of Appeal are not able to come into the country because of border closures and travel restrictions," Justice Palmer told those gathered for the small handover ceremony which included the full bench of the High Court.

Convening the Court of Appeal virtually also represents a considerable cost saving for the National Judiciary which normally flies in the judges from overseas.

The Chief Justice said he hoped this was only the beginning of utilising technology to boost access to the courts and cut costs: “We should be aiming as a matter of priority, to have digital platforms also set up in the courts at hotspot areas in the country, at Gizo, Auki and Lata, so that in the event of an emergency...the court can remain open to attend not just to legal issues and disputes that might arise from the crisis but to be able to continue to maintain its constitutional obligations in delivering justice to our people.”



Chief Justice Albert Palmer, centre left above, with the deputy Australian High Commissioner, Sally Anne-Vincent, and her colleagues (L-R), Justice Program Manager, Frank Fono and Counsellor, Andrew Elborn. The group are standing in front of the video screen installed in the High Court to facilitate virtual court hearings.

MJLA Update

Provinces have their say on Family Protection Act

Provincial Governments, communities and other stakeholders in Malaita, Rennell and Bellona, Choiseul, Western and Isabel provinces are among those being consulted over the past two months as part of a review of the Family Protection Act. The current review is a high priority for both the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs and the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs. Both Ministries have been

working closely with an international consultant, Louisa Gibbs to ensure that the review is informed by comprehensive consultations with all stakeholders involved in implementing the Family Protection Act, with a strong commitment to provincial consultations.

Staff from the MJLA have been part of the provincial consultation teams, giving them fresh insights into the implementation of the act to date. Joining the consultations in Malaita, Chief Strategic Planning Officer, Brenda Joy Wara said she had learnt a lot about people's perspectives on, and experiences of the Family Protection Act. "It is sad that while the rate of domestic violence is quite high, awareness of the FPA is lacking."

Ms Wara said it was interesting to learn that the demand for crisis accommodation in Malaita was overwhelming. "The manager of the Malaita Care Centre highlighted how it has been flooded with victims since its opening earlier this year," she said. "Given the size of Malaita's population, the current capacity of the centre is insufficient. "We heard a lot from stakeholders about their calls for government to prioritise resources for these services," she said.

For new recruit to the Legal Policy Unit, Primrose Lagafoli, it was her first consultation since joining MJLA, and also her first time to visit Choiseul's capital Taro. "Most of the people we spoke to knew that there is a law that protects them from family violence, but they did not know the procedures or the responsible people to seek that help from". Ms Lagafoli said the agencies also highlighted the need for a social welfare officer to be stationed in the capital, to deal with vulnerable people, such as victims of rape or abuse."

Consultations in the four remaining provinces will be undertaken between October and December. Once completed, the review report will be submitted to the Minister for Justice, for tabling in Parliament as the act requires.

News from the Provinces

Many rivers to cross...



Four members of the Public Solicitor’s Office demonstrated their commitment to providing access to justice for all recently, regardless of remoteness or challenging weather conditions, in this case, heavy rains. With a weekend of outreach planned for schools and communities in the Tasaboka area, North East Guadalcanal, Deputy Public Solicitor George Gray, Hayniel Max, Rodney Manebosa and Donation Houa pictured above, didn’t let the overnight flooding of the Tenapari River deter them. With their vehicle unable to make it cross the swollen river, the four legal officers hiked their bags and boots up over their shoulders and waded their way across. The four legal officers made it safely if a little wetter, to the other side where they were able to hold a number of outreach meetings over the weekend with the community at New Tenabuti village which is home to 200-300 people, and Tenakoga High School. “Both at the village and at the school we were asked a lot of questions about law and order and the number of crimes being committed in the area and what can be done to help bring this down,” Mr Grey said. “The crime rate in the Tasaboka area which as a post-conflict society is experiencing a high rate of serious crimes, so a lot of matters are arising.”

Seif Ples builds inclusiveness with signing



Deaf and mute victims of domestic violence will now be able to more easily communicate with *Seif Ples* staff and volunteers after the centre's staff spent the first week of September learning how to sign as pictured above. Facilitated by the Solomon Islands Deaf Association, the training was one of several steps the Centre took in September to ensure the Centre's services are inclusive and accessible to deaf and mute victims. Apart from the sign language training, in September *Seif Ples* also recruited a female member of the Solomon Islands Deaf Association as a volunteer and decided to declare each Tuesdays as a Sign Language day for all centre staff and volunteers.

Centre Manager, Falu Maesugea, said it was important that the services provided by *Seif Ples* were as accessible to a deaf or mute victim as they were for anyone else. "We normally see a number of death and mute people each year, so we decided we needed to improve the centre's capacity to support them effectively. The most fundamental element of this was to make sure we could communicate and understand what a victim had to say."

You may be interested to click and read...

The [Pacific Islands Law Officers' Network](#) have launched their new website, including a digital library where you can track PILON activities and working groups on Corruption, Cybercrime and Sexual and Gender based violence.

[Justice in a Pandemic - Briefing One: Justice for all and the Public Health Emergency](#) is a 34 page PDF, the first in a series on Justice in a Pandemic being produced by *Pathfinders for Peaceful Just and inclusive Societies*, a group of countries, international organizations, global partnerships, civil society, and the private sector that work to accelerate the delivery of the SDG targets for peace, justice and inclusion (SDG16+). Pathfinders is hosted by the NYU Center on International Cooperation. This series is being funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The International Development Law Organisation has published an issue brief on [Women and Customary and Informal Justice Systems](#) focusing on the relationship between women and customary and informal justice (CIJ) systems. It brings together current research, expert perspectives and programmatic experience to discuss the evolution of legal and policy debates on women and CIJ; the challenges women encounter in accessing justice through CIJ systems; the gender-focused engagement entry points, modalities, and good practices for CIJ systems; and policy recommendations to improve women's rights and access to justice.

Comments and Feedback

You are receiving this *eNius* because you are an important part of SIJP's work. We welcome comments and contributions from everyone in Solomon Islands justice sector. If you have any feedback or want any further information, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us by contacting Solomon Islands Resource Facility Strategic Communications Manager, on ML.OCallaghan@sirf.com.sb. To follow us on Twitter please click on icon below.



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