

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

Remarks of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

It has been an eventful quarter with APOR 2022, the Sixtieth Anniversary of the NZ Ombudsman Office, gathering the regional Ombudsman family. Stay safe, Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Mrs. 'Alisi Taumoepeau
Chief Executive Officer

Speakers at the APOR 2022 Conference including the Ombudsman, Mr. 'Aisea Taumoepeau, SC. (backrow, 5th from left).



Regional President of APOR recognizes Tonga's Ombudsman

The Regional President and Victorian Ombudsman, Australia, Deborah Glass, paid tribute to Tonga's Ombudsman, Mr. 'Aisea Taumoepeau, SC.

"... I want to take the opportunity to recognize our dear colleague 'Aisea Taumoepeau SC, whose term finishes early in 2023. 'Aisea has been one of the great stalwarts of the region for many years, and we will all miss him. Go well, 'Aisea."

Ms. Glass made her tribute in the December edition of APOR's *Waka Tangata* Newsletter. ©OMB Tonga.

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Outreach Programs

The Ombudsman, Mr. 'Aisea Taumoepeau, SC., has reminded APOR member countries that in order to remain relevant, outreaching to the public is key to engage and explain ways they could be assisted.



Mr. Taumoepeau was speaking at a session on the theme 'Influencing an integrity and human rights agenda' at the Australasia-Pacific Ombudsman Region (APOR) 2022 held in Wellington, New Zealand on 13th October. The overall theme was 'Remaining relevant and getting Government to listen.'

According to the Ombudsman, "outreaching actually strengthens the principles of good governance." He posed the question of "How can a modern ombudsman influence government without being too political?" The ombudsman stressed the indefinite role of his office in conducting outreach programs and explaining to the public, ministries and government officials of what his office does. He emphasised that through outreach programs, foundations of good governance principles are strengthened and people will understand that the ombudsman office is not political but just doing their jobs as prescribed by law.

Mr. Taumoepeau told the APOR members that his office strives to remain relevant by ensuring that services are accessible to all citizens. Outreach to the public give those affected by administrative decisions of government the courage to seek help. The Ombudsman Act in 2016 empowers the ombudsman to exercise discretion to public reports in the public interests.

The Ombudsman noted the constitutional empowerment made in August 2021 just before the office celebrated its 20th anniversary. His Majesty consented to the constitutional amendment. The amendment, Clause 31(b) (i) – "There shall be an ombudsman appointed by the Speaker with the consent of the Legislative Assembly; (ii) the Ombudsman, shall, unless otherwise provided by law, have complete discretion in the exercise of his legal powers and duties independently without any interference whatsoever from any person or authority."

Under section 11 of the Ombudsman Act, complaints could be received from the public, referred by the Prime Minister with the consent of the Ombudsman or an own-motion investigation initiated by the Ombudsman himself. *(con't p.2)*

(From p. 1)

The Ombudsman also reiterated the importance of conducting outreach in “building bridges and establishing a good working relationship” with MDAs and the public and in influencing, accepting and implementing of recommendations. @OMBTonga.

The Ombudsman of Tonga, Mr. 'Aisea Taumoepeau, SC., (2nd from right) and the Chief Ombudsman of NZ, Judge Peter Boshier (2nd from left), Ombudsman of the Cook Islands, Mrs. Nikki Rattle (3rd from right) together with staff of the NZ and Tonga Ombudsman Office.



Sixtieth Anniversary of NZ Ombudsman Office

The Ombudsman, Mr. 'Aisea Taumoepeau, SC., congratulated the 60th Anniversary of the Office of the Ombudsman of New Zealand, by presenting a gift to Judge Peter Boshier, Chief Ombudsman (top photo at right).

The presentation of gifts concluded the APOR 2022 gathering in Wellington, New Zealand, on Friday, 14th October, that included gifts from the Ombudsman of the Cook Islands and Papua New Guinea.

A carved *kumete* and the emblem of the Office of the Ombudsman was specially carved for this purpose (as shown at middle photo). A brief explanation on the significance of the gift was made by the Deputy CEO, Mr. Sateki 'Ahio, in Tongan, Maori and English.

The *kumete* is used for the investiture of a new king through the ceremony known as *taumafa kava*. As the *kumete* was passed to Judge Boshier, the Tonga Ombudsman warmly announced “*Kava kuo heka*” – which is the traditional saying from the *taumafa kava* ceremony to indicate that the *kava* is ready to serve. In good spirits, the Deputy CEO gave the customary reply that is used to provide direction as to who the *kava* should be served to – “*Ave ia ma'a Judge Peter Boshier*”. Thus the *kumete* was presented to Judge Boshier, who received it gladly.



The presentation of the *kumete* and the logo of the Tonga Ombudsman Office was made while the vicennial sonnet “*Kiama 'o e Uanoa'i Ta'u*” was played. Following the presentation, the Ombudsman of Tonga gave a short speech, to farewell the delegates as he will be retiring next February.

Tonga's delegation to APOR also included the Chief Executive Officer, Mrs. 'Alisi Taumoepeau, KC., Deputy CEO, Mr. Sateki 'Ahio and the Communications & Media Officer, Nanise Fifita. @OMBTonga.



Ombudsman attends GOPAC



The Ombudsman, Mr. 'Aisea Taumoepeau, made a presentation at the GOPAC Oceania Regional Workshop 2022 held on 28-29 November, at the Legislative Council Chamber, NZ Parliament, Wellington.

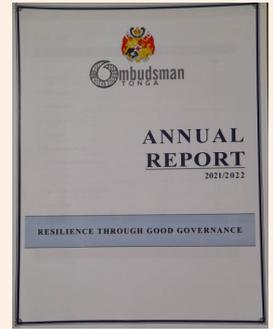
The workshop focused on *Regional Anti-corruption Trends: Constituency Development Funds and Anti-Money Laundering*. The Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC) is a worldwide alliance of parliamentarians working together to combat, strengthen good government, and uphold the rule of law.

The meeting was attended by parliamentarians from Oceania along with integrity officials including Ombudsmen and Leadership Commissions “in order to develop the capacity of parliamentarians to support anti-corruption programs both in their countries and in the region,” according to GOPAC. The themes of the meeting focused on “Constituency Development Funds (CDFs) and Anti-Money Laundering (AML) within a Parliamentary Oversight context.”

The objectives of the workshop included the importance “to provide substantial knowledge to parliamentarians about CDFs and AML,” GOPAC said in a statement. The Tongatapu No. 2 People's Representative, Dr. 'Uhilamoelangi Fasi, and Melemanu Bloomfield, attended the workshop from the Office of the Legislative Assembly. @OMBTonga.



Annual Report 2021/22



The Annual Report for the Financial Year (FY) 2021/22 was formally submitted to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Lord Fakafanua, during the quarter.

The Ombudsman, Mr. 'Aisea Taumoepeau, SC., submitted the annual report in November. Other features consist of the divisional reports of the Corporate, Investigation and Communications & Media Divisions. The annual report has been tabled before the House and scheduled to be discussed Legislative Assembly 2023 session. @OMBTonga.

Ombudsman urges staff “to make each day count”

The Ombudsman, Mr. 'Aisea Taumoepeau, delivered a strong reminder on commitment and responsibilities to one's tasks and works. Mr. Taumoepeau made the emphasis to wrap-up the staff monthly devotion for December and highlighted how good governance principles and integrity should “make each day count.”

Speaking via live zoom from Auckland, New Zealand, (*above left*), on the first day of December, 2022, the Ombudsman highlighted the essence of what has been performed in the past that should determine current duties and responsibilities of staff. “And what is presently being done should determine future commitment and level of performance of staff members in order to be efficient and effective.”

He told staff members that this was the determination that Queen Esther had when seeking help from the King to save her people (Jewish) despite a possible looming death that she would gladly accept as long as her people are spared. The Ombudsman stressed other essential requirements to effective outcomes in staff's performance. They are teamwork and cooperation with each other and in complying with job requirements, as well as commitment and dedication.

“Once those work values are adhered to, I have no doubt that staff would feel accomplished and very eager to perform to the best of their ability at work and able to make each day count,” Mr. Taumoepeau said.

Other staff members who also led December's staff devotion included Mr. Fotu'aikata'ane 'Ataveifoa, Mrs. Sisilia Tokai and Ms. Tepola Fonongaloa. @OMBTonga.

Ombudsman's Christmas Message

The Ombudsman, Mr. 'Aisea Taumoepeau, SC., acknowledged all the work of staff during 2022 and noted the core functions being performed by the Investigation Division. Mr. Taumoepeau made the acknowledgement in his Christmas message to staff and guests at the end of the year function of the Office.

“Each and every one of you has a role to play, very important roles, contributions and works,” according to the Ombudsman. He also said “people use our service in lodging complaints due to differences of opinions and decision making bodies.

“We're able to help them in resolving issues of concern. That is very important as the effect of our services is far-reaching when we are able to help complainants. As the saying goes, good governance is good for you, good for the government and good for Tonga. We stand to promote good governance in decision making at all times,” the Ombudsman emphasized.

Differences of good governance and fair decision making

The Ombudsman explained the difference between good governance and fair decision making.

“Good governance is something visible that we can see and seemingly in order. Making fair decision is a process carried out in accordance with what is right but gradual with certainty taking into account what is legal, factual and with precedence. They're a bundle of rights,” said the Ombudsman.

The Ombudsman wished everyone a Merry Christmas and a Prosperous New Year. @OMBTonga.

Tonga's Mobile Outreach Program features in IOI and APOR Newsletters

The mobile outreach programs (MOPs) of the Office of the Ombudsman has been featured in two international publications. The Waka Tangata Newsletter of APOR, Australasia Pacific Ombudsman Region and the International Ombudsman Institute (IOI) carried the article in their December 2022 edition (*shown below*).

TONGA | New mobile outreach program serves people in villages

15.12.2022

The Office of the **Ombudsman of Tonga** introduced a new initiative to better facilitate easier public access to the services of the Ombudsman. Six mobile outreach programs (MOPs) covered the smaller villages of Tongatapu not commonly present in previous district outreaches.



Ombudsman introduces new outreach programme

About 25 villages on all districts of Tongatapu have received the weekly mobile drives and engaged with various members of the public including women while making tapa or weaving, primary and secondary school students, youth, construction workers and those working in their plantations.

There was no gathering in halls or in groups. Instead, the 4-member outreach team used an office shuttle as the hub for recording complaints, meeting and explaining to visitors about the Ombudsman's services and attend to other queries. The shuttle OMB-4 parks along the road side at various points and waits for people to come forward. The office cooperates with district and town officers as well as village church leaders who accepted Ombudsman brochures to be distributed to their members.

Public notices specifically to villages covered every week are sent out over the radios notifying the people the date and time for each village. Favourable responses with queries were received during the mobile outreach programs.

A total of 14 outreaches were carried out during the quarter – six mobile OPs, three radio talk-back programs/felafoaki and five OPs as part of the REACH Mission in 'Eua. Several complaints and queries were filed from 'Eua, an indication that community outreach programs facilitate easier access of the public to file complaints. Various activities of the office were updated on Facebook especially mobile outreach programs, staff of the months and good governance information.

Island hopping

Fifteen (15) outreach programs (OPs) were held during the quarter in Tonga and New Zealand, as the followings:

- 1 September Quarterly Newsletter – English & Tongan
- 3 Felafoaki program over A3Z/Radio Tonga & 87.5FM
- 1 OP at 'Eua (1st Oct.)
- 1 Radio & Livestream interview of the Ombudsman in NZ by PMN Radio
- 1 News release on APOR Communique – English & Tongan
- 4 Physical OPs in Vava'u (Hunga, Tefisi, Tu'anequivale and Neiafu)

The Office took part in the REACH Mission covering 'Eua, Vava'u, Niuafu'ou and Niuatoputapu during the quarter. The Director of Investigation, Roman Vaihu, and the A/CMO, Paula Mafi, continued with the OP at 'Eua on 1st October. Investigation Officer, Mosese Uili, and the A/CMO covered Vava'u from 17-24th October. Outreaches to the 2 Niuas were held from 21st – 29th November, led by the Acting Director of Investigation, Pilimisolo Tamou'ua, and the A/CMO. The Office of the Ombudsman managed to reach the two Niuas after a lull of three (3) years since 2019. This was due to the prolonged lockdown due to COVID-19 that suspended the annual Royal Agricultural Show.

Right: Members of the REACH Mission trying to reach shores at Niuafu'ou in an open boat after disembarking from the MV 'Ko e Kelesi Pe."



The Office traditionally held its annual outreach programs to the two northern most islands during the shows. The REACH project fully funded one of the officers while the Office of the Ombudsman took up the expenses of the second officer. This is to facilitate setting up and distributing of brochures, pens and other promotional items to visitors while the investigation officer conducts the outreach. @OMBTonga.



Above: OP at Hunga Island of Vava'u through the REACH Mission.

'Akuila Pohiva receives Top Student award

Returning Scholar, Mr. 'Akuila Pohiva, System Administrator, has graduated with flying colours at Auckland's UNITEC Institute of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand.

Mr. Pohiva was awarded with the top achieving student in the Bachelor of Computing Systems programme in Semester 1 2022. He received the top award at UNITEC's graduation ceremony held on 12th December, 2022.

"I feel grateful for all assistance of UNITEC and the New Zealand Government towards my study. I acknowledge the help of the Ombudsman in allowing me to take up further studies. I thank God for the achievement I have made," Mr. Pohiva said.

The Ombudsman and the staff have congratulated Mr. Pohiva for his outstanding performance. "You're setting a standard for upcoming scholars, and already a big standard you have set. We're looking forward for bigger things for this office," said the Ombudsman, Mr. 'Aisea Taumoepeau. @OMB Tonga.



Mr. 'Akuila Pohiva and his mother, Moala Pohiva after graduation in New Zealand.

Far right—Mr. 'Akuila Pohiva accepts his certificate from the Head of School of Computing and Applied Technology, Susan Benneth.

Right—Mr. Pohiva and fellow graduates.



Staff promotion - Two staff members were recently promoted: Mr. Mossese Uili (*right*) to Senior Investigation Officer and Mr. Fotu'aika 'Ataveifoa (*far right*) to VIP Driver.



Office of the Ombudsman, Tonga, Quarterly Newsletter for October—December, 2022.

Published by the Office of the Ombudsman, Tonga. Editor – Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Content & Layout – Communications & Media Officer (CMO). Photos—A/CMO.

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