



Congress gets awareness on PACER Plus Trade Agreement

In a two-hour session, the Joint Plenary of Constitutional Congress and Eminent Persons Advisory Council (EPAC) received awareness facilitated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade (MFAET), on the PACER-Plus Trade Agreement.

As part of the review exercise of the Draft Federal Constitution, the Joint Plenary requested consultation with the PACER-Plus team to have an understanding on this and other trade arrangements when discussing related aspects in the Draft Federal Constitution.

The consultation, which was held at Red Mansion Conference room on Friday 12 August 2011, involved two presentations and Question-and-Answers sessions.

Professor Robert Scollay, Consultant to MFAET for PACER-Plus National Consultations, informed members of the Plenary that PACER-plus is a two-way trade agreement that gives duty-free market access between Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific islands.

Professor Scollay also briefed the Plenary on various trade arrangements PACER-Plus is considering in its provisions to make Pacific island countries including Solomon Islands take full advantage of their market access. This would include goods trade, as well as services trade like labor mobility, education, health and telecommunications services, to name a few.

Dr. Chris Noonan, Chief Trade Adviser to the Forum Islands Countries on PACER-Plus, made a presentation on the implications of trade on the Federal Constitution for Solomon Islands.

In view of the country's choice to change to Federalism, he emphasized the current and existing obligation of Solomon Islands to international treaties, which also includes trade agreements.

"The introduction of the Federal system of government doesn't alter the obligations of Solomon Islands under international treaties," he said.

In addition Dr. Noonan pointed out different aspects in the Draft Constitution that are potential trade issues that should be worth considering.

He elaborated on various issues such as cost and revenue implications; implementation of trade agreements; the scope of Federal and State jurisdiction, which might affect trade; and trade implications on human rights obligations.

The team that represented MFAET's Department of Trade also included Mr. Barrett Salato (Acting Director), Dr. Julia Tijaja (Officer of the Chief Trade Adviser), Ms. Jenny Barile (Senior Trade Officer), Mr. Shivraj Bhatt (Technical adviser for Solomon Islands Integrated Framework for Trade-Related Technical Assistance), and Ms. Laura Norris (Trade Policy Analyst).

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