

Day 4 – Thursday, 29 November 2007
Parallel Sessions – Session 4B 1.30pm-3.30pm

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Position: Regional Legislative Strengthening Advisor

Organisation: United Nations Development Program Pacific Region

Presentation Title: Freedom of Information in the Asia-Pacific Region

The value of the right to information as a tool to entrench accountable democracy and promote participatory development has yet to be actively recognised by the governments of the Pacific. Of the 16 member of the Pacific Islands Forum, on Australia and New Zealand have passed FOI legislation. Despite the slow progress in entrenching the right to information in the Pacific region, it is encouraging that the Pacific Plan for Strengthening Regional Cooperation and Integration, endorsed by Pacific Leaders at the Forum Leaders Meeting in 2005, specifically references freedom of information. At a national level, there has been some progress as well, with Governments flagging FOI as a area of potential activity in Cook Islands, Nauru and Solomon Islands and civil society active in promoting the right to information in Fiji, Vanuatu and PNG. There has been considerable discussion of the value of the right to information in the context of development but in the Pacific there are unique implementation challenges - both institutional and cultural - which will need to be considered by governments. This presentation will canvass many of these issues.