

# Mindsets changing, media freedom improving

Commentary by Harrison Selimen, Suva, Fiji

**MEDIA FREEDOM IS INEVITABLY** improving in Vanuatu. Mindsets have changed, many have learned to love ethics, fairness and the rule of law. This piece of opinion on Media Freedom in Vanuatu was my personal reflection after having spent some years in the media industry as a young journalist.

My fellow veteran journalists back home would hold a different opinion however; after celebrating the Media Freedom Day together with my journalism mates back at USP in Suva Fiji, a different country to Vanuatu with its own Media Decree I personally believe Vanuatu has changed compared to

This newspaper reported in one of their columns that he had been deported, imprisoned, beaten....and threatened with lawsuits so

often that he reacts to each new lawyer's letter with nothing more than a quiet smile, like someone hearing news of an old friend.

The height of this media control and censorship was tested during the recent bribery case which saw some members of parliament jailed. This bribery case somehow changed people's mindsets, including the few elites who try to control the media.

The people's actions began to change as they begin to accept and embrace the information that the various media outlets were releasing and publishing on this case.

This change could have been the result of people waking up to the truth and getting tired of always listening to half-truths being

reported by the media to satisfy a few people.

Certainly if this was in the days when media freedom was abused and there is still much control and censorship over what gets released and published, the publishing of the court judgment of the bribery case could have been different and it would have been chaotic.

But time has changed and maybe social media is a platform where people raise their concerns in anger without thinking twice but it could be an option where people find it effective to raise their concerns without fear that reduces their anger instead of attacking the main stream media. This could be seen as 'media freedom' practiced in a different way

of expressing their views without fear but there's the downside of overstepping the ethics boundary.

Media Freedom was the main topic discussed during the Media Freedom Day at USP and related issues, especially the uncontrolled use of social media was one of the hot discussions.

The debates even led to an extend where one panelist raised that maybe main stream media is not doing enough to make sure citizens voices are heard, thus many are turning to social media. Media has the power but again this power has to come with responsibility.

Vanuatu has gone one step ahead when the National Parliament unanimously passed the Right to the media.

Information Bill (RTI) last year. Media Freedom is gaining momentum in terms of having by-laws passed to enable citizens to have access to any government information by following certain procedures.

When looking at Media Freedom in Vanuatu i also try to compare the case with Fiji and after attending two seminars during the Media Freedom Day at USP the different speeches made by the panelists made me felt that much has yet to be achieved to really reflect the term Media Freedom in Fiji.

Despite the issues that happened in the past, Vanuatu has changed a lot especially in the mindsets of its people and how they responded to the media.



Tenkon Williams

## Vila citizen concerned over tar sealing

By Glenda Willie

citizen says already the potholes are enlarging following the continuous heavy rainfall last week, and to him, that is the answer to poor works done.

He believes if the subcontractor were expecting quality results from their works, "they could have removed the cracked, worn out pavement layers and replaced it with the waterproof double coat of bitumen, instead of putting it on top of the old one like they have done".

Williams uses his parable to make his point. "Superglue could be used to fix a damaged shoe. But if the shoe is broken again in the same place, applying superglue in the same area would not solve the problem." He therefore appeals to the ministry concern to seriously consider this issue.

The concerned Port Vila

## Regional Capacity Building Workshops and Forums 15-18 May 2017

**TO COINCIDE WITH PACIFIC ICT** (PICT) Days the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the Pacific ICT Regulatory Resource Centre (PIRRC), the Government of Vanuatu with the support and assistance of the Telecommunications and Radiocommunications Regulator (TRR) is co-hosting five regional workshops. These regional workshops will all take place at the Vanuatu National Convention Center in Port Vila as part of the 2017 ICT Days Celebrations.

The objective of these workshops is threefold;

- To harmonize emergency telecommunications plans which will facilitate improved and responsive telecommunications in the event of a disaster or emergency;

- To improve capacity building in the Pacific region via the development of skillssets in implementing VSAT solutions in remote locations;
- To provide education and a forum for the community, business, industry and government on online privacy and governance of the internet within the Pacific region.

- To provide and promote required and needed local capacity through values-based technologies training including internet resource.

A brief overview of each workshop is provided below:

### 1. National Emergency Telecommunications Plan Framework

This closed workshop

will address regional support for the development of National Emergency Telecommunications Plans (NETP), looking at the development of NETPs for Pacific Island countries, and suggesting the appropriate tools to be deployed in the development of National Emergency Telecommunications Plans. The expected outcomes for the workshop are:

- Determination of the status of National Emergency Telecommunications Plans
- Analysis of the international response process as outlined in the Tampere Convention and the ability of non-signatories to adopt the same or all of the process as a template. Coordination with the Pacific Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (led by WFP) for preparedness
- Coordination with the ITU for development of appropriate NETP template
- Development of a NETP template that Pacific Island countries can implement

### 2. VSAT Training

This is a three day specialised technical training on Very Small Aperture Terminal (VSAT) satellite connectivity organized by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) and facilitated by Intelsat. VSAT terminals are critical in supplying services to remote areas and areas that will not be serviced by incumbent operators. These

can be best addressed by the

style of services can also play an increasingly important role in NETP's and disaster recovery communication efforts..

### 3. Online Privacy Workshop

This International workshop is being organized by the Asia Pacific Bureau of the Internet Society (ISOC). The workshop is intended to raise awareness surrounding online privacy issues in the small island states of the Pacific. The three sessions for the day focus on;

- ICTs and online privacy in small island developing states
- Developing a framework for privacy in the digital era
- Privacy and data protection for Vanuatu's digital natives

The target audience for this workshop are Government leaders, Internet Service providers, the business community and the interested business and individual users.

### 4. Pacific Internet Governance Forum (PIGF)

Building on from the Pacific IGF which started back in 2006 and a follow up forum held in 2011 in New Caledonia, the Pacific Internet Governance Forum (PIGF) aims to strengthen and enhance the engagement of all stakeholders in Internet Governance and Policy framework for the Internet. This meeting also aims to explore how the internet can be used for the benefit of the Pacific Communities and how the associated risks and challenges can be best addressed by the

leaders in the digital world.

stakeholders involved. This event will come to fruition through a coordinated effort by all Internet Related stakeholders such as the Asia Pacific Network Information Centre (APNIC), the Australian Government, Department of Communications, .NZ, the Internet Governance Forum Support Association (IGFSA), Pacific Institute for Regulatory Resource Centre (PIRRC), USP, ICANN, PICISOC and other stakeholders including the TRR and the Vanuatu Government through the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) and a number of other internet-related organizations in the Pacific Region. The theme for this year is "Working for an inclusive, secure and safe Internet"

### 5. Pacific Youth Internet Governance Program

The Pacific Youth Internet Governance Program is coordinated targeting students and youth in respective communities on areas around use of internet activities. The program will be held at the Central School Hall on the 17th - 18th of May, 2017. The anticipated take home message from this program is to:

- Meet objectives of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)'s resolution that mandates the continuation of the IGF to catalyze the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
- Importantly to build future leaders in the digital world.