



PRESS RELEASE

Apia, 3 October 2022– *Ombudsman held 2nd Dialogue with Parliamentarians on human rights.*

The Office of the Ombudsman also the National Human Rights Institution last week held its 2nd Dialogue with Parliamentarians on human rights on the theme “Strengthening partnership and promoting proactive engagement [of the Office of the Ombudsman] with Parliamentarians in the realization and protection of human rights in Samoa”.

The dialogue is in collaboration with the Samoa Family Health Association, the Government of Australia through the UNFPA Transformative Agenda programme and the Office of the Clerk Legislative Assembly.

The 3 days dialogue targeted Members of Parliament who have direct engagement with the work of the Office particularly the Parliamentary Committee tasked to review and scrutinize the Office’s annual State of Human Rights Reports. It was also attended by the Honorable Speaker of Parliament Afioga Papali’i Li’o Taeu Masipa’u, leader of the Opposition party Honorable Afioga Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi and parliamentarians from across other Parliamentary Committees such as Social and Finance Committees.

The Ombudsman Afioga Luamanuvao Katalaina Sapolu highlighted the unique role of Parliamentarians as guardians of human rights in the country. “Healthy democracies have a system of checks and balances at the executive, legislative and judicial levels, and each of these levels plays its own unique and vital role in this democratic balance. Alongside this system is the Ombudsman, an Independent Officer of Parliament who adds an additional, accountability layer that checks if the system is working to the benefit of people in the areas of good governance and human rights”. Ombudsman, Afioga Luamanuvao Katalaina Sapolu.

Day 1 focused on raising awareness of parliamentarians on the mandated role and functions of the Ombudsman and where it is positioned and connected with the 3 branches of government particular the executive and legislative. The Office also shared the process of its work and how parliamentary committees can engage in this process such as their ability to refer matters to the Ombudsman for investigations and debating the Office’s State of Human Rights Reports.

On day 2, Parliamentarians had the opportunity to hear from Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) who are at the centre of advocacy work on human rights issues such as sexual reproductive health rights, rights of persons with disabilities and rights relating to fa’afafine and fa’atama. Samoa Family Health Association, Nuanua o le Alofa, and Samoa Fa’afafine Association

shared some of the commonly misunderstood perceptions relating to these human rights that are sometimes hindering the promotion and advocacy work in this space with communities. This session was key in raising awareness of Parliamentarians to better inform their discussions on these issues in Parliament and in their role in influencing legislation, budgets and developments, and citizens' concerns.

In addition, Parliamentarians also heard from Judge Loau Donald Kerslake of the Youth Court on the application of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and some of the misconceptions that continue to contribute to the resistance in the community to some aspects of the rights of children.

The Office acknowledges the participation of all members of Parliament that attended and in particular the support of working partners Samoa Family Health Association, the Government of Australia through the UNFPA Transformative Agenda programme and the Office of the Clerk Legislative Assembly.

END.