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08/11/05

MEDIA RELEASE BY COMMUNITY COALITION AGAINST CORRUPTION

CCAC to focus on 2007 national elections

The Community Coalition Against Corruption (CCAC) held a national workshop on Friday 4 November at UPNG, Waigani, Port Moresby to discuss a number of important issues facing PNG, with a special focus on the 2007 national elections.

Chaired by Mr Tas Maketu of Caritas and Mr Mike Manning of Transparency International (PNG), the meeting was attended by 40 community leaders from all sectors of public life in PNG, from all over PNG. All present confirmed unanimously the continued need for the CCAC to act as a network of community groups who will campaign against corruption in public life in PNG.

The CCAC discussed the issues on which they wish to commit their membership for the period leading up to the next elections in 2007. The endorsed platform includes CCAC support for political party strengthening and further support for the role of Parliament as the watchdog over the Executive. Of note was an impassioned call from the members of the CCAC for more women in public office as a primary vehicle for furthering accountability, transparency and good governance in PNG. The CCAC asked political parties to endorse women candidates for 2007.

The CCAC also affirmed their unanimous and complete support for Transparency International (PNG) and the Media Council of PNG's coordination of the current campaign against the Yarka and Kumbakor Bills, and committed themselves to taking a stand in the future on any issues that threaten the integrity of PNG.

The CCAC expressed their sincere gratitude to members of the public who supported the petition campaign, and their gratitude to Governor Bob Danaya for supporting and tabling the petition in Parliament on the 26 October. The total of around 70,000 signatures collected in the four weeks of the campaign indicates the depth of support that the PNG people have for issues that go to the core of accountability of their public officials.

The CCAC looks forward to strengthening the connection between their grassroots communities and the decisions that are made on their behalf.

The CCAC endorses and commits to the following program, which was developed during a workshop held in Port Moresby on the 4 November 2005...

Electoral civic awareness: The CCAC endorsed the notion put forth that the greatest force that PNG has to ensure a safe, secure and effective election in 2007 is civic participation. The CCAC commits to supporting the PNG Electoral Commission (PNGEC) in its civic awareness activities, and urges the PNGEC to begin an extensive civic awareness campaign urgently that should continue right through until the 2007 election, and that community coalitions such as the CCAC are best-placed to deliver civic awareness campaigns.

Political parties: The CCAC supports the strengthening of the political party system, and will encourage people to ask political parties what their policies are and what they can do to improve the lives of ordinary Papua New Guineans. Aligned with this is the hope that the number of political parties be reduced to a reasonable number that still reflect the broad spectrum of political ideology in PNG, and are not personality-based.

Cooperation with elected leaders: The CCAC endorsed the proper role of elected parliamentary leaders, and will support the parliamentary authority of any candidate who legitimately wins an election. The CCAC also committed itself to the notion that elected leaders are granted a commission that is not limitless in its power, but is bounded by the PNG Constitution and principles of parliamentary democracy and that civil society, as do all PNG citizens, reserves the right to hold elected leaders accountable in respect of their public duties whilst they hold office. The CCAC endorses the role of Parliament as a place where public issues are debated and considered at length and in detail, and that currently Parliament is not performing this role as it should.

The CCAC will support action to improve accountability of the Executive to Parliament through mechanisms such as a functioning and strong Parliamentary committee system.

PNG needs more women in public office: The CCAC will not endorse individual candidates, but endorses the principle that PNG democracy needs more women in public office. The CCAC believes the fight against corruption will be strengthened if more women are in public office. The CCAC will endorse legislative action that reserves a percentage of parliamentary seats for female Members. The CCAC calls on political parties to endorse more female candidates for the 2007 elections.

Start laying the groundwork for an Independent Commission Against Corruption: The CCAC calls on all concerned citizens including Members of Parliament, community leaders, and intending political candidates to give serious consideration to the development of a powerful Independent Commission Against Corruption. The CCAC acknowledges that an anti-corruption watchdog requires genuine political and civil will if it is to be effective, and that it must be protected from being captured by the Executive. The CCAC will campaign amongst its constituency to develop this genuine civil and political will.

Continued campaign against the Yarka and Kumbakor Bills: The CCAC endorsed the work of Transparency International (PNG) and the Media Council of PNG in coordinating the opposition to the two Bills currently gazetted that attempt to exempt MPs from dismissal for breach of the Leadership Code, and separately, to raise Electoral Support Grants by K1,000,000 for each Member of Parliament. The CCAC committed itself to campaign against laws that threaten the integrity of public life in PNG.