

# PM: RIGHT TO INFORMATION ESSENTIAL IN A DEMOCRACY

By Godwin Ligo

**IN HIS SPEECH MARKING THE** launching of the policy on the Right To Information (RTI), yesterday, Prime Minister Moana Carcasses, said it is a milestone in the history of Vanuatu in its request for transparency, good governance, accountability and more importantly, its relation with its good citizens.

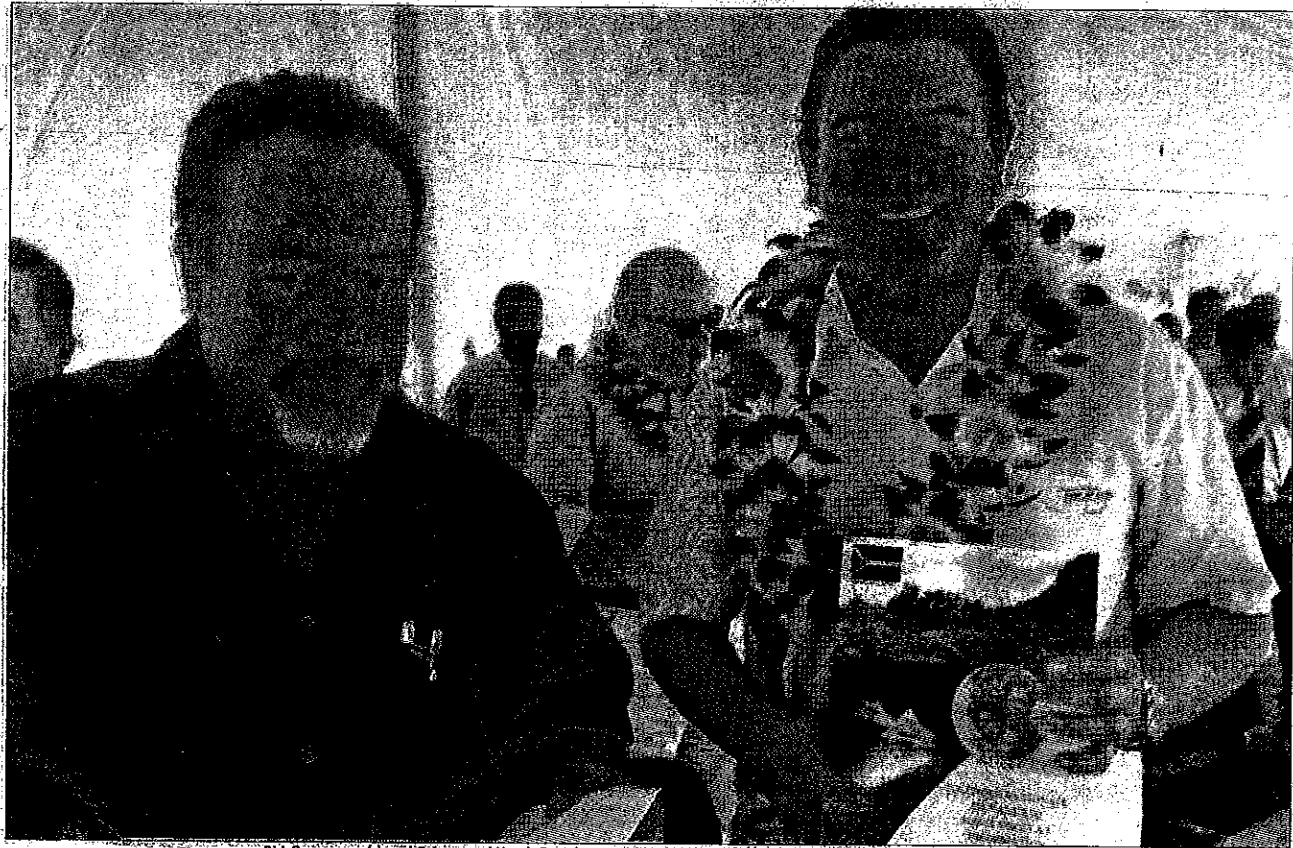
"Today we will witness the Right To Information Policy. The Right to Information Policy is a fundamental human right that was recognized by the United Nations in its Universal Declaration on Human Rights. The Right To Information is a significant part of the Right to Freedom of Expression. Right To Information is an essential element in a democracy," Prime Minister Carcasses said when launching the RTI Policy in Port Vila yesterday.

"My Government has adopted 'Right To Information' 'Freedom of Information or 'FOI' policies and is in the

process to finalize the RTI Bill to go to parliament. I note with pride that we are among the first in the Pacific Islands, and the first in Melanesian countries to do so. Vanuatu is again leading the way in promoting human rights," said PM Carcasses.

He went on to say that, Vanuatu 'Right to Information' is another sign that we are casting aside the vestiges of colonial rule. For Government, by providing Access to Information, is freeing itself from the secrecy and exclusion that was part of the colonial administration, said PM Carcasses.

Before media representations, government officials and representatives of diplomatic corps and the Civil Society Organizations in Port Vila, Prime Minister Carcasses stated that: "We are saying to the people of Vanuatu that we are open, transparent and accountable, and we want the people to have the information that will help them to help us in administering the affairs of the



PM Carcasses (r) and Sports and Youth Development Minister Wright (l) proudly presenting copies of RTI Policy.

Government to progress this country forward," he said.

He said the best policies, best programs, the government, come from the people for whom these are intended.

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"This Government strongly believes in consultation and partnership as essential tools of policy and program development. You have seen how Government uses this approach, for example, in the development of our National ICT Policy and also in the recent changes made to Land Laws in relation to the management of our lands," PM Carcasses told the gathering during the launch of the RTI Policy launch yesterday.

On the note of the right of the Public to know happenings in the country, Prime Minister Carcasses said: "The people, the Public, have the right to know what the Government is planning and equally they have the right to have a say in the planning.

"This Right To Information Policy which I am launching today was developed over a long period of time and with much consultation and it reflects transparent and consultative methods.

"The Government wishes to ensure that the people have a say in the planning and development of the country and that the Government is held accountable for its actions.

"And this can only happen if we have informed population, if we have people who know what

the Government is planning and what the Government is planning and what the Government has delivered.

"Armed with this knowledge, people are able to truly participate and have a say in the future development of Vanuatu. This is the first step in the direction of ensuring a government of the people, by the people and for the people," the Prime Minister said in his speech.

"The key and most important part of this Right To Information policy is that we will proactively, that is to say actively, release information to the public," affirmed PM Carcasses.

He recalled that in the past, many countries have established a "Right To Information" or "Freedom of Information", but they held tight to information until someone asked for it, and then they would go through a long costly process to release the information.

"This Right To Information Law is a good one. The Government has been working to ensure that the people have a say in the planning and development of the country and that the Government is held accountable for its actions. It is a part of a broader strategy being developed to that will see all of us- the Government, Civil Society and Media-making joint effort to ensure that information

is not only accessible, as is everyone's right, but also that it is used responsibly," the Prime Minister remarked in his speech.

"The Right To Information Policy describes a process and please do not think that with the launching of this policy today that every piece of information that should be available will suddenly there ready to view from today. No," The prime minister emphasized in his speech. He said the RTI Policy is a process- it is about cultural change in the public service as much as it is about putting good information management systems in place, as much as it is about making sure that information is able to get to the furthest reaches of our nation. This process will happen over five years. This is because information management has not until recently been a high priority for many government agencies, and because there has been to some degree a lack of expertise in managing information. It is a process which will happen in partnership with the people. The Government Chief Information Officer and his dedicated staff, who have made progress with the National ICT Policy and the roll-out of E-Government.

The Prime Minister also

pointed out in his speech that, the Right To Information Policy will ensure that the change to better practices will become permanent and widespread.

"I must also highlight the role and the work of the Right To Information Steering Committee. This was established in 2013 after the approval of the policy and will be responsible for putting in the structure necessary for effective implementation. They have started their work and have been meeting regularly since last year. The Committee includes representative of the critical Government Departments, NGOs and media. They are here today and I thank them for their hard work so far and looking forward to their continued expertise," the Prime acknowledged the team.

He also thanked the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Media Association of Vanuatu (MAV), the Vanuatu Association of NGOs, Transparency Vanuatu, and the Vanuatu Journalists Association for their support and contribution to the development of the Right To Information Policy.

The Prime Minister then launched the Right To Information policy and dedicated it to the people of Vanuatu.