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PRESS RELEASE

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For immediate Release

Transparency International (TI) Fiji seeks integrity and transparency in the electoral process.

Transparency International (TI) Fiji has begun training its Board of Directors and Staff so they are ready to work with partners to conduct voter education for the 2014 national election.

One of the aims of TI Fiji's proposed voter education is to collaborate with the Government, private sector and civil societies to effectively educate voters before the national elections, Chairman Apisalome Tudreu said after the training programme on electoral systems in Suva last week by Ms Lynn Sferrazza, Programme Director of the ABA - ROLI Fiji.

Mr Tudreu highlighted the need for effective voter education saying that there were 74,855 invalid ballot papers, or nine (9) per cent of the total votes, in the May 6-13, 2006 elections for Parliament. This occurred despite the fact that the Alternative Vote system was in use for the third time as election observers noted.

Ms Sferrazza, who has previously worked in other nations on voter education, said civil society groups should comprehend the elections system as this will assist in their voter education process, adding that since Fiji will have a new electoral system in the next elections, "they will have challenges to educate their constituencies on the new system so that people's votes are counted, and not discarded because they filled out a ballot improperly".

In the one day programme TI Fiji directors, staff and a number of civil society representatives worked in poll simulations with mock voting papers and tally sheets, and then allocated

parliamentary seats to political parties and independent candidates, under the proportional representation system, which is proposed in the revised draft constitution.

Mr Tudreu recalled that the European Union Election Observation Mission in 2006 reported that the high number of invalid votes “indicates that many voters remain uncomfortable with the system and that voter education was not sufficiently effective”.

“The high percentage of invalid votes was also in part due to a narrow interpretation of the provisions of the Electoral Act 1998 governing voters’ intentions,” the mission said in its final report.

“Voter education efforts should be increased, especially regarding the way in which the electoral system works,” which is especially pertinent with the proposal in the revised draft Constitution to introduce a new system, proportional representation, in the national election.

End.

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