



Australian High Commission
Vanuatu

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JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

Prime Minister Maau'koro and Honourable Chief Justice unveil Courthouse and Police Station on Rovo Bay

The Vanuatu Government unveiled a newly built courthouse and police station in Rovo Bay, Epi yesterday. Prime Minister, Hon. Alatoi Ishmael Kalsakau Maau'koro, Chief Justice, Hon. Vincent Lunabek, Minister for Internal Affairs, Hon. Rick Tchmako Mahe and Minister for Justice and Community Services, Hon. John Still Qetu Tari with Australian High Commissioner, H.E. Heidi Bootle, and British Acting High Commissioner, Mr Michael Watters, opened the new building at a ceremony with Epi Chiefs and Shefa Provincial Government representatives. The two facilities will improve access to policing and justice services for communities across Epi and other neighbouring islands, in line with the Government of Vanuatu's decentralisation agenda and National Security Strategy.

Prime Minister the Honourable Alatoi Ishmael Kalsakau Maau'koro said the two projects were a team effort aimed for a collective outcome for police and justice services.

"Vanuatu and Australia have collaborated immensely to build and strengthen our police and justice sector for the past 20 years. Today marks another milestone in history which has seen a partnership and support of the United Kingdom to assist in the justice, law and order and police sector in Vanuatu."

Prime Minister Kalsakau said the importance of decentralisation should never be understated.

"We must reach our people in all the islands and villages to contribute towards development in Vanuatu, to ensure communities are not marginalised but are properly resourced.

"I recognise the Government of Australia to support the policing and broader chain of justice, linking communities across Epi with services of the state. This is a perfect reflection portraying government connecting with the people," said Prime Minister Kalsakau.

Chief Justice, the Honourable Vincent Lunabek said it was a historic day.

"Today is a day of celebration of a building purposely built for the courts on Epi Island. It is also historic as we celebrate the launch of the first ever building purposely built for the courts in Vanuatu since 1980.



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“The Significance of today’s inauguration lies in the fact that is a step further to ensuring that justice can, and will, be accessed at the doorstep of citizens in and around Epi Island,” said the Chief Justice.

Australian High Commissioner, Her Excellency Ms Heidi Bootle, emphasised Australia’s ongoing commitment to the sector.

“The courthouse and police station are the results of the strong partnership between the Vanuatu and Australian Governments. This infrastructure is part of our long-term partnership with the Vanuatu Police Force and Vanuatu judiciary in the provinces to deliver justice and police services to the people of Epi,” said High Commissioner Bootle.

The Government of the United Kingdom supported these developments through installing a solar power system for the police station.

Kiwanis Port Vila provided funding support for the Vanuatu Mobile Force to construct a playground next to both facilities. The playground will support families and young people accessing policing and justice services.

Epi chiefs have named the new buildings in the indigenous language of Epi. The new courthouse has been given the name, ‘*Nakoarena*’ which translates in Bislama to “*ples blong stretem yumi*” or in English, “*when you go to court and receive a penalty - this is to help you to understand what you have done is wrong and help you change your ways.*”

The police post is named ‘*Nailae’na*’ or “*ples blong helpem yumi.*” In English this can be interpreted as “*if you come to us, we will provide you service. If you cannot come to us, we will come to you.*”

Both buildings were designed and constructed according to infrastructure standards that are climate resilient and cyclone resistant. There are ramps also attached providing accessibility for people in wheelchairs.

The courthouse includes a public gallery, elevated judges stand, conferencing facilities and magistrates/clerk office space with a storage and bathroom. It is also equipped with a teleconferencing system that can connect the conference room and courtroom remotely to Port Vila or other provincial centres, supported by a solar power system.

The police station will house seven permanent police officers with an office space, an interview room and holding cell. Police operations from the station will be supported by a banana boat and quad bike provided for Rovo Bay police by Australia in 2021.



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Construction of these facilities is supported through the Vanuatu Australia Policing and Justice Program to strengthen the 'chain of justice' – from communities to police and the courts – and improve access to justice for women, men, and children across Vanuatu.

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