

Australian officials exclude WSWS from reporting on Pacific Islands Forum

14 August 2009

In a blatant act of political censorship, Australian officials organising the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) denied media accreditation to *World Socialist Web Site* journalists, Patrick O'Connor and Richard Phillips, to cover the three-day event.

While the WSWS reporters completed the official application process well before the forum, PIF organisers waited until the last minute before informing WSWS reporters that they would be excluded.

The spurious pretext offered by Laurie Hampton, PIF media liaison official, after several phone calls as to why there had been no reply to the WSWS, was that the web site was an “advocacy group”. The *World Socialist Web Site*’s Australian editorial board immediately protested the decision in a letter to Hampton on August 7. The letter stated:

Dear Mr Hampton,

I am writing in response to your August 5 email denying Pacific Island Forum media accreditation to the *World Socialist Web Site* on the grounds that it is an “advocacy group”.

First and foremost your decision is politically motivated and discriminatory. It is unclear what you mean by an “advocacy group” and why you have reserved this characterisation for the *World Socialist Web Site*. The implication is that the other media organisations that you have accredited cannot be similarly characterised.

To suggest that News Ltd, the Fairfax Media Group and the various radio and television networks that have been invited to cover the Forum do not “advocate” specific policies in the South Pacific region is patently absurd. You have simply chosen those media outlets in political agreement with the general line of Australian government policy, whilst excluding one that has a long record of principled opposition to that policy on the

basis of its socialist perspective. Your failure, moreover, to respond in a timely fashion to our applications for accreditation, which were presented well before the required closing date, was thoroughly unprofessional and a further demonstration of your discriminatory approach.

For your information, the *World Socialist Web Site* and its predecessor, the *Workers News*, have provided extensive and accurate coverage of political, social and economic events in the South Pacific for nearly four decades.

To exclude WSWS journalists from attending the Pacific Island Forum is thoroughly anti-democratic, constituting an attempt to censor what information is made available to the wider public. Rest assured that we will make your decision known to our readers in Australia and around the world.

In conclusion, we insist that the WSWS is provided with all the material made available to other journalists attending the forum.

To date no reply, let alone an acknowledgement of this letter, has been received from Mr Hampton or any other Pacific Island Forum organiser.

During the Forum, Rudd government officials exerted behind the scenes pressure to ensure that every member state toed the line and signed the Australian-drafted final communiqué, which repudiated concerns raised earlier by several Pacific governments on issues including climate change, free trade, and Fiji. (See “Australian government tightens grip over Pacific Islands Forum”)

The Rudd Labor government’s decision to ban WSWS reporters from attending the PIF was clearly aimed at preventing ordinary working people in Australia and internationally from receiving honest and objective reportage on its deliberations and their implications. It also sets a deeply anti-democratic

precedent for the bogus “advocacy group” designation to be used to exclude the WSWS from future events run by the Australian government.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact