



Breaking the cycle of coups in Fiji

“Without an ongoing commitment from all aspects of society to engage in dialogue, including from government and the military, the coup culture will prevail. With the right attitude, dialogue can bring people together and help reconcile Fiji with its past history of political instability.”

These comments were made by Rev Akuila Yabaki, Chief Executive Officer of the Citizens' Constitutional Forum (CCF) at a special lecture on the topic “Breaking the Cycle of Coups” at 4pm Monday 20 July 2009, at the University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia.

Rev Yabaki described recent events in Fiji as worrying and said that Fiji was in a transitional phase where civil society must learn to adapt and face the new challenges presented by these difficult circumstances.

“Now, more than ever there is a need for engagement and dialogue. We must continue to strive for free and fair elections, but the immediate concerns are:-

- Convincing government to come to the



Rev Akuila Yabaki speaks at University of Queensland.

negotiating table for an open, inclusive and independent dialogue process; and

- Ensuring that the return to democratic and constitutional rule occurs as soon as possible,” Rev Yabaki said.

While acknowledging that no one of us can claim to have a perfect solution to end the

political crisis, inter-ethnic tensions or the coup culture in Fiji, he proposed some ideas on how the coup culture can be addressed. These include seven key principles from the NCBBF to end the coup cycle:-

- a) Removing the political, economic and social conditions for coups and strengthening the sanctions against coups.
- b) Setting processes to build national reconciliation and healing.
- c) Redefining role of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces.

- d) Transforming role of public leadership.
- e) Action to improve ethnic relations.
- f) Reforming the electoral system.
- g) Re-looking at national security system.

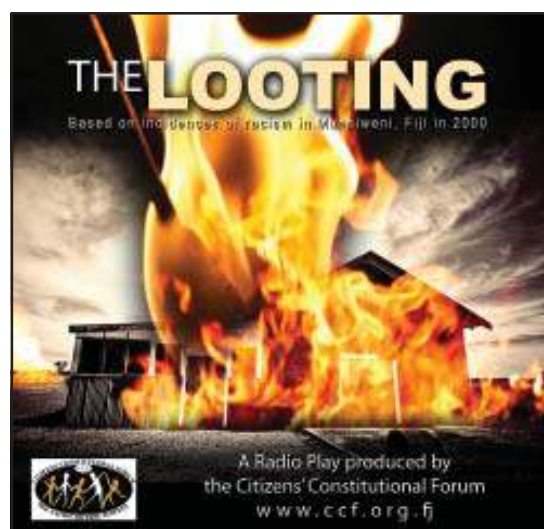
Some specific recommendations that fall under the above principles are:-

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“The Looting” CDs now available



CD copies of CCF's radio play “The Looting” can be purchased for FJ\$8 from CCF office.

Free copies are available to commercial and community radio stations, and to schools and organisations intending to air to an audience for educational purposes. The play is in English, Hindi and Fijian. The main objective of CCF's EED-funded radio play project is to educate ordinary people about human rights.

“The Looting” is on a theme of racism – to educate people not to discriminate, to educate them on human rights and to remind of harmful events in Fiji that had resulted from racist behaviour.

Editor's notes

'Breaking the Coup Cycle' in Fiji, is still seen as a possibility for the future, even in the current situation of increasing size of the army and militarisation of the civil service.

Civil society organisations are being controlled through a requirement to apply for permits for workshops and any public meeting events.

Opinions are restricted through heavy media censorship. Blogs are being used to create further suspicions and spread rumours, robbing the public of credible news sources.

The Charter process recommendations are being selectively implemented with no sign of when the section on ending the coup cycle will be actioned. Only dialogue can now provide new answers.

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Respect, justice, fairness, love, peace - the basis of human rights

CCF's community education workshops have been generating a lot of interest and discussions, in particular on human rights.

'Rights come with responsibilities' is one of the core messages of the community workshops - a message challenged by misconceptions, myths and misunderstanding about human rights.

"From our community experience, human rights is always seen at the community level, as contradicting to traditional and religious values, where women will have more power than men, children will not listen to the parents and wives will not respect their husbands," says Sereima Lutubula, Community and Field Officer at CCF.

"The training approach that we use to persuasively address these misconceptions and misunderstanding is using the basis of human rights - respect, justice, fairness, decency and love," Ms Lutubula said.

"When human rights is expressed and explained in this context, participants begin to have a meaningful realization of what is human rights as they see it as encompassing their religious and cultural values. Val-

ues such as peace, love, humility, understanding and respect for another human beings; where respect for human rights establishes obligations and responsibilities refraining from doing anything that will violate another person and enjoyment of rights," Ms Lutubula said.

In April and May, the education team conducted two community leaders' workshops and three community workshops.

The community leaders' workshops were at Vitawa village, Rakiraki on 15/04/09 and Rairaki Town on 16/04/09.

The community workshops were conducted at Nasautoka, Wainibuka on 14/05/09, Soa, Ra on 15/5/09 and in Naganivatu, Naitasiri on 21/04/09.

The education team conducted 13 community education workshops in the month of July 2009 - the biggest number on record for a month.

The workshops focus on human rights, good governance and citizenship.

Of these, six workshops were conducted in Ra, four were conducted in Naitasiri, and three were conducted in Tailevu province.

World Racism Summit: not much achieved

By Rev Akuila Yabaki

The Durban Review Conference held at Palais de Nation, Geneva from 20-24 April 2009 seemed to have ended with a verdict that not much has been achieved eight years after the World Conference Against Racism, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa, in 2001.

The Conference was convened by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Roots of racism trace back to colonization, slave trade, forced labour and landlessness.

The Geneva conference aimed to advance global efforts for total elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.

Dignitaries representing UN Member governments and 120 delegates from NGOs accredited to the 2001 World Conference Against Racism from around the world, were present. Citizens' Constitutional Forum (CCF) was represented by Rev Akuila Yabaki, as an accredited NGO, based on its work outlined in a paper titled "CCF Publications on Racism and Race Relations in Fiji, 2001-2007".



Durban Review Conference flags flying on the Mont Blanc Bridge in Geneva. (Photo source: OHCHR)

The 2001 Durban World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) itself had ended with a compromised text where language that branded Israel as a racist state was deleted; it denounced Anti-Semitism and said the Holocaust must never be forgotten. Western European and Others (called the WEO Group) were accused of using the Secretariat of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva to undermine the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. At this year's Geneva Racism Review Summit, a boycott by pro-Israel countries was continued by six UN members: United States, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Israel and

Canada.

The basis of withdrawal by these six UN member countries seems to be Article 63, Durban Declaration 2001, which states:

"... We are concerned about the plight of the Palestinian people under foreign occupation. We recognise the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent State and we recognize the right to security for

all states in the region, including Israel, and call upon all states to support the peace process and bring it to an early conclusion."

Unlike Durban 1 2001, the Fiji government was not represented in Geneva at the UN Member governments level. After my return, I enquired to foreign affairs officials, who explained that this was the unfortunate effect of having too many reshuffles in the civil service.

Two months after the WCAR Conference, the UN Secretariat had not released the Final Declaration and Programme of Action. This delay had caused much agitation.

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Roads remains a common concern in Fiji

The need for roads was a common concern of participants attending CCF's Grassroots Budgetary Workshops in Korovou, Sigatoka and Navua.

The workshop was conducted in Korovou from 23-24 April 2009, in Sigatoka from 28-29 April 2009 and in Navua from 1-2 July 2009.

Many participants at these three very different localities in Fiji identified needs that were similar, and which had been in existence for many decades. These include:



Ms Elisapeci Rokotunidau presents a certificate to a participant in Sigatoka.

roads, regular transportation, health centres with qualified staff and equipment, clean water supply, farming and agricultural assistance, vocational training schools, and stable electricity supply.

Roads were a root cause of their problems because without roads, they have difficulty accessing services such as health care, schools, jobs, and market for farm produce.

Some participants proposed ways in which they could contribute to these problems being resolved, through fundraising and accessing donor funds.

The participants at Navua revealed that

this was the first time an education workshop had been conducted in their area and they requested more. Navua and Sigatoka town are located next to big rivers and flooding and better bridges were another common concern. Tailevu participants expressed a need for assistance to get into commercial farming, as there was a feeling that their province was highly under-developed.

The workshops were organised by Mosmi Bhim and facilitated by Mosmi Bhim and Bulutani Matai. Guest speakers at the workshop were Dr Haruo Nakagawa, Fellow in Economics at the School of Governance and Development Studies at the University of the South Pacific, who spoke on the topic 'Governance in Public Finance'.

Mr Apisalome Tudreu, Senior Executive Officer at Transparency International spoke on the topic "Monitoring the Government Budget".

Representatives from the Social Welfare Department - Director Ms Elisapeci Rokotunidau at the Sigatoka workshop and Akini Qauqau at the Korovou workshop, spoke on the topic "The linkage between Ministry of Women and Social Welfare projects and the Budget".

Ms Nanise Vosayaco, a representative of the National Planning Office, took the session on "Introduction to the National Budget - What, Why and For Whom?" at the Navua workshop.

Other topics covered at the



Dr Haruo Nakagawa presents at the Sigatoka workshop.

workshop were "Importance of community participation in the budgetary process" by Bulutani Matai.

The session on "What is Advocacy? Module on advocacy methods" and "Analysis of the 2009 Fiji Government Budget" was taken by Mosmi Bhim.

A community submission outlining the needs and concerns shared by participants, will be sent to the Ministry of Finance.



Participants in a group discussion at Korovou.

German Protestant aid organisations open PNG office

Two protestant aid agencies from Germany, "Bread for the World" and Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst (EED) - commonly known as Church Development Service - opened their Pacific Regional Office in Madang, Papua New Guinea (PNG) on July 15th 2009.

They convened the first joint Pacific consultation with their regional partners. This brought together 48 participants from 25 organisations from Fiji, Germany, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands as well as representatives from EED and "Bread for the World".

Rev Akuila Yabaki represented CCF at the consultation. EED has been a significant donor to CCF and has funded media ac-

tivities in particular. Bread for the World has also been a donor to CCF in the past. Geoffrey Nainoca represented CCF and the Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy (ECCREA).

The activities of the new office concentrate on Papua New Guinea, Fiji and the Solomon Islands, where programmes are being funded with about two million Euros per year.

For 40 years the two protestant agencies have been engaging in the Pacific. Current programs concentrate on the poor and marginalised people in rural areas.

Participants identified key challenges for their organisations: sustainability of the organisations, resource capacity, the rela-

tion between government and non-governmental organisations, the global or external pressures that effect all organisations in the region and the importance of cooperation for development.

One of the key learnings of the consultation was that the root cause of these challenges lies in the current dominant economic model which is private sector driven and exploitative to the environment and in conflict with Pacific traditions.

Meanwhile, on 2 June 2009, Ulla Kroog, the regional representative for EED, visited the CCF office in Suva. Ulla through her visit gained a deeper understanding of CCF's work and provided valuable inputs and suggestions to CCF's programme.

Three new staff join CCF office in July

The Citizens' Constitutional Forum's (CCF) capacity has been boosted with the inclusion of three new staff to its team in July 2009.

Mr Wilfred Tukana Ragunamada has taken up the post of Education Support Officer, Ms Losana Tuiraviravi has taken the post of Youth Liaison Officer and Ms Sunayna Nandini has taken the post of Communications Assistant.

Wilfred is currently completing a Diploma in Management and Information Technology at the Fiji Institute of Technology.

He has previously been employed at the Ministry of Education and is familiar with a range of teaching methodologies utilized by teachers around the country.

Wilfred has also worked as a Civil Education Specialist with the United Nations Development Programme.

"I hope to achieve a broader understanding of human rights and at the same time help educate the community on these issues," Wilfred said when asked what he



From left: Losana Tuiraviravi, Wilfred Tukana and Sunayna Nandini stand in front of the CCF signboard.

would like to achieve in his current job.

Sunayna has almost completed a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Journalism at the University of the South Pacific.

She has worked in the media industry for the past three years and has a special interest in community development and educating the public on human rights issues.

"I believe there are still a lot of people -

especially women in rural areas who are not aware of human rights and have no idea about the meaning of gender equality. I am very passionate about achieving equality for all," Sunayna said when asked what she would like to achieve in her new job.

Losana graduated from the Fiji Institute of Technology in 2004 with a Trade Certificate in Graphic Design and has been working as a youth facilitator for the non-government organizations Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy (ECREA).

By working at CCF, Losana hopes to get more exposure and at the same time provide more effective learning for other young

people.

"I am just excited that CCF wants to work with young people and especially as this is the first time for the organization to consider young people as their target group. This is just one of the many great ideas that they have come up with," Losana said when asked why she wanted to work at CCF.

World Racism Summit: not much achieved

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There was an urgent call on the Secretariat demanding immediate release of the Report with the three paragraphs in question, numbers 97, 99 and 100, placed in the Programme of Action. These three paragraphs relate to the condemnation of, and apologies, for slavery and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, Apartheid, Colonialism and Genocide and a call for "concerned States ... to take appropriate remedial and other measures to halt and reverse the lasting consequences of those practices."

Slavery was again brought to the centre stage of the UN Conference agenda with an impassioned plea, largely by the Africans and Afro-Americans, for reparations for slavery traffic across the Atlantic.

Fiji Racism Questions

Following the adoption by the United Nations of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in September 2007, Fiji has to wrestle with the concept of indigenous Fijians because Fijians are indigenous people not by international law but by history. In international law, indigenous people is a term normally used to refer to mi-

norities who lack visibility and stand in need of special measures for their survival, which are time limited. This is not the case in Fiji where the term indigenous applies to the most dominant community.

The United Nations CERD Committee when deliberating on Fiji in 2008, took interest in the People's Charter and wanted to hear more on the strategies it proposed for eradicating racism. The Fiji Government delegation made reference to the Charter as a people-centred resolution of deep seated problems. The delegation articulated a belief that by meeting its commitments to deal with perceived racial discrimination in Fiji and along the lines of Fiji's adherence to the principles of the CERD Convention, the country could effectively resolve many problems articulated and set out in the People's Charter for Change, Peace and Progress for Building a Better Fiji. This is because Fiji's problems are largely regarded as of a racist nature. Again, not much has been achieved because Fiji is still enmeshed in an underlying racism which can only be resolved if the proposals to end the coup culture in the Charter, is pursued.

Breaking coup cycle

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- 1) remove the economic and social conditions that lead to coups.
- 2) Require all holders of public offices, including the military, to take an oath agreeing not to participate in coups.
- 3) Strengthen penalties and operation of criminal law for coup-related offences.
- 4) Amending the Constitution to say that no coup can abrogate the Constitution.
- 5) Prohibiting participants in coups from holding public office in future.
- 6) Greater effort to address situation of rural and urban poor in order to avoid social alienation and political manipulation.
- 7) Encouraging Indo-Fijian and Indigenous Fijian mutual partnerships in development, commerce and investments.
- 8) Any conviction of treason is to be subject to an automatic life sentence.
- 9) Every politician who enters parliament must, as part of their oath of loyalty, commit not to participate in any future coups.
- 10) Participation in a coup to lead to immediate vacation of a public or chiefly office and forfeiture of all property owned.