

## **Using multi-stakeholder dialogue as a social transformation tool – the case of Fiji**

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Expert Group Meeting on  
“Dialogue in the Social Integration Process:  
Building peaceful social relations – by, for and with people”  
United Nations, New York  
21 – 23 November 2005

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## History & nature of the conflict in Fiji<sup>1</sup>

A majority of Fijians and Indo-Fijians appear to feel that they are locked in a struggle for political, economic, and social power, and for the survival of their ethnic identity. While they acknowledge that this struggle originated in British colonial policies and actions undertaken more than a century ago, they nonetheless tend in current times to generalise about the characteristics and intentions of the “other” group and to believe that the differences between them are insurmountable. There is little inter-cultural mingling or understanding, and both groups feel victimised by their circumstances. Divisions along communal lines have been exploited by political leaders more than they have been healed by projects for cross-cultural harmony and understanding, and the conflict in Fiji could benefit from an initiative in “multi-stake-holder dialogue for social transformation”.

The origins of Fiji’s contemporary ethnic conflict lie in its colonial past. At the time the British established their “protection” over the more than 300 inhabited Fiji Islands in 1874, Fijians were for the most part recently Christianised Melanesians whose social and political structures tended toward the chiefly patterns of Polynesia. They were, that is, hierarchically ordered agricultural societies based on communal ownership of land.<sup>2</sup> All Fijians were members of a *tokatoka* (extended family), within a *Mataqali* (group of families) and *yavusa* (clan). Groups of *yavusa* formed *vanua*, and *vanua* grouped together to form a *matanitu* (state or “confederacy” – of which there are presently three: Tovata, Burebusaga, and Kubuna).

This is not to say that the Fijians were united: fierce rivalry existed between clans, and there were variations in language, custom, and forms of authority. Halapua notes that “Rivalries between *vanuas* and chiefs, and tribal wars, were common before Fiji was ceded to Great Britain”.<sup>3</sup> Ravuvu agrees that “Groups moved about, integrated and disintegrated according to the perceived advantages of leaders and members alike, especially when individual freedom and control over one’s destiny was severely threatened.”<sup>4</sup>

The ostensible purpose of British “paternalistic” rule was to keep the Fijian lifestyle unchanged. But the “Deed of Cession” agreed by Fijian Chiefs and the British in 1874, together with subsequent policy choices, sowed seeds of discord that have ripened at intervals ever since. While the British agreed in the 1874 document to recognize “Fijian paramountcy” (ie, they coopted the chiefly system into their strategy of “indirect rule”), they also subsequently brought to the colony from India between 1889 and 1916 over fifty thousand indentured labourers to work Fijian cane fields.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> My thanks to Dr. Akanisi Kedrayate and Mr. Joeli Besetimoala for assistance in understanding efforts to reconcile the communities in Fiji and for providing essential background information.

<sup>2</sup> Coastal communities were of course based on marine activities rather than agricultural.

<sup>3</sup> Halapua, W. (2003). *Tradition, Lotu & Militarism in Fiji*. Lautoka, Fiji Institute of Applied Studies.

<sup>4</sup> Ravuvu, A. (1991). *Facade of Democracy. Fijian Struggles for Political Control, 1830-1987*. Suva, Reader Publishing House.

<sup>5</sup> Kelly, J. D. and M. Kaplan (2001). *Represented Communities: Fiji and World Decolonization*. Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press.

The retention in Fiji of most of these labourers following completion of their indenture, their need for land and livelihood, laws protecting Fijian sovereignty over land, the policies of racial segregation and distinction between the racial communities (Fijian, Indian, and European) cultivated by the British, and the continued use of racial distinction in the independence constitution of 1970, have set a pattern of enduring conflict focused on identity and access to resources and power.<sup>6</sup> All Fiji citizens who wish to be regarded as indigenous Fijians for land-owning and other purposes must be included in a register (the *I Vola ni Kawabula* – VKB)– an exclusionary practice which sometimes excludes mixed-race Fijians out of land-owning groups as well as non-ethnic Fijians. Even the term “Fijian” is contested, with some insisting that it not be applied to Indo-Fijians. The most recent constitutional review offered the term “Fiji Islander” as a compromise, although the issue is far from settled.<sup>7</sup> Fiji’s current population is approximately 840,000. Of this number, Indo-Fijians comprise approximately 44%, although this percentage is declining through out-migration.<sup>8</sup>

In recent years racial antagonism has been heightened by the tendency of Fijian land-owners to not renew agricultural leases to primarily Indo-Fijian tenant farmers. When the Agricultural Lands and Tenants Ordinances (ALTO), which offered 10-year leases to farmers, expired in 1976, the Mara government of that time introduced the Agricultural Land and Tenants Act (ALTA), by which farmers obtained a 30-year lease with land rental fixed at 6% of unimproved capital value (UCV). Many of these leases came due for renewal from 1997 and the decision by many land-owners to not renew them put thousands of poor farmers out of work and fuelled urban migration and expansion of squatter settlements. This is indeed a complex situation in which land-owners and tenants alike have grievances over rates of return that neither control: the Native Land Trust Board, a government agency established in the 1940s to regulate the use of indigenous land, determines the value of leases (rental paid to land-owners), while returns for sugar (traditionally the primary agricultural product) have been determined by another government corporation (the Fiji Sugar Corporation).

At the current time there is impasse between landowners and tenants, and one year out from an election (due before the end of 2006), the process is ethicized and politicized such that discussion on the topic is fraught.

### **Social integration stages and stakeholders**

The Constitution establishes the equality of citizens in Fiji yet simultaneously establishes the pre-eminence of the Fijian people. This desire to sustain a nation-state for all citizens while protecting and enhancing the interests of the indigenous Fijians

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<sup>6</sup> Premdas, R. (2003). Fiji: Peacemaking in a Multiethnic State. [From Promise to Practice. Strengthening UN Capacities for the Prevention of Violent Conflict](#). C. L. Sriram and K. Wermester. Boulder, London, Lynne Rienner Publishers.

<sup>7</sup> Reeves, P., T. T. Vakatora, et al. (1996). The Fiji Islands. Towards A United Future. Report of the Fiji Constitution Review Commission, Parliament of Fiji.

<sup>8</sup> Reddy, M., M. Mohanty, et al. (2004). "Economic Cost of Human Capital Loss from Fiji: Implications for Sustainable Development." [International Migration Review](#) 384(1447-1461).

through a “compact” (Constitutional Chapter 2) establishes relations that are in some ways exclusionary and in others disciplined into co-existence and forms of collaboration (particularly in economic and political relations). The *Social Justice Act* of 2001 provides for 29 affirmative programs in four areas where government perceives that Fijian interests lag behind those of other races: education and training, land and housing, commerce, and state service.<sup>9</sup>

Until 1987 the leaders of Fiji’s ethnic communities maintained a delicate political and economic relationship in which Indo-Fijian domination of business was tolerated in return for Fijian political hegemony. Norton argues that “the negotiability of contention over land, in the context of a substantial degree of separation in the economy, has favoured cooperation in trade unions, social clubs and associations, and in politics”.<sup>10</sup> He cites the outcome of the 1977 general election, when the predominantly Indo-Fijian National Federation Party won more seats than the Alliance Party of the Fijians but failed to form a government – due to the “...tacit understanding that Fijian predominance in government safeguards the Indian farmers’ access to land, and that a challenge to Fijian political prerogative may provide destructive conflict.”<sup>11</sup>

Indigenous Fijians own some 86% of the land and their ownership is communal rather than individual. Indo-Fijians either work agricultural leases, or rent properties in urban areas, or are squatting in urban and peri-urban areas. The elite own freehold title to land, mostly in urban areas. Indo-Fijians have traditionally dominated commerce and been better educated. Fijians have traditionally dominated the public sector, the military and the police force. The fact that a small percentage of Indo-Fijians has amassed wealth through commerce is sometimes used – through reference to average income - to distort the level of wealth of *most* Indo-Fijians. Due to a combination of factors Fiji’s position on the *Human Development Index* dropped from 44 in 1986 to 81 in 2003. While this index is not disaggregated by race, the perception exists amongst Fijians that their economic position is weaker than that of Indo-Fijians.

Because traditional Fijian society was communal, and village-based, processes of urbanization have weakened the basis of Fijian tradition, and weakened the reciprocal bonds tying chiefs and commoners in common purpose.<sup>12</sup> By the mid-1980s an emerging urban-based middle class began to value competency in political leadership ahead of ethnicity. In practical terms, this meant that at general elections in 1987 “general” votes were placed across the ethnic divide, allowing the political party headed by the commoner Dr. Timoci Bavadra to replace the long incumbency of the Alliance Party headed by the chiefly Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. Mara’s defeat was viewed as a victory for democracy by some- but by others as a transgression of the traditional understanding between Fijians and Indo-Fijians (Bavadra was Fijian

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<sup>9</sup> Parliament of Fiji (2002). [Rebuilding confidence for stability and growth for a peaceful, prosperous Fiji : strategic development plan 2003-2005.](#)

<sup>10</sup> Norton, R. (1981). "The Mediation of Ethnic Conflict: Comparative Implications of the Fiji Case." [Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics](#) 19(3): 309-328.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Lasaqa, I. (1984). [The Fijian People: before and after independence.](#) Canberra, New York, Australian National University Press.

but a number of his cabinet ministers were Indo-Fijian). Third in command of the army, Colonial Sitiveni Rabuka, sided with the latter view and invoked the cause of indigenous Fijian rights as mounted the first *coup* in the South Pacific.<sup>13</sup>

The 1990 Constitution entrenched Fijian interests but was not well received by the international community.<sup>14</sup> By the time general elections were held in 1992 Rabuka had re-fashioned himself as a politician, and with the support of the *Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei* (SVT) party, became Prime Minister. A decade of social engineering followed: re-fashioning of the independence constitution to more vigorously assert Fijian hegemony, and implementing a range of “affirmative action” programs premised on a belief that Fijian interests had been usurped by those of Indo-Fijians.<sup>15</sup> Slight modification of pro-Fijian policies in the revised (1997) Constitution were part of the country’s effort to regain international recognition as a full democracy, but the rise of an Indo-Fijian Prime Minister (Chaudhry) at general elections in 1999 was followed by an incomplete coup in 2000.

The Labour Party had prized executive power from the SVT by forming a coalition with several smaller parties (the *Veitokani ni Lewenivanua Vakarisito* (VLV), Party of National Unity (PANU) and the Fijian Association Party (FAP). There are many interpretations of how conditions conducive to Speight’s coup attempt developed. For some, Chaudhry’s ethnicity was a sufficient trigger; for others, his leadership style was deemed too abrasive; while yet others feared the consequences of his government’s program for reform.<sup>16</sup>

In this circumstance of long-standing contestation between ethnic communities, combined with added threats to existing interests, a Fijian nationalist movement surfaced and fomented public unrest – and then “failed businessman” George Speight led a “civil coup” attempt that mostly failed but yet partly succeeded. With the aid of several soldiers Speight stormed parliament and took the Prime Minister and most members of government hostage. The siege lasted 56 days and the military’s allegiances remain unclear up to the present. A new “government” was sworn in comprising some existing members of parliament together with some non-parliamentarians. Whereas martial law was declared and the military attempted

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<sup>13</sup> Rabuka actually mounted *two* coups. The second, in September 1987 resulting in Fiji severing its ties with the British monarchy, declaring itself a Republic, and being removed from the Commonwealth.

<sup>14</sup> The response of the Labour Party to the 1990 constitution is outlined in: Fiji Labour Party and National Federation Party Coalition (1991). The Fiji Constitution of 1990: A Fraud on the Nation. Nadi, Sunrise Press.

<sup>15</sup> Some “affirmative programs” amounted to little more than cronyism and poor governance. Unsecured loans, for instance, resulted in the collapse of the National Bank of Fiji – responsibility for which was never placed on those principally involved: Grynberg, R., D. Munro, et al. (2002). Crisis: Collapse of the National Bank of Fiji. Suva, USP Book Centre. For analysis of the “Nine Points Plan” of 1988, the Fijian Holdings Company, the Native Lands Trust Board, The Fijian Affairs Board, and other affirmative program initiatives see Ratuva, S. (2000). Addressing Inequality? Economic affirmative action and communal capitalism in post-coup Fiji. Confronting Fiji Futures. A. H. Akram-Lodhi. Canberra, Asia Pacific Press: 226-248.

<sup>16</sup> Rakuita, T. (2002). “Taukei-Vulagi Philosophy and the Coup of 19 May 2000.” Pacific Studies 25(4).

to mediate in the situation without the loss of life, the military commander was nonetheless responsible for the removal from office of the President and for the suspension of the Constitution. After a period Laisenia Qarase was appointed interim Prime Minister and at general elections in September 2001 was returned to this office.<sup>17</sup>

In the aftermath of the 2000 coup attempt two political and legal processes have operated simultaneously, sometimes with common purpose and sometimes with seemingly incompatible aims. The first process concerns the operation of the rule of law with equal application to all citizens of Fiji. The government has worked to restore confidence in the country's tourism industry and other investment sectors and the police and the public prosecutor have pursued their constitutional mandate to bring to justice to those involved in the coup attempt. Through the due process of the law the courts imprisoned – amongst others - the Vice President, the Deputy Speaker of Parliament, members of Cabinet, high chiefs, and members of the military. The Law Society disbarred those of its members who judged had failed to uphold the Constitution.

The second process concerns the implementation of affirmative programs that seek to improve the position of the Fijian community in relation to that of the Indo-Fijian. In 2002 the Government issued a three year strategic development plan intended to rebuild “confidence for stability and growth” in the country.<sup>18</sup> The affirmative program includes the articulation of state institutions that continue, enhance, or rehabilitate “Fijian” methods of governance; the passage of laws recognizing Fijian customs (such as the *Customary Fisheries Bill 2005*); research toward providing for further application of Fijian custom under Constitutional article 186; re-introduction of “Fijian Courts” (to hear cases against Fijians on the basis of Fijian custom); and strengthening of the operation of the Great Council of Chiefs (the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga*).

In 2005 the government first advocated the adoption of “restorative” processes that mitigate the impact of “rule of law” outcomes on Fijian leadership and society. These have included early release of those imprisoned for coup-related offences; and introduction to parliament of the *Reconciliation and Unity Bill 2005*, which seeks to establish a “truth and reconciliation commission” through which individuals who participated in coup-related activities who have not yet faced criminal charges might avoid “punitive” justice by expressing a desire to “reconcile” with their victims and to “restore” broken relationships through requests for “forgiveness”.

The current government thus appears to be attempting to uphold the rule of law and equality of persons on the one hand, and to give special consideration to the interests of Fijians on the other. As expressed by the Prime Minister in 2005:

The nation moved into uncharted waters when high chiefs were found guilty of coup-connected offences and sent to prison. There were many ramifications, not the least of which was the effect of taking chiefly

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<sup>17</sup> Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SDL) won 31 of 71 seats.

<sup>18</sup> Parliament of Fiji (2002). Rebuilding confidence for stability and growth for a peaceful, prosperous Fiji : strategic development plan 2003-2005.

leaders away from their people and the associated implications for social stability. Among many traditional supporters of these chiefs there is an unsettling undercurrent of unease and confusion...The rule of law demands that investigations, prosecutions and trials must continue without interference. But in the wider context of taking the country forward, economically and socially, and bringing our peoples closer together, this prolonged pursuit of justice, is an obstacle to our progress..."<sup>19</sup>

The operation of contrasting programs by the government is interpreted in two similarly contrasting ways. There are those who support a "rule of law" approach that treats all citizens equally. This view opposes the existence of affirmative programs on the basis that no particular sub-group in society is owed special status due to historical circumstances or ethnic identity. After all, the Fiji Human Rights Commission – itself a government entity - is working toward the elimination of all forms of discrimination on the basis of race.

There those who view the affirmative program in Fiji, on the other hand, as no more than an effort to "restore balance" between the ethnic communities, which had not been possible under British paternalism. The Fijians were suppressed and kept out of commerce and urban life, this view argues, and there is need to correct this imbalance through an affirmative program so that the two communities can in future meet as equals – particularly in undertaking economic activities, but also in every area of modern life. As expressed by the Fiji Heritage Foundation:

It would seem ...that indigenous rights to ownership of land and other resources and the application of customary practices can be secured only through legislations (sic) ...For these rights to continue to exist and be secure, indigenous Fijians must continue to dominate cabinet and those who sympathize with them in Parliament. This requires that the indigenous people must always hold political supremacy. As legal rights and not human rights, indigenous rights in Fiji cannot be regarded as inherent and inalienable rights."<sup>20</sup>

### **Dialogue procedures and stakeholders**

There have been many initiatives to promote dialogue and to establish peace networks in Fiji, but nothing can be said to have yet proven successful at national level. Race relations have continued to dominate social, political and economic discourse in the period 2000-2005; but the element of violence that accompanied the coup attempt has added such issues as restoration, retribution and reconciliation to the public discourse.

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<sup>19</sup> Qarase, L. (2005). Summary of Remarks by Prime Minister at meetings for new reconciliation legislation "A new way to reconciliation and justice".

<sup>20</sup> Fiji Heritage Foundation (2005). The role of traditional leaders in relation to parliamentary democracy, including recognition of the rights of indigenous people. Suva, Fiji Heritage Foundation.

**Parliament** has an important role to play in seeking solutions to Fiji's problems with race relations and social integration, but the parliament itself is constituted on the basis of race and has not been able to overcome this limitation. The 1970 Constitution allocated parliamentary seats along racial lines. Each voter had two votes, one for a "communal" seat and a second for a general seat (twenty-seven of the parliament's fifty-two seats were "communal" - twelve for Fijian, twelve for Indo-Fijian and three for "general electors" ie Europeans – an equation intended to approximate democratic government but also ensure that politics continued to have race and issues of race at its centre. The implication of race-based representation is that few members of the legislature seem to consider the interests of the nation as a whole; most articulate the concerns of their own constituency, which is invariably one or other ethnic community. It has proven difficult in such circumstances for a leader to attempt representation of both major communities, lest he or she lose the support of her own constituents.

One intervention that has been attempted with political leaders from a "conflict resolution" perspective is the "**Talanoa**" interactive dialogue process offered by Hawaii-based academic Sitiveni Halapua. The Talanoa approach, which has been described as "less formalised and possibly more 'intuitive' than formal mediation, has not achieved much visible success: political leaders agreed to establish several parliamentary committees to explore solutions to the problems of land and the sugar industry but some committees were appointed but never convened and Talanoa sessions appear to be being held at ever longer intervals.<sup>21</sup>

**Chiefs** probably have greater social authority than elected leaders. While the elite and some of the urbanised have transcended ethnic politics, more than 40% of the population remain in villages and under traditional ties of loyalty to chiefs - who control messages in and out of that social world. However, this influence, considerable as it is, does not extend beyond the ethnic boundaries of the Fijian community. The Great Council of Chiefs, and the chiefs of Fiji at various levels of rank (of whom there are approximately 5,000) have an important role to play in bringing the communities together while reassuring both that their unique identities and values are not at risk. Prominent high chief and leading public intellectual, Ratu Jone Madraiwiwi, a former high court judge and current Vice President of the Republic, persistently encourages this theme in his public appearances.

**Ceremony and protocol** are important to Fijian society, and it is important to give consideration of the forms of ceremony most likely to have impact on social integration processes. In chiefly societies there are ritualised forms of speaking and listening.<sup>22</sup> These are known and understood *within* these societies but what is

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<sup>21</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> Talanoa session was held 3-4 November 2001 and sessions continued through into 2005. The outcome of Talanoa IV was agreement on the need to examine four areas: building trust and reducing suspicion and fear among leaders and communities; fostering wide acceptance of the rule of law; ensuring all communities feel secure in Fiji as their home; and examining the constitution. Pacific Islands Development Program (2001). Talanoa IV. Leaders Statement on Harmony and Stability in the Rebuilding of Fiji. 4 November 2001. Hawaii, East-West Center.

<sup>22</sup> Brison, K. J. (2001). "Constructing Identity through ceremonial language in rural Fiji." *Ethnology* 40(4): 309-.

needed are forms of dialogue that work *across* cultures, that take forms comprehensible to all parties.

Dialogue amongst **religious leaders** has not proven sufficiently comprehensive to assist in resolution of the most critical issues. While there is a Council of Christian Churches in Fiji the dialogue required is between leaders of Christian, Hindu, and Islamic communities. The multi-faith forum Interfaith Search Fiji brings together Bahá'í, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu and Islamic representatives but the Methodist Church of Fiji does not participate – an important omission since it is the strongest religious influence on the majority of Fijian villagers. The theological colleges and seminaries have not played a direct or visible role in fostering inter-religious and inter-cultural understanding, although one academic at the Pacific Theological College has promoted a model of reconciliation based on truth-telling, apology, the claiming of responsibility, and justice-building.<sup>23</sup>

**Civil society** has flourished in Fiji in the past two decades – at least in the urban areas.<sup>24</sup> Whereas earlier organizations focused on community care (generally along ethnic lines), the ethnic and political conflict since 1987 has generated NGO's devoted to human rights advocacy, women's rights, and the spread of democratic culture. The Citizens Constitutional Forum, which obtained funding from Conciliation Resources and subsequently from the European Union, positions itself as a champion of equal rights and justice. Following the 2000 coup attempt and the subsequent suspension of the 1997 constitution, CCF supported a court case by Indo-Fijian farmer, Chandrika Prasad, in which the court reinstated the 1997 constitution. When the CCF subsequently challenged the legality of the interim government it was deregistered as a charitable organisation by the government. Undaunted, CCF established a company and continues its civic awareness activities.<sup>25</sup>

Other significant NGOs include ECREA,<sup>26</sup> the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, and the Fiji Council of Social Service. ECREA has focused on peace-building,<sup>27</sup> a poverty elimination campaign, and clarification of the concepts of reconciliation, forgiveness and justice that are presented in the governments "reconciliation efforts."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Daye, R. (2003). "Finding a Model of Reconciliation." *Fijian Studies* 1(1): 177-192. The work of Fijian Theologian Ilaitia Tuwere explores Fijian Christian theology in a way that informs Fijian perspectives on the social integration challenge, but does not engage with non-Christian perspectives that form part of that challenge: Tuwere, I. S. (2002). *Vanua: Towards a Fijian Theology of Place*. Suva, Institute of Pacific Studies and College of St John the Evangelist.

<sup>24</sup> A recent review of civil society engagement in "multi-track diplomacy" in Fiji is provided in Prasad, S. and D. Snell (2004). Fiji: Enabling Civic Capacities for Conflict Prevention. *Searching for Peace in Asia Pacific: An Overview of Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Activities*. A. Heijmans, N. Simmonds and H. v. d. Veen. Boulder and London, Lynne Rienner: 543-563.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> The Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy is a Christian-based organisation inspired by a vision of a compassionate, just and inclusive society.

<sup>27</sup> Ratuva, S. (2002). *Participation for Peace: A Study of Inter-ethnic and Inter-Religious Perception in Fiji*. Suva, ECREA.

<sup>28</sup> Ecumenical Centre for Research Education and Advocacy (2005). Submission on the Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Bill. Suva.

International NGOs also contribute thoughts concerning how Fiji can solve its social, political and economic problems, although there is a tendency for reports to have no specific audience and no specific policy dialogue target.<sup>29</sup>

Two relatively new **regional peacebuilding networks** are represented in Fiji. The Pacific Conflict Transformation Network<sup>30</sup> is associated with the Pacific Concerns Resource Centre, while the Global Project for the Prevention of Armed Conflict is coordinated in both the region and Fiji by the Citizen's Constitutional Forum. Neither network is as yet sufficiently developed to engage vigorously in peacebuilding in Fiji. In such environments as Fiji, civil society actors are actively promoting agendas of rights and justice but are often regarded by government as oppositional in character. Thus, to call for basic rights is viewed by authorities as disloyalty to the state and labelled as such.

By now it should be clear that the Fijian ethos comprises adherence to chiefly systems which feel themselves under threat from other sets of values (particularly those of globalization and liberal democratic thought). A number of Pacific states have not ratified the ICCPR and other fundamental treaties, knowing they cannot fully adhere to them. Fiji has signed but with reservations. This explains why authorities sometimes appear ambivalent in their commitment to fundamental human rights and social justice.<sup>31</sup>

### **Elements of Interventions**

It should not be thought from the discussion above that there has been no progress in establishing inter-communal dialogue and understanding. Indeed, some government departments have made significant effort, often through the intervention of particularly committed individuals, toward mutual understanding of the different communities. Two examples are the Public Rental Board and the Department of Education, both of which seek to enhance the multicultural aspects of their policies. The Fiji Human Rights Commission is an independent entity established by the state to uphold equality of persons under the constitution. The Ministry of Reconciliation and National Unity has put considerable effort into bringing representatives of ethnic communities into genuine dialogue and exploration of the issues. However, even this Ministry has tended to alienate Indo-Fijian participants when events linked to such efforts as a "National week of prayer" privilege Christian prayer forms over Hindu or Muslim.

In the past few years the Government has promoted "Fiji Week" as an event through which to bring the country's ethnic groups into association through festivals

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<sup>29</sup> See, for instance, a recent report by Oxfam on potential solutions to the problems of Fiji's sugar industry. Such "reports" are issued to an audience at large, and not necessarily into the policy network attending to this particular issue: Oxfam International (2005). *The Fijian sugar industry: Investing in sustainable technology.*

<sup>30</sup> Greener, P., Ed. (2004). *Sowing the Seeds: The Beginnings of a Pacific Conflict Transformation Network. Conference Report.* Auckland, Auckland University of Technology and Pacific Cooperation Foundation.

<sup>31</sup> Fiji's neighbour, the Kingdom of Tonga, has experienced a decade of civil unrest resulting from a struggle by pro-democratic groups to reduce the powers of the monarchy and to establish a more representative parliament.

and public displays. However, the impact on such mass events on the more deeply held views about matters of race, ethnicity, and identity has not been definitively measured. Ironically, the staging of elaborate “reconciliation” and “forgiveness” ceremonies in Suva in 2005 may have intensified resentments rather than reduce them. Few if any victims of the 2000 coup attempt (mostly Indo-Fijians) participated in the ceremonies, while Fijian participants were moved by the participation of high chiefs in the proceedings and satisfied that proper tokens of “forgiveness” had now been offered. In reality the victims and the offenders have not come together, leaving such ceremonies without a real purpose or positive outcome.

The issue of language policy is raised periodically, although with different approaches being proposed. While some Fijians and Indo-Fijians have learnt each others’ languages, they are a distinct minority. The fact that few Indo-Fijians have learnt to speak Fijian frustrates many Fijians, just as ignorance of Hindi, and of Indian culture (and of Hindu and Islamic customs and beliefs) builds a barrier in matters of behaviour and belief. In response, some advocate compulsory language acquisition in the classroom (particularly compulsory Fijian and English).

In the build up to general elections in 2006 there are efforts amongst Fijian political leaders to establish a coalition of Fijian parties. These include the SVT, headed by former Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka, the SDL (the currently ruling party of Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase) and the indigenous Conservative Alliance (CAMV). However, even if Fijian unity is established at the political level, this achievement falls far short of bringing the Fijian community into effective communicative relations with the Indo-Fijian Community. Reconciliation is widely discussed, but few victims of coup-related activities have accepted the government’s overtures toward this end, preferring to take their grievances to the courts, or to fret on them for a further period.

Ethnic conflict in Fiji has not fragmented the state and few analysts expect it to do so. Fiji’s social, economic and political relations, however, have been characterised as realms of exclusion, co-existence, and selective collaboration. At the current time there are few who venture a strong opinion concerning whether or not progress has been made toward social integration in Fiji – there are signs of advance as well as signs that threaten fragmentation. Both communities continue to harbour grievances as well as many misconceptions concerning the intentions of the other and moderate voices run the risk of dismissal. Appropriate interventions continue to be sought.

## Timeline

1972	First elections after independence. Alliance Party wins. Ratu Mara becomes Prime Minister.
1977	Second general election. National Federation Party (NFP) wins but fails to agree on choice of Prime Minister. Dissolution of parliament
1977	Third general election. Alliance Party wins. Ratu Mara returns to position of Prime Minister
1982	Fourth general election. Alliance Party wins and Ratu Mara remains as Prime Minister
1987	Fifth general election. Fiji Labour Party (FLP) and NFP form coalition government. Dr Timoci Bavadra becomes Prime Minister.
1987 – May	Coup led by Lieutenant Colonel (LC) Sitiveni Rabuka and Royal Fiji Military Forces. Bavadra government overthrown.
1987 – September	Rabuka leads second coup. Fiji severs ties with the British monarchy and declares itself a Republic.
1992	General election. Won by Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT) party. Sitiveni Rabuka becomes Prime Minister.
1999	General election. Won by FLP, which formed a coalition with the Veitokani ni Lewenivanua Vakarisito (VLV), Party of National Unity (PANU) and the Fijian Association Party (FAP). Mahendra Chaudhry becomes first Indo- Fijian Prime Minister.
2000 – May	“civil coup” civil coup led by George Speight. Chaudhry and many members of his government held hostages in the parliament for fifty-three days. Military declares martial law, requests President Mara to step aside. Laisenia Qarase becomes interim Prime Minister.
2001 – September	General election. Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SDL) wins the 31 of 71 seats. Laisenia Qarase becomes Prime Minister.

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