

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

Research Response Number: FJI33706
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Questions

Please provide any information indicating that currently, or at any time since the December 2006 military coup, former members of the Fijian Army or reserve have been called up and required to undertake further service.

RESPONSE

Please provide any information indicating that currently, or at any time since the December 2006 military coup, former members of the Fijian Army or reserve have been called up and required to undertake further service.

Summary:

The sources provided below report that up to 3000 territorial force soldiers and reservists were recalled prior to and immediately following the 5 December 2006 coup led by Commodore “Frank” Bainimarama. These army personnel, who had attended their annual two-week camp training in late October to early November 2006, were called to assemble on 26 November 2006. Those in camp for training belonged to the 4th to 8th battalions, according to one report. More than half of those recalled had not responded to the call up by 28 November 2006. Those recalled were required to guard the President’s office and undertake the “clean – up” campaign of the existing government. On 7 December 2006 in a Declaration of a state of Emergency, the coup leader Commodore Bainimarama required “all members of the Republic of Fiji Military reserves” to march into barracks and military centres. One source states that in July 2007, the reserves were disbanded on account of cuts to the military budget in Fiji. In October 2007, Fiji formerly offered to the United Nations its soldiers for further deployment in peacekeeping missions. A military chief of staff indicated that

reservists could fulfil the Fiji army's UN duties as its regular soldiers were "stretched in its clean-up campaign". There were no reports found stating that persons who had served previously in the Fijian army, or former members of the army or reserves, were recalled to undertake further service.

Numbers, structure and roles of Reserve Force:

The Republic of Fiji Military Force (RFMF) consists of approximately 3,500 paid troops and a reservist force of a further 6000 to 7000. Writing on the events surrounding the coup, Jon Fraenkel asserted that after the 3,500 paid personnel, the country has between 15-20,000 military reservists in theory, being those Fijians who have passed through the military since independence (Field, M. 2008, 'Recouping losses – Fiji's regime considers its future', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 12 June – Attachment 1; '10,000 soldiers ready for UN mission' 2007, Islands Business website, source: *Fiji Live/Pacnews*, 8 October http://www.islandsbusiness.com/archives/news/index_dynamic/containerNameToReplace=MiddleMiddle/focusModuleID=130/focusContentID=10329/tableName=mediaRelease/overrideSkinName=newsArticle-full.tpl – Accessed 22 August 2008 – Attachment 2; Fraenkel, J. 2007, 'The Fiji coup of December 2006: who, what, where and why?' in *From election to coup in Fiji. The 2006 campaign and its aftermath*, eds J.Fraenkel & S. Firth, ANU E Press website, p. 428 http://epress.anu.edu.au/fiji/pdf/whole_book.pdf – Accessed 4 July 2007 – Attachment 3).

Wikipedia's entry on the Military of Fiji gives the following overview of the numbers and structure of the active and reserve forces:

The 3,200 men in the active army are organized into six infantry and one engineer battalions, with approximately 6,000 reserves forming a further three.

... The first two regular battalions of the Fiji Infantry Regiment are traditionally stationed overseas on peacekeeping duties; the 1st Battalion has been posted to Lebanon, Iraq, and East Timor under the command of the UN, while the 2nd Battalion is stationed in Sinai with the MFO. The 3rd Battalion is stationed in the capital, Suva, and the remaining three are spread throughout the islands.

...Fiji Infantry Regiment:

Regular Force: 1st Battalion, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Battalion

Territorial Force: 4th Battalion, 5th Battalion, 7th/8th Battalion ('Military of Fiji' 2008, Wikipedia, 1 August (last modified)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_of_Fiji – Accessed 25 August 2008 – Attachment 4).

A diagram of the structure of the RFMF on this Wikipedia entry labels the 4th, 5th, and 7th/8th Battalions as "4th (Reserve) Btn, 5th (Reserve) Btn, 7th/8th (Reserve) Btn" ('Military of Fiji' 2008, Wikipedia, 1 August (last modified)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_of_Fiji – Accessed 25 August 2008 – Attachment 4).

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Reports on the recall of soldiers during and after the December 2006 coup:

On Sunday 26 November 2006, approximately one week prior to the 5 December 2006 coup led by Fiji's military chief Commodore "Frank" Bainimarama, *The Fiji Times* reported that "all army and navy reserves" were called up, and that the Commodore stated at the time that "these army territorial forces and navy reserves were expected to stay in camp for 12 months". The purpose of the call up was, according to the Commodore, to stop anyone entering the President's Office. Other news reports published on 26 November 2006 by *Agence France Presse* and *ABC News Online*, refer to "hundreds of reservists"/"more than 1000 territorial force personnel" being recalled over the weekend for the purposes of preparing for a "clean up" campaign of the present government (Raicola, V., Marau, M. and Nand, A. 2006, 'Military reservists recalled to 'guard Fiji President'', *The Fiji Times*, 26 November <http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?id=52344> – Accessed 21 August 2008 – Attachment 5; 'Fiji military recalls 1,000 reservists for 'clean-up'' 2006, *ABC News Online*, 26 November <http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200611/s1797669.htm> – Accessed 21 August 2008 – Attachment 6; 'Fiji military raises stakes as government showdown looms' 2006, *Agence France Presse*, 26 November – Attachment 7).

An army spokesman confirmed two days later, on 28 November 2006, that more than half of the 3000 reserve soldiers called up failed to do so:

More than half of the reserve soldiers who were called to assemble at the army's headquarters did not turn up.

This was confirmed yesterday by army spokesman Major Neumi Leweni, who said of the 3000 reserve soldiers, less than 1000 reported to Queen Elizabeth Barracks in Nabua on Saturday. Major Leweni did not elaborate on the turnout, which has been labelled by several senior military officers as a very poor turnout.

Major Leweni said there were only 500 reserve soldiers who turned up and this did not include FTG (Force Training Group in Nasinu.).

He said he was still awaiting an update from the camps in Nadi, Lautoka and Labasa.

The reserves were recalled a week after their annual camp.

Checks on the army camps in the Western Division also revealed a poor turnout.

A senior officer said that some of the reserves he met simply refused to go to camp.

"They said that they were warned by their civilian bosses not to go to camp," he said.

Army commander Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama said that among other things, the reserves were being recalled to guard Government House ('Poor turnout by Fiji reserve soldiers' 2006, *The Fiji Times*, 28 November <http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?id=52438> – Accessed 21 August 2008 – Attachment 8).

In late October 2006 "3000 territorial force soldiers" and "navy reservists" attended annual camp training for 2 weeks. The soldiers belonged to the 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th battalions of the Fiji Infantry Regiment. On 7 November 2006, Fiji's military ordered that "3000 reserve troops" already in camp for annual training were to remain there an extra week ('Fiji army

reservists to remain in camp for another week' 2006, Radio New Zealand International website, 7 November <http://www.rnzi.com/pages/news.php?op=read&id=28111> – Accessed 21 August 2008 – Attachment 9; 'Fiji orders 3,000 territorials to report to camp' 2006, Radio New Zealand International website, 29 October <http://www.rnzi.com/pages/news.php?op=read&id=27873> – Accessed 21 August 2008 – Attachment 10).

On 30 November 2006 *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported that “about 3000 territorial and reserve soldiers have been called up. By tomorrow ...the Fiji military will be at full strength” (Brown, M. 2006 'Fiji troops on streets as crisis talks fail', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 November <http://www.smh.com.au/news/world/fiji-troops-on-streets-as-crisis-talks-fail/2006/11/29/1164777657746.html?page=fullpage#contentSwap1> – Accessed 21 August 2008 – Attachment 11).

A government press release 'Declaration of a state of emergency' issued on 7 December 2006 by Bainimarama included the following measure:

...According to the Commander the following measures will be put in place immediately:

4. All members of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces reserves will be marched into QEB (Queen Elizabeth Barracks) and other military centers for the purposes of being deployed to support RFMF's efforts ('Press Release: Declaration of a state of emergency' 2006, Fiji Government Online website, 7 December http://www.fiji.gov.fj/publish/page_8086.shtml – Accessed 26 August 2008 – Attachment 12).

A Fiji Public Service Commission circular issued on 14 December 2006 stated that military reserve soldiers and territorial force personnel in the public service were “allowed to join the army in light of the current situation in the country” ('Press Release: Release of Military Reserves in the Public Service' 2006, Fiji Government Online, 21 December http://www.fiji.gov.fj/publish/page_8117.shtml – Accessed 26 August 2008 – Attachment 13).

Seven months after the coup took place, in July 2007, the Fijian army disbanded its reserves due to budget constraints. This was reported by *Reuters* in October 2007:

Coups can be expensive. Just ask the Fiji military, which has been forced to cut troop numbers and slash rations after breaking its 2007 budget due to the extra costs involved in toppling the government.

The South Pacific island nation's military was allocated F\$80 million (US\$57 million) for 2007, but a bloodless December 2006 coup and subsequent “mobilisation” were not budgeted for, the army told local media.

The army has now reduced rations by more than half, slashing a soldier's daily pay from F\$7 to F\$2.50, to sustain operations, the news Web site [fijilive.com](http://www.fijilive.com) said.

“Yes, we did bust our budget, but that was a national necessity for us,” Military Land Force chief of staff Lieutenant-Colonel Mosese Tikoitoga told [fijilive](http://www.fijilive.com) on Tuesday.

“We had to ask for an extra provision but we were not given any so we had to look from within. We had to cut on our rations.”

The Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF), with around 3,500 men, is one of the smallest in the world.

To trim costs the army said it made soldiers redundant because it could not pay their wages, **disbanded its reserves in July** and cut a lot of training programmes ('Fiji's military blows budget on coup, cuts troops' 2007, *Reuters*, 15 October
<http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSSYD225298?sp=true> – Accessed 22 August 2008 – Attachment 14).

In October 2007 Lieutenant Colonel Mosese Tikoitoga, military spokesman and chief of staff (Land Force), declared that "reservists can fulfil the army's [UN] international duties". The Pacific News Agency Service also reported that at the time the military had admitted that "its regular soldiers have been stretched in its clean-up campaign" ('10,000 soldiers ready for UN mission' 2007, Islands Business website, source: *Fiji Live/ Pacnews*, 8 October
http://www.islandsbusiness.com/archives/news/index_dynamic/containerNameToReplace=MiddleMiddle/focusModuleID=130/focusContentID=10329/tableName=mediaRelease/overrideSkinName=newsArticle-full.tpl – Accessed 22 August 2008 – Attachment 2).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

International News & Politics

Reuters <http://www.reuters.com/>

The Sydney Morning Herald <http://www.smh.com.au>

Region Specific Links

The Fiji Times, 26 November <http://www.fijitimes.com/>

Islands Business website <http://www.islandsbusiness.com/>

ABC News Online <http://www.abc.net.au/>

Radio New Zealand International website <http://www.rnzi.com/>

Fiji Government Online <http://www.fiji.gov.fj/>

Search Engines

Google search engine <http://www.google.com.au/>

Databases:

FACTIVA (news database)

BACIS (DIAC Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

ISYS (RRT Research & Information database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

1. Field, M. 2008, 'Recouping losses – Fiji's regime considers its future', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 12 June. (MRT-RRT General Papers)
2. '10,000 soldiers ready for UN mission' 2007, Islands Business website, source: *Fiji Live/ Pacnews*, 8 October
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13. 'Press Release: Release of Military Reserves in the Public Service' 2006, Fiji Government Online, 21 December
http://www.fiji.gov.fj/publish/page_8117.shtml – Accessed 26 August 2008.
14. 'Fiji's military blows budget on coup, cuts troops' 2007, *Reuters*, 15 October
<http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSSYD225298?sp=true> – Accessed 22 August 2008.