



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice
Fiji

**Fiji – FJI38685 – 2000 Coup – Current
interim government’s attitude to 2000
Coup**

16 May 2011

1. Deleted.
2. **What is the attitude of Bainimarama and the military/police in Fiji to persons involved in the 2000 coup and to persons who may be perceived as able to name persons in Fiji society or the military who were associated with the 2000 coup?**

No reports were located that directly address Bainimarama’s or the military/police attitude towards those who were involved in, or who could name persons who were involved in the 2000 Speight-led coup. There is however, information to indicate that Bainimarama continues to be proactive in seeking prison terms for those he believes have not been sufficiently punished for their involvement in the succeeding November 2000 mutiny involving members of the Counter Revolutionary Warfare Unit (CRW). The November 2000 mutiny is believed to be a continuation of events that had culminated in the Speight-led coup and involved members of the military who had been imprisoned (and recently released) for their suspected roles in the May 2000 coup.¹ An Amnesty International article from 9 November 2000 states that Bainimarama narrowly escaped being killed or captured in the mutiny.²

While no reports were found of the interim government’s attitude to people involved in the coup, it is plausible that the attitude is one of suspicion. This assessment is based on the tension between Bainimarama and Speight, who was backed in the 2000 coup by rebel members of the Fijian Military Force’s CRW. In the weeks following the 2000 coup, negotiations with the coup leaders remained deadlocked, despite the President, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara having assumed governing powers and on 29 May 2000, the Army declared martial law and took over. A further indication of the tension between Bainimarama and Speight (and his supporters) is Bainimarama’s justification of his 2006 coup as a response not only to alleged corruption within the Qarase government but also due to excessive leniency shown by Qarase to those involved in the 2000 Speight-led coup.³

While people involved in the Speight-led coup may be viewed with suspicion by the interim government, three high profile individuals in the coup were able to continue their public lives

¹ Amnesty International, 2000, 'Fiji: Amnesty International: Human Rights at Risk', ASA 18/009/2000, 9 November [Sourced from Café Pacific Website] at <http://www.asiapac.org.fj/cafepacific/resources/aspac/fiji35hrights.html> - Accessed 16 May 2011 Attachment 7

² [ibid]

³ UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2007, *Country Profile: Fiji*, 21 June <http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/front?pagename=openmarket/xcelerate/showpage&c=page&cid=1007029394365&a=kcountryprofile&aid=1018965318864> - Accessed 3 July 2007.

unhindered by the interim government. Ratu Epeli Kanaimawi, a senior figure in the Assembly of Christian Churches in Fiji, Pastor Poate Mata and then Methodist Church president Reverend Tomasi Kanailagi were all named prior to 30 August 2006 for their involvement in the Speight-led coup.⁴ Ratu Epeli Kanaimawi was named High Commissioner to Malaysia on 29 August 2009 and at the time, a military spokesman Major Neumi Leweni stated that “[R]atu Epeli’s involvement in the coup is common knowledge and the army is willing to pass it on to the police if requested.”⁵ On 29 June 2007 Ratu Epeli Kanaimawi was ordered to return to Fiji with Colonel Pita Driti taking over his role as High Commissioner to Malaysia⁶ Reports regarding Pastor Poate Mata and Reverend Tomasi Kanailagi indicate that they have been able to perform their religious work unhindered by the interim government. Reverend Tomasi Kanailagi retired from his religious ministry work in 2009 aged 70 years old.⁷

Bainimarama and the military/police have demonstrated less tolerance of those involved in the November 2000 mutiny. An indication of Bainimarama’s continued willingness to pursue and punish those he believes were behind the recruitment of the CRW mutineers is found in a March 2011 news report⁸ of a successful prosecution of a high profile customary chief, Ratu Inoke Takiveikata. Ratu Inoke Takiveikata had previously been found guilty of inciting members of the military to mutiny but was released in 2007 upon a successful appeal against the verdict. Ratu Inoke Takiveikata was retried and found guilty and sentenced to imprisonment with a non-parole period of eight years.

The abovementioned sentencing of Ratu Inoke Takiveikata can be seen as a continuation of Bainimarama’s intolerance of military’s involvement in the Speight-led coup and November 2000 mutiny. From 2001 until April 2005, 159 military personnel were convicted of mutiny by military tribunals for their involvement in the 2000 coup and its aftermath. Most of the convicted military personnel were sentenced to lengthy prison sentences and were not allowed to re-join the military forces.⁹ Given this, coup participants still in the military could be punished should their involvement in the coup be revealed. On this basis, it is conceivable that they may take actions to prevent the disclosure of their involvement.

No reports were located to indicate what would occur to a person who is able to name persons in Fiji society or the military that had been associated with the 2000 coup.

⁴ Bhim, M. 2007 *The impact of the Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Bill on the 2006 election*, in *From election to coup in Fiji. The 2006 campaign and its aftermath*, eds J.Fraenkel & S. Firth, ANU E Press website, 28 May, p111 & 126-7 <http://epress.anu.edu.au/fiji/pdf/ch10.pdf> -- Accessed 12 May 2011 – Attachment 9

⁵ ‘More criticism of latest Fiji diplomatic posting’ 2006, *Radio NewZealand International* <http://www.rnzi.com/pages/news.php?op=read&id=26487> - Accessed 16 May 2011 - Attachment 10

⁶ ‘Fiji colonel ‘to be Malaysia envoy’ 2007, *ninemsn news*, 29 June <http://news.ninemsn.com.au/world/275950/fiji-colonel-to-be-malaysia-envoy> - Accessed 16 May 2011 - Attachment 11

⁷ ‘Former church president retires’ 2009, *Fiji Village*, 19 September, <http://babasiga.blogspot.com/2009/09/from-peceli-coming-back-from-nearly.html> - Accessed 16 May 2011 - Attachment 12

⁸ ‘Fiji chief gets life for Bainimarama plot’ 2011, *Australian Associated Press*, 7 March <http://news.smh.com.au/breaking-news-world/fiji-chief-gets-life-for-bainimarama-plot-20110307-1bkd4.html> - Accessed 12 May 2011 - Attachment 13

⁹ Bhim, M. 2007 *The impact of the Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Bill on the 2006 election*, in *From election to coup in Fiji. The 2006 campaign and its aftermath*, eds J.Fraenkel & S. Firth, ANU E Press website, 28 May, p111 & 126-7 <http://epress.anu.edu.au/fiji/pdf/ch10.pdf> -- Accessed 12 May 2011 – Attachment 9

Attachments

1. Deleted.
2. Deleted.
3. Deleted.
4. Deleted.

5. Deleted.
6. Deleted.

7. Amnesty International, 2000, 'Fiji: Amnesty International: Human Rights at Risk', ASA 18/009/2000, 9 November [Sourced from Café Pacific Website] at <http://www.asiapac.org.fj/cafepacific/resources/aspac/fiji35hrights.html> - Accessed 16 May 2011.
8. UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2007, *Country Profile: Fiji*, 21 June <http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/front?pagename=openmarket/xcelerate/showpage&c=page&cid=1007029394365&a=kcountryprofile&aid=1018965318864> – Accessed 3 July 2007.
9. Bhim, M. 2007 *The impact of the Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Bill on the 2006 election*, in *From election to coup in Fiji. The 2006 campaign and its aftermath*, eds J.Fraenkel & S. Firth, ANU E Press website, 28 May, p111 & 126-7 <http://epress.anu.edu.au/fiji/pdf/ch10.pdf> – - Accessed 12 May 2011.
10. 'More criticism of latest Fiji diplomatic posting' 2006, *Radio NewZealand International* <http://www.rnzi.com/pages/news.php?op=read&id=26487> - Accessed 16 May 2011.
11. 'Fiji colonel 'to be Malaysia envoy' 2007, *ninemsn news*, 29 June <http://news.ninemsn.com.au/world/275950/fiji-colonel-to-be-malaysia-envoy> - Accessed 16 May 2011.
12. 'Former church president retires' 2009, *Fiji Village*, 19 September, <http://babasiga.blogspot.com/2009/09/from-peceli-coming-back-from-nearly.html> - Accessed 16 May 2011.
13. 'Fiji chief gets life for Bainimarama plot' 2011, *Australian Associated Press*, 7 March <http://news.smh.com.au/breaking-news-world/fiji-chief-gets-life-for-bainimarama-plot-20110307-1bkd4.html> - Accessed 12 May 2011.