

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

Research Response Number: FJI35565
Country: Fiji
Date: 2 November 2009

Keywords: Fiji – Armed forces – Ex-military personnel – Bainimarama regime

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Questions

1. Is there any information concerning targeting of former members of the military in Fiji by the current regime?

RESPONSE

1. Is there any information concerning targeting of former members of the military in Fiji by the current regime?

Sources indicate that former members of the military in Fiji are amongst those who have received adverse treatment under the current regime, and that some ex-military personnel may be perceived as potential sources of threat because of their connections to the previous government or because of their knowledge of and high level of training in military matters.

An article published in the *Fiji Times* on 15 December 2006 reported that two former military officers had been dismissed, in the weeks immediately following the coup, from senior positions within the office of former Prime Minister Qarase:

The military dismissed 13 more people yesterday as it made changes to the membership and leadership of boards and institutions.

...

The dismissals began in the top brass of the Police Force with termination letters given to Andrew Hughes, Moses Driver and Kevueli Bulamainavalu and to date the military has given termination letters to Public Service Commission chief executive officer Anare Jale, chief executive in the Prime Minister's Office, Jioji Kotobalavu, Parliament Secretary-General Mary Chapman, Solicitor-General Nainendra Nand, PSC Chairman Stuart Huggett and Supervisor of Elections Semesa Karavaki.

Others sacked on Tuesday were National Reconciliation Ministry CEO Apisalome Tudreu, Mr Qarase's PS Sakeasi Ditoka and Principal Legal Officer in the PM's Office Ilaitia Tamata.

Mr Ditoka and Mr Tamata were former military officers (Janine, S. 2006, 'Military sacks more officials', *Fiji Times*, 15 December <http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?id=53523> – Accessed 29 October 2009 – Attachment 1).

SBS World News Headline Stories on 8 November 2007 reported the arrest of persons suspected of plotting to assassinate coup leader and interim Prime Minister, Commodore Voreqe (Frank) Bainimarama, and others, and indicated that the former members of the military amongst those arrested were considered to pose a particular threat because of their military experience at elite levels. According to the report:

Eleven men charged with plotting to assassinate Fiji's coup leader and senior members of his cabinet were on a mission to cause mass destabilisation and civil unrest, court documents allege. Suva magistrate John Semisi refused bail for the men, who have been charged with conspiracy to murder and inciting mutiny against the regime of Frank Bainimarama, the military leader who seized power in a coup last year. The men, including former senior army and intelligence officers, were remanded in custody until November 22 after prosecutors submitted two affidavits opposing bail. One affidavit, from deputy army commander Colonel Samuela Saumatua, described them as "extremely dangerous and highly resourceful".

...

Another of the accused, Metuisela Mua, was a former military officer who was familiar with commanding soldiers and posed a significant threat because he was once in charge of the army's Intelligence Corp. Six other accused were members of the elite Counter Revolutionary Warfare United and were highly trained and skilled in the use of firearms, Saumatua said.

...

The 11 men charged so far are among 16 people arrested at the weekend over the plot. They stand accused of plotting to kill Bainimarama, Finance Minister Mahendra Chaudhry, Attorney General Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum and two senior military officers. It is also alleged the men tried to incite Fiji military officers to take over the Queen Elizabeth Barracks, the main army barracks, between August 1 and November 3 ('Accused Fiji plotters denied bail' 2007, *SBS World News Headline Stories*, 8 November – Attachment 2).

On the *Raw Fiji News* website, a report dated 16 March 2009 refers to an "outspoken ex-military Colonel", Sakiusa Raivoce, being on a "stone-throwing hit list" for intimidation purportedly either planned or allowed by the leadership of the current regime:

Sources from within the military say that the outspoken ex-military Colonel Sakiusa Raivoce, is also on the stone-throwing hit list.

They say that the recent spate of cowardly violence by some grown-up indigenous Fijian men, believed to be soldiers, is all planned by Ului Mara, Pita Driti, Epeli Ganilau and Frank Bainimarama.

These sources say that the four know about the stone-throwing intimidating tactic and have refused to speak against it since they are part of it anyway.

They say that Sakiusa Raivoce's house was and still is a target but the cowards, for some reason, have not been able to execute, fearing that Raivoce, who owns a successful military recruitment agency for war-torn countries like Iraq and Afghanistan, is already prepared for them and knows who they are ('Raivoce on the stone throwing hit list' 2009, *Raw Fiji News*,

16 March <http://rawfijinews.wordpress.com/2009/03/16/raivoce-on-the-stone-throwing-hit-list/> – Accessed 29 October 2009 – Attachment 3).

Rock-throwing attacks upon “high-profile individuals” who had spoken out against the military regime were reported in *The New Zealand Herald* on 17 March 2009:

Politically-motivated attacks are on the rise in Fiji, with several high-profile individuals victims of vandalism in the past month.

In the latest attack, pro-democracy politician Attar Singh had rocks thrown at his house and cars at the weekend.

Mr Singh is one of several people, including a lawyer, journalist, newspaper editor and trade unionist, to be subjected to violence and intimidation in Fiji recently after speaking out against the country’s military regime.

...

Fijian police have refused to comment on why prominent Fijians are being targeted.

But former Fiji Law Society president Graham Leung said it was obvious these “acts of terror” were being perpetrated by those acting on behalf of the Government (‘Pro-democracy head says rocks thrown at house’ 2009, *The New Zealand Herald*, 17 March http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10562055 – Accessed 2 November 2009 – Attachment 4).

On 23 March 2009, the *Fiji Times* reported attacks against the homes of the previously mentioned former member of the military, Sakiusa Raivoce, and the editor-in-chief of the *Fiji Times*. Following the attack on his home, Raivoce reportedly stated that it would not deter him from “making comments and stating what I think should be said on issues affecting us”. According to the report:

Global Risks Services chief executive Lieutenant-Colonel Sakiusa Raivoce and Fiji Times editor-in-chief Netani Rika’s households were awakened by exploding bottle bombs early yesterday.

Three men wearing denim shorts, T-shirts and caps were responsible for tossing bottles containing a mixture of kerosene and sugar at their houses.

Lt-Col Raivoce said he was watching the Super 14 games on Saturday night and had gone to bed at midnight.

“I was in bed when I heard a loud bang, it sounded like an explosion,” he said. “I ran outside and saw three men in their 30s wearing denim jeans, T-shirts and caps.”

He said as he came out of the house, one of the men lit a second bottle and threw it against the wall before fleeing.

Lt Col Raivoce said the first bottle hit his Landcruiser in the garage.

“They were lighting the second bottle when I came out but as I ran to extinguish the flames they fled – if it had landed in the vehicle, it would have burnt down my home.”

He said he chased the men down Salato Road and they disappeared at the School for Handicapped.

Lt Col Raivoce said he called the police after 12am and they responded promptly.

“The officers from the dog unit followed the route the fleeing men had taken and they ended up at Nabua Village – that was the last heard from the police,” he said.

Lt-Col Raivoce said it was sad his family was marked.

“The first question the police asked me was if I had any enemies and I told them I did not have any – but probably I was an enemy,” he said, adding the attack on his home was something he saw practised in the Middle East.

“But this will not deter me from making comments and stating what I think should be said on issues affecting us,” he said (‘Fuel bombs fizzle out in terror plan’ 2009, *Fiji Times*, 23 March <http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?id=117479> – Accessed 2 November 2009 – Attachment 5).

An article published in the *Fiji Times* on 3 January 2009 indicated that Raivoce was a member of the national council of the Movement for Democracy in Fiji (‘Unionist leads democracy movement’ 2009, *Fiji Times*, 3 January <http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?id=110534> – Accessed 2 November 2009 – Attachment 6).

A website called Luvei Viti: Children of Fiji includes the following blog entry dated 14 April 2009 that reported a challenge or threat having been delivered in writing to Bainimarama by a group of “ex-military top brass”:

We are told that a group of ex-military top brass sent a letter today telling Frank [Bainimarama] that he has come to the end of his dictatorial journey. It is reported that the letter was signed by all of them. Sources say that these ex-military people have challenged Frank to take them in if he wants to and that they were willing to die as real soldiers protecting the best interest of the people if it comes to that. They also stated that Frank has brought shame to the RFBM institution and Fiji as a nation and that he can not carry on the way he is. “Since you have chosen to live by the sword, you should be prepared to die by the sword”, the letter said (‘Warning letter sent to Frank today’ 2009, Luvei Viti: Children of Fiji website, 14 April <http://luveiviti.blogspot.com/2009/04/fiji-people-theres-light-at-end-of-very.html> – Accessed 30 October 2009 – Attachment 7).

Searches of mainstream news sources failed to find any reference to this matter, however.

An Amnesty International report on human rights violations in Fiji, based on a visit to Fiji in April 2009, refers to those targeted by the current regime since the December 2006 coup – including members of the press, those who wrote letters to the daily newspapers and other prominent critics of the interim government, and “suspected drug dealers, trade unionists and members of outspoken NGOs”. According to the report:

From December 2006 to May 2007, Bainimarama imposed a state of emergency which suspended, amongst other things, freedom of expression. Critics and members of the press, including several editors, were threatened, warned and intimidated by the military. In February 2007, the military admitted to taking more than 1,100 people to the military barracks, who were beaten, otherwise treated inhumanely and forced to do military type drills such as running while being forced to carry heavy loads. In March, the military detained two senior executives of media outlets and warned them about reports in these outlets. Letter

writers to the daily newspapers were also detained, assaulted and subjected to cruel and degrading treatment during the state of emergency period.

Human rights activists in Fiji informed Amnesty International that from December 2006 to July 2007, there were hundreds of cases of detainees being subjected to torture or other ill-treatment, such as being stripped naked and made to run around a field or forced to touch each other's private parts. There were also many reports of soldiers and police officers beating up detainees. Victims included suspected drug dealers, trade unionists and members of outspoken NGOs. Most victims chose not to make complaints because of a lack of faith in the police force and the Fiji Human Rights Commission...

Prominent critics of the government and human rights defenders were placed on travel bans (i.e. they were banned from any overseas travel) without being informed by the authorities, often in reaction to their expression of concern or criticism of human rights violations perpetrated by the military or police force (Amnesty International 2009, *Fiji: Paradise Lost: A Tale of Ongoing Human Rights Violations: April-July 2009*, September, ASA 18/002/2009 – Attachment 8).

However, no specific mention was found in the Amnesty International report of former members of the military having been targeted for reason of their ex-military status.

Former military personnel employed in the Middle East

Sources indicate that, like previous governments of Fiji, the current interim government has actively supported the recruitment by private companies of military and ex-military personnel to work outside of Fiji, including in the Middle East.

In an article dated 31 October 2007 in *The New Zealand Herald* on Fiji's role as a provider of trained military personnel and former personnel employed outside of Fiji, a senior military officer was reported to have stated that, "Our economy has no choice but to build armies and it's a good business. There are few other foreign investments. If we didn't do this, our people would be in the street creating havoc." According to the article:

Since the 1970s, Fiji has positioned itself as a discount-soldier surplus store. Its best customer has been the United Nations' peacekeeping operations.

Today, on the post-September 11 battlefield, Fiji is marketing for hire its 3500 active soldiers, 15,000 reservists and more than 20,000 unemployed former troops.

"Private armies became a viable commercial enterprise the moment America invaded Iraq," says Sakiusa Raivoce, a retired Fijian colonel and director of Security Support Ltd, the biggest of the country's six mercenary employment agencies. "The time is right and our price is right."

...

Fiji, which has undergone four coups in the past 19 years, has the biggest military force among Pacific Island nations and sends officers to study at war colleges abroad, including China, Malaysia and South Korea.

"We made a conscious decision to create an army bigger than we need to generate foreign currency," says Lieutenant Colonel Mosese Tikoitoga, 46, senior officer and private army sales liaison in the junta led by Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama, a former UN peacekeeper. "Our economy has no choice but to build armies and it's a good business. There are few other foreign investments. If we didn't do this, our people would be in the street creating havoc."

Fiji's unemployment rate is about 8 per cent. Its gross domestic product (GDP) is US\$6 billion. Sugar is an important part of the economy, accounting for 20 per cent of its exports, constituting 5 per cent to 6 per cent of GDP and employing 12 per cent of the workforce.

A 2007 report by the UN Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries recognised “the important contributions of remittances from Fijian migrant workers in the field of security to the economy of the country”.

Those wages from returning soldiers, money from the UN for leasing peacekeepers – an estimated US\$300 million over almost 30 years – and fees from private security firms that hire active soldiers have helped the anaemic economy, according to junta leaders.

Pulling a pen from the pocket of a lime-green shirt embroidered with banyan leaves, Tikoitoga makes some quick calculations: Since 1978, Fiji has outsourced more than 25,000 troops to the UN, the British Army and independent mercenary contractors. In 2003, the mercenaries brought home some US\$9 million in wages.

Tikoitoga says he strives to bring to Fiji such private security firms as those whose agents joined UN, US and British officials in the parade-viewing stands. “We specifically train our forces for them,” he says.

Doug Brooks, president of the Washington-based International Peace Operations Association, a lobbying group for security companies that employ mercenaries, says “Fiji is a vital part of the industry” – which he prefers to brand as “the peace and stability operations industry”.

Tikoitoga says more than 1000 Fijians are stationed throughout the Middle East for private armies under the corporate command of Global Strategies Group, Triple Canopy Inc, ArmourGroup International Plc, DynCorp International Inc, Control Solutions and Sandline International.

More than 3000 Fijians serve in the British Army.

Some of those mercenaries were active members of the Fijian Army. The Government allows soldiers, particularly officers, to end their military service to join private security firms, which in turn pay it a fee (Copetas, A.C. 2007, ‘Discount dogs of war fuel military boom’, *The New Zealand Herald*, 31 October http://www.nzherald.co.nz/war/news/article.cfm?c_id=359&objectid=10473052&pnum=0 – Accessed 22 October 2009 – Attachment 9).

An addendum to the UN Human Rights Council’s ‘Report of the Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries as a Means of Violating Human Rights and Impeding the Exercise of the Right of People to Self-Determination’ provides information obtained during the Working Group’s visit to Fiji in May 2007, including information on the interim government’s attitude to the recruitment of former members of the military by private agencies. The report includes the following observations:

The Working Group notes that Fiji has an established tradition of well-trained, disciplined and highly skilled military and security personnel, who perform security functions in various capacities worldwide. However, the Working Group notes with concern that in a number of instances, the security-related functions carried out by Fijians abroad through private military and security companies (PMSCs) may qualify as mercenary-related activities. Unemployment and/or underemployment, a migratory population ready to perform security work abroad, and

largely unmonitored activities of private security companies in Fiji have facilitated such recruitment in Fiji for work, including in Iraq.

...

The Working Group notes that security work is a major source of income for the country and for individuals and local communities; third only to a US\$ 6 billion sugar industry and a US\$ 2 billion tourism industry. Remittances of overseas work are crucial for many rural areas in Fiji. It appears to be this mixture of supply and incentives, coupled with a limited to non-existent legal framework, which has created a breeding ground for the recruitment of Fijians to work for PMSCs (UN Human Rights Council 2008, 'Report of the Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries as a Means of Violating Human Rights and Impeding the Exercise of the Right of People to Self-Determination – Addendum: Mission to Fiji (14-18 May 2007)', A/HRC/7/7Add.3, 8 January <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/4795eacf2.pdf> – Accessed 26 October 2009 – Attachment 10).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

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

US Department of State website <http://www.state.gov>

United Nations

Refworld website <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld>

Non-Government Organisations

Amnesty International website <http://www.amnesty.org>

Human Rights Watch website <http://www.hrw.org>

International News & Politics

BBC News website <http://news.bbc.co.uk>

Fiji Times website <http://www.fijitimes.com/>

The New Zealand Herald website <http://www.nzherald.co.nz>

Search Engines

Copernic search engine

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)

MRT-RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

1. Janine, S. 2006, 'Military sacks more officials', *Fiji Times*, 15 December <http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?id=53523> – Accessed 29 October 2009.
2. 'Accused Fiji plotters denied bail' 2007, *Special Broadcasting Service*, 8 November. (FACTIVA)
3. 'Raivoce on the stone throwing hit list' 2009, *Raw Fiji News*, 16 March <http://rawfijinews.wordpress.com/2009/03/16/raivoce-on-the-stone-throwing-hit-list/> – Accessed 29 October 2009.

4. 'Pro-democracy head says rocks thrown at house' 2009, *The New Zealand Herald*, 17 March http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10562055 – Accessed 2 November 2009.
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7. 'Warning letter sent to Frank today' 2009, Luvei Viti: Children of Fiji website, 14 April <http://luveiviti.blogspot.com/2009/04/fiji-people-theres-light-at-end-of-very.html> – Accessed 30 October 2009.
8. Amnesty International 2009, *Fiji: Paradise Lost: A Tale of Ongoing Human Rights Violations: April-July 2009*, September, ASA 18/002/2009.
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10. UN Human Rights Council 2008, 'Report of the Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries as a Means of Violating Human Rights and Impeding the Exercise of the Right of People to Self-Determination – Addendum: Mission to Fiji (14-18 May 2007)', A/HRC/7/7Add.3, 8 January <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/4795eacf2.pdf> – Accessed 26 October 2009.