



1. Please give general background on Solomon Islander descendants in Fiji.

According to a report sourced from *Radio Australia Pacific Beat*, there are about “12,000 descendents of people from the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea who were taken to Fiji during the blackbirding era from 1864.” Many have subsequently married Fijian women and adopted the Fijian language and customs, but cannot own land and mostly live in poverty in squatter settlements in or near Suva. They lack access to education and as a consequence are often unemployed or work on a casual or seasonal basis, often in the cane fields.¹ The latest overview of Fiji from Minority Rights Group International states that “the small Melanesian community – descendents of Solomon Islanders and New Hebrideans – retain a distinct identity”, that “many cannot claim land rights”, and that the community “are organising to claim improved livelihoods.” No further information is provided as to the name or nature of such organisations, or how such improved livelihoods will come about.²

In an April 2009 *Fiji Times Online* article, a representative of the Solomon Islands Descendants Association claims that lack of access to education has resulted in ninety percent of Solomon Islanders in Fiji living in poverty, and cites a 1997 United Nations Development Programme report which “revealed that Solomon Islanders are amongst the poorest” communities in Fiji.³ In March 2009 the chairman of the Fiji Wages Council called for an increase in the minimum wage, noting that “canecutters and descendants of Solomon Islanders were some of the poorest in the country.”⁴ The abovementioned 1997 *Fiji Poverty Report* by the United Nations Development Programme notes that the Solomon Islander communities in Fiji “include some of the most disadvantaged groups” in the country.⁵ The UNDP report also states that “poorest communities in Fiji are those with no secure tenure over land or sea resources, employment, or business”, which “include descendants of other Pacific islanders” such as Solomon Islanders. For these communities, “[l]ow wages and poor working conditions continue to entrap them in their impoverished circumstances.”⁶

¹ Seke, S. 2009, ‘Stateless and poor Melanesians in Fiji face costly land purchase’, *Radio Australia Pacific Beat*, 19 March <http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/pacbeat/stories/200903/s2520452.htm> – Accessed 6 May 2010 – Attachment 1.

² ‘Fiji Islands Overview’ (undated), in *World Directory of Minorities*, Minority Rights Group International website <http://www.minorityrights.org/4371/fiji-islands/fiji-islands-overview.html> – Accessed 28 May 2010 – Attachment 2.

³ ‘Solomon Islanders call for united effort’ 2009, *Fiji Times Online*, 20 April <http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?id=119607> – Accessed 18 May 2010 – Attachment 3.

⁴ ‘Council seeks fair wage system’ 2009, *Fiji Times Online*, 18 March <http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?id=117067> – Accessed 28 May 2010 – Attachment 4.

⁵ United Nations Development Programme 1997, ‘Income distribution and inequality in Fiji’, in *Fiji Poverty Report*, 1 December http://www.undp.org.fj/index.php?option=com_publications&Itemid=44&task=view&id=7 – Accessed 31 May 2010 – Attachment 5.

⁶ United Nations Development Programme 1997, ‘Processes of Impoverishment’, in *Fiji Poverty Report*, 1 December http://www.undp.org.fj/index.php?option=com_publications&Itemid=44&task=view&id=7 – Accessed 31 May 2010 – Attachment 6.

Some Solomon Islander squatter communities are being forced off the land they have occupied for up to 100 years to make way for development projects. Families are being temporarily relocated to other areas near Suva, and will reportedly have first option to buy plots of land in the new developments. The price of the developed land is likely to be beyond most inhabitants of Solomon Islander squatter communities.⁷ A March 2009 article from the *Fiji Times Online* reported that the Fijian Housing Authority was prepared to forcibly remove squatters from their settlements if they continued to defy eviction notices.⁸

Another March 2009 article from the same source quoted a spokesman for the descendants who stated that he was happy and satisfied with the assistance provided to the evicted squatters by the Housing Authority. The same article quotes the Housing Authority CEO who claims that the families will be moved back to the land post-development; no mention is made of squatter families needing to buy the land.⁹ Nonetheless, one squatter community won a 2007 court case which allowed them to remain on land near Suva which they had occupied for nearly 70 years.¹⁰

A July 2009 report prepared for the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) by Vijay Naidu, an academic at the University of the South Pacific, provides an overview of the attitude of the Fijian authorities to squatter settlements, and government programmes designed to resettle squatters on official, registered land:

...The Ministry of Local Government, Housing, Squatter Settlement and Housing is responsible to oversee the provision of affordable housing. Officials have very ambivalent views on squatters – with some empathising with them and others regarding them as illegal occupants of other people’s land. According to Storey, “It is estimated that some 80% of new housing stock has been built independently of official planning authorities. In essence Fiji’s booming urban areas are being developed autonomously, outside the control and authorisation of government and planners” (2006, 15). This has been the outcome of government supported organisations such as the Housing Authority and the Public Rental Board’s failure to meet affordable housing.

The policy approach to squatters has three different aspects. First, policy promotes forceful removal of squatters by land owners, local authorities and police. Second, resettlement, denoting relocating to sites designated by local or central government. Third, upgrading of squatter settlement whereby the land is officially subdivided and registered with titles, roads and services such as water supply and electricity are provided and there are efforts to improve the housing conditions. These mixed approaches have been in place for the last fifteen years but have failed to cope with the rate of urbanisation and escalating demand for affordable housing.¹¹

⁷ Seke, S. 2009, ‘Stateless and poor Melanesians in Fiji face costly land purchase’, *Radio Australia Pacific Beat*, 19 March <http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/pacbeat/stories/200903/s2520452.htm> – Accessed 6 May 2010 – Attachment 1.

⁸ ‘Force is last resort’ 2009, *Fiji Times Online*, 23 March <http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?id=117487> – Accessed 18 May 2010 – Attachment 7.

⁹ ‘Squatters happy’ 2009, *Fiji Times Online*, 9 March <http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?id=116329> – Accessed 18 May 2010 – Attachment 8.

¹⁰ ‘Solomon Community in Fiji Wants to Return Home’ 2009, *Solomon Times Online*, (source: Fijilive.com), 24 February <http://www.solomontimes.com/news.aspx?nwID=3634> – Accessed 18 May 2010 – Attachment 9; ‘Blackbirders’ descendants stay on: Court’ 2007, *Fiji Times Online*, 2 February <http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?id=56292> – Accessed 18 May 2010 – Attachment 10.

¹¹ Naidu, V. 2009, *Draft Report Fiji Islands Country Profile on Excluded Groups*, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, July

In March 2008 it was reported that the Solomon Islands would establish a High Commission in Suva, as Suva has “one of the highest concentrations of Solomon Islanders living abroad.”¹²

2. Do reports indicate that Solomon Islander descendants face discrimination? If so, what forms does this take, and how serious is it?

According to the Freedom House July 2009 *Freedom in the World* report for Fiji discrimination occurs in Fiji against all non-indigenous Fijians, including those of Solomon Islander descent. The report states that: “Race-based discrimination is pervasive, and indigenous Fijians receive preferential treatment in education, housing, land acquisition, and other areas; some jobs are open only to them”.¹³

In January 2008, the *Fiji Times Online* reported the comments of the chief executive of the Fijian Citizens Constitutional Forum (CCF), Reverend Akuila Yabaki, who claims that “the race-based communal voting system in Fiji and lack of national identity for citizens have been identified as major problems of racial discrimination” in Fiji. Yabaki also draws attention to the discriminatory effects of “race-based affirmative action in education and other areas, unresolved land issues and growth of squatter settlements.”¹⁴

A July 2009 report prepared for the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) by Vijay Naidu, an academic at the University of the South Pacific, assesses the position of excluded groups in Fiji. According to Naidu, Solomon Islander communities are “at the margins of society – landless, unskilled and poor”:

Following the coups of 1987 and 2000, indigenous Fijian ethno-nationalism was accompanied by a number of race-based affirmative action programmes that promoted ethnic Fijians over citizens of other ethnicities.

...Freehold land which comprise less than 8 percent of Fiji’s land area has become extremely expensive and beyond the affordability of a majority of Fiji’s citizens.

...Other minorities such as Solomon Islanders and Ni Vanuatu (‘Melanesians’), Banabans, and mixed race people also are mostly poor and excluded. Being small in numbers they do not have any political influence and therefore remain invisible. They are generally landless and together with other minorities including descendants of Wallisians, they face insecurity of tenure.

...These groups suffer from large scale unemployment, lack of secure access to land and other natural resources and do not have any meaningful voice at the local and national levels.

...At the heart of the issue of disadvantage and exclusion is the enormous inequality in the ownership and control of assets and resources in the country as well as the inequality in access to opportunities.

http://www.unescap.org/ESID/hds/development_account/mtg/EGM_Bg_doc/Fiji%20Islands%20Country%20Profile%20on%20Excluded%20Groups2.pdf – Accessed 17 May 2010 – Attachment 11.

¹² ‘Solomons mission for Suva’ 2008, *Fiji Times Online*, 14 August

<http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?ref=archive&id=97778> – Accessed 28 May 2010 – Attachment 12.

¹³ Freedom House 2009, *Freedom in the World 2009 – Fiji*, 16 July

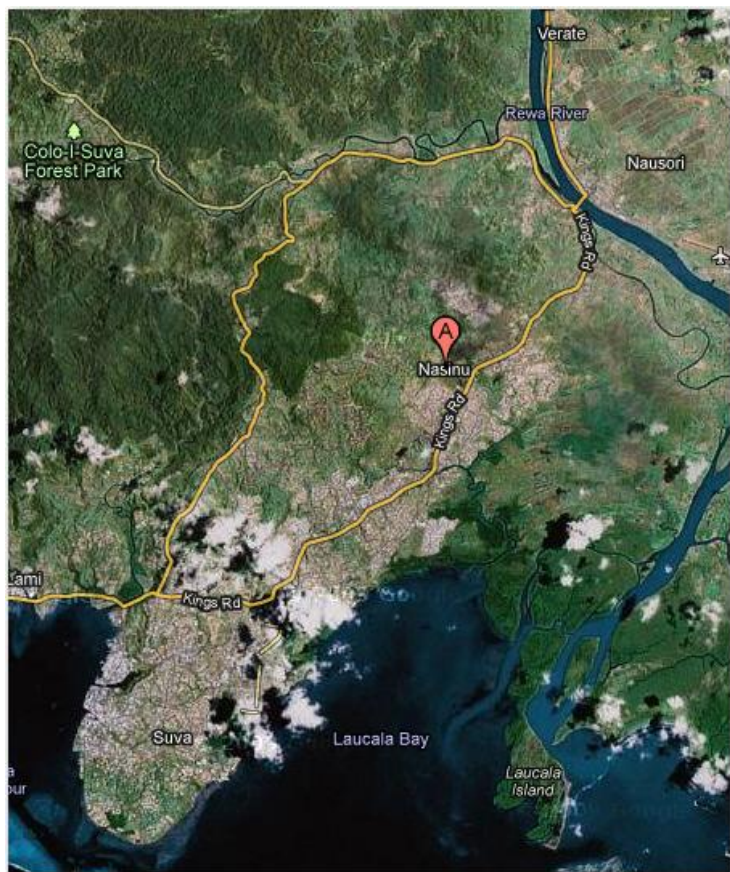
<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2009&country=7607> – Accessed 31 August 2009 – Attachment 13.

¹⁴ ‘A paper on racism’ 2008, *Fiji Times Online*, 25 January <http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?id=79513> – Accessed 28 May 2010 – Attachment 14.

...The situation of the smaller minorities such as Solomon Islanders and Ni-Vanuatu and mixed race persons can be overlooked by national level data gathering.¹⁵

3. Please provide background information on Newtown, and if there are identifiable 'SI' settlements in this part of Nasinu or in other localities.

The town of Nasinu is located on the Kings Road between Suva and Nausori, as illustrated in the map below:¹⁶



No information was located as to the precise location of Newtown village..

According to a September 2009 report sourced from the Fiji Village website, there are more than 20,000 people living in squatter communities in the Nasinu/Suva area. Of these, Nasinu Town Council figures state that 10,449 squatters live in 1,948 households in the Council area. Newtown is in Ward 2 of the Nasinu Council district, which has the third largest squatter population of the Nasinu Council wards; Newtown itself has the fourth

¹⁵ Naidu, V. 2009, *Draft Report Fiji Islands Country Profile on Excluded Groups*, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, July
http://www.unescap.org/ESID/hds/development_account/mtg/EGM_Bg_doc/Fiji%20Islands%20Country%20Profile%20on%20Excluded%20Groups2.pdf – Accessed 17 May 2010 – Attachment 11.

¹⁶ 'Nasinu' (undated), Google Maps website
http://maps.google.com.au/maps?hl=en&safe=off&rls=EGLC,EGLC:2009-24,EGLC:en&q=nasinu+fiji&um=1&ie=UTF-8&ei=XgMGTHi0As-TkAXRnd2MCw&sa=X&oi=mode_link&ct=mode&ved=0CAoQ_AU – Accessed 2 June 2010 – Attachment 15.

largest squatter community in Nasinu. This report does not specify that these are Solomon Islander squatter communities¹⁷

A May 2009 report in the *Fiji Times Online* refers to Newtown being an area that only receives a water supply at night. A government spokesperson is quoted to the effect that this situation would be rectified by the end of the year.¹⁸ In January 2010, an article also sourced from *Fiji Times Online* names Newtown as an area in which “families faced difficulties to meet children’s schooling needs”.¹⁹

A July 2009 report in *Fiji Times Online* refers to a “Newtown Hart settlement in Valelevu, Nasinu”.²⁰ According to a legal document sourced from the University of the South Pacific website, “Newtown Hart” is a reference to a Housing Assistance Relief Trust (HART) settlement in Newtown, Nasinu. The HART is a charitable trust which aims to “acquire and maintain land for special low cost housing projects and self-help housing settlements” for the “assistance and benefit of destitute families”.²¹

It may be of interest to note that, according to a 2005 report sourced from *Solomon Star News*, the Nasinu soccer team “is dominated by Solomon Islanders”.²²

Attachments

1. Seke, S. 2009, ‘Stateless and poor Melanesians in Fiji face costly land purchase’, *Radio Australia Pacific Beat*, 19 March
<http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/pacbeat/stories/200903/s2520452.htm> – Accessed 6 May 2010.
2. ‘Fiji Islands Overview’ (undated), in *World Directory of Minorities*, Minority Rights Group International website <http://www.minorityrights.org/4371/fiji-islands/fiji-islands-overview.html> – Accessed 28 May 2010.
3. ‘Solomon Islanders call for united effort’ 2009, *Fiji Times Online*, 20 April
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<http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?id=117067> – Accessed 28 May 2010.
5. United Nations Development Programme 1997, ‘Income distribution and inequality in Fiji’, in *Fiji Poverty Report*, 1 December
http://www.undp.org.fj/index.php?option=com_publications&Itemid=44&task=view&id=7 – Accessed 31 May 2010.

¹⁷ ‘20,000 living in squatter settlements’ 2009, Fiji Village website, 21 September
<http://www.fijivillage.com/?mod=archivedstory&id=210909c6cb971a42df36486e88f29e#> – Accessed 17 May 2010 – Attachment 16.

¹⁸ ‘DPP posts still vacant’ 2009, *Fiji Times Online*, 8 May <http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?id=120907> – Accessed 28 May 2010 – Attachment 17.

¹⁹ ‘FENC survey ongoing’ 2010, *Fiji Times Online*, 18 January <http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?id=137718> – Accessed 28 May 2010 – Attachment 18.

²⁰ ‘Homes up in flames’ 2009, *Fiji Times Online*, 11 July <http://www.fijitimes.com/print.aspx?id=125229> – Accessed 28 May 2010 – Attachment 19.

²¹ ‘Fiji Islands – Kadavu v The Housing Assistance and Relief Trust – Pacific Law Materials’ 2000, University of the South Pacific Emalus Campus website, 30 November

http://www.vanuatu.usp.ac.fj/pacific%20law%20materials/Fiji_cases/Volume_G-L/Kadavu_v_Housing_Assistance.html – Accessed 8 June 2010 – Attachment 20.

²² ‘Waita terminates Nasinu’s strength’ 2005, *Fiji World News*, (source: *Solomon Star News*), 9 May
http://www.fijiworldnews.com/news/publish/Soccer_11/Waita_terminates_Nasinu_s_strength_37_printer.shtml – Accessed 28 May 2010 – Attachment 21.

6. United Nations Development Programme 1997, 'Processes of Impoverishment', in *Fiji Poverty Report*, 1 December
http://www.undp.org.fj/index.php?option=com_publications&Itemid=44&task=view&id=7 – Accessed 31 May 2010.
7. 'Force is last resort' 2009, *Fiji Times Online*, 23 March
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8. 'Squatters happy' 2009, *Fiji Times Online*, 9 March
<http://www.fjitime.com/story.aspx?id=116329> – Accessed 18 May 2010.
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http://www.unescap.org/ESID/hds/development_account/mtg/EGM_Bg_doc/Fiji%20Islands%20Country%20Profile%20on%20Excluded%20Groups2.pdf – Accessed 17 May 2010.
12. 'Solomons mission for Suva' 2008, *Fiji Times Online*, 14 August
<http://www.fjitime.com/story.aspx?ref=archive&id=97778> – Accessed 28 May 2010.
13. Freedom House 2009, *Freedom in the World 2009 – Fiji*, 16 July
<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2009&country=7607> – Accessed 31 August 2009.
14. 'A paper on racism' 2008, *Fiji Times Online*, 25 January
<http://www.fjitime.com/story.aspx?id=79513> – Accessed 28 May 2010.
15. 'Nasinu' (undated), Google Maps website
http://maps.google.com.au/maps?hl=en&safe=off&rls=EGLC,EGLC:2009-24,EGLC:en&q=nasinu+fiji&um=1&ie=UTF-8&ei=XgMGTIi0As-TkAXRnd2MCw&sa=X&oi=mode_link&ct=mode&ved=0CAoQ_AU – Accessed 2 June 2010.
16. '20,000 living in squatter settlements' 2009, Fiji Village website, 21 September
<http://www.fjivillage.com/?mod=archivedstory&id=210909c6cb971a42df36486e88f29e#> – Accessed 17 May 2010.
17. 'DPP posts still vacant' 2009, *Fiji Times Online*, 8 May
<http://www.fjitime.com/story.aspx?id=120907> – Accessed 28 May 2010.
18. 'FENC survey ongoing' 2010, *Fiji Times Online*, 18 January
<http://www.fjitime.com/story.aspx?id=137718> – Accessed 28 May 2010.)
19. 'Homes up in flames' 2009, *Fiji Times Online*, 11 July
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20. 'Fiji Islands – Kadavu v The Housing Assistance and Relief Trust – Pacific Law Materials' 2000, University of the South Pacific Emalus Campus website, 30 November http://www.vanuatu.usp.ac.fj/pacific%20law%20materials/Fiji_cases/Volume_G-L/Kadavu_v_Housing_Assistance.html – Accessed 8 June 2010.
21. 'Waita terminates Nasinu's strength' 2005, *Fiji World News*, (source: *Solomon Star News*), 9 May http://www.fijiworldnews.com/news/publish/Soccer_11/Waita_terminates_Nasinu_s_strength_37_printer.shtml – Accessed 28 May 2010.