



**Australian Government**  
**Refugee Review Tribunal**

---

# Country Advice

## Fiji

Fiji – FJI36235 – Political dissidents – SDL  
– Email correspondence – Police – Forced conversions – Ethnic Fijians – Methodists –  
Methodist Church

12 March 2010

---

**1. Deleted.**

**2. Please provide updated information on those who speak out against the regime, particularly SDL members. Is there any information on detention after dissemination of political material by email?**

The ill-treatment and harm by Fiji's military government of perceived government critics has continued in the first months of 2010.<sup>1</sup> In February 2010, Amnesty International estimated that over a thousand people have been subject to forms of ill-treatment/harassment, arbitrary arrest or detention on false charges, for being critical of the government since the abrogation of the Constitution and introduction of the Public Emergency Regulations (PER) in April 2009. In January 2010, Fiji's land force commander, Brigadier General Pita Driti, warned government critics "to keep low and try to cooperate with us...otherwise they will be in for something really hard in terms of how we will treat them this year."<sup>2</sup> And in one recent example documented by Amnesty International, prominent human rights lawyer Ms Imrana Jala was charged and her passport confiscated in January 2010, in order to punish her "for her strong public stance against human rights violations perpetrated by the military since its overthrow of the Laisenia Qarase-led government in December 2006".<sup>3</sup>

### Information on SDL members

*Soqosoqo ni Duavata ni Lewenivanua* (SDL) Party members and supporters who criticise the current regime continue to be targeted. On 27 February 2010, an SDL meeting of members and supporters at the party's headquarters in Suva was raided by soldiers and police. The group, which included two former MPs, was detained at a military camp and released during the night. The raid was believed to be prompted by a 600 000 signature petition calling for the

---

<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International 2010, 'Fiji Government misrepresents human rights record to UN', 10 February, PRE01/042/2010 <http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/fiji-government-misrepresents-human-rights-record-un-20100210-0> - Accessed 2 March 2010 – Attachment 8. For other recent reports on the treatment of government critics see the Fijian human rights NGO Citizens' Constitutional Forum submission to the United Nations 2010 Periodic Review: Citizens' Constitutional Forum 2009, *Citizens' Constitutional Forum Submission for UPR on Fiji*, 22 February, p. 2 [http://www.ccf.org.fj/about\\_us/annual\\_report/UPR.pdf](http://www.ccf.org.fj/about_us/annual_report/UPR.pdf) - Accessed 2 March 2010 – Attachment 9; Amnesty International 2010, 'Fiji: Downward spiral continues for human rights following persecution of prominent human rights lawyer', 19 January, ASA 18/001/2010 <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA18/001/2010/en/8fb0dcc2-801c-49d3-855f-f37e8da4f007/asa180012010en.html> - Accessed 2 March 2010 – Attachment 10.

<sup>2</sup> Human Rights Watch 2010, 'UN Rights Council: Demand End to Fiji Abuses', UNHCR website, 9 February <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country....FJI..4b7a562ac.0.html> - Accessed 1 March 2010 – Attachment 11.

<sup>3</sup> Amnesty International 2010, 'Fiji: Downward spiral continues for human rights following persecution of prominent human rights lawyer', 19 January, ASA 18/001/2010 <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA18/001/2010/en/8fb0dcc2-801c-49d3-855f-f37e8da4f007/asa180012010en.html> - Accessed 2 March 2010 – Attachment 10.

restoration of democracy, delivered to Bainimarama in February 2010.<sup>4</sup> In a separate incident, the military declared an earlier gathering in January 2010 at the SDL headquarters illegal. A permit requirement is now strictly enforced for political gatherings, and those without such a permit are likely to be seen as suspect by the government. *BBC Monitoring* reported on 20 January 2010 that: “The military has today stated that it will not tolerate any secret political meetings due to the Public Emergency Regulation (PER). RFMF’s [Republic of Fiji Military Forces] Land Force commander Colonel Pita Driti said any gatherings in relation to political activities need a permit.”<sup>5</sup>

Other actions taken by the current regime to limit the influence of the SDL are:

- As a result of a February 2010 decree giving the Prime Minister the power to stop government pensions and benefits to those perceived to criticise/undermine the regime or incite hatred, more than forty SDL members were expected to lose their pensions.<sup>6</sup>
- In early November 2009, the national director of the SDL, Peceli Kinivuwai, a regular critic of the military-led government, was detained and harassed at an army camp in Suva for commenting to overseas media about the expulsion of diplomats. He was held overnight and released on 5 November.<sup>7</sup>

### **Detention after dissemination of political material by email**

The current Fijian regime does monitor and intercept email correspondence, and it has detained and questioned senior community figures on the content of emails. In addition, blogsites critical of the government have been blocked and blogsite users reportedly targeted by the military. Human Rights Watch reported on the questioning in August 2009 of retired military officer Colonel Sakiusa Raivoce about an email he received. He was later detained for two days:

The Fiji government is habitually violating rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly by arresting and detaining people under the Public Emergency Regulations.

On August 4, 2009, police questioned Colonel Sakiusa Raivoce, a retired military officer, about an email apparently sent to him. He was released without charge. Police arrested him again later that day and over the following two days security forces kept him in military and police detention and questioned him, amongst other things, about his involvement with the pro-democracy movement. He was released on August 6, without charge.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Lealea, S., 2010, ‘Fiji Regime Hits Out at SDL Supporters’, Solivakasama website, 28 February <http://solivakasama.net/2010/02/28/fiji-regime-hits-out-at-sdl-supporters/> - Accessed 2 March 2010 – Attachment 12; ‘Fiji campaigner claims democracy demand has impact’ 2010, Radio New Zealand News International, 2 March – Attachment 13.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Fiji ousted premier's party reported holding "secret meeting"' 2010, *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, source: Fiji Village website, 20 January – Attachment 14.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Fiji’s regime stops pensions to 20 former government ministers’ 2010, Radio New Zealand International website, 7 February <http://www.rnzi.com/pages/news.php?op=read&id=51782> - Accessed 2 March 2010 – Attachment 15.

<sup>7</sup> Amnesty International 2009, ‘Harassment of Government Critics Continues in Fiji’, 10 November <http://www.amnesty.org.au/news/comments/22068/> - Accessed 2 March 2010 – Attachment 16.

<sup>8</sup> Human Rights Watch 2009, UPR Submission to the United Nations 2010 Periodic Review, August, p.3 [http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session7/FJ/HRW%20UPR\\_FJI\\_S07\\_2010\\_HumanRightsWat ch.pdf](http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session7/FJ/HRW%20UPR_FJI_S07_2010_HumanRightsWat ch.pdf) - Accessed 11 March 2010 – Attachment 17.

The emails of Methodists Church leaders have also been intercepted as part of the regime's strategy targeting the Church and limiting its ability to criticise the government.<sup>9</sup> Further discussion of the targeting of the Methodist Church is given in question five below.

Alongside surveillance of private email correspondence, the interim government has also sought to limit the emergence of blogsites used to generate criticism against it. In August 2009, DFAT commented that blogging and blogsites remained one of the few avenues available to express dissent in the aftermath of the 2006 coup, but that those involved in anti-blog sites are reportedly targeted:

One of the few avenues available for publishing dissent is blogging, and several popular blogsites have emerged since the coup in December 2006...

The interim government has publicly condemned the blogs as being meant to "stir" people and "depress" them, and it has advised people not to read them. There have also been reports of military reprisals for those suspected of involvement in the anti-regimes blogsites.<sup>10</sup>

In February 2010, Human Rights Watch reported that access to blogs critical of the military government had been blocked in recent months.<sup>11</sup>

### **3. What information is there on ethnic Fijians being targeted by soldiers (presumably those who are anti-regime)?**

While human rights related information on Fiji does not indicate that the indigenous Fijian ethnic group is systematically targeted by the military on account of its ethnicity, it is the segment of the population most opposed to the regime, and the current government's ill-treatment of critics may be seen to fall most on the ethnic Fijian population.<sup>12</sup> Both the *Soqosoqo ni Duavata ni Lewenivanua* (SDL) Party and the Methodist Church, which have predominantly ethnic Fijian affiliation, are two prominent organisations that have publicly spoken against the Bainimarama government. Around eighty per cent of indigenous Fijians support the SDL; and the Methodist Church is supported by the majority of the country's chiefs and remains influential within the ethnic Fijian community.<sup>13</sup> For information of the treatment of SDL Party members see question two above; and for the Methodist Church see question five below.

---

<sup>9</sup> McGeough, P. 2009, 'An unholy alliance of church and state', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 November <http://www.smh.com.au/world/an-unholy-alliance-of-church-and-state-20091128-jxwu.html> - Accessed 30 November 2009 – Attachment 18.

<sup>10</sup> DIAC Country Information Service 2009, *Country Information Report No. 09/61- Fiji: Imputed Political Opinion*, (sourced from DFAT advice of 18 August 2009), 18 August – Attachment 19.

<sup>11</sup> Human Rights Watch 2010, 'UN Rights Council: Demand End to Fiji Abuses', UNHCR website, 9 February <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,...,FJI,,4b7a562ac,0.html> – Accessed 1 March 2010 – Attachment 11.

<sup>12</sup> For example, see Amnesty International 2009, *Fiji: Paradise Lost: A Tale of Ongoing Human Rights Violations: April-July 2009*, September, ASA 18/002/2009 – Attachment 20; Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2008, *FJI 102703.E – Fiji: Treatment of members and supporters of the Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SLD) [United Fiji Party], in particular treatment of non-elite indigenous Fijians*, 6 February [http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/rir/index\\_e.htm?action=record.viewrec&gotorec=451695](http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/rir/index_e.htm?action=record.viewrec&gotorec=451695) – Accessed 13 November 2008 – Attachment 21.

<sup>13</sup> Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2008, *FJI 102703.E – Fiji: Treatment of members and supporters of the Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SLD) [United Fiji Party], in particular treatment of non-elite indigenous Fijians*, 6 February [http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/rir/index\\_e.htm?action=record.viewrec&gotorec=451695](http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/rir/index_e.htm?action=record.viewrec&gotorec=451695) – Accessed 13 November 2008 – Attachment 21; US State Department 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report – Fiji*, 'Religious Demography', 26 October – Attachment 22.

#### 4. What information is there on forced religious conversions of police officers?

Concerns have arisen in Fiji that police officers would be forced to convert to Christianity, stemming from the influence, fostered by the police commissioner, of the New Methodist Church within the police force. During 2008 and 2009, the New Methodist Church movement known as “Souls for Jesus” partnered with the Fijian Police Force with the aim of enhancing community policing and reducing crime. The partnership was funded by the police and fostered by the police commissioner Esala Releni and his brother in law, Pastor Ayu Vualono. As a result police officers and their families, irrespective of their denomination, were required to attend evangelistic events and rallies held at all police divisions and major police stations.<sup>14</sup> In one case, all off duty police officers were required to attend a Christian crusade rally in June 2009 during which officers marched through the capital Suva chanting the name of Jesus. Senior Hindu and Muslim police officers raised concerns at the time on “the push” to embrace Christianity.<sup>15</sup> The police commissioner stated at the time that those police officers opposed to the influence of the New Methodist Church could leave the police force.<sup>16</sup> In its report on religious freedom in Fiji published in October 2009, the US State Department summarised this development in the Fijian police as follows:

Under the direct leadership of the Police Commissioner, the Fiji Police Force partnered with Souls to Jesus (commonly known as the New Methodists), a Christian group led by the Police Commissioner’s younger brother, to host evangelistic events at all police divisions and major police stations in the country in an effort to foster community policing and reduce crime. All officers and their families are required to attend the rallies, regardless of religion. In February 2009, local media covered a tirade by the commissioner directed against senior Indo-Fijian police officers during which he accused them of being liars and backstabbers. The commissioner told officers to support the Christian rallies or leave the police force. The incident was caught on camera and followed anonymous complaints to journalists from within the police force about Hindu and Muslim police officers and their families being compelled to attend Christian rallies. **There were reports of Hindu and Muslim police officers joining the commissioner’s church for fear of being denied promotions or losing their jobs.** The Police Force asserted the Christian crusades were highly successful, resulting in a 50 percent decrease in crime, and would continue.

##### Forced Religious Conversion

There was some concern the religious crusade instituted by the Police Commissioner resulted in coercion within the police force to convert to Christianity.<sup>17</sup>

By late November 2009 the influence of the New Methodist Church within the police force had reportedly grown too great for the military regime. The partnership between the police

---

<sup>14</sup> US State Department 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report – Fiji*, ‘Religious Demography’, 26 October – Attachment 22; McGeough, P. 2009, ‘An unholy alliance of church and state’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 November <http://www.smh.com.au/world/an-unholy-alliance-of-church-and-state-20091128-jxwu.html> - Accessed 30 November 2009 – Attachment 18.

<sup>15</sup> Cooney, C., 2009, ‘Fiji’s multi-ethnic police join Christian crusade’, Radio Australia News website, 24 June <http://www.radioaustralianews.net.au/story.htm?id=19005> - Accessed 8 March 2010 – Attachment 23.

<sup>16</sup> US State Department 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report – Fiji*, ‘Religious Demography’, 26 October – Attachment 22; ‘Officers against crusade can leave force’ 2009, Raw Fiji News website, source: Fiji Village website, 16 June <http://rawfijinews.wordpress.com/2009/06/16/officers-against-crusade-can-leave-force/> - Accessed 8 March 2010 – Attachment 24.

<sup>17</sup> US State Department 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report – Fiji*, ‘Religious Demography’, 26 October – Attachment 22; McGeough, P. 2009, ‘An unholy alliance of church and state’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 November <http://www.smh.com.au/world/an-unholy-alliance-of-church-and-state-20091128-jxwu.html> - Accessed 30 November 2009 – Attachment 18.

and New Methodist Church was reportedly stopped by order of the Prime Minister and Attorney-General citing security concerns.<sup>18</sup>

## **5. Please provide updated information on the treatment of Methodists.**

The Bainimarama interim government continues to target the Methodist Church, on account of its perceived politically active agenda in speaking out against the current regime and for allegedly spying on the military for the previous SDL government prior to its removal in 2006. The government continues to detain and charge senior Church members. Alongside the eight Methodist Ministers charged for breaching the Public Emergency Regulations (PER) in 2009, a further 15 Ministers were arrested and charged under the PER in February 2010.<sup>19</sup> In January 2010, the police commissioner ordered that a special task force be established to investigate the espionage allegations against church figures under the previous government.<sup>20</sup>

The government has also continued to restrict the normal practice and activities of the Church. Church leaders' telephones have been tapped, their emails intercepted, passports confiscated, and their movements in Fiji put under surveillance. Leaders have also been fearful of speaking out in church services for fear of being reported by members of the military in the congregation.<sup>21</sup> In early 2010, the 2009 ban on the Church's annual conference until 2014 was confirmed; and a directive was issued by the police to the Church ordering it to halt all divisional and quarterly meetings of the Church. The meetings were believed to have a political agenda.<sup>22</sup>

## **Attachments**

1. Deleted.
2. Deleted.
3. Deleted.
4. Deleted.
5. Deleted.
6. Deleted.
7. Deleted.
8. Amnesty International 2010, 'Fiji Government misrepresents human rights record to UN', 10 February, PRE01/042/2010 <http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/fiji->

---

<sup>18</sup> McGeough, P. 2009, 'An unholy alliance of church and state', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 November <http://www.smh.com.au/world/an-unholy-alliance-of-church-and-state-20091128-jxwu.html> - Accessed 30 November 2009 – Attachment 18.

<sup>19</sup> For the 2009 arrests, see: Amnesty International 2009, *Fiji: Paradise Lost: A Tale of Ongoing Human Rights Violations: April-July 2009*, September, ASA 18/002/2009, p.23 – Attachment 20; '15 Methodist Church ministers charged in fresh PER crackdown' 2010, PACNEWS: The Pacific News Agency Service, 4 February – Attachment 25.

<sup>20</sup> 'Fiji Methodist church Ministers named as behind church conference banned until 2014' 2010, PACNEWS, the Pacific News Agency Service, 14 January – Attachment 26.

<sup>21</sup> McGeough, P. 2009, 'An unholy alliance of church and state', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 November <http://www.smh.com.au/world/an-unholy-alliance-of-church-and-state-20091128-jxwu.html> - Accessed 30 November 2009 – Attachment 18.

<sup>22</sup> 'Fiji Methodist church faces further ban', 2010, PACNEWS: The Pacific News Agency Service, 2 February – Attachment 27.

- [government-misrepresents-human-rights-record-un-20100210-0](#) – Accessed 2 March 2010.
9. Citizens' Constitutional Forum submission to the United Nations 2010 Periodic Review: Citizens' Constitutional Forum 2009, Citizens' Constitutional Forum Submission for UPR on Fiji, 22 February, p. 2 [http://www.ccf.org.fj/about\\_us/annual\\_report/UPR.pdf](http://www.ccf.org.fj/about_us/annual_report/UPR.pdf) – Accessed 2 March 2010.
  10. Amnesty International 2010, 'Fiji: Downward spiral continues for human rights following persecution of prominent human rights lawyer', 19 January, ASA 18/001/2010 <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA18/001/2010/en/8fb0dcc2-801c-49d3-855f-f37e8da4f007/asa180012010en.html> – Accessed 2 March 2010.
  11. Human Rights Watch 2010, 'UN Rights Council: Demand End to Fiji Abuses', UNHCR website, 9 February <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,...FJI,,4b7a562ac,0.html> – Accessed 1 March 2010.
  12. Lealea, S., 2010, 'Fiji Regime Hits Out at SDL Supporters', Solivakasama website, 28 February <http://solivakasama.net/2010/02/28/fiji-regime-hits-out-at-sdl-supporters/> – Accessed 2 March 2010.
  13. 'Fiji campaigner claims democracy demand has impact' 2010, Radio New Zealand News International, 2 March. (FACTIVA)
  14. 'Fiji ousted premier's party reported holding "secret meeting"' 2010, *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, source: Fiji Village website, 20 January. (FACTIVA)
  15. 'Fiji's regime stops pensions to 20 former government ministers' 2010, Radio New Zealand International website, 7 February <http://www.rnzi.com/pages/news.php?op=read&id=51782> – Accessed 2 March 2010.
  16. Amnesty International 2009, 'Harassment of Government Critics Continues in Fiji', 10 November <http://www.amnesty.org.au/news/comments/22068/> – Accessed 2 March 2010.
  17. Human Rights Watch 2009, *UPR Submission to the United Nations 2010 Periodic Review*, August, p.3 [http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session7/FJ/HRW%20UPR\\_FJI\\_S07\\_2010\\_HumanRightsWatch.pdf](http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session7/FJ/HRW%20UPR_FJI_S07_2010_HumanRightsWatch.pdf) – Accessed 11 March 2010.
  18. McGeough, P. 2009, 'An unholy alliance of church and state', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 November <http://www.smh.com.au/world/an-unholy-alliance-of-church-and-state-20091128-jxwu.html> – Accessed 30 November 2009.
  19. DIAC Country Information Service 2009, *Country Information Report No. 09/61- Fiji: Imputed Political Opinion*, (sourced from DFAT advice of 18 August 2009), 18 August. (Cisnet Fiji - CX231832)
  20. Amnesty International 2009, *Fiji: Paradise Lost: A Tale of Ongoing Human Rights Violations: April-July 2009*, September, ASA 18/002/2009.
  21. Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2008, *FJI 102703.E – Fiji: Treatment of members and supporters of the Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SLD) [United Fiji Party]*, in particular treatment of non-elite indigenous Fijians, 6 February <http://www.irb->

[cisr.gc.ca/en/research/rir/index\\_e.htm?action=record.viewrec&gotorec=451695](http://cisr.gc.ca/en/research/rir/index_e.htm?action=record.viewrec&gotorec=451695) – Accessed 13 November 2008.

22. US State Department 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report – Fiji*, ‘Religious Demography’, 26 October.
23. Cooney, C., 2009, ‘Fiji’s multi-ethnic police join Christian crusade’, Radio Australia News website, 24 June <http://www.radioaustralianews.net.au/story.htm?id=19005> – Accessed 8 March 2010.
24. ‘Officers against crusade can leave force’ 2009, Raw Fiji News website, source: Fiji Village website, 16 June <http://rawfijinews.wordpress.com/2009/06/16/officers-against-crusade-can-leave-force/> – Accessed 8 March 2010.
25. ‘15 Methodist Church ministers charged in fresh PER crackdown’ 2010, *PACNEWS: The Pacific News Agency Service*, 4 February. (FACTIVA)
26. ‘Fiji Methodist church Ministers named as behind church conference banned until 2014’ 2010, *PACNEWS, the Pacific News Agency Service*, 14 January. (FACTIVA)
27. ‘Fiji Methodist church faces further ban’, 2010, *PACNEWS: The Pacific News Agency Service*, 2 February. (FACTIVA)