

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

Research Response Number: FJI34335
Country: Fiji
Date: 5 February 2009

Keywords: Fiji – Jehovah’s Witnesses – State protection

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Questions

- 1. Please provide information on the history and activities of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Fiji.**
- 2. Is their freedom to worship curtailed or restricted in any way by members of the community or the authorities?**
- 3. Are they subjected to any form of discrimination or mistreatment by members of the community, Christian groups and the authorities?**
- 4. Is state protection available to Jehovah’s Witnesses in Fiji?**

RESPONSE

- 1. Please provide information on the history and activities of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Fiji.**
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- 4. Is state protection available to Jehovah’s Witnesses in Fiji?**

The Watchtower Bible & Tract Society of Australia was contacted in regard to this matter on 23 January 2009 (RRT Research & Information 2009, Fax to Watchtower Bible & Tract Society of Australia ‘RRT Information Request FJI34335’, 23 January – Attachment 1).

The Watchtower Bible & Tract Society of Australia replied on 5 February 2009 with a fax dated 3 February 2009. The advice is as follows:

After communicating with our Fiji office, we can provide the answers below to the questions you listed.

1. **Please provide information on the history and activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Fiji.** In 1913 the first witness arrived, having been transferred here from Sri Lanka by his employer. In 1930 witnesses from other lands came and the public preaching work began in earnest, and has continued to expand throughout the decades that followed. Today there are close to 2400 persons serving in 52 congregations throughout the islands, with 16 other small isolated groups in more remote areas of the country. Jehovah's Witnesses are known throughout the islands of Fiji for their active preaching work, providing large amounts of Bible-based literature in a variety of languages to people of different religious backgrounds.
2. **Is their freedom to worship curtailed or restricted in any way by members of the community or the authorities?** No. We have no opposition to purchasing property for our meeting places, holding public gatherings or carrying on our public ministry. In fact the interim Prime Minister, Mr. Bainamarama, was heard of the radio saying he wished other religions would act more like Jehovah's Witnesses, as they mind their business and never get involved in politics.
3. **Are they subjected to any form of discrimination or mistreatment by members of the community, Christian groups and/or the authorities?** In general Jehovah's Witnesses are highly respected in the country. From time to time a local village chief may restrict our religious activities in his village. Respectfully meeting with the chief and discussing the situation has helped to remove this restriction in some cases. At present in the village of Waisomo we are not permitted to hold meetings or preach. The local village chief has been adamant in his opposition to us. However we have been able to appeal to the Turaga ni Koro, who is in charge of a number of villages, including Waisomo, in this part of Fiji. He has agreed to take up the case and get this decision overturned when a meeting is held with all chiefs in this province in the near future. So while at times we experience problems, they can often be resolved by a respectful and peaceful approach.
4. **If so, do the police/authorities provide protection?** It is usually never necessary to request help when problems are encountered in a village. When it has been necessary we have received support and cooperation from the authorities (Watchtower Bible & Tract Society of Australia 2009, Fax to the Refugee Review Tribunal, 5 February – Attachment 2).

Other Information

For general information on freedom of religion in Fiji please see the most recent US Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* published on 19 September 2008 (US Department of State 2008, *International Religious Freedom Report 2008 – Fiji*, 19 September – Attachment 3).

According to Manfred Enst in his 1994 book *Winds of Change*, the Jehovah's Witnesses came to Fiji in 1958 (Barr, Kevin J. 1999, 'Beyond the Mundane Fiji's Religions and Worldviews', Ecumenical Centre for Research Education and Advocacy website – Attachment 4). An encyclopedia on the Pacific Islands by Brij V. Lal and Kate Fortune reports that "Jehovah's Witnesses succeeded in gaining entry into practically every island group in Oceania during the 1950s and 1960s." The encyclopedia notes that Jehovah's Witnesses were banned in Fiji when they first arrived in 1939 and that they have made "inroads" in Fiji (Lal, Brij V. & Fortune, Kate 2000, *The Pacific Islands: An Encyclopedia*, University of Hawaii Press, Google Books website, p.198

<http://books.google.com/books?id=T5pPpJl8E5wC&printsec=frontcover> – Accessed 22 January 2009 – Attachment 5).

A 2007 report on the official website of the Jehovah's Witnesses provides the following information on Jehovah's Witnesses in Fiji:

Territory or Country	Population	2007 Peak Witnesses	Ratio, One Witness to:	Number Baptized	Number of Congregations	Total Hours Preaching	Average Bible Studies	Memorial Attendance
Fiji	825,478	2,088	395	128	39	451,950	2,342	8,409

(Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania 2008, *Statistics: 2007 Report of Jehovah's Witnesses Worldwide* http://www.watchtower.org/e/statistics/worldwide_report.htm – Accessed 22 January 2009 – Attachment 6).

According to the 1996 Fijian census, there were 6,102 Jehovah's Witnesses comprising 4,815 Fijians, 486 Indians and 801 others (Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics 1996, 'Population by Religion and by Race', *1996 Census of Population* http://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/Social/religion_stats.htm – Accessed 22 January 2009 – Attachment 7).

A search for Jehovah's Witnesses on the Fiji eDirectory website on 22 January 2009 returned 11 results:

Jehovah's Witnesses Of Fiji
Physical Address: 19, Fort Street, Suva
Phone Contact: (679) 330 4766

Jehovah's Witnesses Of Fiji
Physical Address: Kingdom Hall, Koula Road, Ba
Phone Contact: (679) 667 6685

Jehovah's Witnesses Of Fiji
Physical Address: Kingdom Hall, Tuatua, Labasa
Phone Contact: (679) 881 2227

Jehovah's Witnesses Of Fiji
Physical Address: Kingdom Hall, Naveria Balaga Road, Savusavu
Phone Contact: (679) 885 3209

Jehovah's Witnesses Of Fiji
Physical Address: Kingdom Hall, Deo Street, Nadi
Phone Contact: (679) 672 2133

Jehovah's Witnesses Of Fiji
Physical Address: Kingdom Hall, Batinikia Road, Queens Road, Navua
Phone Contact: (679) 345 0154

Jehovah's Witnesses Of Fiji
Physical Address: Kingdom Hall, Ivai Lane, Sigatoka
Phone Contact: (679) 650 1199

Jehovah's Witnesses Of Fiji
Physical Address: Kingdom Hall, Lot 16, Corner of Nasivi/Tabavu Street, Tavua
Phone Contact: (679) 668 0796

Jehovah's Witnesses Of Fiji

Physical Address: Kingdom Hall, Thompson Place, Vaileka, Rakiraki

Phone Contact: (679) 669 3362

Jehovah's Witnesses Of Fiji

Physical Address: Kingdom Hall, Lot 1 Karsanji Street, Vatuwaqa

Phone Contact: (679) 338 5949 ('Jehovah's Witnesses' 2008, Fiji eDirectory search, 22

January <http://www.fijilive.com/edirectory/result.php> – Accessed 22 January 2009 –

Attachment 8).

A 2007 report on the 2006 coup and its aftermath notes that the Jehovah's Witnesses remains outside the Assembly of Christian Churches in Fiji (ACCF). According to Wikipedia, the ACCF "is an umbrella organization comprising several Christian denominations in Fiji. Wikipedia quotes the ACCF website which describes the ACCF as working "to encourage support and strengthen member churches through its constituted vision, mission, objects, powers and all related activities," with a goal of facilitating "reconciliation, unity, peace, and prosperity in Fiji." The 2007 report lists current members of the ACCF as "the Apostles Gospel Outreach Fellowship International (AGOFI); Assemblies of God, Fiji (AOG); Christian Mission Fellowship (CMF); Christian Outreach Centre (COC); Church of God of Fiji (COG); Covenant Evangelical Church (CEC), [formerly the Evangelical Fellowship]; Grace Baptist Church; Advanced Breakthrough Ministry (ABC); Jesus Power Church; the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma; the Methodist Davuilevu Theological College; New Life Centre; Pentecostal Churches of Fiji; Rescue Mission Fellowship; the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCC G), the Worldwide Church of God in Fiji and Tonga; the Fiji Brethren Assemblies Partnership (Gospel Churches); the Family Life Ministry; the New Methodist Church; Fiji Baptist Convention; the Prison Chaplancy; Impact World Tour/YWAM; Prison Fellowship; Global Sports Ministries; Summit Ministries (World Views); Teach us to Pray (ministry); and Assemble Communication" (Newland, Lynda, J. 2007, 'The role of the Assembly of Christian Churches in Fiji in the 2006 elections', *From election to coup in Fiji – The 2006 campaign and its aftermath*, ANU E Press, p.311 – Attachment 9; and Wikipedia 2008, 'Assembly of Christian Churches in Fiji', 20 June http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assembly_of_Christian_Churches_in_Fiji – Accessed 22 January 2009 – Attachment 10: **Users should be aware that Wikipedia is a Web-based free-content encyclopaedia which is written collaboratively by volunteers.** The Research Service recommends that users of Wikipedia familiarise themselves with the regulatory practices which Wikipedia employs as a preventative measure against vandalism, bias and inaccuracy. For more information, see the recommended background reading available in the Wikipedia Topical Information Package).

An article dated 25 June 2007 in *Fiji Times* reports that "more than 3000 Jehovah's Witnesses gathered in Lautoka for a three-day annual church convention which ended yesterday." The Convention was open to members of the public and followers. The convention first met in Suva two weeks earlier with the next convention to be held on Vanua Levu in two weeks ('3000 believers gather for event' 2007, *Fiji Times*, 25 June <http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?ref=archive&id=65198> – Accessed 22 January 2009 – Attachment 11).

A response dated 7 February 2003 by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada found "no information on the treatment of Jehovah's Witnesses by Indo-Fijians or native Fijians or the mainstream Methodist Church could be found among the sources consulted." The response continues:

However, the following information may be of interest. A September 2002 Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited news report stated that the annual three-day Jehovah's Witnesses's convention was to be held at the National Stadium in Suva on 27 September 2002 (FBCL 27 Sept. 2002). The convention, at which "thousands of delegates" were expected to attend, was to be open to the general public (ibid.). Similar conventions were to be held in Lautoka and Labasa in October 2002 (ibid.) (Immigration and Refugee Board 2003, *FJI40254.E – Fiji: Jehovah's Witnesses in Fiji, including the number of practitioners, localities of concentration; and their treatment by both Indo-Fijians and the mainstream Methodist Church*, 7 February – Attachment 11).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

Government Information & Reports

Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics <http://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/>

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/rir/index_e.htm?action=search

UK Home Office <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

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

United Nations (UN)

UNHCR <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rsd>

Non-Government Organisations

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

Freedom House <http://www.freedomhouse.org/>

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

International News & Politics

Fiji Sun <http://www.sun.com.fj/>

Fiji Times <http://www.fjitime.com/>

Fijilive <http://www.fijilive.com/>

Pacific Islands Report <http://pidp.eastwestcenter.org/pireport/>

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

Scoop <http://www.scoop.co.nz/>

Topic Specific

Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania <http://www.watchtower.org/>

Search Engines

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

Google Books <http://books.google.com/>

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. RRT Research & Information 2009, Fax to Watchtower Bible & Tract Society of Australia 'RRT Information Request FJI34335', 23 January.

2. Watchtower Bible & Tract Society of Australia 2009, Fax to the Refugee Review Tribunal, 5 February.
3. US Department of State 2008, *International Religious Freedom Report 2008 – Fiji*, 19 September.
4. Barr, Kevin J. 1999, 'Beyond the Mundane Fiji's Religions and Worldviews', Ecumenical Centre for Research Education and Advocacy website.
5. Lal, Brij V. & Fortune, Kate 2000, *The Pacific Islands: An Encyclopedia*, University of Hawaii Press, Google Books website, p.198
<http://books.google.com/books?id=T5pPpJl8E5wC&printsec=frontcover> – Accessed 22 January 2009.
6. Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania 2008, *Statistics: 2007 Report of Jehovah's Witnesses Worldwide*
http://www.watchtower.org/e/statistics/worldwide_report.htm – Accessed 22 January 2009.
7. Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics 1996, 'Population by Religion and by Race', *1996 Census of Population* http://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/Social/religion_stats.htm – Accessed 22 January 2009.
8. 'Jehovah's Witnesses' 2008, Fiji eDirectory search, 22 January
<http://www.fijilive.com/edirectory/result.php> – Accessed 22 January 2009.
9. Fraenkel, Jon & Firth, Stewart (eds.) 2007, *From election to coup in Fiji – The 2006 campaign and its aftermath*, ANU E Press.
10. Wikipedia 2008, 'Assembly of Christian Churches in Fiji', 20 June
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assembly_of_Christian_Churches_in_Fiji – Accessed 22 January 2009.
11. '3000 believers gather for event' 2007, *Fiji Times*, 25 June
<http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?ref=archive&id=65198> – Accessed 22 January 2009.
12. Immigration and Refugee Board 2003, *FJI40254.E – Fiji: Jehovah's Witnesses in Fiji, including the number of practitioners, localities of concentration; and their treatment by*