



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

Fiji

Fiji – FJI36353 – Fiji Democracy and
Freedom Movement – Australia –
Dissidents – Returnees – Overseas activists
26 March 2010

- 1. Please provide information on an organisation in Australia known as the Fiji Democracy Movement or the Fiji Movement for Democracy, including information on its activities and its office holders.**

Background

The Fiji Democracy and Freedom Movement (FDFM), sometimes shortened to ‘Fiji Democracy Movement’, is based in Australia and is likely to be the organisation in question. Its stated vision is the restoration of a “Democratic and Free Fiji under the 1997 Constitution”. It opposes the rule of Interim Prime Minister, Commodore Frank Voreqe Bainimarama, who gained power through a coup in December 2006.¹ The organisation exerts influence among the ethnic Fijian (non-Indian) diaspora in Australia, although not all of its objectives receive blanket support. An organisation called Movement of Democracy in Fiji (MDF) also exists, but is based inside Fiji.²

The FDFM’s website claims that it was “the first overseas based movement created to actively campaign for the restoration of democracy in Fiji after the Military Coup of December 5th 2006”.³ The Movement was formed at a Public Consultation Meeting in Yagoona, NSW on 18 April 2009. At this meeting, attendees adopted the Sydney Declaration which calls for the restoration of democracy in Fiji.⁴ In addition to urban and regional Australia, the FDFM’s stated aim is to have branches in major cities where there is a sizeable Fijian population throughout New Zealand, United States, the United Kingdom and Canada.¹

Activities

To achieve its vision the FDFM undertakes the following activities:

- To campaign for the reversal of the purported abrogation of the 1997 Constitution of the Republic of the Fiji Islands;
- To grow an international movement that will campaign strongly for the Restoration of Democracy in Fiji;
- To lobby our home governments and their multilateral partners to pressure Fiji via diplomatic, economic and other means for the restoration of Democracy as outlined by

¹ ‘About FDFM’ (undated), Fiji Democracy and Freedom Movement website, <http://site.fjidademocracymovement.org/Mission.html> - Accessed 18 March 2010 – Attachment 1

² Prasad, V. 2009, ‘Democracy movement appoints officials’, *Daily Post*, 3 January <http://www.fjidadailynews.com/news.php?section=1&fjidadailynews=21212> - Accessed 17 March – Attachment 2

³ ‘Welcome & Bula Vinaka’ (undated), Fiji Democracy and Freedom Movement website, <http://site.fjidademocracymovement.org/> - Accessed 18 March 2010 – Attachment 3

⁴ ‘Sydney Declaration For The Restoration Of Democracy in Fiji’ 2009, OzFiji website, 18 April <http://www.ozfiji.com/democracy.html> - Accessed 18 March 2010 – Attachment 4

the Fiji Court of Appeal in the Case of Qarase and Others v Bainimarama and Others (FCA) 2009;

- And to be the voice of the voiceless people of Fiji and tell the story of our predicament to the whole world.⁵

Under the objective of lobbying, the Movement stated several aims at its formation in 2009. These involve influencing the international community, namely Australia and New Zealand, to apply pressure to the Fijian Government. The avenues for pressure include blanket trade sanctions, travel bans, and isolating Fiji internationally – including by exclusion from the Pacific Islands Forum and involvement in UN peacekeeping activities. The FDFM also aims to protest Chinese and Indian financial support for the Fijian regime.^{5 6} These aims are not necessarily supported by all Fijians opposed to the Bainimarama regime. Some have argued that complete trade bans would harm ordinary Fijians.⁷

In September 2009, at the Pacific Islands Forum, the FDFM lobbied the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), a grouping which comprises Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands and fosters each country's development through open trade. The FDFM urged the MSG to drop its support for Prime Minister Bainimarama's roadmap to elections in 2014 and accept a submission for elections no later than October 2010.⁸

On 4 May 2009, FDFM leader Usaia Waqatairewa gave an interview to *Fiji Uncensored*, a website that claims to present both pro and anti-regime perspectives, in which he issued a call for passive resistance against the Bainimarama regime and dismissed the idea of assassination.⁹ The FDFM was involved in rallies in Sydney on 9 May, 24 May and 6 December 2009 to protest the continued military dictatorship in Fiji.^{10 11 12} It was also involved in protests in Canberra in June 2009 outside Parliament House, the Fiji High Commission, Indian High Commission, Korean Embassy and Chinese Embassy.

The organisation's Annual Conference was held in Yagoona NSW in December 2009.¹² The FDFM presented a petition to Interim Prime Minister Bainimarama on 18 February 2010 calling on the Prime Minister to “ensure the swift transition to an elected government” and to

⁵ ‘About FDFM’ (undated), Fiji Democracy and Freedom Movement website,

<http://site.fjidademocracymovement.org/Mission.html> - Accessed 18 March 2010 – Attachment 1

⁶ Cooney, C. 2009, ‘Fiji democracy movement to target Forum nations and international aid’, ABC Radio Australia website, 27 May <http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/asiapac/stories/200905/s2582638.htm> - Accessed 18 March 2010– Attachment 5

⁷ Hartsell, M 2009, ‘Fiji's expats create democratic movement’, Global Voices Online website, 26 April

http://globalvoicesonline.org/2009/04/26/fijis-expats-create-democratic-movement/print/#comments_controls#comments_controls - Accessed 18 March 2010 – Attachment 6

⁸ ‘FDFM Cairns Pacific Forum Meeting a Success’ 2009, Fiji Democracy and Freedom Movement website, 15 August <http://blog.fjidademocracymovement.org/2009/08/15/press-release-after-cairns-forum-meeting.aspx> - Accessed 18 March 2010 – Attachment 7

⁹ ‘Democracy movement calls for passive resistance’ 2009, Fiji Uncensored website, 4 May

<http://fijiuncensored.wordpress.com/2009/05/04/democracy-movement-calls-for-passive-resistance/> - Accessed 18 March 2010– Attachment 8

¹⁰ ‘Fiji Democracy and Freedom Movement (FDFM) Rally’ 2009, Solivakasama Worldwide Movement website, 12 May <http://solivakasama.net/2009/05/12/fiji-democracy-and-freedom-movement-fdfm-rally/> - Accessed 18 March 2010 – Attachment 9

¹¹ Waqatairewa, U. 2009, ‘Sydney Fijians prepare to take to the street’, Fiji Uncensored website, 22 May

<http://fijiuncensored.wordpress.com/2009/05/22/sydney-fijians-prepare-to-take-to-the-street/> - Accessed 18 March 2010 – Attachment 10

¹² ‘Welcome & Bula Vinaka’ (undated), Fiji Democracy and Freedom Movement website,

<http://site.fjidademocracymovement.org/> - Accessed 18 March 2010 – Attachment 3

“immediately and publicly make a commitment that fundamental human rights will be respected”¹³.

Officer Holders

The key office holders of the FDFM include Mr Usaia Peter Waqatairewa, President; Ms Litia Radrekusa, Secretary; and Mr Biu Tabuatamata, Treasurer.¹⁴

2. Please provide any available information on the attitude of the Fijian government towards this organisation and its members.

No information was found on the Fijian Government’s attitude towards FDFM in particular. However, the Government’s hostile attitude towards groups and individuals seen as opposing the regime provides a guide to how it may look upon and treat the FDFM. It suggests that the Fijian Government may attempt reprisals against FDFM supporters if they reside within Fiji.

Critics targeted

An August 2009 DFAT report states that the Bainimarama Government “reacts strongly against organisations (and individuals) opposed to their regime”. The Government was said to feel threatened by such opposition movements and “has actively sought to quash them”. Critics of the regime were allegedly “harassed, intimidated, banned from travel and arbitrarily detained”:

According to a leading human rights organisation in Fiji, in the month of April this year, for example, there were over 20 documented cases of people being threatened by interim government representatives, “called to the barracks” for questioning, being under military surveillance and or being harassed by censors. It is likely more incidences went unreported. It appears the leaders of anti-coup organisations are usually the target of these acts, but it is possible acts against members do occur but are more low-level or inconspicuous.¹⁵

In its 2010 Human Rights Report the US Department of State listed several cases of anti-regime activists being targeted. This included the arrest of politician Iliesa Duvuloco and two others for distributing anti-government leaflets and the charging of human rights lawyer Imrana Jalal and her husband with operating a restaurant without a license, something usually adjudicated by municipal authorities. Several anti-government activists including politician Attar Singh, head of the New Movement for Democracy, had their homes and cars attacked with rocks by unidentified assailants.¹⁶

The targeting of critics was usually carried out under the auspices of the Public Emergency Regulations (PERs). The PERs grant broad powers to authorities in the interest of “public safety”.¹⁷ The Regulations were intended to prevent groups of people meeting without a permit and to censor the media, making it “virtually impossible to express views contrary to

¹³ ‘FDFM NEWS UPDATES’ 2009, Fiji Democracy and Freedom Movement website, 22 July <http://blog.fijidemocracymovement.org/> - Accessed 18 March 2010 – Attachment 11

¹⁴ ‘About FDFM’ (undated), Fiji Democracy and Freedom Movement website, <http://site.fijidemocracymovement.org/Mission.html> - Accessed 18 March 2010 – Attachment 1

¹⁵ DIMA 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 12

¹⁶ US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Fiji*, 11 March, Section 2a & 4 – Attachment 13

¹⁷ Amnesty International 2009, *Fiji: Paradise Lost: A Tale of Ongoing Human Rights Violations: April-July 2009*, September, ASA 18/002/2009, p14 – Attachment 14

those of the regime publicly”.¹⁸ Amnesty International added that between 10 April and 20 May 2009, the police, military and other government officials arrested “approximately 40 people, including journalists” and that some of these were then detained, under the PER’s “broad powers of detention on suspicion of threatening peace and stability in the country”.¹⁹

One of the only avenues available for dissent is through blogging and the FDFM has its own blog site.²⁰ This may attract negative attention from the Government. The aforementioned DFAT report stated the Bainimarama regime publicly opposed blog sites and condemned them as being intended to “stir” people and “depress” them. The regime has advised people not to read them. Both DFAT and Amnesty International stated there had been reports of military reprisals for those suspected of involvement in anti-regime blog sites.^{18 19}

3. Deleted.

4. Deleted.

5. To what extent does the Fijian government / military take an interest in the political activities of Fijians in Australia?

While there was no information on the Government taking an interest in the political activities of individual ordinary Fijians in Australia, it did take an interest in the activities of prominent Fijians. The regime also paid attention to criticism of it within Australia by Fijians.

An August 2008 DFAT report stated it knew of no specific instances where returnees to Fiji were being questioned upon return about their activities in Australia. It adds, however, that “there remains a small possibility that this could happen”.²¹

The Fijian regime took an interest in the political activities of ousted Prime Minister, Laisenia Qarase during a trip to Australia in March 2009. His activities included attending rallies and fund raising for his legal costs. Claiming that Qarase’s activities in Australia had “caused a lot of uncertainty and instability” in Fiji, the regime banned him from traveling again. The regime had kept an eye on Australian media and was aware that Qarase had made anti-government comments during the trip. It called the comments “inciteful”.²²

Pro-government website *Real Fiji News* outlines a Fijian Military Commander’s response to the aforementioned 24 May 2009 anti-regime demonstrations in Sydney, suggesting that the regime had monitored the protest:

Republic of Fiji Military Forces Land Force Commander Colonel Pita Driti said that planned gatherings by former Fiji residents at Hyde Park in Sydney today is not going to change one thing.

¹⁸ DIMA 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 12

¹⁹ Amnesty International 2009, *Fiji: Paradise Lost: A Tale of Ongoing Human Rights Violations: April-July 2009*, September, ASA 18/002/2009, p21, 23 & 37 – Attachment 14

²⁰ ‘FDFM NEWS UPDATES’ 2009, Fiji Democracy and Freedom Movement website, 22 July <http://blog.fijidemocracymovement.org/> - Accessed 18 March 2010 – Attachment 11

²¹ DIMA Country Information Service 2009, *Country Information Report No.08/69 – Fiji political persecution FJI 9361, FJI 9367*, (sourced from DFAT advice of 7 August 2009), 7 August – Attachment 15

²² McLean, Tamara 2009, ‘Fiji’s ousted PM may face travel ban’, *AAP Bulletins*, 15 July – Attachment 16

“We will not be affected and they should remember that. We will remain with our stance because the majority of the people are behind us and have supported the moves implemented by this government”.

‘Fijians living overseas should not be involved with these things happening at home because they are not staying here to experience it’ he said

They’ll be speaking to fulfil their own political agendas’.²³

In April 2009, the Fijian Government had monitored news media in Australia criticising the regime and subsequently targeted journalists within Fiji who it deemed linked to this criticism.²⁴ Information on the treatment of these journalists can be found in Question 6.

It is worth noting that the Fijian regime is suspicious of the Australian Government and despite Bainimarama’s recent positive remarks regarding Australia’s support following cyclone Tomas, the bilateral relationship remains at a low point.²⁵ Fiji expelled Australia’s and New Zealand’s High Commissioners in November 2009, ostensibly due to the countries’ attempted interference in Fiji’s internal affairs.²⁶ Suspicions of Australia may give the regime more reason to take an interest in the political activities of Fijians in Australia.

6. Are there any reports of Fijians being harmed in Fiji for reason of political activities abroad?

No information was found on Fijians having actually been harmed for their involvement in political activities while abroad. This is despite claims made by the FDFM that speakers at a Sydney rally would be harmed upon return to Fiji. There were reports of targeting of journalists inside Fiji whose articles criticising the Government had appeared overseas.

In addition to what was previously mentioned about returnees from Australia, the August 2008 DFAT report stated it was not aware of any specific instances of returnees from any country even being questioned about their activities overseas.²⁷

Despite this, in a May 2009 press release posted on *Fiji Uncensored*, FDFM’s President claimed that two of the Fijian speakers at a Sydney rally against the Bainimarama regime “risk real possibilities of being arrested and possible torture upon their return to Fiji by agreeing to speak at the rally”.²⁸

Journalists inside Fiji whose criticisms of the regime had surfaced in Australian news media were targeted. In April 2009 a local Fijian journalist Pita Ligaiula was detained under the PER regulations for articles he wrote which were published in an Australian newspaper, *The Australian*. Amnesty International alleges Ligaiula was intimidated and threatened with

²³ ‘Military will not be moved’ 2009, Real Fiji News website, 24 May

<http://realfijinews.wordpress.com/2009/05/24/military-will-not-be-moved/#comments> – Accessed 20 October 2009 – Attachment 17

²⁴ Amnesty International 2009, *Fiji: Paradise Lost: A Tale of Ongoing Human Rights Violations: April-July 2009*, September, ASA 18/002/2009, p22 – Attachment 14

²⁵ ‘Fijis leader hails Australia, New Zealand relief aid’ 2010, *Pacific News Agency Service*, 18 March – Attachment 18

²⁶ Merritt, C. & Walters, P. 2009 ‘Fiji expels high commissioner’, *The Australian*, 4 November <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/fiji-expels-high-commissioner/story-e6frg6nf-1225794110025> - Accessed 17 March – Attachment 19

²⁷ DIMA Country Information Service 2009, *Country Information Report No.08/69 – Fiji political persecution FJI 9361, FJI 9367*, (sourced from DFAT advice of 7 August 2009), 7 August – Attachment 15

²⁸ Waqatairewa, U. 2009, ‘Sydney Fijians prepare to take to the street’, *Fiji Uncensored website*, 22 May <http://fijiuncensored.wordpress.com/2009/05/22/syney-fijians-prepare-to-take-to-the-street/> - Accessed 18 March 2010 – Attachment 10

further imprisonment during his detention. Also in April 2009, the authorities interrogated three non-Fijian journalists who were covering political and legal developments, including ABC Pacific Correspondent Sean Dorney. The three were detained and subsequently deported on 13 April.²⁹

7. Are there any reports indicating that Fijians have been targeted in Fiji for reason of the activities of other family members abroad?

No information was found on Fijians having been targeted in Fiji for the activities of their family members abroad. The aforementioned August 2009 DFAT report was unable to provide details of the treatment of family members in Fiji of another pro-democracy, anti-regime, overseas based organisation, the Solivakasama Worldwide Movement (SWM).³⁰

Amnesty International did, however, report that activists within Fiji feared for the safety of their family members. A “human rights defender” told Amnesty that they were frightened to speak out for fear of their families or their staff being harmed by the regime. Of the authorities they said “they have no restraint, once they start”. The report stated that journalists only spoke to Amnesty International on condition of anonymity as they feared for not only their lives but also “their loved ones”, suggesting family members. Indiscriminate attacks on homes also endangered family members. One newspaper editor critical of the regime had had his home attacked with petrol bombs, just a few hours after a similar attack was launched against a staunch government critic, Sakiusa Raivoce.³¹

Attachments

1. ‘About FDFM’ (undated), Fiji Democracy and Freedom Movement website, <http://site.fijidemocracymovement.org/Mission.html> - Accessed 18 March 2010.
2. Prasad, V. 2009, ‘Democracy movement appoints officials’, *Daily Post*, 3 January <http://www.fijidailynews.com/news.php?section=1&fijidailynews=21212> - Accessed 17 March.
3. ‘Welcome & Bula Vinaka’ (undated), Fiji Democracy and Freedom Movement website, <http://site.fijidemocracymovement.org/> - Accessed 18 March 2010.
4. ‘Sydney Declaration For The Restoration Of Democracy in Fiji’ 2009, OzFiji website, 18 April <http://www.ozfiji.com/democracy.html> - Accessed 18 March 2010.
5. Cooney, C. 2009, ‘Fiji democracy movement to target Forum nations and international aid’, ABC Radio Australia website, 27 May <http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/asiapac/stories/200905/s2582638.htm> - Accessed 18 March 2010.
6. Hartsell, M 2009, ‘Fiji's expats create democratic movement’, Global Voices Online website, 26 April http://globalvoicesonline.org/2009/04/26/fijis-expats-create-democratic-movement/print/#comments_controls#comments_controls - Accessed 18 March 2010.

²⁹ Amnesty International 2009, *Fiji: Paradise Lost: A Tale of Ongoing Human Rights Violations: April-July 2009*, September, ASA 18/002/2009, p22 – Attachment 14

³⁰ DIMA 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 12

³¹ Amnesty International 2009, *Fiji: Paradise Lost: A Tale of Ongoing Human Rights Violations: April-July 2009*, September, ASA 18/002/2009, p13 – Attachment 14

7. FDFM Cairns Pacific Forum Meeting a Success' 2009, Fiji Democracy and Freedom Movement website, 15 August <http://blog.fjidademocracymovement.org/2009/08/15/press-release-after-cairns-forum-meeting.aspx> - Accessed 18 March 2010.
8. 'Democracy movement calls for passive resistance' 2009, Fiji Uncensored website, 4 May <http://fijiuncensored.wordpress.com/2009/05/04/democracy-movement-calls-for-passive-resistance/> - Accessed 18 March 2010.
9. 'Fiji Democracy and Freedom Movement (FDFM) Rally' 2009, Solivakasama Worldwide Movement website, 12 May <http://solivakasama.net/2009/05/12/fiji-democracy-and-freedom-movement-fdfm-rally/> - Accessed 18 March 2010.
10. Waqatairewa, U. 2009, 'Sydney Fijians prepare to take to the street', Fiji Uncensored website, 22 May <http://fijiuncensored.wordpress.com/2009/05/22/sydney-fijians-prepare-to-take-to-the-street/> - Accessed 18 March 2010.
11. 'FDFM NEWS UPDATES' 2009, Fiji Democracy and Freedom Movement website, 22 July <http://blog.fjidademocracymovement.org/> - Accessed 18 March 2010.
12. 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)
13. US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Fiji*, 11 March, Section 2a & 4.
14. Amnesty International 2009, *Fiji: Paradise Lost: A Tale of Ongoing Human Rights Violations: April-July 2009*, September, ASA 18/002/2009.
15. DIAC Country Information Service 2009, *Country Information Report No.08/69 – Fiji political persecution FJI 9361, FJI 9367*, (sourced from DFAT advice of 7 August 2009), 7 August. (CISNET – Fiji CX207339)
16. McLean, Tamara 2009, 'Fiji's ousted PM may face travel ban', *AAP Bulletins*, 15 July. (FACTIVA)
17. 'Military will not be moved' 2009, Real Fiji News website, 24 May <http://realfijinews.wordpress.com/2009/05/24/military-will-not-be-moved/#comments> – Accessed 20 October 2009.
18. 'Fijis leader hails Australia, New Zealand relief aid' 2010, *Pacific News Agency Service*, 18 March.
19. Merritt, C. & Walters, P. 2009 'Fiji expels high commissioner', *The Australian*, 4 November <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/fiji-expels-high-commissioner/story-e6frg6nf-1225794110025> - Accessed 17 March.