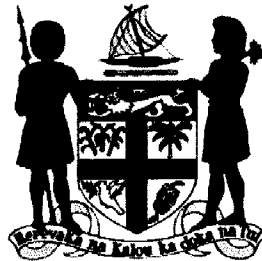
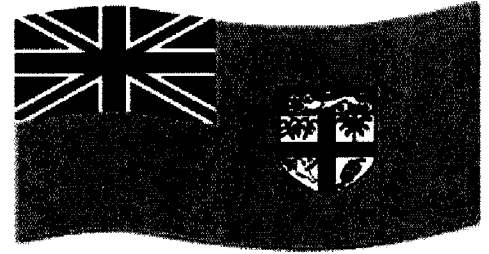
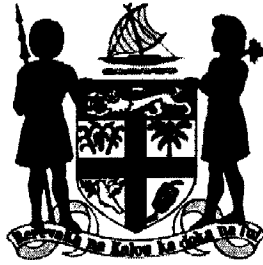


FIJI



Statement by
H.E. Commodore Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama
Prime Minister of the Republic of the
Fiji Islands,
62nd Session of the
U.N. General Assembly

New York, Friday 28th September, 2007



**STATEMENT OF THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE
FIJI ISLANDS TO THE 62ND SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY NEW YORK – FRIDAY 28TH SEPTEMBER, 2007**

Mr President

On behalf of the people of Fiji, I extend to you, and this Assembly, our warm greetings: Ni sa Bula; Namaste.

We congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election to the Presidency of this, the 62nd session of the General Assembly.

Mr. President

We extend to His Excellency, Mr. Ban Ki Moon, our warmest congratulations, as this is his first full Assembly as Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Already, in the brief period of his leadership, we note with gratitude the initiatives he has been taking to enhance momentum in the work of the UN.

Fiji particularly appreciates the Secretary-General's policy of inclusiveness, and the attention that he is giving to the vulnerable situation and the special needs of Small Island nations.

Mr. President

At the outset, Fiji wishes to reiterate its unwavering commitment to achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, pursuit of environmentally friendly and sustainable developmental activities and addressing the challenges of climate change.

As these issues have been widely debated in this august Assembly, I would like to take this opportunity to address issues of particular concern to Fiji.

Mr President

UN-led Peacekeeping Operations is renowned world wide and has become the human face of this multi-lateral body in war torn and conflict prone regions of the world. Fiji has acknowledged the importance of this UN initiative and has played its part in a significant way to date. It has provided troops for more than 30

years. Our troops have served with distinction over this period in many conflict zones. Given the experience that Fiji has gained through its extensive involvement, Fiji offers its expertise and leadership in exploring the possibility of advancing a Pacific SIDS regional approach for contributions to UN Peacekeeping. This would entail participation of small island nations from our part of the world, collectively and co-operatively, towards this noble cause.

For its own part, Fiji continues to stand ready to shoulder the burden of advancing international peace.

In this regard, we have offered our services to the African Union-UN Hybrid Peacekeeping Operations in the Sudan. In the same vein, Fiji is committed to our collective resolve of enlarging the UN presence in Iraq. We are willing to contribute further towards this end should the need arise.

Today, the demand for peacekeeping continues to grow. With it comes the need for institutional reform to adequately cater for the ever changing nature of world conflict. Whilst reiterating Fiji's support to all reform efforts, including the latest initiative of the Secretary-General in reforming the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, I urge the Secretariat to continue to resist the politicization of UN Peacekeeping and to maintain the sanctity of its independence as a forum, wherein, the willing may volunteer their services freely, without bilateral mangling and interference.

Mr. President

I now seek your indulgence, and that of this Assembly, to speak to you about the situation, particular circumstances, and the needs of Fiji at this stage of its nationhood as an independent, sovereign nation.

Fiji's overall situation is that, it is in a deep rut. It needs the understanding and support of the international community, to be able to move forward, to regain its dignity and its rightful place, as a responsible member of the international family of nations.

I am mindful, as I stand here today in your august presence, that you may see me as the military leader who removed an elected Government. I cannot begrudge that because that indeed is a fact.

I submit to you that although the Government of the day was removed from power last December, such action was taken with extreme reluctance.

I am not a politician, nor do I aspire to be one. I am certainly not much of a diplomat and I am not used to speaking at forums such as this. Therefore, in what I say, and how I may put this to you, if in any way I am remiss in regard to the protocols of this Assembly, I seek your understanding.

Mr. President

By the time the Military intervened last December, Fiji's overall governance situation had regressed to a catastrophic level. The international community needs to fully understand the special local context of the Fiji situation.

Fiji became independent on 10th October, 1970, inheriting an institutional infrastructure that could, potentially, have evolved further and strengthened, to allow democracy to take root.

At that time, almost four decades ago, Fiji's future looked to be one of promise and potential. For instance, in terms of per capita incomes, Fiji was, then, in the same league as Malaysia and Thailand.

We, the people of Fiji, viewed our country with pride and dignity, and felt it was: *"the way the world should be"*. And, for over a decade after achieving Independence, Fiji did continue to make steady progress, in economic development, education, reducing poverty and generally improving the living conditions of its people.

Yet, in 1970, Fiji started its journey as a young nation on a rather shaky foundation, with a race-based Constitution, one which rigidly compartmentalised our communities.

The *"democracy"* that came to be practised in Fiji was marked by divisive, adversarial, inward-looking, raced-based politics. The legacy of leadership, at both community and national levels, was a fractured nation.

Fiji's people were not allowed to share a common national identity.

Of the two major communities, indigenous Fijians were instilled with fear of dominance and dispossession by Indo-Fijians, and they desired protection of their status as the indigenous people. Indo-Fijians, on the other hand, felt alienated and marginalised, as second class citizens in their own country, the country of their birth, Fiji.

Mr. President

The dates 14 May and 25 September, in 1987 are fateful in Fiji's history and also for Fiji's Military Forces. The military coups of that year were motivated by an ethno-nationalist, racist supremacy agenda.

Those political, communal as well as military leaders, who were responsible for the coups and related actions in 1987, carry a very large burden, in their collective conscience: for the severe ruptures to the very fabric of Fiji society, and the dislocations and suffering, that they caused in the lives of many of Fiji's citizens.

Mr. President

In May, 2000 Fiji suffered yet another major setback: again a group of ethno-nationalist opportunists, backed by a small errant group within the Fiji Military, overthrew the Government of the day.

As Commander of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF), I did not support or condone the coup.

I drew upon the structural and cultural organisation of the RFMF to intervene, to restore order and a state of security.

The stand-off between the coup perpetrators and the RFMF in May 2000 was potentially explosive at the time, and if not resolved, could have resulted in much bloodshed and even greater chaos.

As Military Commander, I played a key role in the handing over of executive authority back into civilian hands in the wake of the 2000 coup. This rested on a number of critical pre-conditions being met, in taking Fiji forward.

An Interim Government was appointed by His Excellency the President of Fiji, with Laisenia Qarase as caretaker Prime Minister. The Interim Government was tasked to pave the way to fresh general elections, to be held in September of 2001. The other fundamental conditions were: i) that all of the perpetrators of the May 2000 coup, including the RFMF rebels, would be prosecuted; and ii) that the 2000 coup would be publicly renounced as racially motivated.

Mr. President

It is tragic that Fiji's recovery from the brink of chaos in May 2000 did not endure.

In the past years, Fiji's overall governance took a dramatic turn for the worse. In particular this was characterised by the politicisation of the prison services and the criminal justice system. There was also a significant weakening of the key institutions of governance; a pervasive increase in corruption; serious economic decline combined with fiscal mismanagement; a sharp deterioration in the law and order situation; and a deepening of the racial divide in the country.

The convicted coup perpetrators were prematurely discharged from prison, and certain coup perpetrators and sympathisers were appointed as senior Government Ministers and Officials. There were also a series of legislations that were deeply divisive and overtly racist.

The 2006 General Election was not credible. It was characterized by massive rigging of votes with the incumbent government using the State's resources to buy support.

Fiji's overall situation by late 2006 had deteriorated sharply, heightened by massive corruption and lawlessness, a severe erosion of confidence, and an economy on the brink of collapse. Also, during the later part of 2006, Fiji's Military had to pay particular attention to certain external threats to the sovereignty of the Nation.

Under our current Constitution, Fiji's Military is charged with national security, defence, and also the well-being of Fiji's people. Under the circumstances, the RFMF, under my stewardship, could not possibly see such an unacceptable situation unfold without seeking to address it.

Mr. President

History is testament to how I did in fact respond to the situation. For almost four years I was strenuous in my efforts to constructively engage the elected leadership of the country, seeking it to reverse its courses of action that was taking the country down the path of destruction and abyss.

The protracted efforts that I had made to constructively engage with the previous Government came to no avail.

To the contrary, a prominent High Chief connected to the ruling SDL Party attempted to incite a mutiny within the Military, and attempts were made, not only to remove me, but also to eliminate me.

It was with the utmost of reluctance that Fiji's Military, under my leadership, removed the former government from power in December 2006.

There have been critics of this decision. In response to this criticism I say this. Fiji has a coup culture--- a history of civilian or military coups executed in the interests of a few and based on nationalism, racism and greed.

To remove this coup culture and to commit to democracy and the rule of law, policies which promote racial supremacy, and further the interests of economic and social elites, must be removed once and for all. Racism, elitism and disrespect for the law are undemocratic. They lead to hatred, violence, poverty and moral bankruptcy. We saw that in the years leading to World War TWO. We saw the genocide, the concentration camps, the rampant imperialism which resulted in turn, in the creation of the United Nations.

Mr. President

Within a month of the removal of the previous government, the President of the Republic of Fiji resumed his constitutional authorities. On 5 January, 2007, the President appointed an Interim Government which is mandated to govern Fiji until a new government is duly elected.

With exception of myself, the make up of this Interim Government are all civilians. The Presidential mandate provides the framework within which the Interim Government, which I serve as Prime Minister, administers the affairs of the State.

We are resolved to take the measures necessary to convene a free and fair elections, as soon as practically possible. On this, the Interim Government is co-ordinating closely with Fiji's Forum member countries and the larger international community including the European Union.

There has been steady progress made in a number of areas pertaining to upholding of the existing Constitution, investigation into the alleged abuse of human rights, maintaining the independence of the Judiciary and preparatory work for the return of Fiji to Parliamentary democracy.

Mr. President

Fiji's situation is not only complex; its problems are deep-rooted and structural. There are no quick or easy fixes. The country now is at a very critical cross- road: its situation could escalate into more serious deterioration and instability. It is imperative that any such greater disaster or civil strife is averted.

We, therefore, seek constructive dialogue and engagement with the international community, with all our bilateral and multilateral development partners, who we urge to work with us, to help support us, in addressing our fundamental problems, in moving Fiji forward.

Fiji needs the support of the International Community to develop a political and governance framework that is truly democratic, accountable, inclusive, equitable, non-racial, and which unifies Fiji's diverse communities as a nation.

This is indeed the larger and the most critical of challenges which Fiji now faces.

For our part, we are firmly resolved to tackle these challenges at least at four levels:

1. to restore stability, law and order, and confidence;
2. to strengthen institutions for good governance including transparency and accountability and an independent and effectively functioning judiciary;
3. to carry out major reforms in the economy to facilitate sustainable private sector-led growth; and
4. to convene free and fair general elections within a constitutional and governance framework that will ensure that parliamentary democracy is not only restored but can be sustained in Fiji.

To achieve all this, the Interim Government is preparing to launch a major national initiative, referred to as "*the Peoples Charter for Change and Progress*" (PCCP). Through the PCCP, the broad cross section of Fiji's people will be fully engaged and involved, through consultation and participation to develop a

comprehensive agenda of actions and measures, as Fiji's own way of addressing its problems.

For the future, Fiji will look at making the necessary legal changes in the area of electoral reform, to ensure true equality at the polls. At present, all citizens have the right to vote for two candidates, one for a national seat of any ethnicity, and another from a communal raced based seat. This in turn has kept our races apart.

Although democracy in the form of electing a government was introduced in Fiji at the time of Independence, researchers and analysts have suggested that "Fijians live in a democracy with a mentality that belongs to the chiefly system." In essence this means that at election time, Fijians living in village and rural areas are culturally influenced to vote for the candidate selected for them by their chiefs, their provincial councils and their church ministers.

Mr President, this leads me to ask the question whether or not the countries which are demanding Fiji to immediately return to democracy really understand how distorted and unfair our system is both legally and culturally.

This must change; every person will be given the right to vote for only one candidate, irrespective of race or religion. This will send a message out to our people that Fiji's leadership no longer tolerates racial divisions and race-based politics.

All men and women are equal in dignity and in rights. Electoral reform in this respect will be looked at by a National Council for Building a Better Fiji which is designed to entrench the very principle on which the United Nations was founded.

The draft Peoples Charter that will emerge from such a national level undertaking, will provide the political and governance framework, with effective supporting and functioning institutions, to make Fiji a truly democratic and progressive nation.

The draft of the PCCP proposal was circulated widely within the country, inviting comments and suggestions.

Also, Mr. President, I personally wrote to the leaders of Fiji's bilateral and multi-lateral development partners on the PCCP initiative. This included the UN Secretary-General.

I am pleased to report that this initiative has in general been received with very strong support within Fiji, in particular from highly reputable and respected civil society and community leaders in the country.

The Peoples Charter, once formulated and adopted, will provide the strategic framework or fundamental foundation within which the Interim Government, and also successive elected governments, will be expected to operate.

In the current absence of an elected Parliament, there is the issue of legitimacy and mandates. To deal with this, the Interim Government is willing to consider putting the draft Peoples Charter to a Referendum to get the mandate of the people for the fundamental changes, including changes to the Constitution of Fiji, as may be considered necessary and appropriate.

Mr. President

Fiji needs both financial and technical support from its bilateral and multilateral development partners to be able to effectively realise the vision that underpins the PCCP initiative.

Above all, we seek the understanding of the International Community, to help us rebuild our nation within the true spirit of internationally acceptable precepts of good governance, and a democracy that can be made to work, and be sustained, in Fiji. We must also thank those Governments that have stood by and supported Fiji in our hour of need. Fiji is indeed very grateful and is deeply touched by your understanding and goodwill.

Some in the international community including the closest of our neighbours in the Pacific have seen it fit to impose punitive measures upon Fiji. Of course we know that these powerful States are protecting their own economic and political interest in the region. However, we in Fiji are protecting our rights to democracy, and to strengthening our democratic institutions. These powerful States are undermining our attempts to rebuild our nation on strong foundations, and undermining our attempts to appoint people of merit and honesty to our State institutions, regardless of race and religion. Current sanctions target any person appointed by the interim government. This is hypocrisy at its worst on part of those States as they are clearly undermining our efforts to promote and practice good governance.

These actions, such as the travel bans, described as “*smart*” sanctions, have had a debilitating impact on our struggles to revive, to recover, and to reform.

Good governance requires effective functioning institutions. Since the coups of 1987, Fiji has suffered a massive exodus abroad of the country’s skilled and educated people. The major beneficiaries of the transfer of these quality human assets have been Australia and New Zealand; and from these neighbours in particular, we seek understanding and support. Our capacities and institutions have been severely eroded over the years. On all of this, we desperately need help; not a closing of doors.

Mr. President

Please allow me to conclude my statement by re-affirming Fiji’s commitment to the United Nations, and to the various UN conventions on human rights, rule of law, and democratic governance. Fiji does not seek any unwarranted exemptions from any of these obligations. All we seek is your deeper understanding of our

particular circumstances and the complex situation of Fiji. And we seek that you work with us, assist us to rebuild, and move Fiji forward.

In closing, I take this opportunity to extend to His Excellency, the Secretary-General of the United Nations an invitation to Fiji and indeed our Pacific region during his tenure.

I wish you well, Mr. President.
