

FIJI

SUBMISSION TO THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

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FIJI

BRIEFING TO THE UN COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

INTRODUCTION

Amnesty International submits the following information for consideration by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (the Committee) in advance of its consideration of Fiji's Second, Third and Fourth Periodic Reports. The briefing identifies issues that have arisen from Amnesty International's recent work on Fiji and which, in the view of Amnesty International, raise concerns about Fiji's compliance with its obligations under the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (the Convention).

This briefing does not reflect the full range of concerns of the organization in terms of respect, protection and fulfilment of women's rights in Fiji, but looks primarily at the pervasiveness of gender-based violence in the country.

Specifically, this briefing highlights Amnesty International's concerns regarding the failure of the State to meet its obligation to prevent, investigate and prosecute gender-based violence against women and to ensure the provision of reparations. These concerns include:

- violence against women rights activists perpetrated by the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (Article 1, as interpreted by General Recommendation 19);
- violence against women sex workers perpetrated by the Fiji Police Force (Article 1, as interpreted by General Recommendation 19);
- failure to introduce and enforce legislation that prohibits all forms of gender-based violence, and to introduce other effective measures to prevent gender-based violence (Articles 1, 2 and 3, as interpreted by General Recommendation 19);
- the prevalence of cultural practices that are demeaning to women (Articles 1, 2, 5 and 16).

1. BACKGROUND: HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS IN FIJI, 2006-2010

Since the December 2006 coup d'état and the appointment of a military-controlled government, with Frank Bainimarama as both commander of the army and prime minister, the military had been encroaching on Fiji's political and administrative system, including on the independence of judges and lawyers. In the process, a wide array of human rights have been violated. With the April 2009 abrogation of the Constitution and the declaration of emergency, Commodore Frank Bainimarama and the military council consolidated their virtually absolute power in Fiji. Previously parliament had effectively been abolished with the deposing of the Laisenia Qarase government in December 2006.

Following the military takeover, Frank Bainimarama imposed a State of Emergency (from December 2006 to May 2007) which suspended, amongst other things, freedom of expression. Critics and media personnel including several newspaper editors were threatened, warned and intimidated by the military. In February 2007, the military admitted to taking more than 1,100 people to the military barracks, where they were tortured or ill-treated, including being beaten; forced to perform military type drills such as running; and being forced to carry heavy loads during their runs. Letter writers to the daily newspapers were also detained, assaulted and subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment during the State of Emergency period.

Women's rights activists in Fiji informed Amnesty International that from December 2006 to July 2007, there were hundreds of cases of detainees being subjected to torture or other ill-treatment, such as being stripped naked and made to run around a field or forced to touch each other's private parts.¹ Reports were provided to Amnesty International by human rights groups based in Fiji, some of whom were able to interview victims and other stakeholders about the human rights violations by the military and have kept records of their interviews to be used as evidence in future trials. Some of the victims that were interviewed were women who had been subjected to violence and humiliating behaviour.

Following the decision of Fiji's Court of Appeal on 9 April 2009 that the government of Frank Bainimarama, appointed in the wake of the 2006 coup, was unconstitutional, then President Ratu Josefa Iloilo announced in a 10 April 2009 nationally televised speech that he was taking over executive authority of the government and abrogating the 1997 Constitution. He also announced that he was revoking all judicial appointments, effectively sacking all members of the judiciary. Furthermore, he stated that a new government was to be sworn in which would work towards holding democratic elections in 2014.

After his 10 April announcement, the President immediately issued Public Emergency Regulations effective for the next 30 days. These emergency regulations

¹ Email and Amnesty International communication from Fiji based activists between December 2006 and October 2008.

are still in place and have been constantly renewed through decrees enacted by the cabinet, more than 12 months after the abrogation, and have been used to violate the human rights of Fiji's people.

The ongoing censorship of the media, interference with the judiciary and other human rights violations perpetrated by the military and police have meant that women in Fiji, already marginalised, have found it more difficult to enjoy their rights, particularly when it comes to protection against violence and freedom of expression. For instance, in 2009 during the Police Christian Crusades to address crime, police officers often forced women victims to reconcile with their violent husbands so that the marriage remained intact.

2 VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN PERPETRATED BY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

2.1 VIOLENCE PERPETRATED AGAINST WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACTIVISTS AND SEX WORKERS, INCLUDING TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT, BY THE FIJIAN MILITARY (ARTICLE 1, AS INTERPRETED BY GENERAL RECOMMENDATION 19)

Amnesty International interviewed a number of women's rights activists who had been threatened, assaulted or tortured by military officers during the height of the military takeover in December 2006.² Several others were threatened with rape or other violence over the telephone by men who were later identified as having connections with the Fijian military.³ Some of these women were also subjected to beatings, kicks and punches, sexual abuse and other torture or ill-treatment.⁴ The vast majority of the women who had suffered these abuses were too frightened to complain to the police or to the Fiji Human Rights Commission (FHRC) because the integrity of these institutions had been comprised due to close links with the military. The Fiji Police Force is led by Commodore Esala Teleni, who had been the Deputy Commander of the Military during the military takeover. The FHRC had lost its local and international credibility when it publicly supported the military takeover in January 2007.⁵ It was later suspended from the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions and the International Coordinating Committee

² These interviews took place from April to September 2009.

³ See "Women Human Rights Defenders Threatened," Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition website, 11 December 2006, http://www.defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/fiji_whrd_threatened.php and "Fiji: Paradise Lost A tale of ongoing human rights violations April – July 2009" Amnesty International 2009 <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA18/002/2009/en/0024be13-bdd1-47d2-875a-863fff41f978/asa180022009en.pdf>, both accessed 20 April 2010.

⁴ "Virisila Buadromo Carries On Fiji's Warrior Tradition", America.gov, 10 March 2008, <http://www.america.gov/st/hr-english/2008/March/20080310113546ajesrom0.4016687.html>; "Statement: Fiji: threats of reprisals for using UN Special Mechanisms" AWID women's rights, 19 February 2010, <http://www.awid.org/eng/Women-in-Action/Announcements2/Statement-Fiji-Threats-of-reprisal-for-using-UN-Special-Mechanisms>.

⁵ www.fijitimes.com/extras/media/fhrcmediarpt2007.pdf, accessed 20 August 2009; "Forum Eminent Persons' Group Report Fiji 29 January – 1 February 2007" http://archives.pireport.org/archive/2007/February/EPG_Report_2007.pdf, accessed 20 August 2009, para 31, 48 [indicate loss of credibility of the FHRC].

of National Human Rights Institutions. Many of the victims also feared further threats, assaults and victimization by the military officers who had been responsible for their traumatic ordeals.⁶ To date there has been no prosecution of any member of the military who had assaulted any of these women or otherwise violated their rights.

A prominent human rights activist who was critical of the military's assault on members of the public, Angie Heffernan, was threatened with arrest and assault in January 2007 and was forced into hiding from military officers. Other prominent women activists were banned from leaving the country because of their criticism of the interim government. Lawyer Tupou Draunidalo was barred from travelling to Hong Kong to attend a conference in August 2007. Human rights activist Imrana Jalal was also banned from travelling in September of that year. Shamima Ali, prominent women's rights activist and human rights commissioner, was also placed on a travel ban for being an outspoken critic of the government. The travel bans were later lifted.

2.2 VIOLENCE AGAINST SEX WORKERS, INCLUDING TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT, COMMITTED BY FIJI NATIONAL POLICE

In 2009 the Police Commissioner teamed up with the New Methodist Church to run Christian "crusades" in the urban centres as a means of combating crime. There were reports that during such crusades, police arrested female sex workers who were then forced to jump from bridges as punishment for 'selling themselves'.⁷ There were also reports of police assaulting and raping these sex workers. These incidences continue to occur despite the fact that the Christian crusades were stopped by the government at the end of 2009. Amnesty International spoke with women's rights activists who stated that the sex workers are afraid of being victimised by members of the security forces if they lodge complaints against them.⁸ Amnesty International is concerned about the impunity with which the members of the security forces are targeting these already marginalised women for torture and ill-treatment.

Amnesty International calls on the government of Fiji to put an immediate halt to the targeting of women activists and women sex workers. The victims should be able to ask for and access any protection they need so that they can safely complain to

⁶ "Fiji: Paradise Lost *A tale of ongoing human rights violations April – July 2009*" Amnesty International 2009, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA18/002/2009/en/0024be13-bdd1-47d2-875a-863fff41f978/asa180022009en.pdf>, accessed 20 April 2010.

⁷ Amnesty International interview with women's rights activist 01 February 2010. Also see "An unholy alliance of church and state" Sydney Morning Herald, 29 November 2009, <http://www.smh.com.au/world/an-unholy-alliance-of-church-and-state-20091128-jxwu.html> accessed 20 April 2010.

⁸ Amnesty International interview with women's rights activist 01 February 2010. Also see "An unholy alliance of church and state" Sydney Morning Herald, 29 November 2009, <http://www.smh.com.au/world/an-unholy-alliance-of-church-and-state-20091128-jxwu.html> accessed 20 April 2010.

sympathetic and professional staff. The government of Fiji should undertake prompt, effective, independent and impartial investigations, with the aim of ensuring that perpetrators are brought to justice in proceedings which meet international standards relating to fair trial. The government should also take steps to ensure that victims receive medical and psychological services, and the full range of reparation, including compensation and guarantees of non-repetition.

3 FAILURE TO INTRODUCE AND ENFORCE LEGISLATION THAT PROHIBITS ALL FORMS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE, AND FAILURE TO INTRODUCE OTHER EFFECTIVE MEASURES TO PREVENT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (ARTICLES 1, 2 AND 3, AS INTERPRETED BY GENERAL RECOMMENDATION 19)

3.1 NEED FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LEGISLATION TO PROTECT WOMEN AGAINST ALL FORMS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (ARTICLES 2 AND 3)

Amnesty International remains concerned of the continuing rise in reports of sexual and other violence against women and girls in the country.⁹ Women's rights activists who work with survivors have raised their concern that the rates of incidences of violence seem to be worse than previous years.¹⁰

The Fiji government enacted the Domestic Violence Decree on 14 August 2009. This Decree was based on consultations by the Fiji Law Reform Commission with women's groups and other stakeholders in 2004. After its enactment, a number of women's groups in Fiji were critical of the fact that they were not included in the consultations by the current government and that such a decree needs to be passed by a lawfully elected government.

Amnesty International welcomes the enactment of a decree which aims to address violence against women, reflecting the state's acknowledgment, albeit indirectly, of its obligations under the Convention to protect women from violence. However, the organization is concerned that the full text has not been published¹¹ and that information is limited to what the government has made public through its media statements.¹² This lack of transparency raises questions about the extent of the government's commitments to eliminating violence against women.

⁹ "Rape case rise worries Fijian Police" Pacific Island Women United, 14 July 2009, <http://piwunited.wordpress.com/rape-case-rise-worries-fijian-police/>, accessed 08 April 2010.

¹⁰ Amnesty International discussion with Fiji Women's Rights Activists August 2009.

¹¹ At the time of writing, this decree is still inaccessible to the public.

¹² "Extraordinary" Fiji Sun, 11 June 2009, http://www.fijisun.com.fj/main_page/view.asp?id=29132, "New Fiji decree augments court powers in domestic violence cases" Radio New Zealand International, 13 August 2009, <http://www.rnzi.com/pages/news.php?op=read&id=48431>; "'Overwhelming and extremely positive response to Domestic Violence Decree' says Attorney General" Fiji Attorney-General's Chambers, 14 September 2009, [http://webapps01.un.org/vawdatabase/uploads/Fiji%20-%20Domestic%20Violence%20Decree%20PR%20\(2009\).pdf](http://webapps01.un.org/vawdatabase/uploads/Fiji%20-%20Domestic%20Violence%20Decree%20PR%20(2009).pdf) accessed 21 April 2010.

Based on the government's public statements Amnesty International understands that the Decree creates a new offence of domestic violence defined as any act of violence committed in a family situation. The definition includes acts of violence committed in both de facto and de jure relationships and any violence committed against children. Courts are also to be given wide discretion to prevent domestic violence, to take into account the "domestic" nature of an assault in granting or refusing bail, and to issue restraining orders against the perpetrator to prevent further assault.

As far as Amnesty International is aware, there have been no prosecutions under this decree ten months after its enactment. All those currently charged with domestic violence offences are prosecuted for assault-related charges under the Crimes Decree, which came into force on 1 February 2010, and which have similar provisions to the Penal Code (Cap 17) which has been repealed.¹³ The assault provisions in the Crimes Decree do not provide specifically for violence against women. Such violence could fall under common assault (section 274), which carries a maximum sentence of one year imprisonment; assault occasioning actual bodily harm (section 275) which carry a maximum of five years; acts intended to cause grievous harm or prevent arrest (section 255), which carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment; or grievous harm, which carries a maximum sentence of 15 years' imprisonment (section 258). However, in practice persons charged with physically attacking women are prosecuted under the lighter charges of common assault and magistrates have often been lenient in passing sentences. In a report to the United Nations Human rights Council, the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre confirmed that there were many cases in which magistrates often handed lenient sentences such as six months or less or even suspended sentences in violence against women cases.¹⁴ There are separate provisions in the Crimes Decree for rape and other sexual offences (sections 206-233), as well as sexual offences under provisions for crimes against humanity (sections 88-93, 102-110).

Amnesty International believes the government of Fiji must identify and address the root causes of violence against women, in addition to ensuring that perpetrators are prosecuted and that reparations are provided to survivors. Gender inequality and discrimination is justified as being supported by customs or religion and must be effectively addressed in all law and policies (discussed below). Moreover the government must make the complete text of the Domestic Violence Decree public.

¹³ For the Crimes Decree see <http://www.fijilive.com/archive/showpdf.php?pdf=2010/02/Crimes%20Decree%202009.pdf>; For the Penal Code see http://www.itc.gov.fj/lawnet/fiji_act/penal_code.html.

¹⁴ "Fiji Women's Crisis Centre Submission to the United Nations Periodic Review on Violence Against Women: Fiji" Fiji Women's Crisis Centre http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session7/FJ/FWCC_UPR_FJI_S07_2010_Fiji_WomensCrisisCentre.pdf accessed 02 May 2010.

3.2 CAPACITY BUILDING OF JUDICIAL OFFICERS ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS (ARTICLE 1, AS INTERPRETED BY GENERAL RECOMMENDATION 19; THE REQUIREMENT TO ERADICATE GENDER STEREOTYPING ARTICLE 2(D) AND 2(E) AND ARTICLE 5(A))

Amnesty International is concerned that the judiciary in Fiji do not receive sufficient training on how to implement women's equality before the law in practice, particularly in cases relating to violence against women.¹⁵ Whilst there has been judicial training on gender and human rights for a number of years in the Pacific, including Fiji, there are still reports of magistrates who are discriminatory in their decisions and statements in court.¹⁶ In mid-2009, women's groups in Fiji and the region were outraged by the comments of (a then) recently recruited magistrate during a hearing of a domestic violence case. Magistrate Elsie Hudson told the victim she was not living in a utopia and should not expect a perfect husband. The magistrate then reportedly asked: *'Which woman has not been slapped by her husband?'*¹⁷

In a rape case, the same magistrate, in dismissing the case, said that the victim was probably hallucinating because she had provided conflicting statements and that the victim should have bitten the perpetrator's penis to enable her to escape.¹⁸

Amnesty International considers these types of comments by a magistrate as deeply insensitive, demeaning and perpetuating gender stereotyping and violence. Women often face many barriers to reporting cases of violence. Such comments by a judge are unacceptable and the steps must be taken to ensure that they cease immediately and that the attitudes which gave rise to them are addressed.

4 USE OF CULTURAL PRACTICES THAT ARE DEMEANING TO WOMEN (ARTICLES 1, 2, 5 AND 16)

Entrenched cultural, traditional and religious beliefs play a significant role in shaping attitudes towards women and violence. They often determine how community and religious leaders, police officers, court officials and members of the public react to gender-based violence. There is generally a very patriarchal and

¹⁵ "Fiji country supplement", supplement to "Violence against Women in Melanesia and East Timor", Ausaid http://www.ode.usaid.gov.au/publications/pdf/vaw_cs_fiji.pdf, p 158.

¹⁶ Human rights and gender training for court, prosecution and police officials have been implemented by the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM), Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) and the Pacific Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT) for many years.

¹⁷ Fiji Women's Crisis Centre Press Release 24 September 2009, <http://lyris.spc.int/read/attachment/66115/1/htmlversion.html> accessed 19 April 2010.

¹⁸ Fiji Women's Crisis Centre Press Release 24 September 2009, <http://lyris.spc.int/read/attachment/66115/1/htmlversion.html> accessed 19 April 2010.

biased view among the general public against women in Fiji.

4.1 USE OF THE BULUBULU

Traditional forms of seeking forgiveness like the *bulubulu* have often been used by perpetrators of violence to escape the full force of the law. This practice, where the perpetrator's family ask forgiveness from the victim's family through the presentation of the *tabua*, a whale's tooth and other gifts, often takes the decision of reporting a case of rape or violence away from the victim and into the extended family. In cases of violence against women, evidence of the *bulubulu* being presented (by the family of the accused and accepted by the victim's family) can be presented to the court as a mitigating factor. Courts have in some instances passed a lighter sentence in such cases, including suspended sentences in lieu of imprisonment.¹⁹ Further, under section 163 of the Criminal Procedure Code, reconciliation is encouraged by judges and magistrates in relation to a number of offences, including domestic violence.²⁰ This provision in the Criminal Procedure Code has not been repealed by the government.

Amnesty International is concerned at the use of the *bulubulu* as a mitigating factor to lessen sentences, especially in cases of violence against women. This practice betrays the women of Fiji who endure the violence and then see that crimes committed against them are treated less seriously than assaults against men. Perpetrators of violence know that through *bulubulu* they can get away with minimal punishment. Such informal extrajudicial forms of settlement deny the victims recognition of the gravity of the offence committed against her and foster a climate of impunity for the perpetrators.

4.2 GENDER STEREOTYPES AND DISCRIMINATION (ARTICLE 1, INTERPRETED BY GENERAL RECOMMENDATION 19, AND ARTICLE 5)

Gender stereotypes and discrimination are rife in Fiji. When men beat up their wives or girlfriends, the authorities are often reluctant to arrest and charge them unless there is pressure from the family of the victim or from women's rights activists providing advocacy and counselling support to the victim. Reluctance stems from deeply held belief that a man has the right to beat his wife if he has what is considered a justifiable reason to do so.²¹ The police in many instances do not consider domestic violence as a criminal offence and see it instead as an internal

¹⁹ "Fiji country supplement", supplement to "Violence against Women in Melanesia and East Timor", Ausaid http://www.ode.usaid.gov.au/publications/pdf/vaw_cs_fiji.pdf page 158 accessed 16 April 2010.

²⁰ Section 163 of the Penal Code Criminal Procedure Code provides :
163. "In the case of any charge or charges brought under any of the provisions of subsection (1) of section 197 or of section 244 or of section 245 or of subsection (1) of section 324 of the Penal Code, the court may, in such cases which are substantially of a personal or private nature and which are not aggravated in degree promote reconciliation and encourage and facilitate the settlement in an amicable way of the proceedings, on terms of payment of compensation or on other term approved by the court, and may thereupon order the proceedings to be stayed or terminated."

²¹ "Extraordinary" Fiji Sun, 11 June 2009, http://www.fijisun.com.fj/main_page/view.asp?id=29132 accessed 30 April 2010.

family matter that needs to be resolved by the parties themselves. These attitudes of the police have often discouraged women from lodging complaints.

However gender and human rights training being implemented by a handful of women's NGOs in the country (like the Fiji Women's Rights Movement and the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre) has gone some way in sensitizing police officers, prosecutors and other officials on addressing their own biases in order to enforce the law fairly.

4.3 FORCED RECONCILIATION OF VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE BY THE POLICE (ARTICLES 2 AND 16)

As mentioned above, in 2009 there were disturbing developments involving the influence of the then state-supported New Methodist Church. The New Methodist Church joined forces with the Fiji Police Force to undertake a Christian "crusade" to combat crime in urban areas.²² Amnesty International was informed that the new police approach to addressing domestic violence was to compel women survivors of violence to reconcile with their violent husbands, with police and Methodist Church personnel portraying this as the implementation of Christian principles of maintaining the family unit.²³ Many of these cases remain unreported because of the widespread censorship of the media through the Public Emergency Regulations (PER) in force since April 2009. Women's rights activists who worked with survivors of violence emphasised that in many cases police officers, often with the encouragement of the New Methodist Church, advised women that the worst thing they could do to their family and their future would be to leave a violent relationship or press for prosecution of their partners in the courts.²⁴ Amnesty International was informed by activists providing counselling and advocacy services for women survivors that in many cases where reconciliation was forced by the authorities, the abuse often re-occurred almost instantly.²⁵

Amnesty International is concerned that this overt failure to act on complaints by victims of violence against women, supported by policy, has placed women at severe risk of further violence, including increased levels of violence. Although the Christian "crusade" policy was abandoned by the government at the end of 2009, according to reports, the practice still continues.

²² "An unholy alliance of church and state" Sydney Morning Herald, 29 November 2009, <http://www.smh.com.au/world/an-unholy-alliance-of-church-and-state-20091128-jxwu.html>, accessed 20 April 2010.

²³ Amnesty International discussion with Fijian Women's rights activist 02 April 2010.

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid

5 RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT OF FIJI

5.1 WITH RESPECT TO GENDER DISCRIMINATION AND LAW REFORM, THE GOVERNMENT OF FIJI SHOULD:

- Modify or repeal existing laws and regulations that discriminate against women and girls in family or public life. The Domestic Violence Decree 2009 should be made public and, if necessary, be amended to ensure full compliance with international law in general and the Convention in particular.
- Adopt measures, including legislation, to ensure that any customary laws and practices identified as being inconsistent with the Convention and other human rights treaties and standards are overturned and neutralised by the formal legal system; and train officials and launch educational drives to ensure that discriminatory practices are abolished.
- Repeal all legal provisions and abolish judicial practices where “reconciliation” between families of violent men and their wives or girlfriends is imposed on the latter against their will. Immediate steps should be taken to follow up on cases where women have been forced to “reconcile” with abusers, to make an immediate assessment of risks, and take urgent steps to ensure their safety.

5.2 WITH RESPECT TO ADOPTING MEASURES TO ERADICATE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE, THE GOVERNMENT OF FIJI SHOULD:

- Invite the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences to visit Fiji and to report on the adequacy of measures adopted by the State to prevent, investigate and punish violence against women and girls and to provide redress to victims
- Ensure that the Government formulates and implements an effective plan for preventing violence against women and girls. Responsibility for addressing violence against women and girls should be assumed at the most senior political level. A time-bound, well-resourced and coherent method of addressing gender-based violence must be developed. All measures should be benchmarked and regularly assessed to appraise their effectiveness.
- Provide statistical information and analyses about how many complaints are received, how they are investigated and the conviction rates of such cases.
- Implement existing measures and, where necessary, develop new measures to fill gaps that exist in protecting women and children from violence of all forms.

5.3 WITH RESPECT TO THE NEED FOR CAPACITY BUILDING FOR JUDICIAL, PROSECUTION, COURT, POLICE OFFICIALS AND THOSE WHO RESPOND TO FEMALE SURVIVORS:

- Government must implement specific training on gender and women’s rights as a permanent requirement for all judges, magistrates, prosecutors, court officials and police officers.

- Ensure that healthcare professionals, welfare officers, counsellors and legal advisors are given training in how to respond to female survivors of gender-based violence in a manner which respects women's human rights and ensures the safety and welfare of the survivor. In particular, it should be impressed upon staff who deal with female survivors of gender-based violence that they personally play an important role in determining how women and girls perceive the violence they have suffered and how they understand their options and rights with respect to obtaining justice and redress.

- The government should provide greater support for the work of women's organizations in Fiji (including by ensuring freedom of expression) such as the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre which have long been at the forefront of efforts to prevent violence against women. They do essential work offering shelter, counselling and legal advice to survivors of violence, with little or no support from the government

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