



FIJI HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

GPO Private Mail Bag
SUVA, FIJI ISLANDS

Press Statement - 29/6/07

The Fiji Human Rights Commission has written to its Australian counterpart, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) to offer legal assistance in any inquiry into the human rights implications of the Howard Government's controversial plan to 'take control' of 70 Australian aboriginal communities for at least five years by military force.

Director of the Commission, Dr Shaista Shameem said that there was a protocol between human rights commissions that allowed them to provide assistance to each other in times of need as 'international support bodies'. The Fiji Human Rights Commission recognized the enormous contribution of HREOC in lobbying internationally for anti-discrimination policies.

However, the new strategy of the Howard Government to try and stop widespread abuses in indigenous communities was likely to raise important debates on race-based national policies, justice, self-determination, international human rights law applicable to indigenous peoples and minority populations, as well as issues of social engineering using the military. These new and somewhat controversial policies to be implemented in Australia would undoubtedly have an impact on the wider Pacific in terms of the rights of indigenous people to be consulted adequately on policies affecting them.

The Fiji Human Rights Commission has already dealt with similar issues in Fiji and was in a position to provide advice and assistance from the international and regional human rights viewpoint if required.

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Dr Shaista Shameem
Director