



# FIJI HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

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## **Press statement on Media Freedom Day**

Media Freedom is a human right which must be protected because that is the only way that members of the public can receive accurate information about events in the country which affect the decisions they have to make.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Fiji Constitution protect media freedom. Article 19 of the Universal Declaration states that

*'Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers'.*

Section 30 of the Constitution of Fiji protects media and press freedom in the interests of freedom of opinion and expression. However, there are many limitations to freedom of expression in section 30 which should be re-examined when the Constitution is reviewed to see whether it is necessary to retain all these limitations to media freedom and the public's right to freedom of information.

In many countries, media freedom is often undermined by the political agendas of people in power, usually governments, and also by the fact that media ownership is foreign owned. This means that citizens are not provided with all the information to which they are entitled, but only given information which serves either the government or those in power.

In Fiji, media freedom, and freedom of expression and opinion are limited by a number of provisions in the Constitution which emphasise the right of the public to information more than media freedom as a stand-alone right. The drafters of the 1997 Constitution had decided that media freedom and freedom of expression should be limited by law and these limitations are contained in section 30 (2)- (3).

The only way in which members of the public can exercise their right to information is if the media are able to operate freely. But the media in its turn should be balanced, accurate, and fair to all sides. The FHRC urges all journalism schools in Fiji to ensure that their students learn very early on that media freedom is based on the right of the public to accurate and balanced information.

However, the right to information cannot be exercised by the public if there are controls placed on journalists by the authorities or by policies put in place by the owners of the media agencies themselves.

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Director