

The following is a media query sent to the Commission on Overseas funding – Note Dr Shameem’s response was not fully reported.

From: Shaista Shameem [<mailto:sshameem@connect.com.fj>]
Sent: Tuesday, December 12, 2007
To: Maria Burese
Cc: Erica Lee
Subject: Re: OVERSEAS FUNDING

Dear Maria,

See below.

I WOULD BE VERY SURPRISED IF YOU PUBLISH THIS- BUT IF YOU DO NOT PUBLISH IT, YOU REALLY SHOULD NOT BE ASKING ME QUESTIONS THE ANSWERS TO WHICH THE FIJI TIMES DOES NOT PUBLISH ANYWAY- OR PROVIDES A BUTCHERED VERSION.

AS YOU CAN SEE WE HAVE LITTLE FAITH IN THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE FIJI TIMES AFTER THE DEBACLE EDITORIALS OVER THE LAST TWO DAYS. THEY WANT TO SAY RUDE THINGS ABOUT US IN PRINT AND BIG LETTERS BUT DO NOT PUBLISH WHEN WE REPLY- WHAT KIND OF ETHICS IS THAT?

BUT ANYWAY.. I LIKE TO KEEP THE DOOR OPEN.

DR SHAMEEM.

On 12/11/07 4:50 PM, "Maria Burese" <mburese@fjitime.com.fj> wrote:

Sure. Many thanks

From: Shaista Shameem [<mailto:sshameem@connect.com.fj>]
Sent: Tuesday, December 11, 2007 3:37 PM
To: Maria Burese
Cc: Erica Lee
Subject: Re: OVERSEAS FUNDING

Could I respond tomorrow- am on my way out.

Tks

Shaista Shameem

On 12/11/07 3:49 PM, "Maria Burese"
<mburese@fjtimes.com.fj> wrote:

Bula Dr Shameem

Read with interest a story on the commission's decision not to accept aid from Australia, New Zealand and European Union.

What would this mean financially for the Fiji government to support the commission and what is it likely to expect from the commission? How much would this cost the government annually?

THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR FUNDING A NATIONAL INSTITUTION LIES WITH THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT, NOT OTHER GOVERNMENTS. THIS IS IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION ACT- THAT THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD PROVIDE SIFFICIENT FUNDING FOR THE COMMISISON'S FUNCTIONS.

Why after all these years has the commission decided to turn down offers from overseas?

IT WAS NOT MY IDEA TO ACCEPT FUNDING FROM NZ OR ANYONE ELSE. THIS WAS DECIDED BY THE COMMISSION EVEN BEFORE I JOINED BY PEOPLE LIKE IMRANA JALAL, GRAHAM LEUNG AND JUSTICE KEPA WHO WERE THE COMMISSIONERS AT THE TIME. I KNOW JUSTICE KEPA WAS NOT IN FAVOUR OF TOO MUCH FOREIGN FUNDING BECAUSE HE USED TO SAY THAT 'THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A FREE LUNCH'! BUT OVER THE YEARS WE RECEIVED FUNDING FROM A BENIGN NZAID, AND THEN LATER FROM EU AND SOME FROM AUSAID.

BUT THE STRINGS ATTACHED BECAME TOO GREAT- DURING ORDINARY TIMES WE DID NOT FACE DIFFICULTIES, BUT GRADUALLY WE REALISED THAT THERE WAS NOT MUCH VALUE-ADDED TO THE FUNDING AS WE HAD TO EMPLOY NZ CONSULTANTS FOR A LOT OF THE WORK AND WERE AT THE BECK AND CALL OF VARIOUS NZ GOVERNMENT POLICIES TOWARDS HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE PACIFIC. THIS BECAME CLEAR TO US IN 2005 WHEN THE NZ HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION (FUNDED TOTALLY BY NZ GOVERNMENT) TRIED TO MAKE NEO-COLONIAL INROADS IN THE PACIFIC WITHOUT CONSULTATION WITH US, AND THAT IS WHEN WE HAD OUR FIRST PROBLEMS. I ALSO RECEIVED A SURPRISE WHEN A PAPER WE DELIVERED ON HUMAN RIGHTS NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN THE PACIFIC ISLAND STATES WAS ATTACKED BY THE NOW FORMER THE NZ HIGH COMMISSIONER , MICHEAL GREEN WHO SAID HE HAD NOT BEEN INFORMED ABOUT THE PAPER. I HAVE BEEN UNCOMFORTABLE ABOUT THE NZAID, AUSAID AND EU AID POWER PLAY IN THE PACIFIC FOR SOME TIME AND WE ARE THANKFUL THAT WE NEED NOT PUT UP WITH IT ANY LONGER. ALSO NZAID WERE NEVER ON TIME WITH THEIR FUNDING SO THAT OUR PROGRAMMES HAD TO BE DEFERRED EVERY YEAR WHILE THE BUREACRATIC MECHANISMS GROUND ON IN WELLINGTON.

Has it got anything to do with those governments' stand

on Fiji? Hasn't NZ already suspended assistance to the commission after the release of your report on the coup?

I WAS VISITED BY A NZAID STAFF MEMBER IN DECEMBER 2007 AFTER THE TAKEOVER (BUT **WELL BEFORE** OUR REPORT CAME OUT IN JANUARY). HE TOLD ME THAT NZAID WAS HOLDING BACK ON THE LAST BIT OF FUNDING FOR THOSE 'NGOS' THAT DID NOT MAKE SUFFICIENTLY STRONG STATEMENTS AGAINST THE TAKEOVER OF DECEMBER 5TH. BEFORE I SHOWED HIM THE DOOR I TOLD HIM THAT FHRC COULD NOT ENTERTAIN THAT KIND OF INTERFERENCE WITH OUR INDEPENDENCE. I THEN SPOKE TO HIS BOSS IN WELLINGTON (HEATHER RIDDLE) AND TOLD HER HOW OBJECTIONABLE THIS KIND OF INTERFERENCE WAS. FHRC WAS NOT GOING TO BLINDLY ECHO WHAT THE NZ GOVERNMENT STAND WAS ON FIJI, JUST BECAUSE THEY FUNDED US! THIS WAS OUTRAGEOUS AS FAR AS I WAS CONCERNED. SO WE SAID, KEEP YOUR MONEY, WE DO NOT WANT A SLUSH FUND AND WE WANT TO RETAIN OUR INDEPENDENCE. ALL THIS HAPPENED BEFORE MY REPORT OF JANUARY 4TH, AND AN ACCOUNT OF THIS IS CONTAINED IN MY REPORT – PLEASE READ IT.

What are usually some of the strings attached to foreign assistance or aid?

SOMETIMES THE STRINGS ARE OBVIOUS AT OTHER TIMES YOU DON'T NOTICE THEM UNTIL THERE IS A CRISIS. BUT LIKE ALL HAND OUTS, EVERYTHING COMES AS A PRICE. IN OUR CASE, IT APPEARS THAT WE WERE GOING TO BE FUNDED IF WE FOLLOWED NZ AND AUST DIRECTION ACCORDING TO THEIR FOREIGN POLICY. WITH AUSTRALIA, THE DOWNER KEPT GOING ON AND ON AGAINST US, AT TIMES QUITE PERSONAL REMARKS, UNTIL WE TOLD HIM TO 'GET A LIFE'. WE DID NOT HEAR FROM HIM AFTER THAT!

NOW LOOK AT WHERE DOWNER'S AT- THE BACK BENCH I BELIEVE. AND HOWARD IN A WORSE PLACE.

YOU REALLY SHOULD NOT THINK THAT ONCE YOU ARE IN POWER YOU WILL BE THERE FOREVER; POLITICS IS A FICKLE BUSINESS.

WE NEED TO REVIEW THE POLITICS OF AID. YOU SEE, AID SHOULD NOT BE SEEN AS 'CHARITY' FOR US 'POOR' PACIFIC ISLANDERS. AID USUALLY COMES FROM THE WESTERN EUROPEAN GROUP OF COUNTRIES WHICH INCLUDES AUST, NZ AND EU. THESE ARE THE COUNTRIES THAT COLONISED AND UNDER-DEVELOPED US IN THE FIRST PLACE. THEY RIPPED THEIR COLONIAL POSSESSIONS OR PROTECTORATES OFF, EITHER THROUGH TAKING OUR RESOURCES AND BENEFITTING FROM THEM OR EXPLOITING OUR PEOPLE THROUGH CHEAP LABOUR DEALS. THEY ACTUALLY OWE US; WE DO NOT OWE THEM. UK COLONISED US FOR YEARS; FRANCE STILL HAS COLONIES IN THE PACIFIC- THE ONLY COLONIES REMAINING IN THE WHOLE WORLD BELONG MAINLY TO FRANCE; AUSTRALIA TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THE SUGAR INDUSTRY UNDER THE CSR. NZ BENEFITTED FROM THE TRANSFER PRICING THAT WENT ON DURING THE ERA OF THE CSR- FIJI SOLD ITS RAW SUGAR TO NZ REFINERY AND THEY SOLD IT ON THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET FOR MUCH MORE THAN THEY BOUGHT IT- THIS IS ALL DOCUMENTED. WE NEVER REALISED THE FULL BENEFIT OF THE SUGAR INDUSTRY UNDER COLONIALISM AND NEO-COLONIALISM.

SO, LET US STOP THINKING OF AID AS SOMETHING THAT WE NEED TO BEG FOR. WESTERN EUROPEAN GROUP OF COUNTRIES (WHICH INCLUDES AUST AND NZ) MUST REALISE THAT WE NEED TO RE-ORGANISE THE POLITICS OF AID. THEY SHOULD NOT BE GIVEN THAT MUCH POWER TO DECIDE OUR INTERNAL POLICY. ACADEMICS SHOULD START DISCUSSIONS ON THAT AS A MATTER OF PRIORITY. IT IS NOT ABOUT GRATITUDE- IT IS ABOUT DESCRIBING 'HOW EUROPE, AUST AND NZ UNDER-DEVELOPED FIJI AND THE PACIFIC' AND SEEKING REPARATION NOT 'AID'.

THIS IS A HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE LIKE NO OTHER.

I'd appreciate your comments on the above.

Kind regards

maria