



# FIJI HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

GPO Private Mail Bag  
SUVA, FIJI ISLANDS

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25 March 2008

## **Press Statement on Winston Peters' comment on FHRC Media Report**

FHRC responds to NZ Foreign Affairs Minister, Winston Peters' comment this morning that the FHRC's commissioned Report on Freedom and Independence of the Media recommended actions that were 'at odds with human rights principles', as follows:

1. The FHRC's Media Report findings, particularly of interference with Fiji's internal affairs by NZ media conglomerates and journalist Michael Field, are completely on point as a critique of media neo-colonialism, paternalism and racism. NZ Foreign Minister Peters should read the Report properly instead of relying on uneducated and uninformed advice on human rights principles, which in any case is not his area of expertise.
2. The NZ Foreign Affairs Minister is clearly currying favour with the media empire in NZ in what is an election year for him. He is taking on the cudgels on behalf of a number of NZ press outlets, for example the Dominion Post, which have grossly misrepresented the Fiji situation since December 2006.
3. We remind Mr Peters that his own Government has recently passed the **draconian Electoral Finance Act** which prohibits the public from criticizing his government during the whole of election year. This Act effectively muzzles everyone from commenting on his Government's policies on pain of hefty fines and long prison terms.
4. Under the penalty clause of the **NZ Electoral Finance Act**, search warrants can be issued and computers, files and other goods seized. Political parties can even be fined-up to \$40,000- for exceeding spending limits on campaigning, as well as facing a possible conviction of 2 years for all manner of offences against the Act.
5. Media reports say that the NZ Labour Party (Mr Peters Coalition partner), has been seriously compromised and its credibility damaged by a 'secret' loan which it refused to disclose in violation of its own Electoral Finance Act provisions.

6. The **NZ Electoral Finance Act** was used to fine David Moore, who ran a '*dontvotelabour*' website; he was forced to remove his website by the NZ Electoral Commission.
7. Even the NZ Human Rights Commission (NZHRC) failed NZ voters; the NZHRC recommended that all free speech in NZ should be **restricted** as long as **3 months prior to the election this year**. This recommendation is certainly at odds with all international human rights principles, especially Article 19 of the International Convention of Civil and Political Rights that FHRC uses as its guidelines on media freedom. Mr Peters is, paradoxically, not 'at odds' with NZHRC on its recommendation to muzzle free speech in NZ during election year. The question must be asked: is NZHRC sufficiently independent in the advice it tenders to its own government?

Mr Peters is advised that the anti-corruption strategies currently employed by the Interim Government and supported by the FHRC will have the effect of preventing people like his NZ First MPs from using state funds to purchase their personal clothing items, such as underwear. Mr Peters should recall that particular embarrassment (the 'Tuku Morgan underwear' saga) to his party 10 years ago.

Fiji's Interim Government's national agenda will also prevent NZ First ethno-nationalist-type political platforms from taking root in Fiji. No one who lived in NZ in the 1990s will ever forget Mr Peters' racist, anti-Asian, NZ First political platform and programs.

Mr Peters would be well-advised to tend to his own backyard first as he prepares to attend the Foreign Affairs Ministers meeting of the Pacific Island Forum starting this week.

His ignorant comments on FHRC's Media Report should be relegated to the dust-bin of Pacific political economy.

Dr Shaista Shameem  
**Chairperson**

