



FIJI HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

GPO Private Mail Bag
SUVA, FIJI ISLANDS

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The Chairperson of the FHRC replies to former Chairman Transparency International, Hari Pal Singh on his statement about FHRC (Fijilive 25/4/08), as follows:

1. The human rights protection and promotion work of the Fiji Human Rights Commission is contained in all its Annual Reports to Parliament 1999-2006. Mr Singh and TI (Fiji) need to bring themselves up to speed with these Reports which give detailed accounts of its protection of human rights in Fiji since 1999.
2. In more detail, the pre-December 2006 evidence of FHRC's work against apartheid-type Government policies in Fiji is contained in a number of documents that are publicly available. Of particular interest to TI (Fiji) would be our June 2006 Report on Government's Affirmative Programmes and Blueprint, and our parliamentary submissions on the Qoliqoli and Indigenous Claims Tribunal Bills (also made in 2006).
3. More recently, FHRC published an independent Inquiry Report into the Fiji 2006 General Elections which should reveal some other evidence of this nature to TI (Fiji). Also relevant is FHRC's report to the UN Committee on the Convention Against Racial Discrimination. In its submission to this UN Committee the FHRC endorsed the Report of the NGO Human Rights Coalition's CCF, Women's Action for Change and ECREA to the UN Committee. The NGO Report was very informative on the issue of historical racial discrimination present in Fiji which was implemented by the colonial government. The policy of Fijian Land, Indian Labour and European Capital, which was introduced by the British Colonial Government, was based on a system of apartheid and consolidated racial separatism and inequality in Fiji. TI should get itself up to speed on Fiji's history.
4. FHRC also questions the ability of the Fiji branch of Transparency International to impartially consider evidence of non-transparent behaviour and policies in Fiji, both past and present, given the political affiliations of its chairpersons. FHRC observes that the new Chairperson of TI (Fiji) is also the chairperson of the NGO PCPI which is regularly interfering in the independence of the courts in Fiji, as revealed by a number of rulings made by Justice Pathik in PCPI's Angie Heffernan cases. Therefore, whether there is a conflict of interest between TI and PCPI should be reviewed and assessed by the media as the Fourth Estate, in the public interest.
5. Moreover, the FHRC did not notice any particularly earth-shattering observations emanating from TI (Fiji) prior to December 2006 when evidence of governmental non-transparent activities and policies was reported by the media on almost a daily basis.

In fact, TI (Fiji) was transparently silent on this evidence.

6. Clearly, while TI (Fiji) should be totally above local politics and sectarian interests to be able to credibly pronounce on governance issues in Fiji, it is not.

7. On the other hand, Transparency International, as an international NGO, has a good reputation for providing fair and non-partisan views on issues of governance. It would be a great pity if that reputation is tarnished by the political alliances of its branch in Fiji.

Transparency International (Fiji) should therefore become more transparent about its political affiliations in Fiji given that December 2006 events, about which TI keeps on harping, are still under scrutiny by the courts. No NGO, whether international or local, should presume to second-guess the court before it pronounces its ruling. TI should concentrate only on its mandate as it has no authority, nor qualifications, to do otherwise.

And it should also do its homework when it comes to the activities of the FHRC. The information about FHRC's work 1999-2006 is publicly available. If Mr Hari Pal Singh cares to contact me I can enlighten him further, to assist him.

Finally, in summary, TI (Fiji) should be able to recognize apartheid when it stares it in the face. Otherwise this branch of TI will go down in history as an organization which is wasting everyone's time and energy, not to mention its own funding.



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