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**PUBLIC STATEMENT
FIJI ISLANDS
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION A WELCOME FIRST IN SOUTH PACIFIC**

Today's announcement of the new Fiji Islands' national Human Rights Commission Act 1999 is a welcome achievement and makes Fiji the first South Pacific island nation to create a commission for the promotion and protection of human rights, Amnesty International said today.

The organization welcomes the fact that the commission's strong basis in national law reflects international minimum standards for national human rights institutions, and that its well-respected commissioners -- including a woman -- represent Fiji's multicultural population mix.

Three commissioners have been appointed under the new Fiji Constitution by the Fiji Islands President, His Excellency the Rt. Hon. Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, on 24 March 1999 for a period of two years. They are the Ombudsman, Mr Justice Sailosi Kepa (Chairperson), and legal practitioners Ms Patricia Imrana Jalal and Mr Graham Leung.

Amnesty International congratulates the new commissioners on their appointment and hopes they will receive the necessary support for the challenges they face in setting up and running the new commission -- not only from the government and parliament, but also from the people of Fiji and from international human rights organizations.

So far, the Fiji Government has allocated Fiji \$ 200,000 (approx. US \$ 100,000) for the commission's 1999 budget. The commissioners have yet to convene for the first time and to begin recruiting the commission's staff and establishing a head office.

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