

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public statement

AI Index Number ASA 18/001/2008
Date 30 July 2008

Fiji: Perpetrators of police brutality must be brought to justice

Amnesty International strongly condemns the brutal beating of escapee prisoner Josefa Baleiloa at the hands of Fijian Police officers during his recapture in the country's capital Suva on the night of 23 July 2008. Josefa Baleiloa has not regained consciousness since the violent beatings and has been kept on a life support machine at the Colonial War Memorial Hospital's Intensive Care Unit in Suva.

According to Fiji Television News Reports, Baleiloa was viciously beaten by more than 10 police officers, even after he had been subdued. Witnesses have reported that officers dragged Baleiloa and beat him with pieces of timber and stones and jumped on him after he lost consciousness, and continued to do so as he was taken away in a police vehicle.

Amnesty International supports the decision of the Interim Minister for Defence, Ratu Epeli Ganilau to investigate the brutal beating of Josefa Baleiloa and urges that those responsible be brought to justice. Amnesty International strongly urges the authorities to act decisively and promptly on the investigations to restore public confidence in the police force.

The vicious beating of Baleiloa points to a growing record of brutality by the Fijian police against suspects, prison escapees and convicted criminals. In April this year, three police officers were convicted in relation to the death of Tevita Malasebe who had suffered severe injuries after being taken in for questioning in June 2007. In 2001, prison escapee David Wise was brutally beaten to death. Amnesty International calls upon the Fiji Police Force to address this excessive use of violence and ensure that its members are trained to understand their duties and obligations to uphold the law and protect the rights of all citizens.

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