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Fiji: Amnesty International calls for Public Emergency Regulations to be lifted and freedoms of expression and religion to be respected

United Nations Human Rights Council adopts Universal Periodic Review outcome on Fiji

Amnesty International welcomes the revocation in May 2010 of the Pensions and Retirement Allowances Decree 2009 (in force since January 2010), as recommended during the review.¹ This decree had given the Prime Minister the power to stop pension payments and allowances of those who were critical of the government.

Amnesty International considers, however, that since the review in the UPR Working Group, the human rights situation in Fiji has not improved. In April 2010, the government announced its intention to promulgate a decree to regulate the media industry. The draft measures provide for a media tribunal with powers to imprison journalists and editors for up to five years or to impose hefty fines on them if they publish or broadcast anything deemed against “national interest”.² If enacted, the decree will extend and deepen the already widespread censorship provided for under the Public Emergency Regulations. This runs counter to many recommendations made during the review to end censorship of the media and to enforce a legal framework to enable media to operate freely and independently.³ Amnesty International welcomes Fiji’s assurances to support recommendations to revoke the Public Emergency Regulations and calls on the government to abandon the draft decree aimed at silencing the media.

Several States raised the issue of discrimination and violence against women and Amnesty International welcomes Fiji’s acceptance of their recommendations.⁴ The organization is encouraged by the membership of the Minister for Women in Fiji’s Security Council and other measures targeted at providing greater equality for women. However, violence against women remains a concern, and Amnesty International calls on the government to enforce the Domestic Violence Decree 2009, which has not been implemented nine months after its enactment.

Discrimination against members of the Methodist Church of Fiji continues; they have been banned from holding their annual conference until 2014. Since July 2009, more than 25 ministers and officials of the church have been arrested, detained and charged under the Public Emergency Regulations. Amnesty International calls on Fiji to act on the recommendations made during the review and to restore a legal framework to guarantee the right to freedom of religion and the protection of all religious groups and minorities.⁵

Many States raised concerns about and called for independent investigations into harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders.⁶ Amnesty International welcomes Fiji’s acceptance of the related recommendations. In this regard, the organization reiterates its

¹ A/HRC/14/8, paragraph 71, recommendation 97 (Spain)

² Fines of up to USD50,000 for journalists and USD250,000 for editors.

³ Ibid, paragraph 71, recommendations 71-82.

⁴ Ibid, paragraph 71, recommendations 55, 56, 66 and 67.

⁵ Ibid, paragraph 71, recommendations 71 and 72.

⁶ Ibid, paragraph 71, recommendations 60-65

concern about the ongoing persecution of prominent human rights lawyer and activist Ms. Imrana Jalal by the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecution on what Amnesty International believes are politically motivated charges.

Background

The UN Human Rights Council adopted the outcome of the Universal Periodic Review of Fiji on 10 June 2010 during its 14th session. Prior to the adoption of the report of the review Amnesty International delivered the oral statement above. Amnesty International also contributed to the information basis for the review through its submission on Fiji: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA18/001/2009/en>

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