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**Fiji: UN review highlights human rights concerns**

A key UN review of Fiji's human rights record on 29 October has highlighted the need to urgently amend repressive decrees that put severe restrictions on freedom of expression.

At the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva yesterday, more than 50 countries raised several concerns about Fiji's human rights record during the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). A range of human rights issues were on the agenda, including freedom of expression, torture and other ill treatment by security forces, independence of judges and lawyers, workers' and women's rights.

Anti-media laws such as the Media Industry Development Decree came under fire by at least nine countries. Many states also expressed concern about other restrictions to the right to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association including under the Public Order Amendment Decree and the Crimes Decree.

Amnesty International is concerned that a climate of fear and self-censorship prevails in Fiji while heavy fines and imprisonment can be imposed against persons exercising their rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. Although there was evidence of more vibrant public discussions in the lead up to the September elections, a number of human rights defenders and critics of government still have pending investigations against them simply for peacefully exercising these rights.

Fiji failed to acknowledge the damaging impact of these laws, which fall short of international standards, during yesterday's review. Instead, the Fiji delegation defended constitutional protections and limitations on rights, claiming that these are consistent with international human rights law.

In spite of a death in police custody in September 2014, only Germany, United Kingdom and Costa Rica called for specific measures to address torture and ill treatment by the security forces. However, a larger number of countries called on Fiji to ratify the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and its Optional Protocol.

Three countries called on Fiji to immediately facilitate a visit to Fiji from the Special Rapporteur on Torture.

Fiji will now have time to consider the recommendations put forward and to announce which of them it will adopt during the UN Human Rights Council session in March 2015.

**Background information**

During the UPR many countries also called for further action to promote women's rights, particularly to address high levels of gender-based violence and to improve political participation of women.

Other areas raised in the UPR included workers' rights. Spain and the USA called strongly for the review or repeal of the Essential National Industries Decree which limits collective bargaining rights, severely curtails the right to strike, bans overtime payments and voids existing collective agreements in certain industries.

Amnesty International welcomes the commitment by the Fijian government made at the review to introduce legislation to fully repeal the death penalty, which only applies to military crimes.

The UPR is a mechanism of the Human Rights Council under which it reviews the fulfilment of the human rights obligations and commitments of all 193 UN Member States, with each State being reviewed every four and a half years. It is a cooperative mechanism, based on objective and reliable information, and equal treatment of all States. It is complementary to the work of the UN treaty bodies.