

MEDIA RELEASE

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THE REALITY TODAY

Since independence in 1970 Fiji has been ruled by democratically elected Governments with brief gaps immediately after the coups of 1987 and 2000. Since December 2006, we have had more than six years of dictatorship under an unelected and illegal regime. The difference that a dictatorship has brought to our economy and society has been disastrous.

The national statistics for our economy and society from 1970 to 2006 have been published for general information. The same statistics for the six years from 2007 are also available. They show quite clearly that most of Fiji's key performance indicators are far worse during the current regime's rule.

Statistics show that from 1970 to 2006 Fiji enjoyed steady economic development with annual growth at around 3% of GDP or more. Unemployment during this period was low; real incomes increased; inflation was low and the poverty level was about 32% of the population in 2006.

The reality today after six years of dictatorship is quite different. The 2010 – 2011 GDP is barely above the level in 2005. Formal employment has not grown for the last six years and indeed has gone backwards, with more and more young people coming out of our institutions to join the workforce.

Economic growth during the last six years according to a leading Economist is a mere 0.6% of GDP. It might as well be -0.6% or simply 0.0%! Our economy has actually stood still since 2006.

Employment creation has been in the informal sector and family enterprises with low incomes and low hours/days of work.

Underemployment has grown quite significantly and amounts to more than 30% of the labour force. The youth age group is particularly under – employed. They are idle about 60% of their working time.

Unemployment and under-employment could be a significant factor in increasing crime in our country today.

It is estimated that thousands of women have left being full-time housewives to try and make ends meet within their households. Virtually all, both men and women, are working far more hours than six years ago.

Money incomes have not risen much in the last six years while inflation has risen by more than 30%. Real income for almost everyone has fallen by more than 30% and more so for our rural dwellers. Our Government Ministers and defence personnel may be the only people whose real incomes have increased during the six years.

Our citizens living below the poverty line has increased by almost 50% right across the board. It is now just under 50% of the population compared to 32-33% in 2006.

The public debt has increased from \$2billion in 2006 to more than \$4billion in 2012 (some sources say more than \$5billion). The debt burden if shared among all households amounts to \$20,000.00 per household. Foreign debt is increasing at an alarming rate, exposing the country to foreign exchange risks. Some foreign debts have been obtained at a high of 9% interest rate while the IMF was lending money at 2%. Contingent liabilities of government are estimated at more than \$2billion.

Rates of suicide and attempted suicide which were falling around 2006, have risen since then. They are at record levels according to the police's own figures. Violence against women, both sexual and physical,

has escalated to unprecedented levels as reported in the media everyday.

Fiji's key performance indicators during the last six years paint a dismal picture. The country's slide into economic and social chaos continues unabated. The proposed draft Constitution will only make things worse. A dictatorship entrenched in the Constitution is not the right form of Government for Fiji.