

DEMOCRACY IN THE PACIFIC CONFERENCE

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY, CHRISTCHURCH, NEW ZEALAND

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I will be making my presentation this morning under the following Headings: (PP SLIDE 1 ON)

- We have won
- The Fiji Experience
- Customs & Customary Law
- Regional & International Relations
- Post-Conflict Resolution
- Conclusion

(PP SLIDE 1 OFF)

2,500 years ago, that is about 500 BC, a long distance runner named Pheidippides ran 26 miles and 385 yards from the field of the Battle of Marathon to the Greek capital of Athens to deliver the message that the small Greek Army of about 9,000 Athenians and 1,000 of their allies from the town of Plataea fought against a much larger invading army from Persia which is now Iran and defeated them. 192 citizen-soldiers of Athens died in that battle and gave their lives so that the Greek people could govern themselves the way they wanted according to their own values. 18 years before that, the people of Athens decided they were going to use a system of government they called 'democratia' and some notable Greek philosophers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle codified that as 'Western' philosophy with words like democracy, aristocracy, platonic etc being so glibly used today.

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Pheidippides told the worried and fear-confined leaders in Athens that day "we have won!"

The Persian army then was on a path of world domination, but was defeated and after their defeat by the Athenians of Greece, and subsequently by other small armies of Greek city-states of the time forced the withdrawal of the invaders back to their land further east.

2,400 years later the people of Fiji thought **"We have won"** when the country moved on from being a Colony in the realm to being a Sovereign Democracy in 1970, as a result of the Constitutional Conference in Marlborough House which ended a series of conferences in both Fiji and the UK between 1965 and 1969.

In 1977, seven years after independence, the Indigenous chiefs – led Alliance Political Party was defeated in a fair democratic elections according to the electoral provisions enacted to provide for ethnic representation in Parliament with an indigenous majority.

Before the Elections victors could name their Prime Minister to be sworn-in, the then Governor General called the defeated Prime Minister, and swore him in as a Minority Government Prime Minister. The then Governor General was one of the indigenous chiefs who took part in the Constitutional Conferences of 1965 to 1969. Neither New Zealand nor Australia and not even the Palace in London, said it was wrong! Needless to say, the government lasted only until the first session of Parliament when their very first Motion was defeated, forcing another election, which Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara's Alliance won when the indigenous people reunited politically in the three-racial groups Alliance.

In 1987, ten years after the political jolt of 1977, the Alliance Party were again defeated, this time by a party based on the common interests of all workers – the Fiji Labour Party that formed a coalition with the National Federation Party which was a two-cane growers groups political alliance.

Enter the military, albeit initially only a small detachment, immediately supported by the rest. I was then third-ranking in the army and part of my plan was the employment of my two superior officers in civilian positions. Only one of them accepted and became a Diplomat and now our Nation's President. The other is

now a civil servant in the Australian Government, and a commentator on some Pacific Defence debates.

After the May coup d' état I stood on the balcony of Suva's Civic Centre and announced to a large indigenous group that had gathered to give me support; **'we have won'**. I said 'we have won' because the Great Council of Chiefs had just decided to agree to my forceful removal of the Dr. Bavadra government of Fiji and agreed to allow the Governor General to form an interim administration called the Council of Ministers to govern Fiji until a new Constitution was drawn up to entrench the indigenous leadership in the country.

Fiji's racially engineered Constitution came into being on 25 July 1990 and was used in two General Elections, 1992 and 1994, which was not a full term parliament Elections. I was sworn-in as Prime Minister after both those elections. A feature of the 1990 Constitution was that it had to be reviewed within seven years after its promulgation.

Sir Paul Reeves, the late and former Governor General of New Zealand chaired the Review Commission that produced the recommendations which were enacted by the Parliament of Fiji as the Constitution (Amendment) Act of 1997 and became commonly known as the 1997 Constitution.

While that Constitution was acclaimed internationally and enabled Fiji to be readmitted into the Commonwealth, it was still viewed by the Fiji Labour Party leader, as making the Indians 'third class citizens'.

He won the General Elections run in accordance with that Constitution in the 1999 elections. Mr. Chaudhry said **'We have won'**.

His Government was ousted by Bainimarama in 2000 when he appointed Qarase to be interim Prime Minister after a counter coup action by the Army following Speight's unsuccessful attempt at removing the Chaudhry Government followed by Speight holding the Members of Chaudhry's Government as hostages in the Parliament complex for 56 days. I say that Bainimarama ousted Chaudhry's government because I believe that after successfully defeating the usurpers of the people of Fiji's government, he went on to form one of his own, instead of

restoring power to Mr. Chaudhry. Bainimarama and the military thought **'we have won'**

Mr. Qarase capitalised on the Great Council of Chiefs' call for a united Fijian Political party and formed his SDL party with the support of chiefs, the Methodist Church and many nationalistic parties. Using his position as Prime Minister, he put into place a programme to help indigenous people realise greater wealth from their land by providing Agriculture and Fishing assistance – a scheme that he continued into his elected terms.

Mr. Qarase became unpopular with the Army for his converting the Twenty Million Dollars Fijian Affairs Board loan from Government into a grant during his unelected term. However that was a very favourable move to the elite Fijians who had benefitted from the scheme and the 14 Fijian Provinces who had shares in Fijian Holdings Limited which invested the \$20 Million in successful 'going concerns' that gave the investment a very good return allowing Fijian Holdings to give the Shareholders 'infalted' dividend payments, because the loan had a 10 years grace period before it had to repaid, without interest, to Government in ten years, beginning in year 11. Qarase also converted the FAB 'sinking fund' pool for the eventual payment of the loan back to Government by authorising its use for Fijian interests promotion only, which added to his popularity. That was because he had converted the loan into a grant and FAB did not have to repay the loan.

That popularity wave took Qarase through to be a comfortable majority winner in both the 2001 and 2006 General Elections fought under the 1997 Constitution provisions, and made him think **'he had won'**

There have been many versions about the cause of the 'falling out' between Qarase and Bainimarama, but relationships had soured so much that Qarase must be blamed for treating his own Commander at arms length thus endangering the people's government of Fiji in the face of worsening relations with the people's military forces. Bainimarama told the people **'we have won'** and gotten rid of Qarase's bad government.

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We now have an unelected government that is trying to take us back to Constitutional government either under the resurrected 1997 Constitution which it has abrogated or under a new one that will be recommended by the Constitution Commission now rounding off its collection of the people's views and submissions before collating these into a Recommendation for a Constitution for Fiji. The Commission is chaired by Professor Yash Ghai who has international experience in Constitution framing assisted by four other commissioners, three of whom are ladies, demonstrating that Fiji is ahead of many countries in our gender equality quest. One of the Commissioners was a member of Dr. Bavadra's government, ousted in 1987, another was a Minister and Deputy Prime Minister in my government, and one was a very high profile opponent of my Coups and Speight's and a member of the Fiji Labour Party. Even the Chairman was instrumental in one of the political party submissions to Sir Paul Reeves' Commission between 1995 and 1997. So, the Commission does not lack the Fiji perspective nor an understanding of international expectations.

I have highlighted this personal perspective of the Fiji case, and I do not claim this to be the only authoritative one, to give us an understanding of the various forces that play in what we now call Democracy in the Pacific.

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Customs and Customary Laws

In studying the political evolution Fiji has gone through, one cannot deny the importance of Customs and Customary Laws in the indigenous people's assessment of whether a Government was going to deliver their expectations. We have a contributor in this conference who is going to highlight the 'culture of silence' in the Fiji culture. I am grateful that the speaker has elected 'silence' instead of 'deceit' in that presentation.

Customs and Customary Laws have always been the underlying understanding of the people of Fiji, but have never been properly codified for observation apart from the way it has been incorporated into such legislations as the Native Land

Act, Native Land Trust Act and the Fijian Affairs Act and their Subsidiary Regulations.

The political problems that Fiji has had, have all been results of the indigenous people expecting more from these laws (even when not articulated in codified law) against expressions that these are discriminatory and victimise the other races. It becomes more of a battle line when it involves land.

Land has been a hindering and negative asset for the Fijians. They have it, but cannot use it as fungible assets. Once the land has been de-reserved, with the approval of Fijian landowners, it becomes fungible when it has Lease Titles that are bankable by developers. When Fijian landowners want to lease their own land, however, Financing Institutions are wary of using the legal documents of those lands to secure loans because of their inability to enforce mortgagee sales etc. in case of default in loan repayments.

The Fijians however have remained sceptical about non-Fijians being able to deliver on their expectations and always suspect that they would enact legislations that will alienate their inheritance.

The problems that surfaced in Bougainville in the 80's and 90's, the ethnic fighting between the Guadalcanal people and (mainly) Malaitans in the Solomons, the early independence problems in the new nation of Vanuatu at that time, the potential problems that exist in Samoa and the Tongan struggle for, what some of the movement leaders call, real democracy, highlight the reality about Democracy in the Pacific. In fact when we speak of democracy in the Pacific, we have to accept that 'One size does not fit all'.

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'Democratia' that the Greeks put into being for their governance 500 years BC and adopted and adapted by many other societies in the world now may have become so badly 'engineered' that some versions would make those noble Greeks turn in their graves. The Financial crises that befell their country a few years ago, and which they are still trying to negotiate out of, does not help in promoting that system of government. In all of these we in the Pacific and our critics have almost

forgotten that 'democratia' as declared by the Greeks was for the people to govern themselves according to their own values.

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Regional and Internationa Affairs

After the 1987 Coups in Fiji, the country was placed on 'black bans' trade embargoes, immigration restrictions, aid cancellation and suspension, and forced the Interim Government to look for new trading partners and aid sources. The 'Look North' policy was introduced to bypass New Zealand, and Australia whom we had heavily relied on for our development and trade until then.

The Hon Mr. Murray McCullum yesterday mentioned this policy yesterday not realising that it was a hiddeen appeal to New Zealand at the time to also look north and see the needs of the northern neighbours in the Pacific !

We were hurt because when the Allied Forces in both World Wars called on their South Pacific allies, we contributed triangular co-operation in training, equipping and mounting our War efforts and the post War conflicts like the Malayan Emergency.

Fiji had really taken the friendship with both Australia and New Zealand for granted. But, when we objectively look at it, our people remained 'friends' however the governments were almost hostile enough to consider military intervention in Fiji.

While the Pacific Forum was more passive in 1987, it became markedly more actively opposed to Fiji in the wake of Bainimarama's Pustch in 2006. Fiji as a nation also lost a close friend in Prime Minister Tuila'epa of Samoa. But we are hopeful that our cultural ties will help the quick restoration of inter-governmental relationships after the restoration of Parliamentary Government following our propose General Elections in 2014.

The 'friendship' and trade and Immigration vacuum left after 2006 has been the most telling in the history of Fiji's relations with Australia and New Zealand. This has forced Fiji to look at other options as well as totally new ones. Our successive

cementing of diplomatic relationships with new countries, many of them having indigenous emphasis policies almost directly opposite to those of the Bainimarama government has been an interesting development in our international relations pursuit. Our recent entry into the Non-Aligned Movement could also be sore development to our former military aid donors. However, we must not lose sight of the dynamics of 'need'.

While our needs, development, aid, trade, co-operation etc. in the past had always been met by our traditional and customary partners, the void left after 2006 has forced us to venture into uncharted waters. The high-profile role the People's Republic of China now plays in our development and co-operation programmes as well as aid is one that will be difficult to come out of without a worse relationship than that which existed prior to 2006.

While Taiwan used to be a noticeable co-operative worker before December 2006, even after Fiji recognised PRC and openly stated a 'One China' policy, it is now in a very low profile role.

While some countries in the region have had at various times full diplomatic ties thus recognition of PRC and ROC, Tuvalu may be the only one continuing full relations with Taiwan. I will not comment on that relationship except to refer to the dynamics of need. Some euphamistically but unashamedly call these types of relationships 'Chequebook Diplomacy' all I can say is 'Who is not guilty...may cast the first stone.'

Some Chinese interests in our forestry and mineral resources have resulted in some shifts in some of our law emphasis in matters relating to Fijian Land.

While these developments may be unsavoury to our traditional allies, they must realise that the longer the isolation, the more difficult the restoration in relations.

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Civil – Military Relations

A former comrade in arms of mine will be making a presentation on the civil military relations in the Fiji context, so I will not venture into the specific commentary on the Fiji situation.

It is interesting, however to note that militarism was present in most of the political upheavals in the Pacific – militarism in ideology if not in hardware.

In most Pacific cultures which are all tribal in nature, militarism has always been a way of thinking. When things do not work out our way, we think of militant ways of changing things, and in many cases, even before we think of anything else such as petitioning our Representatives in Parliament, writing to the Ombudsman, to the local dailies or waiting for the next General Elections.

Mr. Baledrokadroka will speak on the chief/bati relationship in the Fiji context, but I am sure in most cultural traditions in the Pacific, the military – be they tribal warriors or peacekeeping-equipped soldiers, there has always existed the notion that they are there the final guarantors of security for the people.

Where the ‘people’ and the native people definition becomes blurred, we have situations like the 1987 Fiji and Bougainville cases.

There is hope for a better association between Civil and Military leadership co-operation as well as elected and unelected leadership co-operation in national leadership in a CORPORATE SYSTEM.

This could be a combined Parliamentary and Non-Parliamentary Select Committee where the Commander, the Prime Minister, the Chairman of the Council of Chiefs, the Leader of the Opposition and other co-opted participants could constantly keep a tab on civil-military relations to prevent them from ever breaking down again.

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Democratisation

After the era of the withdrawal of the European Colonial powers from East of Suez, new ethno-political and geographic states have emerged. Many have gone through other political changes in their systems while some have become religico-political states where religion and the state are almost synonymous. Some of these in areas even West of the Suez.

It will be interesting to see how democratisation is effected in Egypt, Libya, Iraq, and Syria after the current civil wars. But those are outside our main area of concern, which is the Pacific.

It is not too difficult, however, to try and gauge the problems that will face Fiji after the 2014 Elections. Will it revert quickly to democratic systems and values without the new democratic order always looking over their shoulders to see what the military is doing ?

The CORPORATE SYSTEM I suggest here could be the best bet in maintaining good Civil-Military relations, and while it provide a great check and balance venue, it removes the fallacy of democratic victor takes all in democratic societies – especially in the evolving democracies in the Pacific.

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Post Conflict Resolution

Post Conflict resolution and state-building humanitarian interventions will also be covered in our conference here in the University of Canterbury. There will also be a presentation or two on the role of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in post conflict resolutions.

These are noble ideas, and worthy of trying because they offer both the aggrieved and the aggressors avenues to air their grievances as well as confess openly their wrong doings withou fear or favour. The way forward after these Commissions will be better lit, with all parties knowing where and what the pitfalls are and

ways to negotiate them without falling into them once again as they most probably blindly did in the past.

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Conclusion

Democracy in the Pacific is a study that needs more than two days, let alone in an address of 20 – 25 minutes. It is a very complicated and multifaceted subject, probably more multifaceted than any other region in the world.

Underlying the faces that have been depicted as hostile to the rest of the world and their puritanical views about democracy, and even those views can be very keenly contested are some of the world's most friendly peoples. Although not noticeable in Rugby fields. But we can very quickly turn around to once again collectively be called what the late Pope John Paul said about Fiji – 'The way the world should be.'

The answer to improving the quality of democracy in the Pacific lies outside politics. It lies in economically rewarding development. Unfortunately, those that give us that are more concerned with our democratic systems that many times conflict with our traditional and customary democratic values which in the final analysis comes to 'the people telling the government what to do.'

T H A N K Y O U .

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