

VERBATIM NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS HELD IN THE COMMITTEE ROOM (EAST WING), PARLIAMENT PRECINCTS, GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS ON TUESDAY, 1ST MAY, 2018 AT 9.40 A.M.

Interviewee: Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation.

In Attendance:

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| 1) Mr. Josefa Koroivueta | - | Permanent Secretary |
| 2) Mr. Rupeni Fatiaki | - | Director Social Welfare |
| 3) Mr. Emosi Zinck | - | A/PAS |
| 4) Ms. Venina Duvuduvukula | - | Acting Principal Accounts Officer |
| 5) Ms. Anareta Apole | | |

Office of the Auditor-General

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| 1) Mr. Abele Saunivalu | - | Director Audit |
| 2) Mr. Mohammed Firoz | - | Audit Manager |

Ministry of Economy

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| 1) Ms. Ana Waqanisau | - | PAO |
| 2) Mr. Rahat Mohammed | | |
| 3) Ms. Lanieta Senibulu | | |

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- I welcome everyone to the meeting of the Public Accounts Committee. At this juncture, I would like to convey my hearty appreciation for the presence of the Permanent Secretary from the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation.

PS, I welcome you, one of the most experienced and oldest serving PS of Fiji and on that note I would like to wish you more success in your position. We are here to discuss the audit issues raised in Volume 3, Auditor-General's Report 2016 which was tabled in Parliament. Joining us we have officials from the Ministry of Economy who are on my far right and on my far left we have officials from the Office of the Auditor-General. In front, just on my left we have our Secretariat staff and we are joined by Opposition Members, Honourable Radrodoro and Honourable Lalabalavu.

The Honourable Chair, is caught up with the new Bills and another Government Member, Honourable O'Connor is busy in his Ministerial engagement.

So, without further ado, Sir, this is the team for the morning. We believe that there are written responses that you have provided before the Committee this morning. We take note of that and we will be hearing from you whilst you are making the submission so without further ado I would like to give the opportunity to introduce us very briefly your team and then from there take us through the submission.

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- Thank you, Deputy Chair, Honourable Members of the Public Accounts Committee and also colleagues from the Ministry of Economy and the good Office of the Attorney General.

The team stands ready to provide response to the Committee this morning but firstly thank you for this opportunity. We have Anareta, on my right here from the Department of Women, next to him is Emosi Zinck from the Corporate Division, this good lady beside me is Venina Duvuduvukula, Acting Principal Accounts Officer, on my left is the gentleman, the Director for Social Welfare. That is our team this morning.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, PS, for that briefing introduction. I believe there is a written submission so I kindly request you if you could take us through the written submission that you have provided.

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- If you would allow, Sir, that we go to page 4 of the audit memorandum.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Yes, Sir.

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- Detailed audit findings and if you allow that we go section by section.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Yes, Sir. 8.1 is *Tropical Cyclone Winston* assistance.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Deputy Chairman, just a question to the auditors. The Audit Opinion that has been given to the Ministry. Can you just inform the Committee on the audit opinion which is an unqualified audit opinion? Yet there are a lot of audit issues that you have also highlighted with the relevant ministries? As we noted the audit opinion keeps changing over the period of time. Some are unqualified, some are qualified but the issue still sort of remains in the respective Ministries. Can you just inform us of the audit opinion, the basis of your opinion and the issues that you highlighted in the audit issues?

AUDIT REP.- Thank you, Honourable Deputy Chairman. I would like to mention that the 2016 accounts for the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation was an unqualified one. There were issues raised but the accounts still remain unqualified. These issues are compliance issues which has not materially misstated in the financial statements, which is why we have not qualified the accounts. That issue has not materially misstated the financial figures reported on the financial statements of the Ministry.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Through you, Honourable Deputy Chairman. A point of clarification as well as the Permanent Secretary is just about to comment on the audit findings.

It is just the styling of the report. It is a draft audit. Can we be given some explanation as to why is it you are presenting a draft?

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- Sir, we are basically responding because I think this will then be finalised as far as we would be perceiving. This is subject to finalisation. What is presented to us was the draft audit. We have not made any changes to the draft findings but we have just responded as per the draft audit.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Office of the Auditor-General?

AUDIT REP.- Thank you, Deputy Chairman. The submission from the Ministry is on the draft. The final is the one in the audit report presented to Parliament. The difference there is that some of the issues in the draft have been removed in the final. The final is the one that was presented to Parliament, the one submitted by the Ministry was the draft that we sent to them. That is the difference.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Just a clarification. This whole audit process, the draft and the finalisation, was there an exit interview conducted between the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation and OAG so that we are not presented here with two different scenarios.

AUDIT REP.- Thank you, Deputy Chairman. Our audit process after the completion of the audit, a draft report is sent to the Ministry where they submit their written comments. OAG reviews and verifies these comments that are provided and then the final is prepared after the resolved issues have been removed. The final is the one that is presented in Parliament. The final copy also was sent to the Ministry when the accounts were sent for signing.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Deputy Chairperson, the question basically was, was there an exit interview conducted between the Ministry and the OAG before the production of this final report.

AUDIT REP.- Thank you. Yes, there was an exit interview for this audit for which the issues that were resolved were removed.

MS. A. APOLE.- Mr. Deputy Chairperson, yes there was an exit meeting conducted with this 2016 Audit Report.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- With this report?

MS. A. APOLE.- Exit interview

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Deputy Chairperson, the report that the PS is about to deliver now is based on the final or the draft? What are we going to be hearing from you, Sir?

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- What we have prepared was to elaborate on the responses for the audit queries.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- The responses that are....

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- That are written there.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- The responses that we asked the Ministry to respond to whether it is in a draft form or whether in the final form. Those are pertinent issues nonetheless covering almost all the audit issues that were raised. So, a lot of issues are not there and like I said whether in draft form or in final form the crux of the matter remains the same, we need to know about these audit issues and they are very pertinent nature.

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- Thank you Mr. Deputy Chairman. We have provided a response and this was in relation to the *Tropical Cyclone Winston* assistance and I do know there were audits raised and there are four dot points in there. What I would just like to respond to the Public Accounts Committee that the decision for the utilisation and even from the provision was actually granted by the Ministry of Economy and it was at a Minister to Minister level. We made a decision to pay out all social welfare beneficiaries based on the fact that the tropical cyclone basically affected the whole of Fiji, whether it was direct or indirect; that was the decision. On top of that, we were operating in silos, this grant was made together with the World Food Programme (WFP).

Now, the outcome of this disbursement or the grant given was hailed as one of the successful Social Protection Transfer Programmes ever to be staged in the Pacific. I think that was something that was praised by the World Bank that we had done this programme, it was a test basically on a cash transfer with funding from World Food Programme. The funding from the World Food Programme was actually in response to the assistance by the Honourable Minister for Disaster Management at that time right after that.

So, we had actually provided supplementary funding to WFP from Fiji funds basically we did not want to miss out any of the welfare beneficiaries, because the World Food Assistance Programme was only to selected beneficiaries and we thought that it was not something called for because the devastation was greater, even though we have clearly made a boundary for all the priority affected areas but there were red zones along those areas and there were communities that were affected outside but the focus was on the key affected areas. So, that was an executive decision. The net outcome was basically that we have a reliable cash transfer system in place that Fiji could now use as a standing mechanism for rehabilitation using the Social Protection Programme. And now even in the global forums, even in the regional forums our cash transfer programme has really stood up well. So, I think that is something that Fiji should be proud of that we have a system in place that could be utilised as a means to rehabilitate after the rehabilitation programme.

The decision to do this was basically Minister to Minister and we had made a number of options and we thought in the best interest of the beneficiaries to be a lump sum payment.

In fact the World Bank did a follow up monitoring and found that there was minimal abuse of the cash transfer programme. That is why it was regarded as a robust programme that we could utilise for rehabilitation after disaster.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, Honourable Members any question?

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Deputy Chair, through you, PS, just a clarification, you stated the Social Protection Programme and as highlighted by the representative of the OAG that this was specifically for your registered recipients.

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- Yes.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Further down stated that you provided the money or the grant regardless of whether they were recipients or not. Can I get some clarification on that?

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- All the beneficiaries are existing Social Welfare beneficiaries so whether they were on a Poverty Benefits Scheme, Care and Protection Allowance, Social Pension Scheme, Food Voucher Programme; all the existing beneficiaries. We have a list that is updated on a monthly and basically this is loaded onto their bank account using the existing mechanism that we have. So, we do not pay out anyone that is outside the beneficiary lists.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- So, Ministry of Economy this was a donor fund as mentioned there? Who gave this donation?

MOE REP.- Sir, it was given by Budget.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- It was given by the Budget, alright.

We do understand that this was a very holistic approach, something the people of Fiji needed after such a devastation. This also brings us to the issue that other ministries have raised that during the times of disasters certain decisions needs to be made which might conflict with the audit process but nonetheless the whole idea of those decisions is to help the people. Whilst this measure looks very holistic in nature and as the PS has said it was very robust and definitely did help a lot of people especially the welfare recipients. Why were audit issues raised? Can you give some general comments on that? Was it because of the way the decision was made and all that?

AUDIT REP.- Thank you, Deputy Chair. We acknowledge the work carried out by the Ministry and for the purpose they were doing it but there were control issues that were raised and that is on Page No. 4 of the report. Some of the documents like the approvals that were not provided. We still needed to cite those approvals like the Cabinet decision.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- I do take note of that but there are a number of points mentioned there. The first one is the decision of the Cabinet that was not provided. So, is that also the main one or generally just control issues that you have raised.

AUDIT REP.- Thank you, Honourable Chair. Yes, they were control issues. At point three, the issue we raised here that there were not Standard Operating Procedures (SOP). OAG believes that with this SOP in place, it would assist the Ministry in the payout of this assistance. As you see in the second point, the issue that was raised there, the payment was paid out to all who were recipients of the scheme irrespective of whether they were affected or not. But we heard from the PS that they were either directly or indirectly affected. So yes, these were control issues that the OAG thinks that the Ministry should have in place to assist them in providing this assistance.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- This is exactly what the other Ministries have raised that it is important to understand that certain assistance were important to be done even though it was in conflict with the audit process. Whilst we take note that these were mostly control issues, but this has also resulted in the Ministry now taking up some measures to change their SOP. . What is the situation at the moment?

MR. R. FATIAKI.- Mr. Chairman, allow me to elaborate on the procedures of the Social Protection Platform that is administered by the Ministry. After *TC Winston*, the World Bank and other international organisations were wondering how they could help Fiji to address some of the issues that came about as a result of *TC Winston*.

When they came to Fiji, they were looking at our Social Protection Platform and through their advice, they discovered that our platform was one of the best in the region. Instead of creating something new, they decided to work together with us and the Ministry of Economy to use the Social Protection Platform as a vehicle to give assistance to those that need it. So to say that there are no procedures and guidelines is not true because we already have our SOP that covers our monthly payments for the recipients; all of them, whether it is through bank mode or whether it is through vouchers.

After that when they came, we already had an existing paying platform. So the only additional work that needs to be done is to, they were saying, “okay, we are going to top up the amount”. Because we have been doing this every month by paying our recipients, all we needed to do with the approved amount that was given to us was to top it up, add the amount and just pay the bank accounts or print the vouchers. So that was the process.

There was no need to establish a new procedure, the only difference is the top up amount that is, the amount that will be paid to the particular beneficiaries in that situation; that is the only difference. But the procedures and processes were already there. It is how payment will be done and the steps that need to be taken to be done. So that is how we did it.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Yes.

MR. R. FATIAKI.- So there was no need for any additional procedures. It is just the topping up of the amount.

The other thing that is mentioned here about the reviews. For the Committees information, the reviews is a consistent activity of the Department/Ministry in trying to address the cases that are coming in. We are all fully aware of the number of cases coming in every year. The amount is immense and so one of our strategies to bring the balance or the numbers down is to review cases. For the Committees’ information, from August last year till February this year under the Poverty Benefit Scheme Programme we have reviewed 3,300 and the total number of recipients is 25,000 and out of that they have terminated 2,561 cases as a result of our reviews. With the Care and Protection, a total of 4,832 recipients, beneficiaries under this programme from August to February this year, we have reviewed 824 cases, other than that 274 were terminated because they have been discovered that they no longer qualify for this programme. And then for the Social Pension Scheme, which is 34,465 on our books, we have reviewed 1,590 and out of that, we have terminated 623 cases because again we have discovered that they do not qualify for it anymore.

To say that we do not review, I just want to correct the forum here that, that is an ongoing process. This is a strategy that we use whether there is a disaster or no disaster, which is part of our responsibility and is factored into our Annual Corporate Plan. This is for the Committee's information.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- We are not actually saying that this is what should be done, we are just asking that this is the advice that came from the Office of the Auditor-General. So, do I take it that the Ministry does not concur with the advice of the OAG that you need to review your SOPs?

MR. R. FATIAKI.- The comment, Sir is the review of the beneficiaries, I think point two in the recommendation on page 5 – “The Ministry should update their lists of beneficiaries and continually review the beneficiaries of their entitlements.” As I said, this is what we do, it is an ongoing activity of the Ministry to review our cases because of the number of applications that are coming in every year. Every year in our Annual Corporate Plan, this is one of the activities that we factor in.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, through you Mr. Deputy Chairperson, PS as I asked earlier on, this is to do with the disaster. Disaster does not have eyes to choose social welfare recipients as against the rest of the people. The OAG Report indicates that the plan that you had for the Social Protection Programme recipients was not only confined to your registered recipients but to others as well. That is why we have just heard from the Director there that when you reviewed, out of 25,000 you took out around 800 or something and then there was another review, you found that they were probably not members or they were not honest in submitting their reports under your present system. So, the question that I would like to raise is, it is on that that we are raising questions. We have a disaster here, we have DISMAC, another legislation on its own; you have this one here to do with welfare recipients. So, when it comes to do with taxpayer's money, you understand PS, we are the watchdogs here for Parliament that is why we are raising this question. Was it purely straight to the recipients or outside of the recipients as well?

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- Honourable Members, Sir, it was directly to the recipients. In no way we would ever make any payment outside of the beneficiaries list that we have. So, only those who are actually on the payment for the beneficiaries. I think the issue just to clarify whether they were in the affected areas or non-affected areas. Now, I think in the *TC Winston* there were 12 priority affected areas that were clearly demarcated. Now, these were severely affected areas, they were the red zones but we know, the effect was basically all over Fiji of *TC Winston*. So I think what they were interpreting was those within the red zone or those outside the red zone.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- PS and Director, thank you very much for the explanations that has been given. Just out of interest of the Committee, how many recipients altogether was involved in this for the direct beneficiaries of this \$20 million pay-out?

MR. R. FATIAKI.- My apologies, I did not provide that but we have the figures with us. For the Poverty Benefit Scheme is roughly about 24,000 recipients because there are three different programmes.

- i) Poverty Benefit Scheme;

- ii) Care and Protection Allowance; and
- iii) Social Pension Scheme.

I can provide all those figures. Roughly, it was 24,000 for Poverty Benefit Scheme, 4,000 for Care and Protection Allowance and about 18,000 for the Social Pension Scheme; the elderly - these are individuals.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- (Inaudible).

MR. R. FATIAKI.- It is a one-off payment. When the programme came up, if you note in our response, there were different amounts, \$600 was given for the Poverty Benefit Scheme because this e households; the target is households not just individuals. Care and Protection Allowance and Social Pension Scheme was \$300. When it first came up the idea was to pay the monthly instalments, say for the next three months after *TC Winston*. However, the decision was made that it should be a one-off payment. Instead of paying the three months, we paid the \$600 for the Poverty Benefit Scheme which is \$100 per month and then \$200 for Poverty Benefit Scheme and \$100 for Care and Protection Allowance and Social Pension Scheme. So, that is the amount that was factored in then.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you for that, Director. The other question is the audit findings – the absence of the Cabinet decision on the grant. Has the Ministry been able to furnish this Cabinet decision to the auditors especially the basis of this pay-out?

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- Deputy Chair, this was the time of disaster. So, as far as we are concerned, the National Disaster Control was in full authority that time and this was an executive decision. So, it was from the Minister for Disaster Management to the World Food Programme, provide funding, funding came and then to us and our Minister at that time and also the Ministry for Economy who were able to put together this contribution by the State to supplement what is being provided from outside.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- You are saying that during this time, this audit finding of Cabinet decision for the grant is not relevant?

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- Yes, because we were operating at the time, we were being briefed at the Disaster Management Meeting that the full authority was actually with the National Disaster Control and we went by that.

MOE REP.- Thank you, Honourable Member. We have seen here that the funding was a donor fund. So, for ODA funding, when it is deposited into the CFA Account it becomes Government money. So, the processes apply here. Once it is released from the budget, it is the authority in itself. Budget is part of the authority for the utilisation of fund. So, what the Ministry was supposed to do in that manner was to formalise the process. In the absence of the Cabinet decision, the Ministry was supposed to put up a paper, a request to Cabinet for the formal approval in order for the Ministry to execute the programme with that additional funding.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Thank you. Through you, Mr. Deputy Chair, some clarifications as well, PS. Thank you for those comments from the Ministry of Economy.

The clarification that I seek here, this rehabilitation, which kicked in after the declaration of the disaster under DISMAC: the 30-day period. After the 30-day period then this kicked in. But I am hearing the PS saying that directive was given by DISMAC. Under that Act, you can only do that after the declaration has been given then rehabilitation starts to kick in.

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- During that period Sir, disaster declaration.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Ministry of Economy, on that?

MOE REP.- Thank you, Honourable Member. For an emergency assistance according to the Procurement Guideline, the emergency period is normally within a 30-day period before it can be extended through the Decree or whatever regulation says. So normally it is within a 30 –day period. Thank you.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- After the 30-day period, this money was given to

MOE REP.- It can be within the 30-day period or after the 30-day period, but it will be covered in the Emergency Decree.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Was a declaration done for this disaster?

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- Yes, it was declaration and also there was an extension of declaration.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. We will move on to the next issue.

AUDIT REP.- Deputy Chairman, I would like to clarify. The Ministry is providing its response based on the recommendations in our draft report. As you can see our report to the Parliament, there is only one recommendation. So that is where the confusion is. They are not agreeing with the recommendations which we have already given such as the update of the list of beneficiaries. This has already been resolved at the exit meeting. Maybe we can stick to the recommendations in the general report.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- No, it is all right. We will go issue by issue. Next?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Deputy Chairman, regarding the second point. The fund that was given to \$20 million and not all has been utilised. We can see the balance of \$0.3 million was returned to the Ministry of Economy. Can we have some explanations on this whether the initial request that was made, how did the \$20 million come about and the refund that was made?

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- I would like to just make a comment, we have seen the final report and as I understand there is only one recommendation, but the whole idea of the PAC process is that we know that issues were raised and we are here to discuss all those issues whether it came in a draft form or after the exit interview we noted that most of the

audit issues that were raised have been resolved. But nonetheless since audit issues were raised, it becomes the responsibility of the Committee to look into that.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Ministry for Economy - \$0.3 million?

MR. R. FATIAKI.- Chairman and the Members of the Committee, these were some of the cases that during the time of disaster, when payments were done after deposits had been made, vouchers had been printed and then we discovered that some of these people do not exist anymore. In our agreement with Westpac, our vendor is that after a certain period of time, if accounts are not active then that amount is retired. Likewise vouchers, if it is not printed, it is returned. At the time when was payment was running, it was to all who were in our books and in a way it was positive to us in a way because we were able to identify cases that were no longer active in the system. So, that is one of the reasons why that balance of \$0.3 million was returned.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Whether they were actually inactive or due to logistical difficulties?

MR. R. FATIAKI.- Normally, Sir, again with active accounts, if it is not for several months, if it is not withdrawn, so like I said that with the agreement with the vendor is that. If they do not come back and say, "I am still alive", that is another way where we monitor is that we hold payments. So if they do not come back and say, "I am still here", then the money comes back. But if they are no longer which means there is no response coming to say that I did not receive mine. In that process, some people who had missed out, they came to us, we backdated the payments but that is the process that we do with some of our recipients.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you.

We will move onto the next one – 8.2 - Limited Access to HFHI Records.

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- Mr. Deputy Chairperson, maybe I will just begin with it and I would like to focus on one, some of the cards being given without funds. One of the key issues after the cyclone was the damage to the communication infrastructure. So, in some areas the cards were given only when there is Vodafone connectivity because it is a Vodafone based platform, only when there is Vodafone connectivity, but some of them because of the network fluctuations, it would have affected the loading of the card. We do know that we have responded to clients that had complained that they could not swipe their cards because there was no money there by basically connecting back to Vodafone.

That is one issue, but we can certainly check on what has been highlighted by the audit just to verify that it is still an issue and also the issue about some of the clients being given cards but not living in the affected areas. I think we need to understand that there was a lot of displacement of people after the disaster. So, they were given because they were from the affected areas but because of the deteriorating state, maybe the house is not there, they had to move elsewhere and most of the people from the maritime had moved to the mainland basically.

The fact that they were given cards because they were living, I do not think is an issue. The issue here is they were from the affected area but they were living in those unaffected areas

which is to me was basically the demarcation between the red zone and those in the non-red zone. But clearly, we did not give cards to those who were not in the red zones. The Help for Home was only for the affected households in the 12 clearly demarcated severely affected areas which we know was already mapped out by NDMO.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- PS, I believe these are the records of anomalies that were highlighted resulting from the Help for Homes Initiative Programme. We believe there were some court cases as well and people were charged and obviously they were to do with the mismanagement of funds. Why are those not appearing here?

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- We work with Ministry for Economy in this programme. We looked after the distribution of the cards to the public. The Ministry for Economy looks after the auditing, the delivery and also to oversight the vendors who had participated in the programme. We all know it raised quite a lot of concern by the people because some of the vendors that were on board basically did not comply with their contractual obligations and it led to a lot of public agony and public outcry because materials were delivered in partly, some were delivered in a very delayed manner and also some were delivered to some location inconvenient to the recipient for that matter which was a big issue. I think the ground level reality is still there.

Also the cases before the police, the cases have gone to court. We have also participated with the Ministry of Economy in that because one of the key components in this programme was the incorporation of the False Information Act which people that need to make a declaration that the information that they provided was true because it is a public money that has been utilised in that exercise. The Government was in no way to tolerate people that want to take financial advantage of the money as given by the State. Those were the cases before the court. It was quite a tedious exercise. The ones that has been crushed by the court, I think is about 23, we just finished taking back their materials as of last week; returning it back to them. But we were partners in this regard for this exercise.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- PS, the audit finding about recipients registered with fictitious Voter Registration Number. Can you just elaborate on that finding? How did the fictitious Voter Registration Number and probably OAG too can also highlight to the Committee on this particular audit finding?

AUDIT REP.- Deputy Chair, in the Fijian Elections Office website it is available for us to view the registration numbers of registered voters. So, that is where we cross-checked the numbers provided against what was available in the website of the Fijian Elections Office (FEO).

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- In terms of the numbers that are recorded here.

AUDIT REP.- The numbers appearing in the report are the numbers provided by the Ministry so we took those numbers and we cross-checked against the FEO website and they were not appearing on the website.

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- Mr. Deputy Chairman, we can take this further because one of the key requirements is, you need to have a photo identification and voter registration card was one of them including FNPF, passport and driving licence and they were also part of

the team as well. We had Fijian Elections Office as well, including Births, Deaths and Marriages Office (BDM). We have seen the list, we can quickly revert to Fijian Elections Office to find out what is the anomaly. We take note of the comments being raised by the OAG.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Deputy Chairman, can we be provided what are these registration recipient identification number because it says here, it is voter registration identification number but it looks like the numbers do not match at all. Some have only six numbers, some have more than six numbers so definitely they will not be from the voter identification number process.

Also, Table 24.6, one of the recipients, the first recipient is receiving \$7,000. Can we get an elaboration on those details here? The one at Korovou Prison Complex.

MR. R. FATIAKI.- Deputy Chairperson, these are some of the cases that would have like, for example, they are working in prison but their houses are destroyed in the village. For example, if some of them maybe working as Correction Officers but they are from Votua in Ba. Their houses were damaged and because their houses are written under their names, some of them used their current addresses instead of their home addresses where the houses were. Those were some of the issues here.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. We will move on to the next one. Unbudgeted Expenses - Diversion of Funds to Cater for DISMAC Operation.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- A supplementary question regarding what PS just mentioned about the False Information Act and the cases that were involved. Now that you have started returning the items back to those recipients after the Court ruling. How does the Ministry intend to rectify all these years when they were in the Court system where they were not given any assistance at all?

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- We worked, like I said, not in isolation in this particular regard. We went in to intervene because people were very concerned that the Court had dismissed their case and the materials were still with the Police. So we went in from this angle because we wanted them to return their building materials and get on to build their homes. So that is the angle that we came in from. We report any cases where we think there is fraud, we think there is double-dipping and where we think members of the households have actually been dishonest. The cases that do come, we do report in that particular regard and we do know there was a lot of dishonesty that was happening during that time. So there are still cases before the Court and with the Police under the Help for Home Initiative.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Those particular instances, the processes that were involved; filling of forms. Some of the recipients were not able to fill in the forms on their own. So most of them were basically filled by someone else and they are being told to sign because first of all they cannot read, they cannot write; how does the Ministry tackle those issues?

MR. R. FATIAKI.- Mr. Deputy Chairperson and Members of the Committee, before we engaged in the exercise, our officers were briefed about the form. In the form every step as clearly stated, they are briefed to read out the questions that are there in the form and once

they come to the end and if they agree, because they will be filling in the forms and then the officers verifies and signs the forms. In cases when people are not literate, again if it is a language problem, we use our different officers from different ethnic groups to interpret for those particular people who are not able to. So, we have people across the board of ethnic groups in our offices and so they do that.

They only sign after they have read out the information to the applicant that this is the information and they also read out the provisions in the False Information Act that if they are giving us false information, they are liable to be prosecuted and pay a certain amount of money or imprisonment. That is the argument that they use in court saying that they were not sure or not clear about the form yet they still signed it.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. We will move on to the next issue, 8.4 – Unbudgeted Expenses – Diversion of Funds to cater for DISMAC Operations.

MS. A. APOLE.- Mr. Deputy Chairperson, the Ministry staff who were engaged in the DISMAC operations as per the NDMO Circular, the fund that was utilised was upon the advice from that Circular which was to be met internally by the Ministry. So, all the funds that were utilised in that exercise was authorised by our Chief Accounting Officer.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Members any questions?

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Just some clarification from the Ministry for Economy on that. Based on the findings of the OAG, this decision taken by the PS, was it in conformity with how funds were to be transferred and utilised?

MOE REP.- Thank you Honourable Member, Mr. Deputy Chairperson, for the utilisation of funds, we have noted here three diversion of funds without authority because the process should have been the application of virement from one allocation to another within the same SEGs or in the same Head. In this instance, the Ministry should have put up a virement requesting for the transfer and the utilisation of funds.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Further to that, through you Deputy Chairperson, PS the findings of OAG all along has been towards the SOPs not in place. We understand fully where you are coming from in terms of the disaster, it is an act of God, et cetera but in terms of ensuring that there is uniformity in the way we decide things through processes and procedures. What would be your views on this?

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- Thank you Mr. Deputy Chairperson, we take note of the issues being raised by the Ministry of Economy. I knew I had discussed with their Permanent Secretary at that time, probably we did not have it written that we needed to fund it from within, but we take note of what needs to be done in that process. Also on top of that, with this programme we did not have any logistic funding and that put pressure on us. That was something that we were quite mindful about. We had to get the job done, we had to look on how to fund the logistics within but at the end of the day these were the barriers, I would say looking back.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- That has been an ongoing issue with the Ministry. You have been given additional task but they do have the necessary budget. The question that we

have been asking, PS, whether there is a need to ask for additional budget in terms of the resources that you have and the task that also might help in your operations. These are issues that have been appearing in the past and continues to appear on the diversion and the additional responsibilities that the Ministry is given during this time.

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- Thank you very much, Sir, for the question. Deputy Chair, maybe I just give in a small highlight to that regard. We have factored those issues as mentioned by the Honourable Radrodro into the budget for the fiscal year taking into account climate change and also gender. Just for mention to the Committee, we have now expanded our focus. There is one portfolio called Gender and Climate Change because we wanted to ensure that we have the resources needed for disasters and also for climate change.

For the new programme, I am happy to say that we now have a logistics budget already provided. So, I am sure we will not have the same issue that we went through at that time. I think what was unexpected was, we were given a programme at a time that was needed and that we had to implement it in the best productive way that we could ever be but within the resources that we have. That was the issue.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- PS, the care programme, is the Ministry also involved in that?

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- Yes.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- You have the necessary budget for it to

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- We now have the logistics budget which makes us, so thank you. There are six components to the Care Programme by the Fijian Government, two of them is implemented by the Ministry and we just started yesterday.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- (Inaudible)

MR. J. KOROIVUETA. – Is the Home Care and also the Welfare Care. Home Care is somewhat similar to Help for Home but instead of just building structural damage, it also includes household effects; that is the difference. It is clearly categorised and there is a clear guideline that has been given out to us.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Concentrating is only on the western parts of Viti Levu. Why is that so? There is also flooding in the other parts?

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- This one is only in the North and from Ra to Sigatoka and we do know the affected communities. How it is implemented is, we go to the affected communities whereas before we usually cluster it in the main centres where there was connectivity. This one is much more different.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- It say for Viti Levu, why not the other parts which were also affected by the flood?

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- Yes, this was the advice that was given to us that we focus in Ra down to Sigatoka and also in Labasa. We still do not have as yet the one for Kadavu. So, that is the information being provided to us.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Members, I believe that we have completed the first part of the submission, that is, issues that were raised in regards to *TC Winston*. So, on this note we will take a small break and we will resume our submission after 15 minutes.

The Committee adjourned at 10:35 a.m.

The Committee resumed at 10.56 a.m.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Members, we will move on with the written submission and I would like to allow once again the Permanent Secretary to take us from issue 24.7 which is 8.5 as per their written response - , Liability at Period End – Unpaid 2016 Overtime Payments. Thank you.

MS. V. DUVUDUVUKULA.- Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chairman. On the response on 24.7 as per the auditors' recommendation, we did make the payment at the beginning of the next financial year. The main reason is because there was lack of time to verify all the officers' overtime that we had to gather from other divisions. These are the overtime for the officers who took part in the HFH programme.

As mentioned by PS, there was no logistics given for this payment of overtime, which is the reason that we did not pay the overtime at the end of July 2016. That is why the payment was made to the officers the following financial year 2016-2017 and approved by the Madam Minister.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- So we do take note that these payments have been done, yes?

MS. V. DUVUDUVUKULA.- Yes, Sir.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. So I think that resolves the matter. Honourable Radrodro.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- It would also be a result of your unexpected change in financial year, you should have also put it here, comments.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. We will move onto the next issue, that is, Advance Payments at Year End – Misstatements in the General Ledger System.

MS. A. POLE.- Thank you, Sir. On 24.8 as highlighted by the OAG's comment to avoid misstatement in the receipts and expenditures. In 2016 there were only 6 months from January to June. As this is always the case from the previous years, because the Social Protection Programme pay-out always falls on the beginning of next month, 5th, but the payment was done at the end of July in 2016 considering the balance that is available and with consultation with the Ministry of Economy, we managed to pay this, to avoid the late payment to the Social Protection Programme recipients.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Members, any question on that? I think that has been rectified by the Ministry. The next issue is 8.8 – Mis-statements of Social Protection Programs expenditure Recorded in the General Ledger.

MS. V. DUVUDUVUKULA.- Thank you Sir, for 24.9 we noted the recommendation of the Auditor-General. We had verified the vouchers and we ensure that in future proper adjustments to be done as it is currently. I have added that when we do payments for the Social Protection Programme pay out, if there is any budget that is not available at that current time, we always find ways to make the payment and we always justify when the balance is available. Thank you.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- The Office of Auditor-General, was the justification sufficient enough to rectify this audit issue and come to a conclusion that it has been resolved? Any comments? Since they are using another allocation to balance the books.

AUDIT REP.- Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chairperson. We would like to stress here that it is important that the Ministry regularise this and if they have made SEG 5 payment from SEG 4, they need to correct it when the budget is given in the next quarter.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Has the Ministry rectified and corrected this as of now, as we speak?

MS. V. DUVUDUVUKULA.- Yes, Sir.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. Honourable Members any questions? 8.9 - Care and Protection Programme – Ineligible Recipients. Can we just have some brief information of what this programme is all about before we move on to the audit issue? Thank you.

MR. R. FATIAKI.- Thank you Mr. Deputy Chairperson and Honourable Members of the Committee. The Care and Protection Allowance is one of the Social Protection Programmes that we issue to children, the target here is children. Children from poor single parent households. So, the definition of a child is 18 years and below, so if the child is above 18 years, he/she is no longer considered as a child. So, the assistance is given to such households and this is where the audit reports have come, is that once they turn 18 years they should be out of the system and this is given to single parents, before it used to be single mothers but now it is single parents meaning that men who are looking after their own children can also apply if they are finding difficulties to support their own children.

So, this is given until a child turns 18 years but then again in the process, we do review if we see that they are better off, now that they have improved their status then we exit them from the system and there is another programme which is called Income Generating Programme where we give them seed funding, identify cases such as this. We help them with seed funding for them to graduate from the system that is the Care Protection Allowance.

Yes, I would admit that this is one of the challenges that we face and the review of cases. As I said, only up to 8 years then they should be out of the system. Unfortunately in some of the cases, if there are three or five children, and if the eldest child is the one that is registered, it is registered under the child. If the eldest child is the one that appears in the

system, so when the eldest child turns 18, then accordingly the system should terminate, then you have the other children who are still under 18 years who are also part of the family. This is where we face challenges because at the moment we are depending on manual reviews. The system does not flag to us, it is depended on our reviews. Most of the time we come across these types of cases. This is something that we are trying to rectify and we are working with ITC. There is a system that is now being endorsed and we are going to implement it very soon where the applications once it is entered into the system, once the child turns 18 the system should flag it and tell us that this case is up for review. That is what we are trying to do to improve this. At the moment it is depended on our manual reviews. For the Committee's information we are not just reviewing the Care and Protection Programme, we are also reviewing the Poverty Benefit Scheme and the Social Pension Scheme. It is quite a big exercise throughout the year for us to continue to do our review because that is something that we are always trying to improve.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- PS, I believe I asked that question out of interest because we do get some issues raised by the members of the public.

First, I take it now that this scheme is for both the parents whether a single mother or a single father.

The other question out of interest is, what is the cut off income criteria for this if a single parent wants to apply, Sir?

MR. R. FATIAKI.- ... below the poverty line. We are working at the one that

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Tax bracket has now increased to \$30,000.

MR. R. FATIAKI.- You might have to review that?

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- That amount has been increased but when it comes to the poverty line, I think there is a different calculation for that. Any idea, Ministry of Economy, on what is the cut off amount for the figure? Is it still 16?

MS. A. APOLE.- Deputy Chair, it would depend mostly on the hourly rate of the parent if he or she is being paid less than \$2.68 an hour.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Then they qualify?

MS. A. APOLE.- Yes, they qualify for that.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. So it is based upon the hourly rate?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Can we just get a comment from MOE since that is their policy, increasing the rate from 16 to 30 to confirm to us if that has also increased the poverty line threshold?

MS. A. WAQANISAU.- Thank you, Honourable Member. For statistics purpose according to the Bureau of Statistics analysis, yes, that is so, anyone that earns below that tax bracket threshold will automatically go into that poverty line.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Ministry of Social Welfare, are you going to incorporate this amount in your regulation as a cut off amount?

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- Yes, if we focus on the Poverty Benefits Scheme, if you look at the poverty population, we can divide them into five levels and it is the lowest quintile that we target. We commonly call it the poorest of the very poor that we focus on. But you know there are different classes of poverty and there is certainly a poverty, like as being said by the good lady, poverty line. There is poverty assessment, we have the poverty statistics for our country but the figures for Fiji was done before *TC Winston*. Now we do not know, what is the reality?

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- And these figures will only come from the Bureau of Statistics?

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- Correct, Sir. I think some has already been provided in the December latest release which is a basic data compilation of what is available and it is continually going to be put out. Some of it was actually poverty data.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Yes, we will move on to the audit issue now.

MR. R. FATIAKI.- Honourable Chair, I have alluded briefly to the challenges we face. I am not making excuses on the reviews. It is a challenge that we continually face.

At the moment it is manual review so officers pick the cases to be reviewed and how we are going to address these because this has been an ongoing challenge for the past years. The number of cases continue to increase and so we have to be doing reviews and that will take a big chunk of our work.

So we are working as I mentioned, on a system that will be able to flag to us that this child is now turning 18 and then this case is up for review. So that is the strategy that we are setting forth to help us try and address this ongoing issue that is always coming out annually in our reports that reviews need to be done.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- So I guess the criteria depends on the nature of the case as well. That is a whole different process altogether. It does not only take into account the income, probably it also takes into account other factors.

MR. R. FATIAKI.- Yes, we do take into account other factors and likewise most of the information that we get, we get it through the interviews with the recipients. Likewise our observation, honestly I would highlight to this forum, most of the people in this programme are really poor. They come to our offices with children not attending school, struggling, single parents, husbands or partners have deserted them so these are cases we can positively approve because of what we have seen on the ground.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- PS, just a general information and I want to reflect on the Cyclone Assistance Relief Effort (CARE) for Fiji programme that is going to be introduced. There was an announcement by the Government of the day that this will be the certain criteria, but members of the public come and ask more about the scheme.

One of the questions that I have been asked a lot is in regards to the welfare of the school children especially those who were affected. They ask questions like whether the clothes, school uniform and all these things will be covered in that particular scheme. It states in the criteria that you recover household items. So, are things like stationery, books and school uniforms covered in this scheme?

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- Yes, Sir. It is all covered in here.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you.

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- Thank you, the household effects which includes furniture, appliances, clothes, white goods are all included.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you for that, Honourable Members, any questions on 24.10?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Deputy Chairperson, just a question to the Ministry. Taking into account the challenges that you have highlighted in terms of the respective reviews and the number of recipients, 18,000, you can correct me if I am wrong.

MR. R. FATIAKI.- The Care and Protection is almost \$5,000 and the Poverty Benefit Scheme is 25,000 households. So, altogether that is the total amount of recipients from the different programmes.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- The Care and Protection Programme, the recommendation of the auditors is to at least conduct a review annually. Does the Ministry have the resources, say internal audit team to conduct this or may be seek the assistance of the Ministry for Economy to do this exercise on a regular basis or annually as mentioned in the audit recommendation?

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- I think Director has mentioned a way forward was a digital platform which is co-operation with ITC that we have now to be able to synergise the databases at the division and also at central level and we can actually flag up children who are beyond 18. The cut off here is 18 according to the Child Welfare Decree. We are also looking at our own human resources in the next budget because we know the issue about child abuse in Fiji, we really need to build up on this particular issue. So, they are all related in that particular regard; we build up the human resources. We will be able to undertake proper reviews in that particular area because I think over the years we have been seen on the ground but the landscape has required that we actually put ourselves in different areas where the Government is opening up our new offices.

So, that includes, I think to-date we have now opened in Vunisea, Kadavu, Levuka, Lekutu in Bua and Saqani as well.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. We will move onto the next issue 8.12 – Fixed Assets Register Not Updated.

MS. V. DUVUDUVUKULA.- Mr. Deputy Chairperson, on 24.11 we have noted the auditors recommendation and we have taken necessary actions in all the vouchers that has not been verified and incomplete in this case. Currently, there is a way forward that we always ensure that necessary checking is done before the payment is made. Thank you.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- I am sorry, I asked the wrong, one, not actually wrong one but I should have asked this one first – Failure to Implement Internal Control – Payment Anomalies. Any questions on this, Honourable Members? No. So, we will move on to Fixed Assets Register Not Updated.

MR. E. ZINK.- Mr. Deputy Chairperson, in terms of the Fixed Assets Register not Updated, we acknowledge the comments given by the Office of the Auditor-General. It was one of the challenges that we also faced in 2015 but we have put in measures in place to have our fixed assets register updated and we have a team that is currently going around to all offices around the country to update their fixed assets register. So, that is the action that we have taken.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Any questions, Honourable Members? No. We will move on to the last issue I believe and that is 8.13 – Late and Non-retirement of Accountable Advances.

MS. V. DUVUDUVUKULA.- Thank you Mr. Deputy Chairperson, in the next question we note the auditors comments because I believe that these are ongoing issues that we have been facing in the Ministry. Normally, the reason why the officers delay in acquitting their accountable advances as stated in the comments that the delay in programmes being implemented or activities carried out in the field. Some reasons are due to adverse weather conditions, that is why they do not acquit it on time. But currently the Ministry is taking actions in not acquitting accountable advance on time. As a way forward, we always remind them through emails even with the seven days given to clear all accountable advance. And also, we are now strictly monitoring imposing surcharge on officers who are late in submitting their accountable advances.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Accountable advance, does this also include salaries or what are these accountable advances that we are talking about?

MOE REP.- These are for travel, when officers go for travel.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- This is for travel?

MOE REP.- Yes.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- What is the policy now? We had one ministry saying that they have restricted accountable advances. So, if someone is checking into a hotel, once they reach the hotel then the hotel informs the Ministry and then they do the payment. That is how stringent they have become. What are the processes the Ministry is following in order to curb this as it has been an ongoing issue?

MS. V. DUVUDUVUKULA.- For the hotel accommodation, we always follow the Finance Procedures like issuing the Purchase Orders (PO) but there are some hotels that do not accept PO that is where we just process direct payments to the vendors.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Members, any question?

MOE REP.- Just in addition to this. We are requesting the Ministry on the reconciliation part. The RFA accounts, the accountable advance they have not submitted the reconciliation for this financial year. I think they did submit, amended it, so they re-submit. Of course for other reconciliations, for drawing they have not submitted anything to FMIS for this financial year and SLG accounts have submitted, bills account they have not submitted anything. We have been meeting with the Accounting Staff and also we have written to PS. Maybe PS can look into these reconciliations because we are about to close the financial year again. So, if the reconciliations are done on a timely manner, it could assist the Principal Accounts. One of the areas, there was delay in the closing of last financial accounts and the submission of the AFS. So, I will just ask the Ministry to look into this reconciliation issues for this financial year so that we are able to do it in a timely manner.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- PS, any comments?

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- Deputy Chair, yes, we take note of what the Ministry of Economy has rightfully given us. We have also strategized that we are going to boost the department because I think it has been resource stricken as well. Same people working over so many different layers and functions and we are expanding from 110 way back in 2013 and now hitting over 400 now and continue to expand. So, unless we take care of the human resources we will also be faced with these issues of delayed reconciliation, delays in processing and also in the Standard Operating Procedures in meeting timelines because we know it is one of the engines of the Ministry as we continue to build.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, Honourable Members.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Just a question to the PS and the officials as well. What would be your views especially on the disaster management? It is a new frontier there, I mean the extension to the frontier that you are already looking after, that is on SOPs because we have had a lengthy discussion with the Ministry of Disaster Management as well on this. It seems as highlighted by the OAG as something that needs to be factored in.

I am sure your new much enlarged role again is not kind of hampered with in terms of working overtime especially the procedures. What could be your views on that? I understand you have mentioned that you have been having conversations with your counterpart there and again there is a need to have this in place.

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- We have actually in place now a business re-engineering reform where we have actually identified all the processes within the Ministry and we are working with the Civil Service Reform. We basically want to have a Standard Operating Procedure for every process across all departments because unless and until we have that, we will always fail in meeting up to standards and also deviation from what is required from us. That is a process in motion right now. I am actually market, which is one of my key

deliverables,

Honourable

Chair.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Honourable Chair, through you, I would like to make a suggestion that we could have this as a strong recommendation as well in addition to the similar one we made for disaster management.

DISMAC is already empowered to rope in the different ministries and ensure that the SOPs are in place especially for disasters. Thank you, Honourable Chair.

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- Can I just contribute because we work very closely with the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) and the partners. We have contributed in a powerful way towards having a people-centered disaster response. One of the inputs we made for the first time after *TC Winston* because we came into play and we found that there was a lot of abuse by the humanitarian workers who were utilising their role for their own gain. There were a lot of abuses. Abuses against women, children and we put in an instrument called the code of conduct for all humanitarian workers that whoever steps foot in Fiji, they need to sign that code of conduct, basically to safeguard our people, both within and also from humanitarian workers and agencies abroad.

I think the NDMO Act is a very old one. I think UNDP has given full support for the review of the NDMO Act. So I think in no time we should be able to see a modernised National Disaster Management Act. We have also worked on many frontiers from our side was basically that the disaster response need to be gender and socially inclusive which was a key element, two things that was not in the previous disaster response. So this is the angle that we come in. We need to be very inclusive in looking at gender and social inclusiveness because if you look at proportion of affected people, the people who are disadvantaged are disproportionately much more affected than the rest of the communities; the old people, the children, the women, people with disabilities and also those that are poor. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chairman.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. We take note of the fact that for the past few years the responsibility of the department especially in terms of relief and assistance post-disaster has increased a lot. We do hope that necessary changes and regulations are in place to give the Ministry more powers and guidelines to actually continue the increased assistance. We know that there is also a big responsibility which is going to be bestowed on the Ministry and that is the different assistance that has been announced. The Ministry will be taking a very active and essential role in that regard.

On that note, I would like to wish the Ministry all the best for the plans that are underway for them to carry out, probably in the coming weeks and I thank the Ministry for the rectification of the issues that were raised. Most of it has been control measures, resulting from the relief assistance work that was carried out. We do understand that most of the measures were new to the Ministry and of course there were some challenges attached to it including the audit issues that were raised. But it is good to note that with the exit interview, most of the audit issues have been rectified and we take note of that. We also take note of the second recommendation that the Members have said and we will be including that recommendation in our report. On that note, PS I wish and you and your team all the best in the work that you are going to carry out. Are there any final comments before we finally conclude the session?

MR. J. KOROIVUETA.- I just wanted to thank your goodself, Honourable Deputy Chairperson and members of the PAC for the deliberation. Thank you for the well wishes.

The Committee adjourned at 11.32 a.m.