

# **[VERBATIM REPORT]**

## **STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE, LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS PUBLIC HEARING**

### **BILLS**

**Investment Fiji Bill 2022 (Bill No. 05/2022)**



**SUBMITTEE: Residents of Qila Settlement, Taveuni.**  
**VENUE: Mr. Jitendra Naidu's Residence, Qila,  
Taveuni.**  
**DATE: Sunday, 20<sup>th</sup> February, 2022.**

**VERBATIM REPORT OF THE PUBLIC HEARING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE, LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS HELD AT MR. JITENDRA NAIDU'S RESIDENCE, QILA, TAVEUNI, ON SUNDAY, 20TH FEBRUARY, 2022, AT 7.23 P.M.**

**Present**

1. Hon. A.A. Maharaj - Chairman
2. Hon. R.R. Sharma - Deputy Chairperson
3. Hon. Dr. S.R. Govind - Government Member
4. Hon. Ratu S. Matanitobua - Opposition Member
5. Hon. M.D. Bulitavu - Opposition Member

**Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts**

1. Mr. Collin Sowani Yabaki - Director Heritage and Arts
2. Mr. Veniki Nalio - Senior Policy and Convention Officer

**Interviewee/Submittee: Residents of Qila Settlement, Taveuni.**

**In Attendance:**

1. Mr. Fida Hussein
2. Mr. Jitendra Naidu
3. Mr. Raveen Narayan
4. Mr. Rudra Nand Shandil
5. Mr. Niras
6. Mr. Ruven Prasad
7. Mr. Janendra Prasad
8. Mr. Tuicolo
9. Mr. Ajay Shalendra Prasad
10. Mr. Bidday Nand
11. Mr. Waisiki C.

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MR. CHAIRMAN.- Good evening everyone. I shall call the meeting to order now. Before we start, I request Mr. Ruven Prasad, to lead us with a word of prayer.

MR. A.S. PRASAD.- Thank you, Sir. First of all, I would like to thank each and every one for taking out their time to reach the small village of Taveuni Island. I really appreciate it. I would ask everyone to bow their heads for a word of prayer.

(Prayer in Hindi - Mr. Ruven Prasad)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Mr. Prasad, for leading us with a word of prayer. Before we proceed, may I request the Advisory Councillor of Qila District to welcome each and every one who is present here this evening.

MR. J. PRASAD.- *Ni sa bula vinaka*, a warm welcome to you all. As the Advisory Councillor of Qila Settlement, I welcome the honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, who managed to reach up the two kilometres. Thank you.

We are gathered here to discuss something better. We have crisis coming our way, we have difficulties but we have managed to hold hands together so that we can lead a healthy and happy living. The Government that is running at the moment will lead us to good opportunity especially us, those who are elderly, our children and whoever is in need. So with those words, I shall give the floor back to the Committee. May God bless you all, *vinaka*.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Mr. Jitendra Prasad, the Advisory Councillor of Qila Settlement for those welcoming words. On behalf of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, I would like to welcome each and every one who is present right here this evening to be part of the submission that we are collecting at this point in time on the two Bills that is before our Committee - the Heritage Bill 2021, Bill No. 3 of 2021 and the Fiji Investment Bill 2022, Bill No. 5 of 2022.


Those of you who might be aware and those of who might not be aware of what we are going to do this evening, if you have been following Parliament, you might have known for the that whenever a Bill is introduced in Parliament, it is referred to a particular Committee and that Committee happens to be the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights. It is our responsibility as a Team to go out and collect submissions from the general public, get their views, deliberate on it, if there is a need for changes to take place in the Bill that is given to us by Parliament, we make necessary amendments to it and then we report back to Parliament.

(Introduction of honourable Committee Members)

Now, I will request honourable Dr. Govind to briefly take us through the two Bills that we are going to discuss this evening. Later on, we will ask honourable Sharma to explain the Bill in the Hindi language, after which we will go into a question and answer session and discussion on the two Bills. So, I will now hand over to honourable Dr. Govind.

HON. DR. S. GOVIND.- Thank you. Mr. Chairman and honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, the Advisory Councillor of Qila Settlement and all distinguished members, it is a great pleasure this evening to be here in Qila. I think it is the first time a Parliamentary Standing Committee is here in your community, which means that the Parliament of Fiji is here closer to your home to discuss some very important issues which will be explained shortly. I would like to thank you for giving your valuable time and come here in such large numbers. Thank you very much.

First of all, I would like to apologise, I am not the Chairman of the Committee but I am sitting on the chair. The reason I am sitting on the chair is because my leg has a bit of pain. This evening we have come with a very special purpose to discuss the importance of these two Bills. Before law is made on any subject, it is drafted and it is called a Bill. Once the Bill is turned into a law, it is called an Act.



This evening, we have two Bills – the Heritage Bill 2021, Bill No. 3 of 2021 and the Investment Fiji Bill 2022, Bill No. 5 of 2022. I will very brief because I think a lot of you understand

*Hindi* very well. Later on, we will request honourable Sharma, whom I was told is also from Qila, Taveuni, he will speak your language. He will explain to you in *Hindi* about these two Bills.

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The second Bill is a very important Bill called the Investment Fiji Bill 2022, Bill No. 5 of 2022. Last year, there was an Act which was passed by Parliament called the Investment Act. That Act was passed because Fiji needs economic growth, we need potential investors to come into Fiji and invest their money so that jobs are created, our economy can grow so that all sorts of services can be provided to you, such as education, water, sanitation and roads. If we do not have money, then there cannot be any development.

The Investment Fiji Bill 2022 deals with how to promote Fiji's economy abroad and domestically. This is a small Bill. The Bill's main objective is to start up a Fiji Investment Board like the Heritage Council. The Investment Board will be responsible for implementing the Investment Fiji Bill when it becomes an Act and mostly promote Fiji locally and abroad, to bring in more investors into Fiji so that our economy can grow. So you have an opportunity to comment on this Bill on anything to do with investment.

I am sure in Taveuni, there are a lot of local investors. Some have been investing in *yaqona*, *dalo*, agriculture and also in tourism. I am sure you have a lot of things to say.

Without taking much of your time, I would like to hand over to the microphone to Mr. Chairman and then honourable Sharma will speak in Hindi and give an explanation on the two Bills, after which we will give the opportunity to comment, ask questions and talk about the Bills. Thank you so much once again for coming and participating in this important dialogue.

(Explanation on the two Bills in Hindi – Hon. R.R. Sharma)

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MR. J. PRASAD.- I would like to thank the Committee for coming over to Qila. As mentioned earlier, it is a history for us and a pleasure for Taveuni Island. Once again, I thank you

all for coming and visiting us.

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MR. J. PRASAD.- Now, I would like to move on to the Investment Fiji Bill 2022. As we have seen that in Taveuni, there is a lot of potential in agriculture. We mainly deal in *yaqona* and *dalo* basically rootcrops. I think 90 per cent of the people in Taveuni are farmers.

I think it is really important that there should be some form of investment in the agriculture sector to be provided here. What I mean to say is that, for *dalo* export, there is no cold storage for *dalo*. *Dalo* is basically sent from here to Suva for processing, they pack it up in Suva and then they export it. We see that the prices increase as it travels down to Suva, so that cost can be recovered and given to farmers. Farmers will be really happy to produce more.

I have seen that a lot of people have moved out of Taveuni. Even the younger generation look for white collar jobs. On the other hand, we see that there is a good amount of money in agriculture. I think the people of Taveuni will try to save their fuel and stay back and invest in agriculture.

I am one of the graduates from the University of the South Pacific. As for me, I am an Accountant here in Taveuni and I have seen that farming is really an enjoyable process but it depends on how you go with it. So if there is some form of investment coming from overseas investors, I think people will try to stay back in Taveuni and invest more in agriculture to produce *dalo*, *yaqona*, cassava and all kinds of rootcrops that we can find here in Taveuni. Thank you.

(Translation in Hindi – Hon. R.R. Sharma)

(Question in Hindi by Mr. P. Narayan)

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Ladies and gentlemen, there is a suggestion from Mr. Narayan regarding transportation from Natuvu to Taveuni. He has requested if there is any investor who would like to invest in getting a bigger vessel that can transport trucks, cars, et cetera, from Buca Bay and Natuvu to Taveuni. He mentioned that sometimes, the boat does not go in a week where all his produce like *yaqona*, *dalo* and other root crops, are held back in Taveuni. So if there is any potential investor who would like to invest in that, they will be most happy about it.

MR. J. NAIDU.- Thank you. I have an opinion regarding the Investment Fiji Bill 2022 that I would like to emphasise on. Tourism was the only sector we have been looking at that we have invested heavily on in Taveuni because of the sites that we have, mostly at the Tagimoucia Lake, the Bouma Waterfall and the Waitavala Water Slide. Because of this lockdown, I am focussing on where we will go.

During the pandemic, there were no tourists and hotels have been locked down. There was no income for the Government, hotels, et cetera. So I would emphasise that investment in agriculture should be our major concern.

As we have seen, all our brothers and sisters who were working in the tourism sector ended up doing gardening and farming. So we can encourage our children to have education but they could invest their money in agriculture so that they can be our major producers of food not for their living but for export. Thank you.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Thank you, Sir. We have noted your concern and surely we will pass the message to the relevant authorities.

(Translation in Hindi by Hon. R.R. Sharma)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Mr. Naidu for that approach and suggestion that you have given and approach that needs to be taken with regards to investment. One thing that we need to realise is, when we are talking about investment, for example, in agriculture, there are a couple of different types of investments that can take place.

Local investors who are willing to invest in terms of agriculture, there are two types of farming - subsistence farming and commercial farming. If there is an investment, we would like to see investment into commercial farming. Subsistence farming is something totally different and it is not covered under the Investment Act or the Investment Fiji Bill 2022.

What we can do is try to look for potential investors who can have joint venture with the local farmers, for example, for export of cassava. A lot of cassava is being exported and recently, an investor invested somewhere in the Western Division (I stand to be corrected), I think in Ba.

There is a difference between potato chips and potato fries. With potato fries, you do not just have to cut the potato and fry it. You mashed it up, make it into powder form, then you defreeze it into cubes and then fry it. That is known as French fries that you might get at McDonalds.

The carbohydrate content in potato is quite high. There is a healthy option, such as cassava chips because that is gluten free. So an investor has invested in a particular factory whereby he is going to come up with this cassava chips. We have so many cassava farmers in Fiji. There was a Fiji citizen who has migrated to Australia, he brings in cassava chips from Europe and distributes it in Australia. So he wants raw cassava fries so if anyone can start exporting it from Fiji.

An investor has stepped in to increase the value of a particular product. Cassava might have been exported in a couple of cents or dollars per kilogramme but this is now adding value to it. So is that what you are saying?

It is not that we are going to invest in a farmer who is a subsistence farmer. That is done through the Ministry of Agriculture but in here, if you are going to invest in farming, we need to look



into commercial farming. We know that with the two main commodities in Taveuni - *dalo* and *yaqona*, may be in future someone might be interested in setting up a factory here.

Investment Fiji's responsibility is to look for a potential investor who can come and invest in Taveuni and start processing *dalo* here. As mentioned by the gentleman who was speaking before, this is the responsibility of Investment Fiji, not just locally but overseas as well.

Overseas investors can come and invest in different sectors or places where our local investors have not invested in. If they are trying to collaborate with the local investor to invest, then that is why we are coming up with Investment Fiji. Investment Fiji, in very layman's term, would set up an office that is going to implement the Investment Act that was enacted by Parliament in June 2021. The Act is already there which states how people can come in, get registered, et cetera. But this office is going to ensure that the implementation of the Act takes place and how it is going to take place, so that is the difference and what the Advisory Councillor was talking about. I hope that clarifies.

Are there any other comments or questions?

Since there are no other comments or questions, I now hand over to honourable Bulitavu to wrap up this evening's session and then honourable Sharma will have a *Talanoa* session with all those who are present here. Thank you.

(Vote of Thanks – Hon. M.D. Bulitavu)

The Committee adjourned at 8.26 p.m.