



STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE, LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Review of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji Annual Report 2017-2018



PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI
Parliamentary Paper No. 33 of 2023

3 April 2023

Published and Printed by the Department of Legislature, Parliament House, SUVA



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CHAIRPERSON'S FOREWORD



The Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights ('**Committee**') was referred the *Parliament of the Republic of Fiji Annual Report 2017-2018* ('**Parliament Report**') to review and table its findings back to Parliament.

The Parliament of the Republic of Fiji is vested with the power and authority to make laws for the country.

This Report captures the work of the Committee, its findings and recommendations, with respect to the Parliament Report.

The Committee reviewed the Parliament Report, identified issues, which were deliberated on extensively and independently formed its view and stance on these. The Committee sent a correspondence regarding the aforementioned issues to the Department of Legislature, for clarification.

At the conclusion of the review, the Committee noted that the Parliament has done a commendable job during the reported period, and resolved to highlight the certain key achievements in this Report.

The Committee also resolved that it would be necessary to put forth a few recommendations for consideration of the Department of Legislature and Parliament, and these are as follows:

- i) The Committee recommends that Parliament continue with its efforts in promoting gender equality and empowerment.
- ii) For the purpose of maintaining its efforts regarding SDG 10; the Committee recommends the following:
 - that Parliament consider improving accessibility to the Complex by fast-tracking the installation of aids such as direction signs and other means of accessibility, which cater for persons who have mobility issues; and
 - that Parliament consider introducing other initiatives such as Hansard being published in the different vernacular we have in Fiji and in braille, which would promote inclusivity.
- iii) The Committee recommends that a clear demarcation of the 'Parliament precinct' is considered by the House in order to facilitate easier accessibility to the Parliament precinct, which also contributes to the achievement of SDG 10
- iv) The Committee recommends the expeditious digitisation of all Parliamentary Hansard.
- v) In terms of the Parliament Space/Infrastructure; the Committee recommends that space should be provided for separate offices for the various parties represented in Parliament.


- vi) The Committee recommends that the awareness and public engagement programmes for the Parliament, 'Meet the Speaker' and 'Parliament Bus', be revamped to include all Members of Parliament, opening up more opportunities for engagement with the public.

I commend the representatives of the Department of Legislature, for its support and cooperation, by providing prompt responses to the Committee's queries.

I would like to acknowledge the members of the Committee of the previous Parliament for their work, which assisted the current Committee in completing the review.

I would also like to thank my colleagues who are part of the Committee, Hon. Iliesa Vanawalu (Deputy Chairperson), Hon. Mosese Bulitavu, Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua and Hon. Faiyaz Koya, for their work on the review.

Finally, the Committee's thanks go to the secretariat staff, whose work and assistance enabled the Committee to carry out its work.


HON. RATU RAKUITA VAKALALABURE
Chairperson

COMMITTEE REMIT AND MEMBERS

The Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights ('Committee') is established under Section 70 of the *Constitution of the Republic of Fiji* and Standing Order 109 of the *Standing Orders of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji*. The Committee's mandate and functions are provided under Standing Order 109 (2) and 110 (1) (a)-(d) & (f). The Committee consists of the following Members:



Hon. Ratu Rakuira Vakalabure
(Chairperson)



Hon. Iliesa Vanawalu
(Deputy Chairperson)



Hon. Mosese Bulitavu
(Member)



Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua
(Member)



Hon. Faiyaz Koya
(Member)

COMMITTEE SECRETARIAT

Staff

- Mr. Ira Komaisavai – Senior Committee Clerk
- Mr. Jackson Cakacaka – Deputy Committee Clerk
- Ms. Darolin Vinisha – (former) Committee Assistant
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights (**‘Committee’**) of the 2018-2022 Parliament was referred the *Parliament of the Republic of Fiji Annual Report 2017-2018* (**‘Parliament Report’**) on 29 July 2022, pursuant to Standing Order 38 (2) of the Standing Orders of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. The previous Committee was mandated to review the Parliament Report and table its findings back to Parliament, but had not been able to complete the review, due to the dissolution of the previous Parliament.

The current Committee, had been referred the Parliament Report, after it was reinstated in this Parliament (2022-2026 Parliament), on 13 February 2023 and took on the review responsibility.

1.1 Procedure and Programme

The Committee began the review on 14 March 2023 and resolved to continue from where the previous Committee had left off, starting with reviewing the evidence collected, which is in the form of responses provided by the Department of Legislature, to the questions formulated by the previous Committee based on the issues it identified.

The final step of the review process was the compilation of all issues identified from the evidence received, which were then deliberated on and the Committee forms its own independent view on all issues identified. The Committee then compiles a Report on the review that includes a few recommendations, which was also reviewed before being finalised for tabling before Parliament.

1.2 Parliament of the Republic of Fiji – Department of Legislature

The Parliament of the Republic of Fiji is constituted by Chapter 3 of the *Constitution of the Republic of Fiji* (**‘Constitution’**) and its administration is headed and managed by the Speaker of Parliament and the Secretary-General to Parliament.

Supporting the Parliament is the Parliament Secretariat that is known as the Department of Legislature (**‘Department’**), which comes under the authority of the Secretary-General to Parliament and directions from the Speaker of Parliament. The Department comprises of two (2) divisions, namely the Legislative Process (now known as the Legislative Services Division) and the Administration, Finance, and IT Services (now known as the Corporate Services Division). Both divisions contribute to ensuring that Parliament fulfills its constitutional functions.

2.0 DELIBERATION AND FINDINGS BY THE COMMITTEE

2.1 Deliberation by the Committee – Issues identified

This part of the report provides a summary of the deliberation conducted by the previous Committee, which the current Committee based its review on. The Committee commenced the review by continuing from where the previous Committee had ended its work; and below is a summary of the key issues identified, which were consequently addressed and clarified. The clarifications provided are captured in part 2.2.

The Department promotes staff development in terms of further education and relevant training, which the Committee commended but also wanted to see how much effort and resources the Department had placed on it.

The Committee noted that there are certain responsibilities with the Department that needed to be elaborated on, such as:

- the support, specifically in terms of work tools, provided to the Parliament and staff in carrying out their functions;
- the promotion of good working conditions, which include work hours, rest times, remuneration (Overtime pay), and Members of Parliament and staff welfare; and
- the efforts towards achieving certain goals/targets of the sustainable development goals, such as SDG 5 (Empowerment of Women and Girls) and SDG 10 (Reducing Disability based Inequality).

There were discussions about other aspects within the scope of administration of the Department, such as the plans regarding the Parliament infrastructure in terms of acquiring additional space for Parliament's use, the status of the 'Meet the Speaker' and the 'Parliament Bus' programme, and the details regarding certain expenditure for the reported year.

Furthermore, it was noted that there was tremendous support given to Parliament through the UNDP Fiji Parliament Support Project ('FPSP'), but felt that clarification was needed on the strategies in place by the Department in ensuring the continued collaboration between Parliament and the UNDP through the FPSP.

2.2 Clarification provided by the Department of Legislature

A summary of the clarifications provided on the issues identified are provided below.

In terms of staff development, the Parliament has three (3) policies/plans aligned towards the provision of supporting staff learning and development, which include the following:

- the Training Plan, which is based on the identification of training needs, which leads to addressing the goal of capacity building and institutional strengthening through personal and professional development of staff.
- the Training and Bonding Policy, which aims to keep the Parliament staff abreast with all current professional knowledge, skills and attitudinal orientation, which leads to maximising best performance. The policy does not restrict training to only

classroom-based but has made allowances for other modes such as, non-conventional training methods; twinning programmes, part-time training, coaching, mentoring, and fully funded courses.

- the Learning and Development Policy, aims to encourage and enhance learning and development of staff knowledge, skills and abilities to create a high performing workforce. It provides the basis for any Civil Service training, scholarships, study leave and study assistance as well as specific details in relation to bonding for staff.

In regards to the support, such as work tools, provided to the Parliament and staff for carrying out their functions, it was advised that there is proper recording of all ICT equipment/assets procured and provided to Members of Parliament and staff. Maintenance of these equipment is undertaken on a quarterly basis for the older versions of Operating Systems, and for the newer versions of the Operating Systems, software patches are pushed through the network or internet, to fix software bugs.

Additionally, Parliament has a backup and archival system that can be accessed at any time. Parliament has servers on-site as well as servers at the ITC datacenter. This backup system has been in operation from 2013 to date however, it has been advised that this infrastructure will eventually require upgrading and there are plans to undertake the upgrade but this will be subject to budget availability.

In terms of promoting good working conditions; it was advised that the Department adheres to existing regulatory instruments such as the General Orders, which provides for employment guidelines for staff, and internal policies and programmes (such as the Flexi Policy and the Wellness Programme). For remuneration; a job evaluation exercise was done for staff in 2017-2018, and for Members of Parliament (including the Hon. Prime Minister, Hon. Leader of Opposition, Hon. Speaker, Hon. Ministers, and Hon. Assistant Ministers), remuneration is considered by a Special Committee on Emoluments, set up and aligned to the *Parliamentary Remuneration Act 2014*.

In terms of the Parliament infrastructure, it was highlighted that there have been some changes done, whereby Level 3, which was previously occupied by the Judiciary (Appeals Court Registry), has been converted to house an additional Committee Room, the Parliament Discovery Centre (which would clear space in Room BCR 1), and relocation of some units, since critical ITC infrastructure will need to be housed in those unit spaces (these include the Inter-Parliamentary Relations and Protocol unit and the Civic Education and Media unit). It was also advised that Parliament will continue to consult with the Judiciary through the Chief Registrar's Office for additional space for the Parliament.

In terms of the 'Meet the Speaker' and 'Parliament Bus' programmes; it was advised that these programmes had to be suspended due to COVID-safe restrictions and protocols. Following the lifting of certain COVID-safe restrictions and protocols, the Parliament's Civic Education and Media unit resumed the 'Parliament Education Tours'. The 'Meet the Speaker' and 'Parliament Bus' programmes will resume after consultation with the Speaker of Parliament.

Furthermore, in regards to the UNDP FPSP; the Committee was advised that UNDP and Parliament have just launched Phase 3 of the project, which will provide support to the Parliament for the next three years. The Department gave assurance that it will do its best in ensuring that there is no disruption of service delivery to the Honourable Speaker and

the Honourable Members of Parliament, in terms of the support provided through the UNDP FPSP.

Moreover, in regards to the clarification on the details regarding certain expenditure for the reported year; it was noted that Parliament is allocated a one-line budget however, adheres to a reporting template which is used across whole of Government.

Written copies of the queries and clarification provided are uploaded along with this Report onto the Parliament website: www.parliament.gov.fj.

2.3 SDGs impact analysis

As part of its review, the Committee is also mindful of the requirements of Standing Order 110 (2) whereby all matters before the Committee are to be reviewed on a gender equality basis. This is supplemented by the Committee's appreciation of the Parliament's role in contributing towards the Global Goals (sustainable development goals), which Fiji is also committed to.

From the review it was commendable to note that in terms of the promotion of gender equality and empowerment, the Department has excelled. This is evident in the gender composition of staff (46% males and 54% females), which is a result of the principles of the Open Merit Recruitment and Selection guideline.

During the reported period, it was commendable to note the efforts in realising Parliament's aim of implementing Sustainable Development Goal ('SDG') 10, which is aimed at reducing inequality based on disability, via the construction of ramps for persons living with disability. It was further advised that the Parliament through the Assets Management Unit will continue to ensure that regular improvements are undertaken on the historic Government Buildings within the frameworks of National Heritage. There are also future planned activities to increase physical accessibility to the Parliament complex, which includes providing easier access to the elderly and those who have mobility and visual impairments, such as the construction of hand rails and inclines together with installation of signposts at strategic locations in the Parliament precinct.

2.4 Key Findings

After deliberations of all the documents and information acquired from the work of the previous Committee, a few pertinent findings have been identified and a summary of these is provided as follows:

- i) Parliament has made tremendous strides in contributing to the achievement of certain sustainable development goals, specifically SDG 5 and SDG 10.
- ii) Parliament has been provided great support by the Department and donor partners such as the UNDP, which have led to numerous noteworthy undertakings.
- iii) The work conditions for Members of Parliament and staff have been given priority, which has allowed for Parliament to function well.
- iv) The welfare of Members of Parliament and staff is also given ample emphasis, so as to maintain a safe work environment.

3.0 COMMENDATIONS/ RECOMMENDATIONS

After extensive deliberation, the Committee would like to highlight the key achievements in the reported year and suggest a few recommendations for consideration by the Parliament of Fiji.

- i) The Committee commends the Department for its noteworthy achievement on SDG 5, and also recommends that Parliament continue with its efforts in promoting gender equality and empowerment.
- ii) The Committee commends the Department for its achievement on SDG 10 in terms of physical accessibility to the Parliament Complex, and numerous initiatives introduced for expanding accessibility to Parliament business, such as the sign-language interpreters, however recommends the following:
 - that Parliament consider improving accessibility to the Complex by fast-tracking the installation of aids such as direction signs and other means of accessibility, which cater for persons who have mobility issues; and
 - that Parliament consider introducing other initiatives such as Hansard being published in the different vernacular we have in Fiji and in braille, which would promote inclusivity.
- iii) The Committee recommends that a clear demarcation of the ‘Parliament precinct’ is considered by the House in order to facilitate easier accessibility to the Parliament precinct, which also contributes to the achievement of SDG 10.
- iv) The Committee recommends the expeditious digitisation of all Parliamentary Hansard.
- v) In terms of the Parliament Space/Infrastructure; the Committee recommends that space should be provided for separate offices for the various parties represented in Parliament.
- vi) The Committee recommends that the awareness and public engagement programmes for the Parliament, ‘Meet the Speaker’ and ‘Parliament Bus’, be revamped to include all Members of Parliament, opening up more opportunities for engagement with the public.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights has fulfilled its mandate approved by Parliament, which is to examine and review the *Parliament of the Republic of Fiji Annual Report 2017-2018* with due diligence.

The Committee's review highlighted numerous findings, which are reflected in this Report. The Committee also put forth a few recommendations for consideration of the Parliament of Fiji.

The Committee through this report commends the *Parliament of the Republic of Fiji Annual Report 2017-2018* and recommends that the House takes note of the contents of its Report.

MEMBER'S SIGNATURES



Hon. Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure
(Chairperson)



Hon. Iliesa Vanawalu
(Deputy Chairperson)



Hon. Mosese Bulitavu
(Member)



Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua
(Member)



Hon. Faiyaz Koya
(Member)

DATE: 30/03/2023