



# PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI

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File Ref: PARL 7/15

05 October 2022

Hon. Alvick Maharaj  
Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts  
Government Buildings  
SUVA

Dear Honourable Chairperson,

**RE: RESPONSES TO QUERIES FROM THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE, LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS – DEPARTMENT OF LEGISLATURE 2017-2018 ANNUAL REPORT**

1. Reference is made to your letter dated 23 September 2022 in relation to the above subject.
2. I have taken note of the Standing Committee's task to review and scrutinise the Parliament's 2017-2018 Annual Report and in that respect, please see attached as **Appendix 1**, the responses to the queries raised by the Standing Committee.
3. Should the Standing Committee have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned directly.

Thank you.

Respectfully,

**Jeanette Emberson (Mrs)**  
**SECRETARY-GENERAL TO PARLIAMENT**

*Attach:*

Parliament's 2017-2018 Annual Report – Responses to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights

1. In reference to Page 11 in regards to staff development (further education and relevant training); the Committee seeks clarification on whether there is provision in the Department's strategies/policies/plans aimed at supporting such staff development?

Parliament has three (3) policies/plans aligned towards the provision of supporting staff learning and development. These include –

- a) **Training Plan** – The Parliament has annual Training Plans that are designed to systematically train and up-skill staff to ensure we are efficient, productive and competitive in our service delivery. The Training Plan is derived through the identification of training needs and the MYAPA process. In doing so, the Parliament is addressing the goal of capacity building and institutional strengthening through personal and professional development of staff. The Training Plan is submitted to the Training and Productivity Authority of Fiji (TPAF) as required under the FNU Levy Act, who, through their vigorous assessment processes ensure that training identified are actually undertaken, and thereafter, Parliament is eligible to reclaim 90% of the levy paid to FNU on a yearly basis. Documentation on the trainings attended by staff both locally and overseas, in-house trainings, leadership trainings and training conducted by internal registered Training of Trainers (TOTs) are evidences needed for the claimable of the bi-annual levies. While supporting staff training, there is also a return on investment both in monetary value and also in institutional knowledge back to Parliament.
- b) **Training and Bonding Policy** – is a strategy to keep the Parliament staff abreast with all current professional knowledge, skills and attitudinal orientation, and which aims to maximise 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 – training which are not classroom-based such as online or virtual learning, webinars, online workshops and other forms of distance education by utilising mobile device educational technologies;
  - Twinning Programmes – entering into twinning arrangements to learn from each other as well as share experiences and resources. This includes Parliament staff engaged in on-the-job training with the Victoria Parliament and vice versa whereby the Victorian Parliament staff conducted workshops and trainings for the Fiji Parliament staff in Fiji in relation to specific unit outputs;
  - Part-time training – training undertaken alongside staff full time work schedule. Staff are eligible to enroll in 2 units per semester whilst working full time and 50% of the fees refundable when completed.
  - Coaching – this involves work-based activities which entails one-to-one between staff and their supervisors;
  - Mentoring – this entails having a trained mentor providing guidance and advise to develop competencies of staff; and
  - Fully-funded courses – fully funding costs for staff trainings/courses where applicable.
- c) **Learning and Development Policy** – which aims to encourage and enhance learning and development of staff knowledge, skills and abilities to create a high performing workforce. The Learning and Development Policy outlines the policy basis for any Civil Service training,

scholarships, study leave and study assistance as well as specific details in relation to bonding for staff. Training needs of staff and knowledge gaps are identified, then the Training unit will liaise with the training providers who can provide the necessary trainings needed at the most cost effective methods available. The policy also ensures that all learning and development activities focus on the transfer of learning acquired by the staff back to the workplace and also provide return on investment to the Parliament.

**2. In relation to certain business units in Parliament: Assets Management Unit (AMU); Information Technology (IT) and Human Resources (HR) Unit, the following clarification are sought –**

**a) How does the Information Technology Unit manage the ICT equipment for Parliamentarians and the staff?**

For all ICT equipment procured including the Broadcasting and Conferencing systems, the model numbers, serial numbers are recorded in the Assets Register. When issuing devices to Honourable Members of Parliament or staff, the serial number and model number are recorded against their respective names. A declaration form is signed by MPs or staff for the IT devices issued to them, ensuring they are accountable to any loss, damages or negligence.

With respect to managing the computer systems, maintenance on the older versions of the Operating Systems are undertaken on a quarterly basis. For the newer versions of the Operating Systems, software patches are pushed through the network or internet to fix software bug. There is an endpoint software installed on every machine, which monitors real-time traffic and applies customised security policies over applications and storage interfaces.

**b) For the HR unit: how does the Unit ensure that it allows for the promotion of good working conditions, which can include working time (hours of work, rest times and work schedules): remuneration including overtime pay; and the physical and mental well-being of staff and MP's in the workplace?**

Hours of work are governed under General Order 301 for Established staff and for the Support Services Staff it is covered under Clause 17 of the Contractual Terms and Conditions of Employment for Government Wage Earners . The Flexi Policy allows staff to take flexible working hours. The Parliament has also allocated one (1) hour in a week for the Wellness Programme to address the physical well-being of staff. The Parliament recognises that work-life balance can improve employee motivation, performance, productivity and also reduces stress, therefore in that respect, the Flexi Policy was introduced in 2017. In addition, Overtime work is allowed in essential circumstances and eligible officers are entitled for the payment of overtime or time-off in lieu – this is governed under the General Order's Section 418 for established staff and Section 23 of the TCE for GWEs for Support Services Staff.

At times, Parliament invites the Ministry of Health to conduct medical check-up for Members and staff. Staff are also encouraged to take regular breaks from their workstations to help raise their mood and protect against mental ill-health. During one Parliament sitting tea break, the National Food and Nutrition Centre was invited to promote healthy diets and lifestyle to MPs and staff and this initiative aimed to combat nutrition-related diseases affecting Fijians. Parliament is also liaising with the Judicial Department for more space as we understand that an employee's work environment has a tremendous impact on their health and wellbeing which may contribute to stress. On the other hand, other organisations were also invited to Parliament to raise awareness and promote their

policies on insurance covers including savings, medical covers, accident and death benefits and also other institutions such as banks, FNPF, Unit Trust of Fiji in terms of managing savings for family and future.

A Job Evaluation Exercise was also conducted in 2017-2018 by Strategic Pay of NZ, an independent consultancy organisation, by determining the value/worth of the work of all positions in Parliament and then determined the relevant remuneration bands of all those jobs/positions. As a result of the JEE, all staff were then moved to a relative higher band depending on the job level. The JEE was undertaken as the Parliament staff were not included in the Civil Service Pay Rise, when they conducted the same process of job evaluation earlier in the year 2017.

With respect to the Honourable Members, the Members of Parliament remuneration is determined through a resolution of Parliament. The discussions between the Whips could assist in proposed names for appointments of the MPs to be Members of the Emoluments Committee (Special Committee) and agreed to by the Business Committee before the names are proposed in the House. The Special Committee after its appointment inside the Chambers of Parliament will then invite submissions from invited groups for remuneration packages that warrant the level of His Excellency, the Hon. PM, Hon. Speaker, Ministers, Assistant Ministers and the rest of the MPs. It would also compare the remuneration packages of other Parliaments to effectively make a decision on the salaries and allowances payable. The remuneration are then packaged along salary and various allowances and so forth for the MPs.

After considerable discussions a decision is made, a report is then tabled back inside the Parliament Chambers for the Members of Parliament to debate it further and it is the Resolution of the House which will be gazetted and comes into effect. There are no provisions in the Remuneration Act for the MPs' to be paid overtime and any variance to the status quo would require a Parliament resolution.

With respect to the physical well-being of MPs in the workplace, the House Committee which is chaired by the Speaker considers the welfare and amenities for Members. Any resolutions from the House Committee will be facilitated by the Parliament secretariat.

- c) **For the AMU: It was encouraging to note that one key achievement for the Unit during the reported period was the construction of ramps for persons living with disability, which realises the Parliament's aim of implementing Sustainable Development Goal ('SDG') 10, which aimed at reducing inequality based on disability. The Committee seeks clarification on the other actions that the Parliament planned to carry out, if any, to make the Parliament precincts be more public friendly?**

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 and in collaboration with the technical staff from the Ministry of Infrastructure and Meteorological Services – this is also to ensure that backup services and related general servicing of building accessories are properly undertaken in a timely manner.

As part of Parliament's future planning activities and improvement, there exists a need to increase physical accessibility to the precincts in future. This 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 precincts which will bring about greater access and inclusivity.

Parliament will now continue to host the Fijian Parliament Open Day for Persons with Disabilities.

Proper labels to be placed in front of our main entrance, that is, PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI as it provides guidance for tourists, submitters, visitors to Parliament, school children and other respective groups visiting Parliament. Also, for easy access within the precincts, proper labels and directions to be placed outside the Chamber, Opposition and Government offices with signage pointing up the stairs, Committee Rooms and the ground floor, where the public frequently ask questions about the location of court rooms. Follow up discussion will be made with the Judicial Department on the possibility to provide floor plans of all their offices and placed at strategic locations within the Parliament precincts.

**3. In terms of the Parliament precincts infrastructure; what are the Parliament's future plans in this regard?**

Level 3 was previously occupied by the Judiciary (Appeals Court Registry) and following their relocation to Veiuto, the Parliament has finally secured that space. Ongoing works are being undertaken to convert the space to house an additional Standing Committee Room, the Parliament Discovery Centre (which would clear space in Room BCR 1), and relocation of some units as 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.

At this stage, as has been done previously, the Parliament will continue to consult with the Judiciary through the Chief Registrar's Office for more additional space for the Parliament – whilst this will be a long shot, it is an avenue that the Parliament will continue to pursue.

**4. In terms of gender breakdown for the Parliament staff; the Committees seeks clarification on the difference in percentage of males and females?**

The gender composition of staff is 46% males and 54% females. The Parliament upholds the principles of the Open Merit Recruitment and Selection guideline. Additionally, the Parliament provides equal employment opportunity to all citizens of Fiji which is based on merit.

**5. The Committee seeks clarification on the status of the 'Meet the Speaker' and Parliament Bus' programmes?**

As the Standing Committee may be aware, COVID-safe restrictions and protocols were in force nationwide and this meant that all face-to-face public engagement programmes of the Parliament were suspended. Following the lifting of certain COVID-safe restrictions and protocols earlier this year, the Parliament's Civic Education and Media unit resumed the 'Parliament Education Tours'. The 'Meet the Speaker' and 'Parliament Bus' programmes will resume soon and in that light, the secretariat is consulting closely with the Hon. Speaker on this matter.

**6. Does the Parliament have a backup IT system (server) and if not, are there any plans in place in this regard?**

Parliament has a backup and archival system. The Automated Recording System has servers that host the Committee rooms as well as the Debating Chambers. Subsequently these are archived on a separate server and can be accessed at any time.

Parliament has servers on-site as well as servers at the ITC datacenter – data on-site are replicated on the server at the ITC datacenter. This backup system has been in operation from 2013 to date however, this infrastructure will eventually require upgrading but this will be duly subject to budget availability – there are current plans to undertake the upgrade by the end of the financial year or early in the next financial year.

- 7. In terms of the UNDP FPSP partnership with Parliament: the Committee commends the UNDP FPSP in supporting the Parliament in activities such as capacity building for MPs and staff. The Committee seeks clarification on the strategies in place by the Parliament in anticipation of the possibility that the UNDP FPSP support comes to an end?**

For the information of the Standing Committee, earlier this year the UNDP FPSP launched its Phase 3 which will provide support to the Parliament for the next three years. The secretariat has taken note of the Standing Committee's comments and can ensure the Standing Committee that ongoing consultations with the Project are being maintained to ensure that there is no disruption of service delivery to the Honourable Speaker and the Honourable Members of Parliament.

- 8. In reference to the Statement of Receipts and Expenditure for the Parliament; the Committee seeks clarification and information on the following –**

- a) What does the special expenditure entail, for the reported year?**

Parliament is allocated a one-line budget however, adheres to a reporting template which is used across whole of Government. In the Parliament's case, Special Expenditure is grouped under SEG 7 and includes the following –

- (i) Standing Committee Sitting Allowances \$456,216.24;
- (ii) Select Committee Sitting Allowances
  - Business Committee \$1,400.00;
- (iii) Annual Parliamentary Subscriptions
  - Inter-Parliamentary Union \$22,807.02; and
  - Commonwealth Parliamentary Union \$85,257.79; and
- (iv) Consultation Fees (Capability Framework) \$4,250.00.

- b) In reference to the expenditure on travel and communications, the Committee requests for a breakdown (percentage wise) of how much funding was spent on individual items listed under this expenditure, which includes overseas Official Engagements attended by the Honourable Speaker and Members of Parliament, Parliament Sittings, Committee Sittings and Public Consultations and Internet charges.**

The comments from the Standing Committee are noted and the breakdown in percentage are tabulated below –

<b>SEG 3 - Travel &amp; Comm Secretariat</b>	<b>2017/2018 Budget</b>	<b>Expenditure as at 31<sup>st</sup> July 2018</b>	<b>Available Balance</b>	<b>%</b>
Travel - Local	\$353,000	\$11,816.85	<b>\$(30,591.53)</b>	<b>109%</b>
Travel - Overseas		\$371,744.68		
Subsistence - Local	\$180,000	\$172,353.84	<b>\$(334,223.67)</b>	<b>286%</b>
Per diem - Overseas		\$341,869.83		
Telecom	\$160,000	\$18,185.78	\$16,546.88	90%
Vodafone		\$125,267.34		
Internet	\$10,000	\$12,752.88	<b>\$(2,752.88)</b>	<b>128%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$703,000</b>	\$1,054,021.20	<b>\$(351,021.20)</b>	<b>150%</b>
<b>SEG 3 – Members of Parliament</b>	<b>2017/2018 Budget</b>	<b>Expenditure as at 31<sup>st</sup> July 2018</b>	<b>Available Balance</b>	<b>%</b>
Travel - Local	\$500,000	\$92,952.67	\$85,149.42	83%
Travel Overseas		\$321,897.91		
Subsistence - Local	\$900,000	\$970,702.59	<b>\$(326,635.81)</b>	<b>136%</b>
Per diem Overseas		\$255,933.22		
<b>TOTAL</b>	1,400,000	\$1,641,486.39	<b>\$(241,486.59)</b>	<b>117%</b>
<b>TOTAL SEG 3</b>	2,103,000	\$2,695,507.59	<b>\$(592,507.59)</b>	<b>128%</b>

<b>SEG 7 – Special Expenditure</b>	<b>2017/2018 Budget</b>	<b>Expenditure as at 31<sup>st</sup> July 2018</b>	<b>Available Balance</b>	<b>%</b>
Standing Committee Sitting Allowances	\$864,000.00	\$456,216.24	\$407,783.76	53%
Select Committees	\$100,000.00	\$1,400.00	\$98,000.00	1%
Annual Parliamentary Subs	\$270,000.00	\$108,064.81	\$161,935.19	40%
Consultation Fee – JEE	\$50,000.00	\$4,250.00	\$45,750.00	9%
<b>TOTAL SEG 7</b>	<b>\$1,284,000.00</b>	<b>\$569,931.05</b>	<b>\$714,068.95</b>	<b>44%</b>

For the information of the Standing Committee, the secretariat in November 2018, released a publication entitled “Overview of the Fijian Parliament 2014 – 2018” which provided a statistical measurement of how the Fijian Parliament has achieved its purpose and vision over the first Parliamentary term under the 2013 Constitution.

**-ENDS-**