

APPENDICES

Table of Contents

Verbatim Report.....	3
Written Responses.....	22

Verbatim Report

[VERBATIM REPORT]

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS & DEFENCE

ANNUAL REPORTS

**(1) Parliament of the Republic of Fiji 2022-2023 Annual
Report**

ENTITIES: Parliament of the Republic of Fiji

VENUE: Big Committee Room, Government Buildings, Suva

DATE: Tuesday, 1st April, 2025

**VERBATIM REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE HELD AT THE BIG COMMITTEE ROOM
(EAST WING), PARLIAMENT PRECINCTS, GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS, SUVA,
ON TUESDAY, 1ST APRIL 2025, AT 9.02 A.M.**

The Committee resumed at 10.18 a.m.

Submittee: Parliament of the Republic of Fiji

In Attendance:

- | | | |
|--------------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| 1. Ms. Jeanette Emberson | - | Secretary-General to Parliament |
| 2. Mr. Abele Sakulu | - | Deputy Secretary-General |
- -----

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Members, members of the media and the public, the secretariat, dear viewers, ladies and gentlemen; a very good morning to you all. It is a pleasure to welcome everyone, especially to the viewers who are watching this proceedings.

At the outset, for information purpose, pursuant to the Standing Orders of Parliament, specifically Standing Order 111, all Committee meetings are to be open to the public. Therefore, this meeting is open to the public and the media. However, for any sensitive information concerning the submission that cannot be disclosed in public, that can be provided to the Committee either in private or in writing. But do note that that will only be allowed in a few specific circumstances, which include national security matters, third-party confidential information, personnel and human resource matters, as well as Committee deliberation and development of the Committee's recommendation and report.

I wish to remind honourable Members and our invited submittees that all comments and questions are to be addressed through the Chair. For those viewers watching this live on *Facebook*, questions can be asked via comments, and only relevant questions will be considered by the Committee. Please, note that if there are any questions by the Members of the Committee, who may interject, or we will wait until the end of your submission to ask questions.

This is a parliamentary meeting, and all information gathered is covered under the Parliamentary Powers and Privileges Act and the Standing Orders of Parliament. Please,

bear in mind that we do not condone slander or libel for any sort, and any information brought before this Committee should be based on facts.

In terms of other protocols of this meeting, please, be advised that movement within the meeting room will be restricted. Minimise the usage of mobile phones and all mobile phones are to be on silent mode.

I would now like to introduce the members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence.

[Introduction of Committee Members]

The Committee will be having an oral submission from Parliament of the Republic of Fiji in relation to their 2022-2023 Annual Report. I would like to take this time to invite our guests to introduce themselves before we proceed with the question and answer session. You may begin, Madam Secretary-General.

MS. J. EMBERSON.- Deputy Chairperson and honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I would also acknowledge the staff who are present here to support the Committee. For the purposes of the viewers and those tuning live to this morning's session, I would like to introduce ourselves this morning.

[Introduction of Parliament Officials]

Deputy Chairperson, as has been communicated through your Secretary this morning, we have only recently received the additional set of questions early this morning, and we had put in a request to provide more informed responses by next week or the week after. However, for the purpose of our meeting this morning, we request that we cover the generic areas that had been conveyed in the Chairperson's letter dated 25th March, 2025.

If you would allow me, Deputy Chairperson and honourable Members, may I proceed with a brief general overview of the operations of Parliament, depicting some of the achievements that have been identified in some Units. I would also like to have a few commentaries on staff gender segregation, with particular emphasis to the statistics of women in leadership. We also would like to touch on the relevance to SDGs, the challenges and the future outlook.

Deputy Chairperson, as we are well aware, people are at the heart of the Fijian Parliament and our vision and our strategy are ambitious. They guide us towards making Parliament the best that it can be. A key aspect of our strategic plan is how the Fijian Parliament Secretariat, which is our very own people, will continue to support Parliament in the successful delivery of its purpose, vision and mission, and that is all highlighted in the said Annual Report which is being deliberated at this point in time.

We will achieve that through our drive and commitment to deliver excellence in our parliamentary services. So, for the reporting period in question from 2022 to 2023, Parliament continued to operate as a collective and a collaborative effort. The way in which we worked together safely and sustainably throughout the pandemic has made us stronger, has made us bolder and has made us more resilient. That positioned us well for tackling future challenges for Parliament.

If there is one constant about working in a parliament, it is change. We must flex and adapt so we can continue to deliver the services that Members and the people of Fiji need. We must look to how we transform our services and the way we work in a post-pandemic world. We know the way in which the public wish to engage in the public debate and with Members, and the Parliament itself changes over time. We must respond to that too, and together with our honourable Speaker, honourable Members and the broader community, we aspire to build confidence in our Parliament on the important democratic governance it provides to Fiji.

Moving on now, Deputy Chairperson, we would like to touch a bit as well on the trend analysis on the achievements that had been identified from some of our core Units. We would like to particularly focus on the finance, ICT security and system upgrades, asset management, tables and journals and committees, civic education and media, and then proceed to the gender composition and highlights, which is usually contained by our Human Resources Unit. If you would allow me, Deputy Chairperson, I will defer to Deputy Secretary-General to touch on the first bit of the finance component before we move on to the other Units, if it is agreeable with the Members.

MR. A. SAKULU.- Deputy Chairperson, the Corporate Services Division plays a vital role in supporting the legislature in providing a comprehensive range of services across Parliament. This support extends to 55 Parliamentarians and their staff, encompassing areas such as HR, Training, Financial Services, IT, Security, et cetera.

In regard to our finance, from August 2020 to July 2021, we were allocated \$8.6 million. In 2021-2022 financial year, we were allocated \$7.1 million, a decrease by \$1 million. From August

2022-August 2023, it was increased again to \$8.6 million. For the financial year spanning August 2020-2021, budgetary allocation for Parliament was \$8.6 million. However, in March 2022, a COVID response supplementary budget was introduced, resulting in an increase \$45,000, bringing the total to \$7.1 million.

The adjustment was necessary to accommodate the reinstated overtime payments. The Finance Unit effectively managed the budgetary allocation which showed a significant increase in the fiscal year 2022-2023. The total budgetary allocation for the reporting period in question stood at \$8.6 million, reflecting an increase of \$1.5 million.

The contributing factors to the increase include the following:

- Reopening of both, national and international borders, that allowed parliamentary engagement locally and abroad.
- Re-instatement of funding for the Standing Committees that allowed parliamentary work including site visits and public consultation.
- Investment in upgrading parliamentary information and communication technology system.
- Maintain the serving of the Parliament building.

For the ICT security and systems upgrade, from August 2020-July 2021 and continuing through to July 2022, the ICT successfully implemented Microsoft Office 365 E1, enhancing virtual meeting capabilities for Parliament in a fiscal year. Significant developments surfaced and that pertained to translation during the plenary sessions and upgrade of the operating system to Windows 10, and installation of 10 micro-antivirus and malware protection across all computers within the network.

The ICT Unit had been instrumental in delivering and managing business applications that support the effective administration of parliamentary operations. Through the strategic use of technology, the Unit has facilitated engagement with the public and ensured the ongoing efficiency in parliamentary functions.

A key milestone for Parliament at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic was the establishment of a hybrid system for parliamentary sittings, Committee hearings and virtual deliberations. The hybrid system allowed the institution to hold its first ever hybrid sitting between May and July 2021. Over 50 percent of our Members of Parliament

attended virtually, ensuring that Parliament's essential functions continue, while at the same time, adhering to strict COVID-19 safety protocols.

That adaptability and commitment to good governance during challenging times speak volume of our resilience. Our hybrid engagements have continued post-pandemic, particularly for standing committee deliberations and public engagements. The studio was set up to support livestreaming, sign language interpretation and two-way virtual communication, making our Parliament more accessible to citizens and stakeholders.

In line with the commitment to improving fiscal security and cyber security measures, the Unit conducted a review, implemented 10.10 micro-antivirus and malware software across all computers with a local area network. Additionally, the upgrade from Windows 8.0 to Windows 10 was completed in the fiscal year 2022-2023.

Another notable achievement for the financial year 2023 was the establishment of two additional audio channels that enable real-time interpretation of the *Vosa Vakaviti* and Hindi for the 55 Members of Parliament, the honourable Speaker and the Chambers.

The ICT Unit collaborates closely with the Standing Committees, Civic and Media Unit and the Hansard Unit to ensure comprehensive recording, broadcasting, timing of audio and audiovisual records of parliamentary sessions. This collaboration has facilitated a 100 percent delivery rate of written Hansard Reports of parliamentary debates and Committee discussions. The ICT Unit remains committed to enhancing the technological framework to support Parliament's essential functions and public engagements. Thank you, Deputy Chairperson.

MS. J. EMBERSON.- I will also quickly run through the other remaining heads that I have before I go on to the gender, SDGs and the future outlook and challenges of Parliament. With respect to asset management and we also noted the additional questions that the Committee had proposed to us this morning which we will respond to at a later date, I just wanted to highlight, in addition to the statistics that is already contained in the report, that we also conducted 155 service and maintenance operations, resulting in an expenditure of \$41,000. We have noted the additional questions, Deputy Chairperson, which we will respond to as well.

An important highlight here as well is that the recorded vehicle runs reflect the increasing demands placed on the fleet to facilitate official engagements of parliamentarians, encompassing the committee work, official trips, the workshops and the trainings, and this data has been meticulously compiled from the fuel purchase

Appendices - Review Report of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji 2022-2023 Annual Report

records and vehicle log sheets. We also take into consideration the varying pricing in the fuel, so when the fuel prices go up, it is expected that the expenditure on fuel would also go up at the same.

In terms of Tables and Journals and Committees, the statistics are clearly outlined in the Report that is before the Committee. We can answer any further questions that have been posed to us this morning. We will provide a more detailed breakdown of the reports that have been referred to each of the six Standing Committees - the reports that are still pending, Committee Reports that had been tabled and are pending debate in the House, and we will do that in due course.

With respect to the Civic Education and Media Unit, the Unit has been instrumental in enhancing the Fijian Parliament's engagement with the wider community. I believe the statistics that has been put forth and highlighted in the Report is also a testament of the activities that the Unit engaged in over the course of that reporting period.

On gender composition and highlights, honourable Deputy Chairperson and honourable Members, as of August 2022 to July 2023, we had 43 female staff and 37 male staff. During 2020/2021 financial year, a total of 12 staff contracts were renewed for three-year terms, which included two appointments, three retirements, one resignation and one death. Additionally, one proceeded on military leave to serve on an overseas mission, whilst three were seconded to the UNDP for a short assignment to support the Nauru Parliament.

In the 2021-2022 financial year, the Parliament successfully advertised and filled 12 positions, whilst 11 interns were recruited.

During the financial year in question, which is 2022-2023, several staffing changes occurred, including 10 resignations, two new appointments and the promotion of eight existing staff. Furthermore, 18 acting positions were filled to ensure operational continuity. Despite a turnover rate of 10 percent, our HR and Training Unit had consistently engaged graduate interns and volunteers through the National Employment Centre (NEC) to maintain and ensure the smooth operations of the institution. Deputy Chairperson and honourable Members, to round that up, at the close of the 2022/2023 financial year, the parliamentary service comprised 75 staff, which included 60 established staff, five support services personnel, two drivers and eight interns.

In terms of the relevance to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - the Fijian Parliament and the SDGs, parliaments are responsible for holding their governments or executive to account for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, for the SDGs. The Agenda

2030 Declaration acknowledges the essential role of national parliaments through their enactment of legislation and adoption of budgets, and their role in ensuring accountability for the effective implementation of our commitments. Parliaments are highlighted in the SDGs themselves as part of a standalone goal that recognises the critical linkage between sustainable development and democratic governance.

In terms of the challenges, honourable Deputy Chairperson and honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, as an evolving institution that must remain relevant to the people, we are constantly faced with challenges, and these are not limited to the following:

- (1) Challenges in planning the annual legislative programme and competing expectation among clients, MPs and others.
- (2) Cyber security threats to the Fijian Parliament website infrastructure network and data repositories.
- (3) Significant disruption of business operations as a result of major external events.
- (4) Challenges in filling key roles and limited funding.

However, these challenges, along with the ones posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, has made us stronger, bolder, and more resilient, and this has bolstered our commitment to delivering exceptional and professional services to the honourable Speaker and honourable Members of Parliament.

As a future outlook, honourable Deputy Chairperson and honourable Members of the Committee, making a positive difference to the lives of Fijians is the strategic vision for Parliament. Our Members and everyone who works for them and for Parliament have a crucial role to play in making sure that that is at the heart of all that we do.

That scrutiny function is key to ensuring that the people of Fiji are well served by their Parliament and that their voices are heard. Building on those achievements, we strive to have a parliament that even better represents the people. That is how we will strengthen Fiji's place as a modern and dynamic parliamentary democracy.

I thank the honourable Deputy Chairperson, honourable Members. The DSG and I are ready to respond to a few questions that the Committee may have at this point in time.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you Madam SG and DSG for the comprehensive information and for the commendable work done under your leadership. I now open the floor for any questions.

HON. I. TUIWAILEVU.- Deputy Chairperson, through you; Madam SG, is there any petition or submission received from the public during this reporting period?

MS. J. EMBERSON.- Please, allow me to peruse my statistics. For this reporting period, Sir, I can confirm that there were no petitions.

HON. V. LAL.- Through you, Deputy Chairperson, we have heard about ICT. How safe is our ICT system from cybercrime and malicious activities confronting our society today? Can you say that it is safe?

MS. J. EMBERSON.- I will try to provide a few responses, honourable Deputy Chairperson, and if further information is required, then I will request to provide a more detailed response at a later date.

As has been alluded to by the Deputy Secretary-General, and in line with the commitment to improving physical security and cybersecurity measures, the Unit conducted a review and implemented endpoint-trend micro-antivirus and malware software across all computers within the local area network. Additionally, the upgrade from Windows 8.0 to Windows 10 was completed in this fiscal year. That shows our commitment, honourable Member, of having knowledge and being aware of the threats that are associated with ICT systems.

That was one of the initiatives that the Unit had proposed to ensure that we were safe, that our honourable Members were safe, honourable Speaker, and other stakeholders that we engaged in. It is not to say that there will be no risk at all, there will always be impending risks when it comes to ICT systems. I believe that the response from our dedicated secretariat is to try and keep up with the evolving changes and demands of the system.

I believe that through the capable leadership of our Manager ICT, Maika, who has been able to ensure that for now, we are safe. If, at any point in time, we receive any report

Appendices - Review Report of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji 2022-2023 Annual Report

that we may be at risk, there will always be moves amongst the secretariat to pursue avenues where we would, sort of, get some security. I hope that answers your question at this point. I can provide further details if needed.

HON. V. LAL.- Through you, Deputy Chairperson, how is Parliament addressing IT glitches during Parliament sittings and Committee meetings?

MS. J. EMBERSON.- Honourable Deputy Chairperson and honourable Members, we do acknowledge and we can say that, yes, there have been some glitches during our parliamentary sittings and I believe I may have also touched a bit on that in our last presentation for our other two Annual Reports that the Committee had deliberated upon.

The recent glitches that had occurred during the last sittings was due to the final testing of the final phase of the whole entire upgrade that we had proceeded with in 2024. It had to involve testing it on a sitting week, and we did expect that we would have some glitches, which we did.

We had also reported back to the vendor to advise them and keep them updated on what was happening in the House. They were very good, they had provided reports to say that it was all part of the test runs. We had advised the honourable Speaker on the same and to which he had also conveyed to the honourable Members. We will endeavour to try to achieve as minimal disruption to any of the proceedings in the plenary, and that would mean to minimise any glitches that we can already anticipate. It is an endeavour that the Secretariat has always had from when we started to move more into digital transformation.

Whilst we have our shortfalls, we know that we have to rise above them, so I would like to assure the Members at this point in time that your Secretariat will continue to work around the clock to try and ensure that there is minimal disruption to the operations of the House.

HON. V. LAL.- Thank you, Madam SG. Through you, Deputy Chairperson, I have one more question; we have sign language and translation during Parliament sittings. Is it going to be extended to Committee level, or it will just remain there?

MS. J. EMBERSON.- Thank you, honourable Deputy Chair and honourable Lal for the question. For us as a Secretariat, we tend to run our programmes in phases. We pilot a few projects here, and then when it is successful, we roll out to the other avenues that we envisage. For the question, honourable Member, that is something that we can

definitely do. At this point in time, I cannot commit to say that we will be able to implement at a certain day. It is something that will require consultation because it will also include budgetary implications. As you are aware, all these will need to be factored in and presented to the right agency and Ministry before we can then roll out. But we are listening, we can hear the concerns coming from the Standing Committees, and it is something that we will definitely look into.

HON. V. LAL.- The reason why I asked that question is when we go for public consultation, English being our second language and most people are not well-versed with it or they find difficulty in expressing themselves, most of them give submission in the vernacular. If we have translators with us, then it will make people better understand the situations and whatever they want to express. Thank you so much for that.

MS. J. EMBERSON.- Thank you, Sir, we are taking note of the valid comments.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Madam SG, just a supplementary to that, to my understanding, currently, the Communities do not have interpreters, either sign language?

MS. J. EMBERSON.- No, Sir, it is just in the plenary at this point in time. The contract that we also signed with the sign language interpreters only covers the period during the plenary sessions in the House.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- My question is a three-part question. Are we fully staffed? When is the next Job Evaluation Exercise (JEE)? Was there any assessment done with the workload that the current staff have on themselves and any assessment or exercise done on their mental wellbeing and health? What many people do not realise is when you work in government or parliament, you deal with an ocean of information and that can lead to burnouts and, especially, affect our mental health and wellbeing.

MS. J. EMBERSON.- Thank you, honourable Deputy Chairperson. That is one of the questions that I would also request that we provide a more informed response at a later day, but from memory, the last JEE that was undertaken for the Secretariat was in 2018.

Yes, we are fully aware that we are in need of another evaluation, which is something that our team is already working into because we have to make the necessary submissions for budget support. We have policies and documents that align to the wellness of our staff. Yes, our staff are the key people here who provide support to the Members and to the House, so it is also within our ambit to ensure that each staff is

supported and is able to undertake their work well. I would request, honourable Deputy Chairperson, that a more informed response is provided on that at a later day.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- A follow-up to that, we had the Women's Mock Parliament last year. If you can just highlight some of the outcomes from that exercise because women representation is key in our legislative House and can you also highlight the youth mock parliament that is forecasted, I believe, for this year?

MS. J. EMBERSON.- Honourable Deputy Chairperson, with respect to the Women's Mock Parliament that we had last year, we were of the view that it was a great success and I say that because we were able to gather about 56 women from across Fiji to converge here in Parliament and be able to undertake and exercise a planned workshop which exposed them to the kind of work that the parliamentarians undertake. The idea behind the mock parliament was to really empower women, to encourage them to come out and be able to take up leadership positions such as one which is being a member of parliament. That was not just the sole initiative of Parliament Secretariat and leadership but also with close consultations with the Ministry of Women, with our development partners, so the additional idea as well was to try and prepare women for the upcoming 2026 general election.

We had a lot of applications from right across Fiji. Unfortunately, we had to only be able to take about 56 women at that time. This was to ensure that they were ably seated in the house and experience a mock parliament as Members would have seen. We did have some debrief sessions after that. There were surveys that were obtained from the representatives or the participants. These have been collated and discussed also with the development partners. It seems very promising, there seems an appetite for these kinds of activities which have proven to be very effective when it comes to trying to get women to come on board.

Obviously, once the Fijian Parliament had endeavoured to undertake this initiative, it had also reflected on the feedback that the other jurisdictions have been doing as well or had encountered with so from those lessons, we tried to also improve upon the one that we had last, in 2016. I believe the former Speaker, His Excellency the President, had also made some comments to the participants on the last day that he was very impressed with their contributions in the House, with the issues that they brought and, mind you, those women had actually decided on the motions that they wanted to debate in the House. They had already brought real life issues from their communities and that is the point that we are trying to make, to try to encourage women that from wherever they are, they can always come to the House. They can be representatives of the people and

be there to advance the issues that women themselves would commonly face. If you require any further information, we can also provide that in due course.

On the Youth Mock Parliament, I am pleased to share to the Committee that we have dates around September. We are already working now with our development partners to ensure that we have the selection process underway. That is something that we will also host after a lapse of many years, I suppose, and it is something that we are also looking forward to host. We would like the youth to also have a similar experience that the women mock participants had.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, Madam SG, for the information. I think the youth are really looking forward, and for your information as well, a lot of youth are interested now to come before the Committee and on the BBNJ Treaty as well. A lot from overseas have even showed their interest for submissions, but I leave it to the Committee secretariat. They are eagerly looking forward to the youth parliament.

Honourable Members, do you have any questions?

HON. A.T. NAGATA.- Through you, Deputy Chairperson, I have only one question. I understand that the staff turnover rate for Parliament is 10 percent. Does Parliament have any staff retention policy in place?

MR. A. SAKULU.- Thank you, Deputy Chairperson. For the retention policy, yes, we have adopted the Civil Service Retention Policy, and we add more to it. For example, for salary band, we have a higher salary band than the Civil Service. The Civil Service we are paying from Band F, so we are a salary higher.

During COVID, when the Civil Service was advertising their positions through contract when it was nearly expiring, we renewed staff contracts. We did not send anyone home. In the meantime, there are other retention policies which we are looking at, as follows:

- (1) Reimbursement of 50 percent of fees for any officer or any staff who went for studies. If they are on part-time studies, we reimburse 50 percent of their fees.
- (2) Payment of overtime, unlike in the Civil Service, they have stopped paying overtime hours.
- (3) Plan to have an insurance policy for staff, which is in the pipeline. We are looking at submitting in the next budget.

- (4) Re-introduce long-service leave for staff. This was taken away by the Civil Service when contracts were implemented.

MS. J. EMBERSON.- I would also like to add on, Deputy Chairperson. Sometimes when people see that there is a high turnover rate of staff leaving, they think something is wrong with the institution. For this case, I would like to also highlight that all those staff who had left moved on to more lucrative work posts overseas or either locally, so in essence, it was a promotion for the staff that had left.

Whilst trying to also keep the staff here in Parliament because we have engaged and we have built upon our capacity building programmes for them and ensuring that they have that institutional knowledge, it becomes really difficult when we are not able to match the offers that is coming from the other institutions. I want to highlight that as well for honourable Members.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Madam SG, thank you for highlighting what has been forecasted for them in terms of insurance and long-service leave. Just a question on staffing, in terms of capacity building and training, do you forecast any programmes or can you highlight the local, regional and international programmes for staff capacity building and training? How does Parliament ensure the selection process? After the trainings, are they looking at a promotion increment within? Are they still part of Parliament or they have gone off to other ventures, to other companies or organisations? Just on how we have provided training, selection and if we have been able to retain these talents within Parliament space and how effective this has been.

MS. J. EMBERSON.- Thank you, honourable Deputy Chairperson and honourable Members. With some of the staff who had left, sadly, we had invested highly in their capacity building, but we were not able to match the offers that were being offered from the other side. In terms of capacity building for staff, that is something that is very important to our training unit. Our training unit is a unit that looks after those training opportunities.

Now, in terms of the opportunities that are available for the staff to engage in and which we encourage for them is the programmes that come through from our development partners - UNDP. So, if there is any organised workshops, we select according to the kind of work that the staff does on a daily basis and matching that with the outcomes of the objectives of the proposed training, then we select with the staff who needs to attend that training. So, if it is to do with the Committee's work, it will obviously be the committee staff. We will do our selection as well to ensure that everyone has had

an opportunity to participate. So, for those that have gone on more than two or three workshops, we will look at the other ones, we try not to leave anyone behind.

There are also other opportunities where staff go overseas. These would be invitations from the other bigger organizations, such as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), and if there is any other affiliate bodies that the Fijian Parliament is affiliated to. We assess those invitations, we see the relevance of the work of the institution, to the work of the respective units, and then we also decide on that. It is not just one person making a decision on who goes where, we actually have a process where our training unit or HR puts up a submission and it goes up to our level. At each level, there is some level of consultation and discussion, so at the end of the day, we would like to capitalise and achieve as much as we can from their training.

In terms of coming back to the office, staff are expected to produce a report - a Back to Office Report, on the learnings that they have achieved through their training or workshop or engagement. It does not stop there, we also have a Knowledge Management Information Session, which we try to hold every quarter or if we can hold more frequent sessions, we would also do that. That is where staff who had gone and have come back to report back to the staff and it is more a knowledge sharing session. They highlight or go through what they have reported on, they share their experiences, what they have learnt and how that has impacted their work coming back. So, we try to have them come and report back to the staff after a few weeks from return, so that at least there is some visibility of the return on that investment that has been put into that training. We are hoping that we can continue to build upon this programme. That is one of the most more effective means of trying to capacitate our staff.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- I have a final question. If you can highlight about the eight capital projects, I need clarity on that. Also, we may accept this and agree that the beauty of politics is not knowing what happens next. We had gone through a phase where Members have become independent. Some Members had said, “I wish I had my own space. Let us look at the whole of Parliament and its operations. Are we alright with the fact that the infrastructure we have supports our operations, the goals and missions of Parliament, or is there any plan on extension of infrastructure, maybe a relocation? Where are we in terms of our infrastructure? Do we need to expand, probably relocate, or that is not in the plan at all, or we are doing fine?

MS. J. EMBERSON.- Honourable Deputy Chairperson and honourable Members, that is a very pertinent question that must be asked. We say this because behind the

scenes right now, we have been discussing and consulting on the need for more space. We have been saying that even from 2014, 2015, 2016, but there just does not seem to be any further movement for more allowance of space given to Parliament.

With the former speaker, there were discussions to just try and assess or do some kind of feasibility study to see whether this location is still alright, it is still able to house the members and the growing numbers. We started with 50 Members, to 51, 55, now we are at 56. There is a need for more space, honourable Members. We have tried discussing with the Judiciary. They were good enough to hand us over Level 3, which we are using as well for one of the other blocks and some of our staffing, and I think that is about it that we will ever get.

The idea now is to look into whether expansion is feasible for Parliament or whether a total relocation. That is something that is going to be beyond what the Secretariat can push at this point. However, be rest assured that we are consulting very closely with our honourable Speaker, we are consulting also with whoever we deem to be relevant to the discussions at this point. We do not want a place that is going to be so non-compliant with OHS matters, et cetera.

Yes, I can confirm at this point that we are already having discussions. At the end of the day, it would also rest upon the government and the finances because movement is not easy. So, in trying to gauge how government expands for the entire nation, that is one of the considerations and the factors that will be needed to be taken on board. If I may inform, honourable members, that that is where we are at this point in time in terms of consultation. We are very much hoping that a standalone building for the Fijian Parliament would be an ideal start to continue the good work that the institution has now come to achieve since its re-establishment on 6th October, 2014.

HON. V. LAL.- Perhaps, one final comment, Deputy Chairperson. As we all know and as you have alluded to that there are different groupings which have come up and we were not prepared for it, we were just used to the government and opposition. Now, since different groupings, it is only fair that we also give office space to G9.

Thank you so much and thank you for your very honest answer. I would like to thank you once again for whatever you have come up with.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- My last question, for this Parliament Bus Programme, how are the selections of the schools carried out and how effective is this programme? My other question is in terms of publicity and marketing. There is a lot of good work done

Appendices - Review Report of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji 2022-2023 Annual Report

everyday that Parliament does - we do as Members of Parliament, Committee members do, and personally, I feel that it is not reflected in the media - the educational aspect of what goes on in Parliament. Then, there are always people, stirring up wrong narratives of how the legislative body works. So, there are two aspects - the school bus programme and the publicity, the PR and the media marketing of the parliamentary work.

MS. J. EMBERSON.- Thank you, honourable Deputy Chairperson. I managed to put some responses together for these two questions so, please, allow me to elaborate on those two questions.

Our Civic Education and Media Unit is the Unit that looks after the rolling of the Parliament Bus Programme. The Unit has a list of schools that have already been visited and those that have not been visited. The selection is then done based on the Unit's Parliament Bus Programme. Some had come to visit Parliament, and we aim to reach more rural schools in maritime and outer islands. Just last week, the team covered nine schools in the Nadroga/Navosa District and one special school. For those bus programmes, at the end of the sessions, we usually hand out evaluation forms and these are usually given to the teachers, to the students or to the audience who may be there. We note that more students get to know and learn more about Parliament from this such programme.

In terms of how the Unit ensures publicity on the works of Parliament, the Committee notes that there is not much engagement on our social media pages, or the Parliament TV channels during non-parliamentary or committee sittings. For Parliament to strengthen its reach through short video snippets, yes, we also note the comments or questions from the Standing Committee of the importance of undertaking this.

Can the Committee be provided with some best practices as a result of work attachments and how we have integrated this into our system to boost engagements? We would respond that the Unit will soon recruit a Parliament TV and Production Officer that will be responsible for videos and contents on our social media pages and Parliament TV channel and will work closely with the Committee secretariat for their events and public consultations.

Drawing back to the earlier question as well on whether we are fully staffed, I suppose there is always going to be a no answer to that because of the evolving needs of Parliament, the evolving work that the Committees undertake, the robust debates, that is all linked to the service that is provided to them by the staff. We can never have too many staff in Parliament, is our honest view, and we would need to ensure that we have full staff

capacity and even to continue to have an open mind to employ more because of the evolving needs of the Members of Parliament.

With that being said, we are currently making submissions. We have made submissions for these positions, so we are hoping to fill them as soon as possible. We also hope to see a shift in the way that our page is being built at this time and I would like to add that under the capable leadership of our Manager, Civic Education and Media, Bale, Tarun and the rest of the team, they have been working so hard and so well to ensure that all the Committee work is put out there for the public to be able to engage in the committee work.

We thank you, honourable Deputy Chairperson and honourable Members, for these pertinent questions. We will always continue to draw upon our failures, our gaps, we will build upon them and ensure that we continue to provide the best. So, at the end of the day, the honourable Members are able to effectively discharge their legislative, their representative, their oversight and their scrutiny functions.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, Madam SG for that brilliant summary. You have made my work even easier. I commend the leadership; I commend the work we all Members are part of and I sincerely welcome the honest opinions and discussions that we have. We, as leaders, need to address the issues we face and only then, we can work towards with the collective effort of making our legislative body deliver its purpose.

On that note, Madam SG, I wish to sincerely thank you for availing yourself for this meeting. We thank you for your time and hope that you avail yourself if the Committee has further queries on this matter.

On behalf of the Members, I declare this meeting closed.

The Committee adjourned at 11.15 p.m.

Written Responses



PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI

**PARLIAMENT COMPLEX, CONSTITUTION AVENUE
P.O.BOX 2352, GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS, SUVA
PHONE 3225600, FAX: 3305325**



Ref: PARL 6/15

21 April 2025

By email delivery:

**Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua
Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence
Parliamentary Complex
Government Buildings
SUVA**

Dear Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua,

RE: Submission to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence – Parliament of the Republic of Fiji 2022-2023 Annual Report

1. Reference is made respectfully to your letter of 25/03/2025 and email dated 01/04/2025 on the above subject matter.
2. I have duly taken note of the Standing Committee's request for the following –
 - (a) a submission on the general overview, trends analysis on achievements, staff gender segregation, with particular emphasis on the statistics of women in leadership, relevance to the Sustainable Development Goals, challenges and future outlook; and
 - (b) the additional questions numbered 1 through 23.
3. In light of the above, please kindly see attached as Appendix 1, the substantive response to the Standing Committee's request.
4. 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:

Appendix 1

Brief: Request/Questions by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence on the 2022-2023 Annual Report of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji

Date: 21 April 2025

To: Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence

From: Secretary-General to Parliament

Subject: Response to the Request/Questions by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence on the 2022-2023 Annual Report of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji

Purpose of the Brief

This brief provides responses to the request/questions raised by the Standing Committee on the Parliament's 2022-2023 Annual Report.

Background

Pursuant to Standing Order 38(2), the Hon. Speaker, on Friday, 14 March 2025, referred the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji 2022-2023 Annual Report to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence.

On 25 March 2025, the Standing Committee requested for a presentation on the following –

- (a) general overview;
- (b) trends analysis on achievements;
- (c) staff gender segregation, with particular emphasis on the statistics of women in leadership;
- (d) relevance to the Sustainable Development Goals;
- (e) challenges; and
- (f) future outlook; and

on 1 April 2025, the Standing Committee conveyed twenty-three questions for response.

A. GENERAL OVERVIEW

People are at the heart of the Fijian Parliament. Our vision and our strategy are ambitious and guide us towards making the Parliament the best it can be. A key aspect of our Strategic Plan is how the Fijian Parliament secretariat – our own people – will continue to support the Parliament in the successful delivery of its purpose, vision and mission. We will achieve this through our drive and commitment to deliver excellence in our parliamentary services.

For the reporting period in question (2022-2023), the Parliament continued to operate as a collective and collaborative effort – the way in which we worked together safely and sustainably throughout the pandemic has made us stronger, bolder, and more resilient. This positioned us well for tackling future challenges for the Parliament.

If there is one constant about working in a Parliament, it is change. We must flex and adapt so we can continue to deliver the services that Members and the people of Fiji need. We must look to how we transform our services and the way we work in a post pandemic world. We know the way in which the public wish to engage in the public debate and with Members, and the Parliament itself changes over time. We must respond to that too, and together with our Honourable Speaker, Honourable Members and the broader community, we aspire to build confidence in our Parliament and the important democratic governance it provides to Fiji.

B. TREND ANALYSIS ON ACHIEVEMENTS

The Corporate Services Division plays a vital role in supporting the Legislature by providing a comprehensive range of services across Parliament. This support extends to 55 Parliamentarians and their staff, encompassing areas such as human resources and training, financial services, information technology, security, event management, transportation, and the maintenance of the Parliament

buildings. Our collaborative efforts ensure the smooth functioning of parliamentary operations and contribute to an effective legislative process.

- Finance

August 2020–July 2021	August 2021–July 2022	August 2022–July 2023
\$8,611.2 million	\$7,108.6 million	\$8,610.5 million

For the financial year spanning August 2020 to July 2021, the budget allocation for Parliament was \$8,611.2 million. In the subsequent fiscal year, August 2021 to July 2022, the budget was initially set at \$7,063.6 million. However, in March 2022, a COVID-Response Supplementary Budget was introduced, resulting in an increase of \$45,000, bringing the total to \$7,108.6 million. This adjustment was necessary to accommodate the reinstated overtime payments.

The Finance Unit effectively managed the budget allocations, which saw a significant increase in the fiscal year 2022–2023. The total budget allocation for the reporting period in question stood at \$8,610.5 million, reflecting an increase of \$1,501.9 million. The contributing factors to the increase included the following –

1. The re-opening of both national and international borders allowing for Parliamentary engagements locally and abroad;
2. Reinstatement of funding for the Standing Committees parliamentary work including site visits and public consultations;
3. Investments in upgrading Parliament’s Information and Communication Technology (ICT) system; and
4. Maintenance and servicing of the Parliament building.

- ICT Security and System Upgrades

From August 2020 to July 2021 and continuing through to July 2022, the ICT Unit successfully implemented Microsoft Office 365 E1, enhancing virtual meeting capabilities for Parliament. In the fiscal year 2022-2023, significant developments surfaced and these pertained to translation during plenary sessions, an upgrade of the operating system to Windows 10, and the installation of Trend Micro Antivirus and Malware protection across all computers within the Network.

The ICT Unit has been instrumental in delivering and managing business applications that support the effective administration of parliamentary operations and standing committees. Through the strategic use of technology, the unit has facilitated engagement with the public and ensured ongoing efficiency in parliamentary functions.

A key milestone for Parliament at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic was the establishment of a hybrid system for parliamentary sittings, committee hearings, and virtual deliberations.

The hybrid system allowed the institution to hold its first-ever hybrid sittings between May and June of 2021. Over 50% of our Members of Parliament attended virtually, ensuring that the Parliament's essential functions continued whilst at the same time, adhering to strict COVIDsafety protocols.

This adaptability and commitment to good governance during challenging times speak volumes of our resilience.

Our hybrid engagements have continued post-pandemic, particularly for Standing Committee deliberations and public engagements. The studio setup we invested in supports live streaming, sign-language interpreters, and two-way virtual communication, making our Parliament more accessible to citizens and stakeholders.

In line with the commitment to improving physical security and cybersecurity measures, the unit conducted a review and implemented Endpoint Trend Micro Antivirus and Malware software across all computers within the Local Area Network. Additionally, the upgrade from Windows 8.0 to Windows 10 was completed in the fiscal year 2022-2023.

A notable achievement for the financial year 2022-2023 was the establishment of two additional audio channels that enabled real-time interpretation of the *Vosavakaviti* and *Hindi* for the 55 Members of Parliament, the Honourable Speaker, and the secretariat in the Chambers.

The ICT Unit collaborates closely with the Standing Committees, Civic and Media sectors, and the *Hansard* Unit to ensure comprehensive recording, broadcasting, and archiving of audio and audiovisual records of parliamentary sessions. This collaboration has facilitated a 100% delivery rate of written Hansard reports of parliamentary debates and committee discussions. The ICT Unit remains committed to enhancing the technological framework that supports Parliament's essential functions and public engagement.

- **Asset Management**

From August 2022 to July 2023, the Parliament fleet successfully completed 5,841 vehicle runs and conducted 155 service and maintenance operations, resulting in an expenditure of \$41,007.26 on fuel.

During the fiscal year 2022-2023, the fleet consisted of nine vehicles, which included a 12seater mini-bus designated to support 55 Members of Parliament and 75 staff. The recorded vehicle runs reflect the increasing demands placed on the fleet to facilitate official engagements of Parliamentarians, encompassing committee work, official trips, and workshops and training sessions. This data has been meticulously compiled from fuel purchase records and vehicle log sheets.

- **Tables and Journals and Committees**

The Standing Committees play a vital role in the legislative process by conducting meetings, public consultations, and site visits. Their activities from August 2020 to July 2023 are summarised below –

August 2020–July 2021	August 2021–July 2022	August 2022–July 2023
35 Sitting Days	40 Sitting Days	25 Sitting Days
49 Acts	59 Acts	22 Acts
307 Committee Meetings	546 Committee Meetings	387 Committee Meetings
216 Virtual Meetings	326 Virtual Meetings	0 Virtual Meetings
91 Face-to-face Meetings	213 Face-to-face Meetings	314 Face-to-face Meetings
0 Hybrid Meetings	7 Hybrid Meetings	73 Hybrid Meetings
0 Public Consultations	0 Public Consultations	38 Public Consultations
0 Site Visits	0 Site Visits	17 Site Visits
115 Oral Questions	195 Oral Questions	93 Oral Questions
15 Written Questions	28 Written Questions	26 Written Questions
47 Committee Reports Tabled	45 Committee Reports Tabled	39 Committee Reports Tabled

The financial year 2022-2023 experienced a notable increase in face-to-face committee meetings, with a total of 314 meetings held, up from 213 in the previous financial year. This trend reflects a return to traditional meeting formats as pandemic-related restrictions continued to ease. Additionally, committees have adopted a hybrid meeting format since 2022, allowing for greater flexibility in participation, particularly for members unable to attend in person due to travel or location constraints.

During the financial year, a total of 17 site visits and 38 public consultations were conducted. These efforts included engagements in the northern regions led by the Public Accounts Committee and the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights. A significant highlight was the consultations regarding the Heritage Bill 2023, which showcased a commitment to fostering public input on important legislative matters.

Despite the increase in face-to-face engagement, the 2022-2023 reporting period recorded the lowest number of sitting days compared to previous financial years. This decline in sitting days also coincided with a reduced number of Acts passed, which can be attributed to various factors, including the lasting impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and shifts in parliamentary priorities, and the period leading up to the general election.

Moreover, there was a decrease in the quantity of oral questions posed during this period, with 93 questions submitted compared to 195 in the previous year. However, the number of written questions remained relatively stable, and the overall number of committee reports tabled also saw a decline, suggesting the decline in parliamentary activities as the nation was gearing up for the general election.

• Civic Education and Media

The Civic Education and Media Unit has been instrumental in enhancing the Fijian Parliament's engagement with the wider community. This has been achieved through various initiatives and the strategic use of information and communication technology (ICT). The following is a detailed assessment of the unit's activities and achievements from August 2020 to July 2023.

August 2020–July 2021	August 2021–July 2022	August 2022–July 2023
37 Press Releases	22 Press Releases	41 Press releases
273 visitors to Parliament (March -July 2022)		2,703 Visitors to Parliament
145,000 Engagements on the Parliament social media platforms	Over 300,000 Engagements on the Parliament social media platforms	Facebook reach of 1,315,544
		Parliament Bus Programme – 2,819 Students and 250 Teachers

Throughout the period from August 2020 to July 2023, the Civic Education and Media Unit has significantly enhanced the Fijian Parliament's engagement with the broader community, leveraging information and communication technology (ICT) to facilitate digital interaction with parliamentary content. The unit has prioritised creating a pleasant and informative visitor experience in collaboration with various assets while actively supporting the Parliament's outreach initiatives and promoting the development of parliamentary democracy through diverse social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically in March 2021, the unit initiated live broadcasts of committee public consultations in the Western and Northern divisions. Although outreach programmes, including the 'Parliament Bus' Programme, Speaker's Debates, and Tours to Parliament, faced disruptions due to COVID-safety restrictions, the unit adapted by exploring alternative methods to educate and inform the public about parliamentary developments. The provision of IT equipment proved instrumental in maintaining active update capacities across social media outlets. Between 2020 and 2022, the unit successfully recorded over 445,000 engagements across its social media platforms.

With the resumption of face-to-face public engagement in March 2022, the Parliament welcomed an estimated 273 visitors from March to July of that same year. The following financial year (2022-2023) witnessed a remarkable increase, with 2,703 individuals visiting Parliament. A noteworthy highlight of FY 2022-2023 occurred on the first day of sitting following the 2022 general election, during which the Facebook reach alone reached 410,500, totalling 337,000 viewers. Overall, the total reach for this reporting period was 1,315,544, with Twitter and Instagram accounts also experiencing growth in followers.

Another significant achievement in the 2022-2023 financial year was the revival of the Parliament Bus Programme after a four-year hiatus. This initiative, funded by the UNDP Fiji Parliament Support Project, successfully engaged 2,819 students and 250 teachers, demonstrating the unit's ongoing commitment to civic education and outreach.

1. Increase in Press Releases: There was a notable increase in the number of press releases issued during FY 2022-2023 (41) compared to FY 2021-2022 (22), reflecting a more proactive approach to information dissemination and public engagement.

2. Visitor Engagement: The number of visitors to Parliament saw a substantial rise in FY 2022-2023 (2,703) compared to the period from March to July 2022 (273), indicating the success of resumed public engagement activities post-COVID-19 restrictions.
3. Social Media Reach: Engagement on social media platforms more than doubled from FY 2020-2021 (145,000) to FY 2022-2023 (over 300,000). Notably, the Facebook reach for FY 2022-2023 reached 1,315,544, underscoring the effectiveness of digital engagement strategies.
4. Parliament Bus Programme: The revival of the Parliament Bus Programme in FY 2022-2023 marks a significant advancement in civic education efforts, reaching 2,819 students and 250 teachers and reaffirming the unit's dedication to outreach and education within the community.

C. Gender Composition and Highlights

The gender composition and notable achievements related to gender equality within the Parliament staff from August 2020 to July 2023 are summarised below –

August 2020–July 2021	August 2021–July 2022	August 2022–July 2023
41 female and 28 male	40 female and 26 male	43 female and 37 male

During the financial year 2020–2021, a total of 12 staff contracts were renewed for three-year terms. This period included 2 new appointments, 3 retirements, 1 resignation and 1 death. Additionally, 1 staff proceeded on military leave to serve on an overseas mission, whilst 3 staff were seconded to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for a short-term assignment to support the Nauru Parliament.

In the 2021–2022 financial year, the Parliament successfully advertised and filled 12 positions and whilst 11 interns were recruited.

During the financial year 2022–2023, several staffing changes occurred, including 10 resignations, 2 new appointments, and the promotion of 8 existing staff. Furthermore, 18 acting positions were filled to ensure operational continuity. Despite a turnover rate of 10%, our HR and Training Unit had consistently engaged graduate interns and volunteers through the National Employment Centre (NEC) to maintain and ensure the smooth operations of the institution.

At the close of the 2022–2023 financial year, the parliamentary service comprised 75 staff, which included 60 established staff, 5 support services personnel, 2 drivers, and 8 interns.

- Increase in Female Staff: Over the past three fiscal years, there has been a slight but consistent increase in the number of female staff members. This trend reflects the Parliament’s commitment to promoting gender equality within its workforce.
- Balanced Gender Composition: By FY 2022-2023, the gender composition of the Parliament staff showed a balanced representation, with 43 female and 37 male staff members. This balance is indicative of the efforts to ensure gender diversity and inclusivity.
- Senior Positions Held by Women: A considerable proportion of senior positions within the Parliament are held by women. Notable appointments include Mrs. Jeanette Emberson as Secretary-General to Parliament and Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua as Deputy Speaker. These appointments highlight the progress made towards gender equality in leadership roles.

D. RELEVANCE TO THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

- **Fijian Parliament and the SDGs**

Parliaments are responsible for holding their Governments (Executive) to account for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Agenda 2030 Declaration acknowledges the “essential role of national parliaments through their enactment of legislation and adoption of budgets, and their role in ensuring accountability for the effective implementation of our commitments.”

Parliaments are highlighted in the SDGs themselves as part of a stand-alone goal that recognises the critical linkage between sustainable development and democratic governance.

The main Parliamentary bodies that undertaken monitoring of the Government's progressing of the SDGs are the Standing Committee in the various thematic areas that come under their respective ambits.

Standing Committees should be undertaking SDG analyses when undertaking their oversight and scrutiny work, particularly in the review of legislation, annual reports and other Committee work.

The Secretariat role is to facilitate this by providing the necessary support. Since 2016, the Secretariat has undertaken certain activities to assist Parliament and its Standing Committees to progress on their SDG commitment. This has been undertaken through –

- Gender Mainstreaming and the Gender Toolkit;
- Standing Committee Guidance Note on the SDGs – guideline for Standing Committees to undertake SDG analyses during review of Bills, Annual Report and other relevant Committee undertakings;
- SDG Self-Assessment was undertaken at the end of 2017 and published in 2018. [We are overdue for another assessment to new parliamentary terms and new MPs]; and
- Secretariat through the Research Unit monitors SDG work by MPs through the *Hansard* records (this was put on hold due to staff resource constraints, and is being slowly revised as at the end of 2024).

The resumption of the Speaker's Debate in 2024 is another SDG-related activity through which Parliament is doing its part in bringing the SDG to the public agenda.

Parliament has also been involved in certain actions that are SDG-related, particularly within the context of its inter-parliament engagement. Examples are –

- CPA – Commonwealth Women’s Parliamentarians (CWP) Fiji Group; • CPA – Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disability (CPwD) Network; and
- Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum on Global Health (APPFGH).

These include Parliament’s participation at various inter-parliamentary conferences and workshops on SDG-related topics on climate change, disaster management, peacebuilding, gender and women, and so forth.

Note: Parliament has not undertaken any other capacity-building on the SDGs especially in terms of understanding goals, targets, implementation and monitoring, since 2019. This is important as we have new MPs (2022-2026 term) and also changes in staff, particularly for the Standing Committee secretariat who need to be sensitised to the SDGs and also understanding the relevance to Standing Committee oversight.

E. CHALLENGES

As an evolving institution that must remain relevant to the people, we constantly faced challenges such as –

- (a) challenges in planning, the annual legislative programme and competing expectations among clients (MP’s) and others;
- (b) cybersecurity threats to the Fijian Parliament website, network infrastructure and data repositories;
- (c) significant disruption of business operations as a result of major external events; and (d) challenges in filling key roles and limited funding.

However, these challenges along with the ones posed by the COVID-19 pandemic made us stronger, bolder, and more resilient – and this has bolstered our commitment to delivering exceptional and professional services to the Honourable Speaker and Honourable Members of Parliament.

F. FUTURE OUTLOOK

Making a positive difference to the lives of Fijians is the strategic vision for the Parliament. Our Members and everyone who works for them and for the Parliament have a crucial role to play in making sure that this is at the heart of all we do.

This scrutiny function is key to ensuring that the people of Fiji are well-served by their Parliament and that their voices are heard. Building on these achievements, we strive to have a Parliament that even better represents the people. This is how we will strengthen Fiji's place as a modern and dynamic parliamentary democracy.

G. QUESTIONS ON THE PARLIAMENT'S 2022-2023 ANNUAL REPORT

Committees and Tables and Journals Unit:

1. Of the number of Annual Reports tabled in Parliament, what is the status on the total number of reports referred to each Standing Committees, number of review reports tabled back in Parliament and number of pending reports before Committees. The Committee understands that there are no provisions in the SO that allow for timeframes given for annual reports. Is Parliament considering putting stringent measures to allow for effective reporting in moving forward?

SUMMARY				
TOTAL REPORTS TABLED 69 REFERRED TO	BREAKDOWN OF THE REPORTS REFERRED TO STANDING COMMITTEES			
		REFERRED TO STANDING COMMITTEES	TABLED COMMITTEE REPORTS	PENDING REPORTS
	Public Accounts	9	–	9
	Justice, Law and Human Rights	6	–	6
	Social Affairs	27	5	22

STANDING COMMITTEES 64	Economic Affairs	12	2	10
	Foreign Affairs and Defence	3	–	3
NOTED BY MEMBERS 5	Natural Resources	7	2	5
TOTAL		64	9	55

2. What are some of the challenges faced by Parliament in facilitating Committee meetings? What could be some areas of improvement?
- (a) The availability of meeting rooms is a major challenge – Only 3 meeting rooms are available for the six Standing Committees and one Sub-committee;
 - (b) Lack of quorum – ensuring quorum is achieved – without a quorum, discussions and decision-making can be delayed and meetings can be cancelled;
 - (c) Cancellation of scheduled meetings where the meeting must reschedule which leads to no rooms available and reorganisation of staffing, equipment (IT etc.) and other logistics;
 - (d) Time Constraints for reporting back to the House – Committees often face tight schedules due to the large volume of work they need to process. This leads to rushed discussions and incomplete analysis;
 - (e) Complexity of Issues – Some of the issues discussed in committee meetings are highly complex, requiring specialised knowledge. Without expertise in certain areas, committee members may struggle to fully understand and deliberate on the matter at hand;
 - (f) Inadequate Technology and Infrastructure – Members and secretariat must be issued with latest laptops to ensure work is carried out efficiently considering today’s fast-paced, technology-driven environment. Modern laptops with updated software and hardware capabilities is crucial;
 - (g) Implementing better scheduling and ensuring stricter attendance policies could help address this issue. Additionally, using technology like virtual meetings (where allowed) could make it easier for Members to attend remotely;

- (h) The possibility of hiring outside venue to assist Committees in their meetings and utilisation of hybrid meetings; and
- (i) Better Scheduling and Workload Management: Implementing better systems for scheduling meetings, reducing the frequency of overlapping committee sessions, and balancing the workload of Members could help ensure more focused and productive meetings.

Asset Management and Transport Unit:

3. Please provide a breakdown of the 8 capital projects undertaken during the year under review, how is this correlating with the Financial Statements on page 27.

Below are the eight projects mentioned in the report –

- (a) BCR Kitchen Upgrade – Modernising kitchen facilities;
- (b) Level 3 Carpet Replacement – Enhancing comfort and safety;
- (c) Generator Muffler Upgrade – Reducing noise and improving backup power reliability;
- (d) Air-Conditioning Improvements – Maintenance and servicing for better energy efficiency;
- (e) Air-Conditioning Installations – New installations to meet staff needs;
- (f) Security Enhancements – Upgrading electronic door controls;
- (g) Polishing Works – Enhancing aesthetics in BCR and SCR rooms; and (h) Stainless Steel Installations – Upgrades in the OCTA Room.

Since Parliament operates under a one-line budget, much of its funding was allocated through the operating expenditure, which was managed internally. As a result, most initiatives, including infrastructure and facility-related improvements, were funded through the operating allocation rather than being categorised as major capital works. This approach allowed for more flexible

financial management but also meant that larger projects had to be prioritised based on available resources and operational needs.

4. Has there been any exercise/study conducted on how Parliament could reduce its fuel expenses of \$41,007.26 as stipulated on page 12 of the report?

The monitoring on fuel expenses is conducted through monthly reports, which are submitted regularly for review. These reports provide insights into fuel consumption and fleet management.

In addition to providing the normal transportation within Parliament, the fleet also supports Committee tours, staff tours, and other trips required by the Executive and Members of Parliament.

Currently, there are a total of nine vehicles in the Parliamentary fleet, averaging a fuel cost of approximately \$379.40 per vehicle per month. With close monitoring of the global and national fluctuating fuel prices, this expenditure is generally considered sufficient and not exorbitant for maintaining transportation needs whilst ensuring operational efficiency and full discharge of MPs legislative, representative and oversight and scrutiny functions.

5. How is Parliament addressing limited office space specifically for its Members of Parliament?

This has been a pending issue since Parliament's re-establishment in October 2014. The former Registry Office at Level 3 was the only space that was allocated to Parliament after the office was relocated to the Parliament Old Complex in Veiuto. The Government of the day through the Office Accommodation office at the Ministry of Civil Service allocates office spaces for all Government Ministries and Departments.

Ongoing discussions are happening for moves to have a standalone Parliament building or major extension in the current site.

Inter-Parliamentary Relations and Protocol Unit:

6. The Committee notes the two UNDP Funded Workshops reported for the period under review, can Parliament provide the breakdown of UNDP workshops conducted from 2020-2023. What are some of the gaps/challenges these workshops address?

(a) MPs Training 6-8 December 2021 (Inter-Continental Hotel, Natadola)

Topics that were covered are as follows –

- Standing Orders, including parliamentary privileges and ethics.
 - Panel on Electoral Systems and Party Systems: A comparative perspective on advantages and disadvantages of different electoral systems.
 - Making and Changing Government in Pacific Parliamentary Systems, including core principles for the smooth transfer of power from one government to the next.
 - Role of Parliament in Curbing Corruption: Transparency International's recent Corruption Barometer for the Pacific.
 - COVID-19 Crisis: Parliamentary Innovation and Response during the Pandemic: Emergency Powers and the Role of Parliament.
 - Panel on Electoral Systems and Party Systems, Representation: A comparative perspective.
- (b) Staff 2021-2022 Strategic and Operational Plan Workshop, 16th – 17th December 2021 at the Natadola Resort. The COVID-19 outbreak had impacted, and continues to impact, parliaments in different ways, ranging from minimal to existential challenges. The current experience has no doubt reshaped parliament practices and strategies, many of which lead to some permanent changes. To successfully preserve the operation of Parliament, during a time of global pandemic whereby the key functions of Parliament as a legislative body are arguably most needed, it was crucial that appropriate, proportionate and reasonable measures were taken to facilitate these changes. An evaluation of Parliament's operations before and during the crisis helped the secretariat to take stock and understand our operations and inform our recovery and strategic process to ensure that it continues to achieve the mission of being a parliament that is: representative, transparent, accessible, accountable and effective.

- (c) Staff Refresher and Strategic Plan Review Workshop held at the Outrigger Fiji Beach Resort, Coral Coast on 22-26 November 2022. The refresher workshop introduced staff to current trends and updated their knowledge on new standards of practices that emerged over the years. It also ensured that staff understood and were updated on the latest rules and policies. The review of the Strategic Plan aligns the organisation to a new vision, mission, and long-term objectives after the expiry of the initial plan. The new plan identified gaps from the old and allocated the resources necessary to achieve the strategic goals. It also identified the risks involved, addressed performance issues and challenges and ensured that the secretariat would do better in serving the MPs come the new term of Parliament.
- (d) Induction Programme for new Members of Parliament on Tuesday, 20 December 2022 at the Grand Pacific Hotel and it was aimed at preparing Members for the first sitting of Parliament, which was the administration of Oaths.

7. How effective are overseas visits for MPs and Staff? How is Parliament ensuring that selected learnings are implemented – what mechanisms are in place to monitor postevaluation in particular for parliament attachments?

Overseas study visits and meetings for MPs and staff provide opportunities to meet with foreign parliamentarians and parliamentary staff, establish personal connections, and foster a sense of understanding and cooperation. It allows MPs and staff to observe different approaches to parliamentary best practices, governance, policies, and providing valuable insights that can improve internal decision-making.

MPs and staff are also exposed to international issues firsthand and enhance better understanding of global issues and challenges. Regular engagement overseas with other parliamentarians leads to stronger parliamentary relations which will be beneficial to our Parliament.

The reports from MPs and staff are mechanisms for monitoring lessons learnt and how successful the overseas study tours and meetings attended by MPs and staff. Most of these have been implemented including the review of the Standing Orders, parliamentary oversight of Government actions and legislative scrutiny.

Human Resources, Administration and Training Unit:

8. When will Parliament conduct a job evaluation exercise?

The next job evaluation exercise for Parliament is anticipated to take place after the current round of filling all budget-approved vacant positions is completed. The last such evaluation was conducted in 2018, which has made it imperative to reassess job roles and responsibilities to ensure they align with the evolving demands and workload of the Parliament and its Standing Committees. Given the significant changes in both legislative priorities and the scope of work expected from parliamentary staff, it is advisable to conduct this evaluation before the commencement of the new/next Parliamentary term. This will not only help in optimising performance and efficiency but also in ensuring that roles are appropriately aligned with the Parliament's objectives moving forward.

9. How is Parliament addressing staff turnover (refer to page 32)? Please provide statistics on the number of staff employed, resigned and number of vacancies prior to 2022-2023.

Parliament is actively working to reduce staff turnover by implementing a variety of constructive strategies aimed at enhancing employee satisfaction and retention. Here are some key measures being put into action –

- (a) We prioritise career development by offering a variety of opportunities to support professional growth. We provide engagement training programmes designed to enhance skills and knowledge. Additionally, we encourage our staff to take advantage of the study assistance outlined in our Learning and Development Policy, which reimburses educational investments. We also strive to establish clearly defined career paths to help navigate advancement within the Parliament.
- (b) Employee Engagement Initiatives: To elevate employee morale and engagement, we are reintroducing the quarterly SG Hour programme and revitalising the Wellness, Social, and Sports Committee. These initiatives are designed to create a more vibrant and connected workplace.

- (c) **Non-Monetary Benefits:** We are also introducing valuable non-monetary benefits, such as long service leave, which acknowledges the loyalty and dedication of our employees. This initiative rewards staff with additional time-off after meeting a qualifying period of service, allowing them to recharge and refresh.

These strategies reflect our broader vision to make Parliament an even more attractive place to work, ultimately leading to a more stable and effective workforce.

Financial Year	2018 – 2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Resignations	7	3	0	5	13
Males	4	1	0	2	7
Females	3	2	0	3	6
Turnover Rate	11%	5.8%	0%	6.4%	19.7%

What are some of the capacity building provided for staff?

We are committed to fostering the professional growth of our staff through a variety of development opportunities. These include local training sessions offered both internally and externally, participation in specialised workshops, attendance at industry conferences, and engagement in Parliament work attachments that provide practical experience. Furthermore, we facilitate overseas training programmes and on-the-job training to broaden skill sets and perspectives.

Additionally, we provide comprehensive on-the-job training programmes that are designed to equip employees with the necessary skills and knowledge required to excel in their roles. These training sessions are tailored to meet the specific demands of each

position and often include hands-on experience, mentorship from experienced, and access to a variety of resources to ensure a thorough learning process.

Staff are strongly encouraged to actively participate in KMI (Knowledge Management Initiative) sessions. These sessions are designed to facilitate the sharing of insights and key learnings derived from the various training programs that employees have attended. By engaging in these discussions, staff can contribute to a collaborative learning environment, where they reflect on their experiences and apply their newfound knowledge to enhance their professional development and the overall effectiveness of the organisation. This initiative not only fosters individual growth but also enhances collective understanding and best practices within the team.

To support continued education, those pursuing part-time studies will receive reimbursement for 50% of their tuition fees upon successful course completion. This initiative underscores our dedication to investing in our employees' future and enhancing their expertise within the organisation.

10. In line with the Ministry of Civil Service key strategies on addressing staff retention, what are some of the multi-faceted approaches Parliament has adopted over the years? How effective are these strategies?

Parliament has adopted several multi-faceted approaches to address staff retention, aligning with the Fiji Ministry of Civil Service's key strategies. Here are some notable measures –

- (a) Employee Engagement Initiatives: To elevate employee morale and engagement, we are reintroducing the quarterly SG Hour program and revitalising the Wellness, Social, and Sports Committee. These initiatives are designed to create a more vibrant and connected workplace.
- (b) Non-Monetary Benefits: We are also introducing valuable non-monetary benefits, such as long service leave, which acknowledges the loyalty and dedication of our employees. This initiative rewards staff with additional time off after meeting a qualifying period of service, allowing them to recharge and refresh.

- (c) Flexible Work Arrangements: Offering flexible working hours to help employees balance their work and personal lives better as per our Flextime policy.
- (d) The salary bands for Parliament staff exceed those of the civil service, reflecting a commitment to attract and retain skilled professionals. In our last budget proposal, we successfully advocated salary increments, recognising the hard work and dedication of our staff.
- (e) Recently, contracts were renewed without a competitive advertising process, raising the importance of ensuring that internal candidates are considered before seeking external applicants.
- (f) Furthermore, we offer a reimbursement of 50% of fees for employees pursuing part-time studies, promoting professional development and continuous learning.
- (g) Furthermore, time-off is rewarded at the end of the financial year, ensuring that employees have financial security when they take their leave. This approach not only promotes a healthy work-life balance but also values the well-being of our staff.
- (h) We are currently in the process of submitting a budget request to implement a comprehensive insurance plan for employees, with a strong emphasis on prioritising their well-being.

These initiatives underscore our dedication to enhancing the work environment and supporting our valued staff.

11. Since Parliament operates in a politically affiliated environment, does it have a whistleblower policy for staff considering if the Code of Conduct Bill is passed in Parliament?

The secretariat duly notes the recommendation by the Standing Committee and will engage if further consultations before any further action is taken.

12. In reference to page 31 of the annual report, can Parliament provide a breakdown of catering cost for all Parliament and Committee Sittings (Including Standing and Select Committees) for the year under review (reference to page 31)?

The catering costs are as follows:

1. Parliament Sittings

(a)	Refreshments from Café Moments (Parliament Opening):	\$3,326.08
(b)	Refreshments for August-September Sitting:	\$24,073.04
(c)	Swearing-in of Members of Parliament:	\$4,173.91
(d)	Member of Parliaments Dinner February Sitting:	\$1,152.29
(e)	Refreshments for February Sitting:	\$9,391.30
(f)	Refreshments for March Sitting:	\$16,256.52
(g)	Refreshments for April Sitting:	\$10,173.91
(h)	Member of Parliaments Dinner April Sitting:	\$6,443.48
(i)	Budget Debate afternoon tea:	\$542.32
(j)	Refreshments for Budget Debate:	\$21,052.17
Total expenditure		\$96,585.02

2. Standing Committees

(a)	Social Affairs:	\$3731.16
(b)	National Resources:	\$2,761.40
(c)	Justice, Law & Human Rights:	\$2,779
(d)	Foreign Affairs & Defence:	\$2,317.64
(e)	Economic Affairs:	\$3,387.73
(f)	Public Accounts Committee:	\$4,433.23

Total Expenditure \$19,410

3. Select Committee

(a) Business:	\$1503.95
(b) Standing Orders:	\$621.74
(c) Privileges:	\$895.65

Total Expenditure \$3021.34

The total cost of catering was **\$119,061.36**

13. Can Parliament also provide a breakdown of the cost of standing committees site visits and public consultations undertaken during the year under review (reference to page 31)?

The Parliamentary Standing Committees undertook 38 Public Consultations and 17 Site Visits during the 2022-2023 fiscal year.

- (a) Standing Committee on Economic Affairs (SCEA) visited PAFCO in Levuka, the total expenditure was \$730.
- (b) Standing Committee on Natural Resources (SCNR): Fisheries Station, \$16,072; Committee Site Visit, Nadi \$500; Site Visit at Department of Fisheries, Tavua \$575; & Site Visit to the Ministry of Fisheries, Labasa, Vanua Levu, \$500.
- (c) Standing Committee on Justice, Law & Human Rights to the North & Levuka Site Visits, \$7,471; Site Visit to the Western Division \$2,500 & \$6290 respectively.

The total expenditure for Standing Committee sites visits and consultations was **\$34,638**.

14. Can Parliament provide more information on how it is addressing issues on falsification of address by Members of Parliament – what are some of the internal controls that it has implemented (reference to page 32)?

The secretariat undertook a review of the Administrative Guidelines and Declaration

Form for the Members of Parliaments and sought the views of the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption which we have incorporated into the forms. Further vetting was also sought from the Office of the Solicitor-General. MPs forms now have a requirement that they must be signed and stamped by a lawyer or JP before it is submitted to the Internal Audit Committee for verification before they are endorsed by the Secretary-General for payment.

Civic, Education and Media Unit:

15. The Committee notes that the Civic, Education and Media Unit had 4 staff resignations leaving the Unit with 2 staff. What is the current capacity to date (page 17)? What is the proposed plans for a fully-fledged Unit (refer to page 17)?

The Unit still has two staff and one Intern, who is currently on Maternity Leave, however the post-processing is currently underway for two more positions and one senior position will be advertised in the month of April. This should now bring the number of positions to six, with the inclusion of the Graphics Designer, who has been re-assigned from the ICT Unit to the Civic Education and Media Unit.

16. How effective is the Youth Mock Parliament? Is there any post-evaluation conducted after this is undertaken or how and where are youths being represented in the works of Parliament?

The last Youth Mock Parliament was held in 2015, however, we are pleased to confirm that the next one will be held in September of 2025. In 2017, the Youth Mock Parliament Prime Minister took part in the 6th Asia-Pacific Youth Parliament, and in 2021, two Youth Mock Parliament participants took part in the 12th Virtual Commonwealth Youth Parliament.

On Commonwealth Day last year (2024), there was an Open Day in Parliament for tertiary institutions and we continue to engage with other youth groups who want to visit Parliament and to learn more about Parliament.

17. Why did it take long for the drafting of the 2022-2026 Community Engagement Strategy (page 18) to finalise?

The Manager of the Unit resigned before the finalisation of the strategy, and with only two staff at that time, priority emphasis was placed on the core deliverables of the Unit which did not include the finalisation of the Strategy. The Unit continues to implement part of the strategy, according to the strength of the Unit and with more staff that will be recruited this year, more activities will be undertaken as outlined in the Strategy.

18. In terms of the Parliament Bus Programme, how are the selection of schools carried out? How effective is this programme (refer to page 18)?

The Unit has a list of schools that have already been visited and those that have not been visited are selected as part of the Unit's Parliament Bus programme. In some cases, the schools bring their students and teachers to visit Parliament. And with respect to those that cannot come to the precincts, our Unit endeavours to reach them, particularly for those in the rural and maritime areas.

During the last week in March 2025, our team covered nine schools and one special school in the Nadroga/Navosa District.

Evaluation forms are distributed at the end of each programme and from these survey, we are able to establish that more students become aware and learn more about Parliament from the Parliament Bus programme.

19. How is the Unit ensuring publicity on the works of Parliament? The Committee notes that there is not much engagement on our social media Pages or Parliament TV Channels during non-parliamentary or committee sittings? For Parliament to strengthen its reach through short video snippets (90-second video on the works of MPs behind the scenes by involving youths from universities to

undertake this activity), animated videos targeting our children/youths on the works of Parliament basically on the importance of the mace, type of parliamentary system, the works of Parliament and Committees etc.? Can the Committee be provided with some best practices as a result of work attachments and how have we integrated this into our system to boost engagements?

The Unit will soon recruit a Parliament TV and Production Officer that will be responsible for videos and contents on our Social Media pages and the free-to-air Parliament TV Channel on the Walesi platform. Our team will continue to work closely with the Committee Secretariat for their events and public consultations.

Information, Communications and Technology Unit:

20. How safe is our ICT system from cybercrime and malicious activities confronting our society today?

Parliament subscribes to Microsoft Business Premium with the use of online Collaboration tools primarily within the Microsoft 365 ecosystem. These tools facilitate communication, document sharing and project management for remote and hybrid teams. Key tools include Microsoft Teams, OneDrive, SharePoint and Outlook Groups.

Microsoft 365 Business Premium offers several key security advantages designed to protect small and medium-sized businesses like Parliament with a maximum of 300 users.

- (a) Advanced threat protection: It includes Microsoft Defender for office 365, which helps against phishing, ransomware and other sophisticated cyber threats.
- (b) Identity and Access Management: with Microsoft Entra ID, protects against password theft and ensure secure access to business apps from anywhere.
- (c) Device Management: Microsoft Intune allows us to manage and secure devices, including the ability to remotely wipe data from lost or stolen devices.

- (d) Data protection: Microsoft Purview helps protect and classify sensitive data, encrypt messages and prevent data loss.
- (e) Secure Collaboration: Tools like Microsoft Teams and SharePoint enables us to secure communication and collaboration, ensuring that only authorised personnel can access confidential information.

These features collectively provide a robust security framework, helping business operate securely and efficiently from anywhere. The govnet domain is administered by the Department of Information Technology and Computing Services (ITC&S) responsible for providing information Technology to Government departments and ministries. A similar strategy has been implemented by ITC&S to protect their infrastructure from cyber threats.

21. Does Parliament have the right tools and technology issued to staff to ensure seamless work is undertaken particularly when there are public consultations and site visits. For streaming of live public consultations, are staff adequately resourced to undertake this exercise or what are the plans for live streaming of sessions outside of the Parliament precinct?

Parliament staff have been provided with a Microsoft business Premium account that enables them to work remotely. Parliament was allocated funds to upgrade and replace legacy hardware and software. For the procurement of replacement equipment, Parliament is working on the BOS of equipment and tender for replacement to ensure compliance to the Financial Management Act and other applicable laws. Streaming of public consultation and site visits was carried out at a small scale with the use of mobile phones devices. There are plans to broadcast live public submission outside of Parliament on the Parliament Television Channel.

22. Is Parliament considering acquiring translation and sign language interpreters' services at the Committee stage?

This can be facilitated in the Committees if the Language Translators are available during the live broadcasting. Also, as part of our long-term plan, Parliament is working on the broadcasting of Parliament Sittings and Committee Submissions in vernacular with the inclusion of language interpreters as well.

23. How is Parliament addressing IT glitches during Parliament and Committee Sittings?

Parliament is working on the Multi-language Translations and Captioning project with the use of AI ASR (Audio Speech Recognition) in the Chambers and Committees. The integration of new systems to the current infrastructure to facilitate the broadcasting of multilanguage and captioning is a complex exercise that causes disruptions when tested during a live session. The technical team is working closely with our vendors to identify, isolate and rectify issues in a very short time. Building redundancies in the system is the only way to ensure continued operations and minimises down-time. It is a way of increasing reliability and resilience by having multiple paths or layers of protection against failure.

The secretariat will continue however, to work on improving on identified gaps and ensuring that there is minimal to no disruptions during Parliament and Committee sittings.

-ENDS-
