



STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE

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



PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI
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Acronyms

Acronyms

CPA	-	Commonwealth Parliamentary Association
UNDP	-	United Nations Development Programme
ITC	-	Information Technology and Computing Services
JEE	-	Job Evaluation Exercise
KMI	-	Knowledge Management Initiative
SCFAD	-	Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence
SDGs	-	Sustainable Development Goals
MP	-	Members of Parliament
FPSP	-	Fiji Parliament Support Project
MLTC	-	Multi-language Translations and Captioning

Chairperson's Foreword

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence (Committee) hereby presents to Parliament the Review Report of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji's 2022-2023 Annual Report.

The Parliament of the Republic of Fiji (Parliament) is the legislative body of the country. It is based on the principles of the Westminster Parliamentary System and guided by the 2013 Constitution of the Republic of Fiji. The Parliament is a unicameral legislature comprising 51 members (after the 2018 general election and 55 members after the 2022 general election). Section 46 (1) of the Constitution provides that the authority and power to make laws for the State is vested in Parliament and is exercised through the enactment of Bills and assented to by the President.


Parliament is the voice of the Fijian people, charged with passing laws to ensure public safety, promote economic opportunity, guarantee equality under the law, provide needed administrative services and functions, and ensure the education, health, and welfare of all Fijian people. It is also responsible for overseeing the operations of the Government and holding them accountable.

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence's review of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji 2022–2023 Annual Report highlights significant institutional progress alongside key operational challenges. Despite the review being outside the Committee's usual mandate, it undertook a comprehensive analysis through public submissions and enquired additional information. The report reflects a productive legislative year. However, the Committee identified several ongoing issues, including delays in the tabling of referred annual reports, staffing constraints, infrastructure limitations such as office and meeting space shortages, and the need for regular job evaluations.

To address these, the Committee made ten key recommendations, including expanding accessibility services, introducing structured training schedules, formalizing post-visit reporting, and implementing standard operating procedures. The analysis concludes that while Parliament has shown resilience and adaptability, particularly in digital modernization, structural reforms and institutional capacity building are essential to enhance efficiency, accountability, and public trust in Fiji's democratic processes.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Secretary-General of Parliament and to all the staff for their good work and unwavering support during this reporting report. I also thank the members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for their efforts in compiling this bipartisan report, as well as the Secretariat for their invaluable support.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I hereby submit this report to Parliament.

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Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua
Chairperson

Recommendations

- 1.0 The Committee recommends that Parliament continue to conduct regular reviews of its ICT security measures, ensuring that they are up to date with emerging threats, and consider increasing staff training on cybersecurity best practices (*reference to point 3.3.1*).
- 2.0 The Committee commends the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji for considering the expansion of sign language and translation services to committee sessions in the future, following further consultation with relevant agencies and Ministries (*reference to point 3.3.2*).
- 3.0 The Committee recommends that stringent measures be put in place such as amendments to the Standing Orders of the Republic of Fiji to allow timeframes for review of Annual Reports by Standing Committees (*reference to point 3.3.3*).
- 4.0 The Committee recommends frequent Speaker and Chairs meetings together with secretariats to be conducted monthly – this is to address issues faced by the respective Committees (*reference to point 3.3.4*).
- 5.0 The Committee recommends that due consideration be given to the urgent issue of office space constraints faced by Parliament. Given that the matter has remained unresolved since Parliament's re-establishment in 2014, the Committee strongly urges that ongoing discussions with the Ministry of Civil Service and relevant stakeholders be expedited (*reference to point 3.3.5*).
- 6.0 The Committee recommends that Parliament implement a yearly, planned schedule for training workshops for MPs and Staff to ensure consistent development and address emerging needs. This proactive approach will allow for better alignment of training programs with strategic priorities, provide ample time for capacity building, and ensure that both MPs and staff are continually updated on best practices, legislative changes, and key challenges. A well-structured training calendar will help in bridging knowledge gaps and enhancing Parliament's overall effectiveness (*reference to point 3.3.6*).
- 7.0 The Committee recommends that overseas study visits and meetings for MPs and staff be strengthened and strategically planned to ensure alignment with Parliament's priorities. It is further recommended that a structured post-engagement reporting and evaluation framework be formalised to track the application of lessons learned and assess the effectiveness of these visits in enhancing parliamentary practices, governance, and oversight functions (*reference to point 3.3.7*).
- 8.0 The Committee commends Parliament for strengthening its staff retention strategies by introducing additional benefits such as insurance and long-service leave. The Committee suggests that Parliament further explore flexible work arrangements and professional

development opportunities to enhance staff satisfaction and reduce turnover (*reference to point 3.3.8*).

- 9.0 The Committee recommends that the job evaluation exercise for Parliament be prioritised and conducted before the start of the new Parliamentary term. This will ensure that job roles and responsibilities are aligned with the evolving demands of Parliament and its Standing Committees, helping to optimise staff performance and efficiency in line with legislative priorities and Parliament's objectives (*reference to point 3.3.9*).
- 10.0 The Committee recommends that Parliament expedite the development and implementation of a comprehensive whistleblower policy, particularly in light of the potential passage of the Code of Conduct Bill. This policy should be designed to protect staff members who report unethical behavior. Further consultations should be conducted to ensure the policy effectively addresses concerns and aligns with best practices (*reference to point 3.3.10*).
- 11.0 The Committee commends Parliament for its significant progress in promoting gender equality and inclusivity within its workforce. With a near-equal gender composition of 54% female and 46% male staff, Parliament has demonstrated a strong commitment to gender balance. Notably, women hold key leadership positions, such as Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua as Deputy Speaker and Mrs. Jeanette Emberson as Secretary-General to Parliament, highlighting the importance of female leadership in shaping parliamentary decisions.

1.0 Committee Remit and Composition

Under Standing Order 109(2)(e) the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence is mandated to look into matters related to Fiji's relations with other countries, development aid, foreign direct investment, oversight of the military, and relations with multi-lateral organizations. The members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence are as follows:



Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua
Chairperson

Deputy Speaker of Parliament
Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs



Hon. Rinesh Sharma
Deputy Chairperson



Hon. Ratu Isikeli Tuiwailevu
Member

Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Heritage and Arts



Hon. Penioni Ravunawa
Member

Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services



Hon. Virendra Lal
Member

1.1 Committee Secretariat Team

Supporting the Committee in its work is a group of dedicated Parliament Officers serving as the Committee Secretariat. These officers are appointed and delegated by the Secretary-General to Parliament by Standing Order 15(3)(i). The Secretariat officers are as follows:

- Mrs. Susana Korovou – Senior Committee Clerk
- Mrs. Elesi Tabuyaqona – Deputy Committee Clerk

2.0 Background and Terms of Reference

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence (the Committee), was referred the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji 2022-2023 Annual Report on 14 March 2025. The referral of the Annual Report was done in accordance with SO 38 (2), whereby the Committee was assigned to investigate the contents of the report and provide a report to Parliament at a future Sitting. This report is outside the usual mandate of the Committee, but the referral was made to help ease the workload of the other Standing Committees.

2.1 Procedure and Program

Public Submission (written submission and oral submission)

In relation to Standing Order 111 (1), the Committee is committed to upholding public trust in Parliament, by ensuring that there is public participation and that all such participation is given due consideration. The Committee had called for an oral public submission from the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji on 1 April 2025. This session was aired live on the Walesi Parliament Television Channel and on the Parliament Facebook page. The Committee also asked for additional information through questions, with a written response provided at a later time.

A summary of the submission is provided in a later part of this report, under the heading ‘Committee’s Deliberation and Analysis’. Copies of the written submission and the verbatim from the meeting can be obtained from the online Appendices of this report, which can be accessed from the Parliament website: www.parliament.gov.fj.

3.0 Committee Deliberation and Analysis

3.1 Introduction

The Parliament of the Republic of Fiji (Parliament) is the legislative body of the country. It is based on the principles of the Westminster Parliamentary System and guided by the 2013 Constitution of the Republic of Fiji. The Parliament is a unicameral legislature comprising 51 members (after the 2018 general election and 55 members after the 2022 general election). Section 46 (1) of the Constitution provides that the authority and power to make laws for the State is vested in Parliament and is exercised through the enactment of Bills and assented to by the President.

Parliament is the voice of the Fijian people, charged with passing laws to ensure public safety, promote economic opportunity, guarantee equality under the law, provide needed administrative services and functions, and ensure the education, health, and welfare of all Fijian people. It is also responsible for overseeing the operations of the Government and holding them accountable.

Section 79 of the Constitution establishes the office of the Secretary-General to Parliament (Secretary-General) who shall be responsible to the Speaker for the efficient, effective and economical management of Parliament. Additionally, the Secretary-General shall have the authority to appoint, remove and discipline all staff in Parliament. Parliament is supported by staff who provide procedural support and advice to Members along with a wide range of essential services that facilitate the work of the Parliament.

3.2 Summary of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji 2022-2023 Annual Report

3.2.1 Strategic Priority 1: Respect for the relevance and independence of Parliament

3.2.1.1 Facilitating the seamless operation of the plenary

Under Strategic Priority 1: Respect for the Relevance and Independence of Parliament, several key units within Parliament worked collaboratively to ensure effective legislative functioning. The Tables and Journals Unit played a vital role in supporting the seamless operation of the plenary by preparing essential documents, offering procedural guidance, and liaising with MPs, the Executive, and statutory bodies. Throughout the 25 sitting days, the Unit prepared 25 Order Papers and 183 scripts, supported five Business Committee meetings, and facilitated the processing of 93 Oral Questions, 26 Written Questions, and the passage of 22 Bills into Acts. A major highlight was the facilitation of the first parliamentary sitting following the 2022 general election, which included the first-ever secret ballot election of the Prime Minister under the 2013 Constitution. The 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

Figure 1: Summary of Activities for Tables and Committees Unit from 2020-2023.

The Standing Committees, guided by the same strategic priority, focused on enhancing government accountability and public engagement conducted a total of 387 meetings (314 face-to-face and 73 hybrid), tabled 39 reports, and conducted 38 public consultations along with 17 site visits. These efforts included engagements in the northern regions led by the Public Accounts Committee and the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights. Their scrutiny extended to audited government reports and legislation such as the Heritage Bill 2023. A significant highlight was the consultations regarding the Heritage Bill 2023, which showcased a commitment to fostering public input on important legislative matters. These efforts not only ensured transparency in the use of public funds but also promoted public participation in the legislative process. Among the notable milestones were the appointments of Hon. Viliame Naupoto, serving as an Opposition MP, and Hon. Alitia Bainivalu, the first woman MP, as Committee Chairpersons.

In terms of external engagement, the Inter-Parliamentary Relations & Protocol Unit strengthened Fiji's ties with international parliamentary bodies and managed diplomatic protocols. The Unit facilitated 12 overseas visits, 29 courtesy calls to the Speaker, and 19 protocol arrangements. It also supported professional development through two UNDP-funded workshops. These efforts aimed to build MP capacity, promote knowledge exchange, and foster international parliamentary cooperation.

3.2.2 Strategic Priority 2: An effective Parliament with exceptionally capable people

3.2.2.1 An effective and diverse workforce

Despite limited resources and a growing workload, the Human Resources, Administration, and Training Unit remained focused on building staff capacity and supporting Parliament's long-term goals. At the end of the reporting period, the parliamentary workforce consisted of 75 staff members, with a gender distribution of 54% female and 46% male. The Unit prioritized professional development, organizing four in-house and five external training sessions that benefited 64 staff members.

The Unit also finalised a comprehensive Discipline Guideline, promoting consistent and fair handling of staff conduct. During the year, the organization experienced a 10% turnover rate, with 10 resignations, 2 new appointments, 8 promotions, and 18 acting positions filled. To

maintain operational efficiency, the Unit continued to integrate interns and volunteers through the National Employment Centre (NEC). Looking ahead, the introduction of a Human Resource Information System (HRIS) is seen as a key opportunity to modernize and streamline HR management, enhancing data accuracy and service delivery.

3.2.2.2 Effective Stewardship of the Parliamentary Precincts

The Assets Management and Transport Unit, though staffed by only two personnel, played a critical role in maintaining and enhancing Parliament's infrastructure and resources. Key projects included modernising the BCR kitchen, replacing carpets, upgrading the generator muffler, and improving air-conditioning systems, all contributing to better safety, energy efficiency, and comfort. Enhancements in security (such as updated electronic door controls) and aesthetic improvements in key rooms also supported Parliament's functional and heritage value.

Additionally, the Unit supported MPs' official duties by managing a fleet of nine vehicles, including a mini-bus, and recorded 5,841 vehicle runs during the reporting period. A total of \$41,007.26 was spent on fuel. The team successfully delivered 8 capital projects and 155 servicing and maintenance works, while managing shared space constraints. Their ongoing efforts ensure that Parliament remains a well-functioning, accessible, and secure institution.

3.2.3 Strategic Priority 3: Sustainable service delivery through operational excellence

3.2.3.1 Strengthening governance and accountability at all levels

Ensuring Comprehensive and Precise Documentation of Proceedings

The Hansard Unit continued to uphold its commitment to providing accurate and timely records of all Parliamentary and Committee proceedings. Despite administrative changes following the 2022 general election and a new cohort of MPs, the Unit adapted effectively, leveraging support from UNDP and returning consultants to maintain high-quality reporting. Throughout the reporting period, the Unit produced Hansard reports for all 25 sitting days and 47 verbatim reports for Committee meetings, achieving 100% delivery. Capacity building was emphasized through three on-the-job training sessions, including exposure to advanced reporting tools such as Wordfest. The Unit also engaged in regional peer-to-peer exchanges with other Pacific Parliaments, further strengthening its standards and collaboration across multilingual reporting environments.

3.2.3.2 Strengthening Governance and Accountability

The Monitoring, Evaluation, and Compliance Unit focused on improving institutional performance through timely submission of critical documents and policy reviews. Key achievements included the finalisation of the Assets Management Plan and Risk Management Policy, essential for effective operational planning and budgeting. The Unit also supported the submission of the annual Operational Plan and conducted a staff planning workshop to align efforts with the updated Strategic Plan. These initiatives reinforced a results-driven culture, encouraging data-driven decision-making and improved institutional accountability, despite ongoing challenges in monitoring and reporting systems.

3.2.3.3 Financial Prudence and Compliance

The Finance Unit played a pivotal role in ensuring sound financial governance, managing a total budget allocation of \$8.6105 million. The Unit ensured timely submission of reconciliation and compliance reports to the Ministry of Finance, including salary and wage reports, monthly performance updates, and the draft Financial Statement to the Auditor-General. These practices contributed to enhanced transparency, prudent use of resources, and alignment with financial regulations. The tracking of expenditures, such as the \$41,007.26 spent on fuel, also reflects Parliament's commitment to fiscal responsibility.

3.2.3.4 Provision of Timely Research and Information to Members

The Research and Library Services Unit continued to support MPs with reliable, non-partisan information to inform debate and policy-making. It responded to 55 library requests, prepared 10 information briefs, 2 annual report summaries, and 38 budget briefs. A key highlight was the Annual Budget Analysis, conducted with support from the UNDP Pacific Floating Budget Office, which included joint efforts with staff from Australia and Tonga's Parliaments. This initiative simplified fiscal data for MPs and strengthened internal analytical capacity. The Unit also led training for 18 staff in budget analysis, including 11 local staff and 3 interns participating for the first time. These capacity-building exercises enhanced the research team's ability to support Parliament's oversight function effectively.

3.2.4 Strategic Priority 4: ICT to facilitate the services of Parliament

3.2.4.1 Enhancing digital access to Parliamentary information and records

The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Unit plays a pivotal role in enhancing digital access to parliamentary information and modernising service delivery across the institution. This year, the Unit significantly contributed to Parliament's transparency, accessibility, and digital transformation by maintaining robust ICT infrastructure and ensuring the seamless broadcasting of 305 hours of Parliament sittings and 116 hours of Committee meetings. In a historic moment following the 2022 general election, the Unit successfully facilitated electronic voting, attendance, and microphone systems for MPs, and broadcasted the election of the Speaker, Deputy Speaker, and Prime Minister, held on Christmas Eve, with record online viewership. Additionally, the Unit implemented a translation system in the Chambers, enabling real-time interpretation of *Vosa Vakaviti* and Hindi into English through a dedicated audio channel for MPs and Parliament staff.

To strengthen cybersecurity and operational efficiency, the Unit worked with the government's IT provider to upgrade all systems from Windows 8.0 to Windows 10, and deployed Trend Micro Antivirus and Malware protection across all devices on the Parliament LAN. The ICT Unit also handled 371 technical desk queries, underlining the growing demand for ICT services. Despite limited staffing, the Unit has taken over key responsibilities such as managing the Parliament Television studio, previously handled by the Fijian Broadcasting Corporation. Looking forward, additional funding and staffing are essential to support these expanding ICT operations, including the critical upgrade of the plenary conferencing system to ensure data and system security.

3.2.5 Strategic 5: Extensive engagement and effective communication

3.2.5.1 Communication and Public Engagement

The Civic Education and Media Unit continued its mission to raise public awareness and promote participation in the parliamentary process, with a strong focus on engaging youth. Despite being reduced to only two staff members following the COVID-19 pandemic, the Unit resumed its programmes and recorded notable successes. Key initiatives included the Parliament Bus Programme, which reached 2,819 students and 250 teachers, and hosted 2,703 visitors to Parliament. Public engagement through media saw a significant boost, particularly on Facebook, where the total reach hit 1,315,544, including 337,000 viewers on the historic first sitting after the 2022 general election. Engagement across Twitter and Instagram also grew steadily.

The Unit produced 41 press releases, livestreamed 85 Committee meetings, and marked key international observances such as Commonwealth Day and the International Day of Democracy with official messages from the Speaker. Additionally, the Community Engagement Strategy (2022–2026) was drafted, following a review of the 2018–2022 strategy. Despite resource constraints, the Unit’s work remains vital to strengthening Parliament’s connection with citizens and enhancing democratic participation across Fiji.

3.3 Committee Findings

3.3.1 Cybersecurity of ICT System

The Committee inquired on the security of Parliament's ICT system in light of growing cyber threats. The response outlined steps taken to upgrade security, including the implementation of antivirus and malware protection and the upgrade of systems from Windows 8.0 to Windows 10. These tools support secure communication, especially for remote work. ICT infrastructure is managed in collaboration with the Department of ITC Services, which also implements strong cyber protections. Staff are equipped with updated technology, and Parliament is currently upgrading outdated equipment to improve performance. Although system integration has caused some disruptions, the technical team is actively working with vendors to resolve issues and build redundancies for smoother operations.

The Committee recommends that Parliament continue to conduct regular reviews of its ICT security measures, ensuring that they are up to date with emerging threats, and consider increasing staff training on cybersecurity best practices.

3.3.2 Expansion of Sign Language and Translation Services

The Committee inquired about extending sign language and translation services to committee level in particular, face-to-face public submissions, in addition to their current availability during plenary sessions. The response indicated that further consultation is needed before any implementation. 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 Committee recommends that Parliament should prioritize expanding sign language and translation services to committees, ensuring accessibility for all members and enhancing public participation in parliamentary processes.

3.3.3 Effective Tabling of Committee Reports

The Committee has reviewed the status of annual reports tabled in Parliament during the year under review, noting that a total of 69 reports were presented, with 64 referred to Standing Committees and 5 noted by Members without referral. Of the reports referred to committees, 9 have been tabled back in Parliament, while 55 reports remain pending before the various Standing Committees. A breakdown of the reports referred to committees reveals that the Public Accounts Committee has 9 pending reports, the Justice, Law and Human Rights Committee has 6, the Social Affairs Committee has 22 pending reports with 5 tabled, the Economic Affairs Committee has 10 pending and 2 tabled, the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee has 3 pending, and the Natural Resources Committee has 5 pending and 2 tabled. Importantly, the Committee highlighted that there are currently no provisions in the Standing Orders to establish specific timeframes for the review of annual reports. Given this, the Committee raises concerns about the need for more stringent measures through the amendment of Standing Orders to ensure effective and timely reporting in the future.

3.3.4 Challenges faced by Standing Committees

During the review process, the Committee inquired several challenges that Standing Committees face in their operations, including limited availability of meeting rooms, with

only three rooms available for six committees and one sub-committee, leading to scheduling conflicts. A lack of quorum often disrupts meetings, causing delays and cancellations, while rescheduling adds logistical complications, such as rearranging staffing, IT resources, and equipment. Tight time constraints for reporting back to the House create pressure, often leading to rushed discussions and incomplete analysis. The complexity of issues under review requires specialized knowledge, which committee members may lack in certain areas, hindering their ability to deliberate fully. Another concern relates to, inadequate technology and infrastructure, including outdated laptops which hamper the efficiency of work.

The Committee recommends frequent Speaker and Chairs meetings together with secretariats to be conducted monthly – this is to address issues faced by the respective Committees.

3.3.5 Office Space

The Committee raised concerns about the adequacy of Parliament's infrastructure, especially in light of the growing number of members and shifting political dynamics. The response acknowledged the need for more space and ongoing discussions regarding potential expansion or relocation of Parliament.

The Committee recommends that due consideration be given to the urgent issue of office space constraints faced by Parliament. Given that the matter has remained unresolved since Parliament's re-establishment in 2014, the Committee strongly urges that ongoing discussions with the Ministry of Civil Service and relevant stakeholders be expedited.

3.3.6 MPs and Staff Workshop

The Committee noted two UNDP-funded workshops during the review period and requested a breakdown of all such workshops from 2020 to 2023, along with the gaps they address. The first, held for MPs from 6-8 December 2021 at the Inter-Continental Hotel, covered topics like Standing Orders, parliamentary ethics, electoral systems, and corruption. The second, on 16-17 December 2021 at the Inter-Continental Hotel, focused on COVID-19's impact on Parliament and strategic planning during the pandemic. A third workshop, the Staff Refresher and Strategic Plan Review, took place from 22-26 November 2022 at the Outrigger Fiji Beach Resort, updating staff on new practices and reviewing the strategic plan. Additionally, an induction program for new MPs was held on 20 December 2022 at the Grand Pacific Hotel. These workshops addressed challenges such as adapting to new practices, maintaining staff capacity during the pandemic, and aligning Parliament's strategic direction.

The Committee recommends that Parliament implement a yearly, planned schedule for training workshops for MPs and Staff to ensure consistent development and address emerging needs. This proactive approach will allow for better alignment of training programs with strategic priorities, provide ample time for capacity building, and ensure that both MPs and staff are continually updated on best practices, legislative changes, and key

challenges. A well-structured training calendar will help in bridging knowledge gaps and enhancing Parliament's overall effectiveness.

3.3.7 Effectiveness of Inter-Parliamentary Visits by MPs and Staff

The Committee was informed that overseas study visits and meetings for MPs and staff provide valuable opportunities to engage with foreign parliamentarians and parliamentary staff, fostering personal connections and promoting mutual understanding and cooperation. These visits enable MPs and staff to observe different approaches to parliamentary best practices, governance, and policies, offering insights that can improve internal decision-making. Furthermore, MPs and staff gain firsthand exposure to international issues, enhancing their understanding of global challenges. Regular overseas engagement strengthens parliamentary relations, which ultimately benefits our Parliament. The reports from MPs and staff serve as a mechanism for monitoring lessons learned and evaluating the success of these study tours. Many of the insights gained have been implemented, including the review of the Standing Orders, improved parliamentary oversight of government actions, and enhanced legislative scrutiny.

The Committee recommends that overseas study visits and meetings for MPs and staff be strengthened and strategically planned to ensure alignment with Parliament's priorities. It is further recommended that a structured post-engagement reporting and evaluation framework be formalised to track the application of lessons learned and assess the effectiveness of these visits in enhancing parliamentary practices, governance, and oversight functions.

3.3.8 Proposed Job Evaluation Exercise

The Committee was informed that the next job evaluation exercise for Parliament is expected to take place once the current round of filling all budget-approved vacant positions is completed. The last evaluation was conducted in 2018, highlighting the need to reassess job roles and responsibilities to ensure they align with the evolving demands and workload of Parliament and its Standing Committees. Given the significant changes in legislative priorities and the scope of work required from parliamentary staff, it is recommended that this evaluation be conducted well before the start of the new Parliamentary term. This will help optimize performance and efficiency, ensuring that roles are appropriately aligned with Parliament's objectives moving forward.

3.3.9 Addressing Staff Turnover

Parliament is focused on reducing staff turnover through strategies that improve employee satisfaction and retention. Key initiatives include career development opportunities, employee engagement programs like the SG Hour and Wellness Committee, and non-monetary benefits such as long service leave. To support staff growth, Parliament offers local and overseas training, workshops, and on-the-job learning, including mentorship and practical experience. Staff turnover data shows fluctuations, with a peak of 19.7% in 2022-2023. A more detailed breakdown is tabulated below.

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	3	0	3	6
Turnover Rate	11%	5.8%	0%	6.4%	19.7%

Table 2: Summary of Staff Turnover from 2018-2023

The Committee recommends that Parliament consider implementing additional monetary benefits, such as performance-based bonuses, salary reviews, and enhanced retirement or pension plans, to further improve staff retention and satisfaction. This will help ensure that employees are adequately rewarded for their contributions, making Parliament a more attractive place to work and reducing turnover rates.

3.3.10 Consideration of a Whistleblower Policy for Staff

The Committee noted the importance of a whistleblower policy for Parliament staff, especially considering the introduction of the Code of Conduct Bill. The Parliament has acknowledged the concern of the Committee and will engage in further consultations before taking any additional action.

The Committee recommends that Parliament expedite the development and implementation of a comprehensive whistleblower policy, particularly in light of the potential passage of the Code of Conduct Bill. This policy should be designed to protect staff members who report unethical and inappropriate behavior, ensuring accountability and transparency within the institution. Further consultations should be conducted to ensure the policy effectively addresses concerns and aligns with best practices.

4.0 Sustainable Development Goals

In Fiji's parliamentary context, Parliament plays a vital role in advancing and monitoring the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by scrutinizing government actions, passing relevant legislation, and approving national budgets. The thematic Standing Committees are key in this process and should integrate SDG analyses into their oversight responsibilities, including during reviews of legislation, annual reports, and inquiries.

Since 2016, the Parliamentary Secretariat has supported this through tools such as the Gender Toolkit, the Standing Committee SDG Guidance Note, and the 2018 SDG Self-Assessment, though a follow-up assessment is overdue. SDG monitoring by the Research Unit, which was paused due to staffing constraints, is now being resumed. Initiatives such as the Speaker's Debate, and engagement in international networks like the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians and the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum on Global Health, further support Parliament's SDG commitments. However, no comprehensive SDG training has been conducted since 2019, despite a new cohort of MPs and Secretariat staff. It is therefore recommended that targeted SDG capacity-building programs be urgently developed for MPs and committee staff to strengthen understanding, implementation, and oversight of the SDGs in the current parliamentary term.

4.1 Gender Equality in Parliamentary Scrutiny

The Committee commends the Parliament of Fiji for its strong commitment to gender equality and inclusivity, in line with Standing Orders 110(2). The current workforce composition of 54% female and 46% male demonstrates significant progress toward gender balance. The presence of women in senior leadership roles, including the Secretary-General and Deputy Speaker, further reinforces the importance Parliament places on empowering women in decision-making positions. These achievements reflect ongoing efforts to foster a diverse and inclusive institutional culture within the Fijian Parliament.

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


5.0 Conclusion

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence has conducted a thorough review of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji 2022-2023 Annual Report. The Committee report is bi-partisan and has ten recommendations for consideration. The Committee is grateful and commends Parliament of the Republic of Fiji for the forthright discussions held with the Committee during their public submissions.

6.0 Committee Members' Signatures



Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua
Chairperson



Hon. Rinesh Sharma
Deputy Chairperson



Hon. Ratu Isikeli Tuiwailevu
Member



Hon. Penioni Ravunawa
Member



Hon. Virendra Lal
Member

7.0 Annexure

Published evidence

Written evidence, transcripts, and supporting documents can be viewed on the Parliament website at the following link:

<https://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-foreign-affairs-and-defence/>