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Verbatim Report

[VERBATIM REPORT]

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE

ANNUAL REPORT

1. **2019-2020 Annual Report**
2. **2020-2021 Annual Report**

ENTITY: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade
VENUE: Big Committee Room (East Wing)
DATE: Tuesday, 27th January, 2026

VERBATIM REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE HELD AT THE COMMITTEE ROOM (EAST WING), PARLIAMENT PRECINCTS, GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS, ON TUESDAY, 27TH JANUARY, 2026, AT 9.24 A.M.

Present

(1) Hon. L.S. Qereqeretabua - Chairperson
(2) Hon. R.R. Sharma - Member
(3) Hon. I. Tuiwailevu - Member
(4) Hon. P.K. Ravunawa - Member
(5) Hon. V. Lal - Member
(6) Hon. T.R. Matasawalevu - Member

Interviewee/Submittee: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade In Attendance:

(1) Mr. Anare Leweniqila - Director Multilateral and Europe Bureau
(2) Ms. Kiti Temo - Chief of Protocol
(3) Mr. Savenaca Raiwalui - Director Human Resources
(4) Mr. Luke Ravusoni - Director Finance
(5) Mr. Josua Tuwere - Manager, Executive Support Unit
(6) Ms. Sherleen Lal - Manager, Policy Research and Development
(7) Ms. Jane Kumari - Senior Policy, Planning & MEL Officer

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Good morning, honourable Members, representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, members of the media who may be watching this meeting, and also the public. A very good morning to you all. It is my pleasure to welcome everyone to the room today, as well as those who are joining us on the live broadcast.

For your information and to the submittees, I want to advise you that pursuant to the Standing Orders of Parliament, specifically Standing Order 111, all Committee meetings are open to the media and to the public, so this meeting is open to the public and to the media. However, if there is any sensitive information relating to your submission that cannot be disclosed publicly, such information may be provided to the Committee either in writing or in a closed session. Please, note that this will only be permitted in limited circumstances, including the following:

(1) matters relating to national security;
(2) third party confidential information;
(3) personnel or human resource matters; and
(4) Committee deliberations and development of the Committee's recommendations and reports which we do ourselves in closed meetings.

I want to remind everyone in this room that any comments and questions are to be directed through the Chairperson and for those viewers who are following this meeting live on *Facebook*, your questions may be submitted via the comments section. However, do note that only relevant questions will be considered by the Committee Secretariat. Members of the Committee may interject during the submission or, if you prefer, honourable Members, we can wait until after their powerpoint presentation this morning.

I remind all those present that this is a Parliamentary proceeding, and all information providers are protected under the Parliamentary Powers and Privileges Act and the Standing Orders of Parliament. We will not condone any slander or libel of any kind, and all information presented to the Committee must be factual.

In terms of the meeting protocol, I just ask everyone that you keep your phones on silent and we keep movement to a minimum as we have cameras also working around the room.

I will now introduce you to the Members of the Committee.

(Introduction of Committee Members and Secretariat)

As you can see, this Committee is made up of both, Government and Opposition Members. Today, honourable Members, the Committee will receive an in-person submission from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade in relation to the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 Annual Reports. I now invite you, perhaps, Director Multilateral and Europe Bureau, to introduce your team before proceeding with your PowerPoint presentation. Please, remember that you must turn on your microphone so that the media team can capture everything.

MR. A. LEWENIQILA.- Madam Chairperson, thank you for extending the invitation for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade to attend this meeting with the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence. All protocols are observed, Madam.

Also, allow me to, once again, extend the apologies of the Permanent Secretary who is not able to be here with us today due to prior commitments. So, our Team who is here this morning, if you can allow me to introduce ourselves

(Introduction of Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade Officials)

Before we go into the presentation, I will briefly introduce the two Reports, Madam. The two Reports that we are here for in terms of the reporting period 2019-2020 and 2020-2021, came at a time when Fiji was facing unprecedented effects of the global pandemic of COVID-19.

In terms of looking at the alignment of the priorities of the Ministry, the Ministry remained aligned to Government commitment under the National Development Plan (NDP) 2018--2022 in terms of the strategic priority areas of global leadership, trade and investment, socio-economic development, public policy, peace and security, human rights and democratic values.

For the Committee's information, during that period, one of the main effects that affected the Ministry's ability to carry out its planned activities was in relation to the global shutdown, which affected methods of work in terms of looking at the introduction of online meetings and also in terms of the slowdown of the global economy which resulted in the Government making austerity measures in the subsequent budgets that affected the priorities that we had planned for the two reporting periods. So, in terms of those austerity measures, the Ministry readjusted its priorities in an effort to respond to the effects of the global pandemic and also in terms of supporting Fiji's recovery postpandemic during the reporting period.

With that brief introduction, Madam, I will now hand over to Sherleen to go over the presentation that the Ministry has prepared for the Committee this morning.

MS. S. LAL.- Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, we will be looking at our presentation outline for today, an overview of what the Ministry did at that point in time. We will be focussing on the two reporting periods while we are presenting to you, as there may have been developments that have happened to date that are not captured here. The presentation highlights the key achievements from the 2019-2021 period, the challenges we faced and what we have done to date after the 2021 period.

In terms of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, our main role is to conduct diplomacy and manage relations. Responsibilities for the Ministry include:

(1) implementing Fiji's Foreign Policy;
(2) maintaining and strengthening Fiji's diplomatic relations; (3) building bridges for cooperation with development partners; and
(4) growing trade with other nations – the support role that we do.

Diplomatic relations: We had established formal diplomatic relations with 182 countries. At that point, we had 10 Missions abroad, with the Roving Ambassadors Division based at our headquarters.

In terms of the legislative framework that guides the work that the Ministry does, we are guided by the:

(1) Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations 1961, Vienna Convention on Consular Relations 1963 and Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties 1969.
(2) Diplomatic Privileges and Immunities Act 1971.
(3) Special Missions Privileges Immunities Act 1972.
(4) Marine Spaces Act 1977.
(5) Diplomatic Missions and International Organisations Act 2016.
(6) Foreign Service Regulations (FOSR).

In terms of our planning document, at that point, we were guided by the National Development Plan (NDP) that was launched in 2017 (5 Year and 20 Year Plan), and we had a 2014 Foreign Policy Statement that we continue to use, of course, with revisions that were going on. We had a strategic plan that was aligned to the NDP with developed operational plan, business plans and individual workplans accordingly.

There was a question by the Committee in terms of the alignment of Ministry's workplans to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), I would like to say that, at that point, SDG reporting was vested with the Ministry of Finance. However, we were aligning to the NDP, which was also aligned to the SDGs, so that is how we had drawn our alignment in terms of planning framework.

In terms of operations, there is a bit of uniqueness to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs compared to any other Ministry. We have an onshore and offshore component, that is representation through our Diplomatic Missions abroad. We work as the window to the world. The unique services we also provide is consular services, logistical and protocol facilitation and support for visits and conferences. Consular services and the work that protocol does is unique because no other Ministry is able to do that at this point in time because of the powers vested in that.

In terms of our global footprint, at that point, we started off 2019 with 16 Missions. After COVID-19 and during COVID-19, we closed five Missions - Seoul, Kuala Lumpur, Washington, Brussels and Port Moresby, as per the Cabinet Decision. You will see reflected on the screen are 10 overseas Missions that the Ministry had as of 2021, and the Roving Ambassadors Division that is based at our headquarters.

Key highlights: Our Director Multilateral has mentioned the context we were working with, but I would like to go through it. The Ministry had faced significant challenges due to the emerging global issues, including the onset of COVID-19 pandemic, international travel restrictions, climaterelated pressures, overseas Missions and headquarters operations were

disrupted, requiring rapid adjustments to maintain diplomatic engagement and consular support. Strategic priorities were also influenced by the Ministry's commitment to multilateral forums and the need to sustain economic and security regional partnerships.

In terms of highlights:

(1) We had the Presidency of the Human Rights Council.
(2) A bit of work was done on fisheries and aquaculture with South Korea.
(3) The COVID-19 coordination also kicked in at the later part of 2020.
(4) Fiji supported the establishment of the Pacific Humanitarian Pathway for COVID-19 to move essential medical supplies across the region.
(5) Volunteer Scheme – an MOA was signed with the Tuvalu Government in terms of the Fiji Volunteer Scheme.
(6) Workforce strength – 89 percent of the 146 approved positions, which I will be covering later in my slides.
(7) We had an annual budget of $36.9 million with an overall utilisation rate of 91 percent.

In 2021, the Ministry operated under prolonged COVID-19 restrictions, which continued to impact overseas Missions, diplomatic engagement and service delivery, travel limitations, health protocols and increased demand for consular services, particularly repatriation and emergency assistance, shaped operational priorities. The Ministry also faced ongoing global economic and climate challenges requiring adaptive strategies to maintain Fiji's regional and international engagements.

In terms of the Presidency with the Human Rights Council, Ambassador Nazhat Shamim Khan was elected President.

We started working on vaccine diplomacy, in addition to COVID-19 supplies, like medical supplies that we were assisting get channelling through to support our health sector. We started working on trying to acquire vaccines, which led to Fiji being one of the first Pacific Island countries to get vaccines from the COVID-19 Facility.

We also worked with New Zealand to come up with a Duavata Partnership at that time. We also had *TC Yasa* and *Ana*, and the recovery process was facilitated with donor coordination through NDMO and the Ministry of Finance.

Workforce readiness: We managed the transition to virtual work. We implemented the Government's mandatory COVID-19 vaccine policy. The annual budget at that point was reduced to $32.7 million, with a utilisation rate of 86 percent.

Further to the information requested by the Committee, Fiji acceded to five Treaties during the 2019-2020 period and two more during the 2020-2021 period. Please, refer to Pages 15 to 19 of the written submission that was provided, for a detailed update on the submission and implementation that was done. A few responses were yet to be received from line agencies because the Treaties are vested with them for their implementation and reporting. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs comes into play with the support we provide through our multilateral team and also the Missions.

In terms of gender analysis for the Ministry's activities and staffing, the staff establishment for the reported graph shows the comparison of 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. In 2019, we had 146 positions, of which 130 were filled, leaving 16 vacant positions. For 2021, there were 121 positions with 116 filled, so only five vacant. The record shows a significant drop in the number of approved positions due to whole-of-government budget control measures.

In terms of gender representation and policy support, the record continues to show more male officers than female officers in both reported areas. Despite representation of both gender in the Ministry, core roles remained higher compared to supporting arms. In analysis, policy refers to Foreign Service Officers, Protocol, and Diplomats, with support staff being the Executive Support, Information Technology, Finance and Human Resources. In terms of gender analysis for the Ministry, women in leadership were 8 percent at that time.

Moving on to challenges, operationally, we had shifting priorities. We had to reorganise ourselves due to COVID-19, managing change, adjusting to the new normal, learning to work from home, and assessing staff capability and capacity because not everyone had laptops or internet. Families during lockdown were working and dealing with it. Resourcing and turnover were managed as best as possible with the resources available.

In terms of geopolitical shifts, we had challenges in our Foreign Policy areas. There was a rapid change, largely due to global structural long-term nature - travel restrictions, border closures, and developments in regional and international relations. In 2019-2020, just before COVID-19 and continuing after that, the Pacific became very contested. It got a lot of attention from major development partners, like the United States of America, China, Australia, et cetera. It was how we deal and manage our country-to-country relations that has kept us to where we are, to get the best for our people - our Fijians on the ground, based on the competitive advantage that is vested with our partners. We worked through that.

In terms of what we have done from our challenges and what we have learnt, our strategic direction shows strength in leadership. We have a dedicated in-house Permanent Secretary,

we have an Assistant Minister, and now we have a dedicated Minister as well, which adds to the accountability and transparency, and the work that needs to be done.

Alignment of our Corporate Plans to the National Development Plan: We had aligned to the then National Development Plan (NDP). We have also reorganised ourselves towards aligning to the NDP that we are working with now and working in terms of the global and regional leadership that we hold in the Pacific and also in the international arena, as you will note that Fiji has a lot of respect with its international partners as well.

Working on return on investment, tangible output focus and review of foreign policy priorities: In 2024, Fiji has also launched its first Foreign Policy White Paper which has been guiding us, so our Strategic Plans and Operational Plans have been developed in line with the Foreign Policy White Paper and also the NDP that we have.

Policies, at that point, we had worked on formalising remote work arrangements, virtual diplomacy and alternative engagement mechanisms to ensure uninterrupted delivery of core functions. So, basically, learning to work from home and also now even after COVID, we have moved on from the COVID era and coming into recovery and resilience, learning that we can also work in hybrid mode. Not everyone has to go and attend meetings in person, we have Missions abroad that we mobilise to these platforms. We also have our teams from Headquarters either travelling or they also use hybrid mode when they are presenting

On operations, there were Civil Service reforms then that were going on in terms of the five major guidelines that were being launched and operationalised. We are now working on the review of the Foreign Overseas Service Regulations (FOSR), to make it more relevant. In this year's budget, we have also received the changes in post allowance, which has now been adapted to the UN rates, and it is also aligned to the cost of living adjustment that was needed. It was long overdue for our Missions, because that was last done in 2005, if I am not wrong. Those were internal.

In terms of systems and processes, we continue to work on enhancing our systems and processes, having better monitoring processes, and having better engagement with our stakeholders so that we can deliver better to what is required of us by the Government of the day. That is all in terms of my presentation. Our team is available to you, Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, to respond to any questions or any clarifications that you may have. Thank you very much.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you very much, Ms. Lal, thank you for that very clear and concise presentation. You certainly covered a lot of areas there, and I want to apologise to the Members of the Committee. Usually, we would have that big screen, so if you are struggling to

read the font, apparently, that projector is not working. So, we apologise, on behalf of the Ministry.

I now leave the floor open to the honourable Members for questions. Please, just remember to turn off your microphones after you finish speaking. Honourable Sharma and then Honourable Lal, for your questions, thank you.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Chairperson, through you, I have a question to the Ministry; when was the last time you appeared before our Committee? What were the challenges faced by your Ministry in making this Annual Report?

MS. S. LAL.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, we last appeared before your Committee was for our 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 Reports. The challenges that had come out of that was that there has always been an ask by the Committee and rightly so in terms of update in terms of Treaties and Conventions, alignment to SDGs and other work that the Ministry does. The challenge then in terms of Treaties and Conventions was that it had shifted to the Solicitor-General's Office, so they have the mandate of doing the tabling and working through, so they kept the records of it.

As I had mentioned earlier, the implementation of those Treaties and Conventions lies with the line agency because they are technical in nature, and they usually do, because accede to a particular Treaty, it comes with terms and conditions to what you need to fulfil. That was one of the challenges. That is one information that we have not been able to give so well to the Committee. However, we are now working on gathering our information and also creating a database in terms of that.

In addition to that, updates on Memorandums of Understanding and Memorandums of Association or Memorandums of Co-operation that had been signed, because once the Ministry of Foreign Affairs facilitates the process through negotiations, once it is signed, the onus is on the implementing agency in terms of its implementation. The reporting back, sometimes, does not come so clearly as well. that was one of the challenges.

In terms of SDG alignment, like I have mentioned, we have aligned ourselves to the NDP, which was then aligned to that. Our Multilateral Team works closely with the Ministry of Finance, but the actual reporting was not vested with the Ministry. It was done by the Ministry of Finance at this point in time.

In terms of reporting delays and the issues that we have had, as I had mentioned, we have had resource constraints and staffing turnover as well. The Policy and Planning Division

seems to be having a bit of staff changes over time, so it has just been handed from one hand to the other. We are reassuring the Committee, through you, Madam Chairperson, and honourable Members, that we are working on clearing out our backlog of Annual Reports.

HON. V. LAL.- Madam Chairperson, through you, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the submittees for their comprehensive report.

As per the Report, I can see that there is a mention of closure of two Embassies, I think, Korea and Malaysia, towards the end of 2020. However, in your report, you are saying that five Embassies were closed. I would like to know exactly how many Embassies were closed and how did it affect your service delivery?

MS. S. LAL.- Madam Chairperson, through you, I thank the honourable Member for the question. Yes, we had mentioned five Missions were closed because as per Cabinet decision and in that 2020-2021 Budget, we were to close five Missions. However, the other Mission closures would be reported in the next financial year, which is our next Annual Report, in terms of what actually transpired and what came through. That is why this Report only captures the two that were closed during these financial years.

It was just a bit about re-organising the way we were working. COVID needed some control measures, and it was the decision of the then government of the day that these Missions were going to close. However, we did not stop working with our development partners. Most of those countries have Resident Missions in Fiji, so our team at Headquarters works very closely with these Missions.

We have had Missions accredited, for example, when the Korea Embassy closed, our Embassy in Tokyo had been accredited to Korea. So, we have worked through, very strategically, placing accreditations on our different Missions, to continue our relations and engagements with these very important development partners.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Madam Chairperson, I thank the Ministry for a very comprehensive report that they have provided. I fully understand the challenging period during the COVID pandemic and the focus on socio-economic diplomacy. I want to thank them most sincerely during COVID for the access to the much-needed vaccine that enabled us to get back on our feet and to return to our economic activities for the nation.

My question is also based on that in terms of the access of vaccine during the lockdown period. There was a lot of redistribution of resources in order to try to focus our national effort to overcome the pandemic period. I believe there were also lessons learnt during that time and if you can share with us some of the lessons that you have learned during that time, in case of another similar pandemic hits our country.

MS. S. LAL.- Thank you, honourable Member, for the question. The work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in relation to working with partners on access to vaccine, I think our Diplomatic Missions have good cordial relations with some of these countries. I think we were one of the first countries to access AstraZeneca through GAVI, through the WHO.

However, in terms of looking at the lessons learnt, I think one of the things that we know which is basically internal or in-country is in terms of the control of the spread of the diseases, where we look at some of the lessons from the way it was done overseas in terms of some of the Missions that we operate. I think there are some lessons learnt there that we can look at - how those control measures were put in place.

In terms of looking at the access to vaccine, I think, it basically comes down to the relationships that we built with partners in terms of working with some of those donors to ensure that we can be part of the planning that they do on their side in terms of the much-needed vaccine.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Chairperson, through you, I have been informed that some of the state of these Missions are in really poor conditions. Looking at geopolitics, looking at the rising costs, or tensions in some of those countries and suddenly, prices go really high (I think, the one in London), can you elaborate on how Fiji mitigates this? How do we retain our staff, office and resources? How do all these work?

MR. A. LEWENIQILA.- Madam Chairperson, through you, yes, we agree with those sentiments in terms of the state of properties at our Fiji Missions, for properties for the Fiji Government. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been going through a lot of difficulties in terms of upgrading the properties. That is through wear and tear, and particularly also in terms of funding.

We have four Missions around the globe that has Government properties which is New Zealand, Australia, London, as well as the one in Brussels. Every now and then, we request for budget in terms of renovations. At the moment, for the property at the Fijian High Commission in London, we are currently working on the renovations.

There are three renovations that have been carried out from last year until this year. Last year, we completed the full renovations to our Second Secretary residence, which is the first that has ever been done on that property. Currently, we are doing the Fiji House, which is the residence of the Head of Mission. We are currently in the second phase now, and while we are doing that, the Chancery has actually closed down. For the Missions, the Ministry of Finance has allocated a temporary office budget where the Mission has now been relocated to

(temporary office), while the Mission and Headquarters are working on phases one and two for the renovation of our Chancery.

For us, it has been a challenge, but there is no turning back. We are trying our best to keep our Government properties at the Fijian Mission at all times.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Chairperson, my next question is related more a bit on what is currently happening. What we have seen around the world is that tariffs are being used as negotiating tools or as threats. I would like more clarification on this, because the public is watching, and this will be debated in Parliament. Can you advise the Committee, when a nation slaps Fiji with tariff, and I use the word 'slap', where does this go wrong for Fiji? Was it because the Mission was not updated, or they were supposed to be the negotiating stakeholders - the frontline ones to negotiate, who know what is happening and update the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Government? Who are the stakeholders involved? How does Fiji look at negotiating for future nations that it does trade with?

It also comes as a worry to some of the businesses here that tomorrow, any nation can put massive tariffs on us, and we can just close down. It is really a worry from the ground when we look at foreign trade. Can you just elaborate on how does this whole thing work out so that people can have clarity on this?

MR. A. LEWENIQILA.- From the Ministry's standpoint, I think it comes down to negotiation. I think we did not have any prior information in terms of our external trade, or any notification on any implementation of any trade measure by the U.S. The measure by the U.S. caught everyone by surprise, but it really comes down to negotiation with the U.S. in terms of the areas that they have identified.

For Fiji, the onus is on us to protect our interests in terms of the tariff measure that has been applied and negotiate with the U.S. on the level of tariff which we can both agree on a win-win situation. That is currently ongoing between the Officials at the Ministry in terms of external trade. That function has been recently transferred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It will be a joint exercise between the Officials in the Department for External Trade and our Diplomatic Missions to work out a solution with the U.S. in terms of the tariff level.

The U.S. has an upper hand on Fiji in terms of when it comes to this negotiation, but that is also something that we can leverage with the U.S. in terms of looking at areas to ensure that we can come to an amicable solution on the tariff level that will be applied. When you look at the tariff, there will certainly be some tariff applied, but it is on us to negotiate the level of tariff that we can live with in terms of the negotiations that we are doing.

HON. V. LAL.- I will go back to the agreement we had with the Tuvalu and Fiji Government, in regards to teachers on the Fiji Volunteer Scheme. I would like to know whether that Scheme is still in place and how successful it was? What I see is, we have our own needs in Fiji, our retired teachers to be re-employed because we have a shortage here.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- To the team from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, if you do not have the answer right away, you are very welcome to let us know later.

MR. A. LEWENIQILA.- Madam Chairperson, I think we can come back to the honourable Member with an update on that particular scheme with the Tuvalu Government. There are some parts of the agreement that could be sourced from the Department of Labour, but we can check on that and come back to you in terms of our discussions with the Roving Ambassador's Office.

HON. V. LAL.- Is this Scheme still ongoing?

MR. A. LEWENIQILA.- I think it is.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- What Director Multilateral is saying, honourable Lal, is that they will check with the Department of Labour or perhaps, even the Ministry of Education, because as they have said before, while we may be signing the MOAs or MOUs, the line Ministries are the ones that implement it, so we would need to ask the actual stakeholder Ministry.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- I have a simple question about your human resource at your local level. What would be the percentage of your staffing at the moment? If there is a need, how do you do your recruitment - through the Ministry or through the Ministry of Civil Service?

MR. S. RAIWALUI.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, the positions in terms of human resources, the current manpower strength of the Ministry is at 92 percent, with 8 percent vacant positions. In terms of recruitment, we are still following the Civil Service recruitment policy. The recruitment is done at the Ministry through the recruitment guideline of the Civil Service. That is both, for officers at headquarters and officers at the Missions.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- When was the last Job Evaluation Exercise (JEE) done for the Ministry? I heard in the presentation that there was a lot of staff turnover, that staff are leaving. What are some of the retention strategies that the Ministry has?

MR. S. RAIWALUI.- The last JEE that we did was in 2023. We are currently working on another round of job evaluation, especially for our technical positions. I believe the turnover was more on our policy officers, and that is why we are running another job evaluation, which is currently with the Ministry of Civil Service, for the job evaluation leadership team to assess.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, I also noticed in the report it is more like a story. I could not see the strategic direction that the Ministry is taking. What are some of the things that you envision to achieve during a financial year?

I noticed in the report it is more like a story, just stories of conventions, treaties and bilateral relations. This is the first time I am sitting in this Committee and evaluating the report by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and I noticed that it is unique. Perhaps, it is unique in its nature because of its technicality, but I do not see the strategic direction on what the Ministry is trying to achieve annually or a strategic objective of the Ministry.

MR. S. RAIWALUI.- Thank you, honourable Ravunawa, for the question and the comment.

In terms of looking at the strategic direction of the Ministry, when the Ministry last appeared, we talked about the Foreign Policy White Paper. Providing that strategic direction was long overdue in terms of guidance and the way we conduct ourselves with the diplomatic work we do.

As mentioned in the presentation, during the reporting period, we aligned ourselves with the NDP and the priorities of Government outlined in the NDP. With the new Foreign Policy White Paper, we managed to get the Ocean of Peace concept, endorsed both within Government and at the regional level. That will guide future work on security and ocean measures, and also re-look at the mandate on global leadership, focusing on sovereignty, prosperity and security pillars of the Foreign Policy White Paper. We will dovetail the strategy for Foreign Missions according to the three pillars of the Foreign Policy White Paper.

HON. V. LAL.- Madam Chairperson, through you, I can see in the report that there is a proposal for FBC to have a formal arrangement to connect with BBC. I am interested and I would like to know the progress on this.

MR. S. RAIWALUI.- Madam Chairperson, we will try to get an update on that effort to connect FBC and BBC.

Based on the current update, we do not have formal relations between the two broadcasting agencies, but we can provide an update on the progress of those discussions during the reporting period as an update to the honourable Member.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you very much to the team from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade. Honourable Members, are there any more questions?

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- I have one last question, Madam Chairperson. In terms of some initiatives, for example, the Vuvale Partnership, do you have a term where you review the engagement that you signed off initially?

MR. S. RAIWALUI.- Honourable Member, I think we have a review period for these agreements. For Vuvale Partnership, we are reviewing it this year in terms of implementation of the current agreement - what measures we can put in place to address current gaps and the new areas of focus, given the strategic priorities of Fiji and Australia, that we can foster in the new agreement.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Chairperson, through you, I have a comment. If the Ministry can re-look at the structure or the way annual reports are done. The people do not realise the work of Parliament and the work of the Committee. When we scrutinise an annual report, we are able to debate it at the best of our abilities in Parliament and fill in the gaps. That is the job of the Committee. We are here to work with you and help you, but I think the structure needs to be re-looked at. I think it would make it much easier for us to scrutinise.

MR. S. RAIWALUI.- Certainly, we take those comments on board, Madam Chairperson. In terms of the question from the honourable Member, we have also started to look at how other countries do their reporting - something that we will try to follow.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you very much to the team from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, and thank you, honourable Members.

As you know, after this, we will be visiting the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, so you can meet the staff one-on-one and see the amount of work that goes on in the office and the Bureaus.

On that note, I sincerely thank the representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade for your time to be here for this submission. We appreciate your time and cooperation, and we look forward to your continued engagement, should the Committee require any information. We have already let you know some of the questions we have, and we look forward to your answers.

Thank you, honourable Members and I thank everyone. I declare this meeting closed.

The Committee adjourned at 10.06 a.m.