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Verbatim Report

[VERBATIM REPORT]

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE

ANNUAL REPORT

2023-2024 Annual Report

ENTITY: Parliament of the Republic of Fiji
VENUE: Big Committee Room 2 (East Wing)
DATE: Monday, 19th October, 2026

VERBATIM REPORT OF THE MEETINGS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE HELD AT THE BIG COMMITTEE ROOM, EAST WING, PARLIAMENT PRECINTS, GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS, ON MONDAY, 19TH OCTOBER, 2026, AT 9.12 A.M.

Present

Hon. L.S. Qereqeretabua	-	Chairperson
Hon. R.R. Sharma	-	Deputy Chairperson
Hon. R. Matawasawalevu	-	Member
Hon. V. Lal	-	Member

Apologies

Hon. P.K. Ravunawa	-	Member
Hon. I. Tuiwailevu	-	Member

Submitee: Parliament of the Republic of Fiji

In Attendance

(1) Ms. Jeanettee Emberson	-	Secretary General
(2) Ms. Louis Vakarau	-	Acting DSG/Head of Corporate Services

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MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Members, representatives from the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji, members of the media and the public; a very good morning to you. It is my pleasure to welcome everyone to this room, as well as those who are joining us live via the live broadcast.

Pursuant to the Standing Orders of Parliament, specifically Standing Order 111, all Committee meetings are open to the public and the media. Accordingly, this meeting is open to the public and members of the media. Any sensitive information that cannot be provided to the Committee either in writing or in a closed session, this will only be permitted in limited circumstances, including matters relating to national security, third-party confidential information, personnel or human resource matters and the Committee's own deliberations.

I just wish to remind all honourable Members and witnesses that all comments and questions should be directed through the Chair. For viewers following this live meeting on *Facebook*, questions may be submitted via the comment section, but only relevant questions will be considered by the Committee. We will take the opening statement from Madam Secretary-General of Parliament, and then we will ask questions later.

I want to remind everyone present that this is a parliamentary proceeding and all information provided is protected under the Parliamentary Powers and Privileges Act and the

Standing Orders of Parliament. Slander or libel of any kind will not be condoned, and any information presented to the Committee should be factual.

As you all know, in terms of meeting protocols, please, turn your mobiles on to silent, and we ask that we keep movement to a minimum in the room.

Honourable Members, you know Ms. Lois Vakarau, Head of Corporate Services, and also Madam Secretary-General, and likewise, Madam Secretary-General and Ms. Vakarau, you know the Committee, so there is no need for introductions. We also welcome Tatila from Hansard Unit this morning.

Madam Secretary-General, you may start. Thank you.

MS. J. EMBERSON.- Thank you, Madam Chairperson, and thank you, honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence. Just for the benefit of the viewers who are also watching this live proceeding, I just wanted to reiterate that I am Jeanette Emberson, I am the Secretary-General to the Fijian Parliament.

MS. L. VAKARAU.- Good morning, Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, my name is Lois, Head of Corporate Services and currently acting Deputy Secretary-General.

MS. J. EMBERSON.- Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, I wanted to just give a brief overview statement of the operations of Parliament for the reporting period of 2023 to 2024. Then following that, we will be open to providing further responses to the summary that you have before you, which was conveyed this morning.

For Parliament, Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, our general overview is that people are at the heart of the Parliament of Fiji, and guided by an ambitious vision and strategic direction, we are committed to strengthening Parliament's ability to serve the people of Fiji effectively. Now, central to our Strategic Plan is the role of the Parliamentary Secretariat and our dedicated staff, whose professionalism and commitment enable the successive delivery of Parliament's purpose, vision and mission. Through a continued focus on excellence, we strive to provide high-quality parliamentary services and support.

During the said reporting period of 2023 to 2024, Parliament continued to benefit from a strong culture of collaboration and collective effort. The experience of working together sustainably through daily challenges has strengthened our resilience, our adaptability and capacity to meet emerging demands. These qualities have positioned us well to navigate future opportunities and challenges.

Change remains constant in a parliamentary setting, and ours is not immune to that. To meet the evolving needs of Members and the people of Fiji, we must continue to adapt, to innovate and to transform the way we deliver our services. Public expectations and methods of engagement are continually evolving, and Parliament must remain responsive to these changes.

Working closely with the honourable Speaker, with the honourable Members and the wider community, we remain committed to strengthening public trust and confidence in Parliament and the vital democratic governance it provides to Fiji.

Now, in terms of the responses to the questions which have been posed to the Secretariat, as you are aware, Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, these have been duly provided. We are open now to any further questions that you may have.

Suffice to say, we have tried to respond as much as we can and as accurately as we can. There are several areas that we note the Committee has asked of the Secretariat, and we hope that the responses can guide your process of review and assessment of the said reporting period. So, Madam Chairperson, I will refer to the Committee for your further questions.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, Madam Secretary-General. Honourable Members, I open the floor now for any comments or questions to the Head of Corporate Services and also Madam SG.

HON. V. LAL.- Good morning, Chairperson and good morning, Ma'am. Thank you so much.

How do you go about, Ma'am, implementing the recommendations? I have come across where one Committee has given a recommendation, and then when another report appears before another Committee, the recommendation given by the previous Committee was not implemented. I raised this in Parliament as well, and I can give you a clear example of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs where it recommended that the Rakiraki Town Council actually reinstates the drainage levy. That was not done and it is still pending. So, my question is, how do you go about to see that the recommendations made by Standing Committees are actually implemented?

MS. J. EMBERSON.- Madam Chairperson, through you, at present, there is no formal mechanism within the Parliament of Fiji to track the implementation of Standing Committee recommendations after the relevant Ministry or agency has submitted its response to Parliament. Accordingly, the Secretariat does not monitor or report on the subsequent implementation status of those recommendations.

However, Madam Chairperson, through you, in following the best practices from other Parliaments around the world, the Fiji Parliament may be able to establish a register that keeps a record of the Standing Committee's recommendations and its implementation track. This would enable Standing Committees to track and monitor the implementation of their recommendations through regular follow-up processes, and, where necessary, determine whether the relevant agencies or Ministries or Entities should be called or recalled before the Committee to account for progress made.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. I think also because Standing Orders allows us or tells the Minister responsible for that recommendation to report back to Parliament within 21 days, if I am not wrong. I wanted to ask, if you would not mind, Madam SG, the research capacity in our Research and Library Services. They produce a lot of information, a lot of briefs, a lot of summaries and speaking notes and speeches for honourable Members. However, in this reporting period, there were only three Research Officers and one Librarian. Are there any moves or plans to increase the capacity of the Research Unit?

MS. J. EMBERSON.- Madam Chairperson, through you and to the honourable Members, the Units, so our Research and Library Services Unit, the staffing capacity for the said reporting period was only three Research Officers and one Librarian. As rightly put by Madam Chairperson, yes, indeed, this was a challenge that the Unit was faced with, and the Parliamentary Secretariat as a whole, in terms of providing research services to the Parliamentarians.

Now, one research staff was on study leave overseas during that period. If I may, Madam Chairperson, also sort of show the sequence from that reporting period up until now in terms of the progress that has been made to date, we have four Research Officers and one Librarian, and the capacity is much better than that of the 2023 to 2024 period.

We also had other internal issues that we had to deal with in terms of performance of staffing within that Unit, but that has since been dealt with. We continue to improve on where we can, and where we see gaps, we try our best to try and address those. So, we hope that with this current capacity, we are able to sort of share the pressure amongst the existing staff.

We also coordinate very closely, and that is our HR Unit and the respective Units and Managers, if they need more staff. That is something that is ongoing during any financial year, and something that Management also takes seriously when it puts together its budget submission to the Ministry of Finance.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, SG, if I go through Parliament's 2023-2024 Annual Report, just on the statement of receipts and expenditure for the year end 31st July, 2024, the travel and communication for the year of 2024 was $2.4 million for Parliament, and the previous year (2023) was $1.2 million. So, travel and communication has doubled or increased by $1.2 million for Parliament from 2023 to 2024. Can you just update the Committee on what transpired, what travel and communication is this?

MS. J. EMBERSON.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, we take note that those are not one of the questions that were posed through the Secretariat. However, we can respond to that. So travel and communication is budgetary allocation for staff, as well as honourable Members in terms of mobile phones, in terms of the plans that are bought for the MPs, as well as the internet services.

As you are aware, there have been updated remuneration or allowances for honourable Members through the Emoluments Committee, and the Parliament Secretariat is mandated to ensure that we align and adhere to the provisions that had been resolved and approved by the House. So, these expenses pertain to phone services, mobile, the plans have increased for MPs, as well as for staff because the work of Parliament is always evolving.

When we compare this term and especially the reporting period in question to that of the first term when Parliament was re-established, there is a trend that you will see that more work is being done in Parliament, and that also includes the Committees. So, in order to ensure that the support to Members is at par level, we have to ensure that we have to pay for the services that are needed. So, I hope this clarifies, but if you need further clarification, please, do let us know.

HON. V. LAL.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, I can see there was a self-assessment done against the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures, and one of the recommendations was that the legislation around parliamentary powers and privileges should be reviewed and updated as soon as possible. However, I can see in the remarks that it is still outstanding. Can the Secretary-General, please, explain that?

MS. J. EMBERSON.- Thank you, and through you, Madam Chairperson, before I go on to responding to that question, if I may just add on to the previous question posed by honourable Sharma in terms of the increase in our budget for travel and communications. In terms of the travel, there was also a significant increase, and this was to accommodate the upgrade of the Members' entitlements.

In response to honourable Lal's question on the legislation around parliamentary powers and privileges, yes, that has been noted. As it is, Parliament is also trying to work through its

priorities in terms of which legislations it wishes to put forth. There are ongoing works for a parliamentary bill which, I believe, we had also sort of mentioned at the last reporting cycle when we also appeared before the Committee. This, for the Parliamentary Powers and Privileges Act, really, that is the role of the Government of the day to propose any amendments.

From the parliamentary side, we have the Committees that may also push for amendments, and if reflected in their reports or any other suggestions, then those will be taken on board. Perhaps, this is something that we can still work towards. It is still outstanding, and that is because we have not delved into any work to really bring this up to the recommendation that has been put forth, Madam Chairperson.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- I want to go to the effectiveness of the Parliamentary Civic Education. I know that it may not be possible, but as much as we would like for the Civic and Education Unit to reach maritime areas of Fiji. Are there any plans in progress to improve the reach of the Unit?

MS. J. EMBERSON.- Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, in terms of our Civic Education Programme, you may be well aware that we have a Parliament Bus Programme, and as you have put out, has sort of reached schools which are mostly inland. The concern and issue that you have raised is how do we improve that for the maritime zone?

All schools that visit Parliament complete feedback forms, so those are the ones that we have already undertaken. In terms of furthering our reach into the maritime areas, that is something that we will definitely need to look into, Madam. The Committee has brought this up to our attention.

Now, whilst we try our level best to try and cover the schools that we have not been able to reach over time, as you may be aware, there is a register that our Civic Education maintains, and we try to cover all the schools in the four Divisions. We will definitely look into how we can improve our reach to the maritime zone. There may be funding constraints, as always, with any initiative and any programme that any institution wishes to pursue, but this is something that we will definitely take on board as an improvement for our Civic Education reach, Madam.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Chairperson, through you, again, on the receipts and expenditure. For 2024, I see a capital purchase of $4.4 million for Parliament. I do not think the report has a breakdown of what Parliament had procured for $4.4 million. If you can just highlight the Committee on that?

MS. J. EMBERSON.- Madam Chairperson, through you, it is good to see that honourable Sharma is directly quoting from our Report and those are the ones that we did not prepare for through the questions but, anyways, we are able to respond to that.

So, the $4.4 million was actually for the ICT infrastructure upgrade, and there was a launch earlier that year as well. There were four phases to that initiative, and I can confirm that we have successfully rolled out all the stages that we had intended to. You would have noted in the Chambers, we are now ready to, or now we have the capacity to broadcast in the three languages - the stations that are dedicated to each of the languages that can be spoken on the floor. This is also improved on our virtual connections and all the other related upgrades that were necessary.

For an institution like Parliament, we appreciate that ICT is always evolving everyday, and if we cannot keep up with the developments, we will be so left behind. So, in our endeavour to ensure that Members can fully execute their representative, their legislative and their oversight and scrutiny functions, we must also keep up with the developments around us.

For the $4.4 million, we were very fortunate that the Government, through the Ministry of Finance, had approved that request, and we were able to roll out that project within that financial year.

HON. V. LAL.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, I have sat in the Business ocmmittee at times and I have seen sometimes there are valid questions posed by the Opposition, but because Government is reluctant to answer those questions in Parliament, to accept those questions. What is the role of the Secretariat here? I mean, we have seen that sometimes, the questions are very valid but because the Government is reluctant, how do you go about advising the Speaker that you should accept it or should not accept it?

MS. J. EMBERSON.- Perhaps, for this question, Madam, I would reserve my comments, given that the proceedings of the Business Committee are confidential and are not made public to the public. For that reason, I believe I do not have the capacity or the authority to make any comments outside of the Business Committee.

As you are well aware, that is a committee that is chaired by the honourable Speaker and also includes membership from four Government Members, including the honourable Prime Minister and from the Opposition, the Leader of the Opposition. So, I beg the indulgence of the Committee, Madam Chair, if I can refrain from providing any further response to this question, please.

HON. V. LAL.- Thank you, I really understand. I think this is the prerogative of the Business Committee, but sometimes what we have actually noticed is when members of Parliament make statements in Parliament or outside Parliament, which is sometimes not factually correct, and I can give you examples of that, as Secretary General to Parliament, do you come in to correct them or you issue statements in regards to whatever has been said?

MS. J. EMBERSON.- Through you, Madam Chaiperson, I can only respond from the Secretariat side. As is well established in other jurisdictions as well, the Secretariat does not respond to any queries that may be brought for the intended attention of the Members. We believe that the House is where these matters can be addressed, so if the Opposition does have concerns about such matters, they have the mechanisms that are in place and as you have also alluded to, that is through question time.

We also have the debate on the motions that are listed on the Order Paper for that particular day. We also have other avenues where Members can exercise their oversight functions. So, we would recommend as a Secretariat that the Members capitalise more or tap more into these avenues.

Our Secretariat is not here to dictate or to run Parliament. We are here to serve the honourable Speaker, the honourable Members and the Fijian people in its endeavour. Perhaps, honourable Member, that is something that could be brought back to the House or even through your caucus, through your leaders.

There is also the avenue where these matters can be written directly to the honourable Speaker, and he would be the best person to decide on these questions. Thank you.

HON. V. LAL.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, Madam SG, just adding on to that, because all the Members of Parliament are not lawyers and they needed Parliamentary Counsel, all the 55 Members do not have access to a Parliamentary Counsel. Are you going to look into it further in future?

MS. J. EMBERSON.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, I can confirm that the Secretariat is still pursuing the post of a Parliamentary Counsel or even a dedicated Legal Unit to support the Members in terms of the concerns that have been raised over time with the Office of the Speaker. This is something that we have not been able to obtain during that financial year. It is something that we are still pursuing, though, because we know that it is a post that will be very much valuable in an institution such as Parliament. Looking at other jurisdictions, they also have Parliamentary Counsels, they have a dedicated Drafting Unit or a dedicated Legal Unit. That is also something that we would like to mirror and this is for the purposes of

adopting and adapting to best practices. So, Madam Chairperson, perhaps, I can just confirm that it has not ended there, we will still pursue so that we can get such position in Parliament. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, Madam SG. That is good news.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Chaireperson, through you, I was on the Business Committee, I think, the last time, and I can confirm that the Tables Unit is doing a wonderful job in terms of scrutinising all the questions that are before both sides of the table. So, thank you, Madam SG, for that.

Madam SG, one of the concerns is how the Committees are colliding in regard to room space, especially with the stakeholders that are so busy or the Committees that remain so busy. We are, sort of, struggling for especially this particular room in terms of live submissions. How is your Parliament addressing that?

I have a two-part question. One is for the Committees and the other is, some of these journalists stand here all day waiting for questions that they want to ask certain Ministers. In the last Parliament, we went until probably two o'clock in the morning. I think a few of them were here, and there is lack of sitting space or any proper space for them - barely any space or chairs for them. So is there any provisions or is Parliament going to consider a particular room just for the journalists and their well-being? Standing all day is actually painful. Is Parliament looking into accommodating a space for them or putting in more chairs in the front? I know space continues to be an issue. How is the Parliament, going forward?

MS. J. EMBERSON.- Thank you, honourable Sharma. Through you, Madam Chairperson, we have always dedicated the Small Committee Room for the media and journalists, except when there is a parliamentary event and we need to use the Small Committee Room. Then they are advised through our Manager, Civic Education and Media Unit.

We all know that we do not have space. We have always been vying for space and putting in submissions for space. There is ongoing work for a proposal for Parliament to have a standalone building. That is something that we would like in the years to come. It is not going to be overnight work. There is going to be a lot of finances involved, a lot of expertise, and it is not something that a small country like Fiji can just have in the next few years. It is something that is being discussed internally. We are also trying to see if there are any potential donors that could also assist in this endeavour. There is a lot of aspects also, a lot of factors to take into consideration in terms of land, space, where would this be, proximity to the people because at the end of the day, this is the house of the people.

Those factors are all being taken into consideration and we hope that maybe just one day, Parliament would have its own standalone building. As much as we sympathise with the journalists because of the lack of spacing, we try to work with the limited space that we have and where we can accommodate, we will definitely reach out to them. We are very apologetic in that regard because we would like them to be also comfortable and to have a really comfortable, dedicated room, Madam, but that is not something that we are able to afford at this point in time.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Chairperson, one more question and I can be corrected on this; I think on our Parliament page, I think we have Hansard copies from 2014 and beyond because prior to that, I believe there was an interim government for probably eight years. I am talking about the Hansard now during the Qarase Government, the Chaudhry Government, 1990s.

I believe the physical Hansard copies are in the Library. Are there any plans to digitalise them and then have them uploaded on to our Parliament page? I mean, I really do not get the time to go down to the Library myself, but I would love to read them. So, are there any plans to digitalise these copies so that they are there for the wider public?

MS. J. EMBERSON.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, I would like to confirm to the Committee that in the past years, we had, sort of, put a submission to purchase a machine - a printer and scanner, that would scan or digitise all those previous Hansard Reports. The issue with those reports is that they are old and some of the pages are not able to be scanned. So we needed that machine, which we could not afford.

I think it is still something that is still unaffordable at this point in time, considering all the other priorities that we have to, sort of, meet for the Members' imminent needs for their oversight roles. That is something that we will not dispense with, but we will still try our level best to be able to digitise all those.

In terms of the honourable Member's remarks to the Hansard on the website, we only have from 2014 onwards, so that is from 6th October, 2014 when the first Sitting in the first term took place.

So, we only have those Hansard Reports online from 6th October, 2014 to date, and for digitisation of the other previous records, we will try to work something to try and get those in place but where it permits, given the condition of those records.

For the information of honourable Members of the Committee, we may not have all the records as well on hand because as you remember, there was a lot that was happening during that time. A lot of damage had also occurred in the old parliamentary precincts, so some records were never recovered. What we have currently in our Library with our team is what we have been able to salvage, and we hope that we can do justice to digitising those in the near future.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam SG, in one parliamentary year, and I will stick to 2023-24, how much does Parliament spend on catering?

MS. J. EMBERSON.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, for the said reporting period of 2023-2024, we had spent on parliamentary sittings catering a sum of $170,000. For Committee sittings for the same reporting period, it sat at $21,000. In total, it was $192,904.

HON. V. LAL.- This is the last question from me, I have seen in my two terms of Parliament, we have lost some very good Parliament staff and people are still leaving. Recently, we have lost, I know, due to various reasons. So, my question to you, Madam, is there any staff retention initiative which Parliament is working on so that we do not lose good staff and we are able to attract good staff from outside as well?

MS. J. EMBERSON.- Thank you, and through you, Madam Chairperson, I can confirm that we have staff retention measures in place to the best of our ability, and this is not a secret fact.

The band that the staffing in Parliament receive over that of the Civil esrvice is a bit higher, so for someone on a managerial post in the Executive would get slightly less than what our Managers here in Parliament would get. It is not far off, and this is something for the benefit of those who are tuning in and maybe jumping up in arms now at that fact. However, it was done through an independent process. We had a consultant who also assisted Parliament in doing these assessments so that we could ensure that we were applying something that was fair and not too distant from that of the Executive. We have other plans that are in place.

We have a succession planning policy for those who may be leaving. In terms of training capacity within the institution, we encourage staff to attend as much as we can offer. These would be the ones that are offered locally outside the parliamentary precincts. We also have a lot that involve the Members of Parliament and the staff as well, and this is something that helps build their capacity.

Now, the result of that is that they become very good at what they do. They become very knowledgeable, and they are very marketable. That is the very reason why we lose staff. It is

not because they have been terminated or anything, no. Some staff have passed on whilst being employed, and then the others have all gone on promotion.

So, as an institution as well, we are very proud of that fact. Whilst we would like to retain and keep them here, we, unfortunately, cannot keep up with what the market is offering them. In all fairness, we would have to release them to go and enjoy the benefits that they would receive in the other institution, because they are also doing it for their families.

I have always been asked a lot of questions, and I think this is how many times now that I have also received this question and comment. However, I would like to say that it was not that they left on bad terms - they all went on promotions. For me as a fellow worker here, it gives me great pride to know that these staff have grown so much in their responsibilities, in the levels that they are at, and that someone else has seen that they can contribute also to the institution. So, I hope at some point that maybe, we would not be asked any more of these questions, unless of course, there are other dire reasons why staff are leaving. I would like to say that it really makes the institution a proud one, because we know that we have groomed staff to be the best that they can be.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you for that answer, Madam SG. Now, for our last question this morning, I hand over to honourable Matasawalevu.

HON. T.R. MATASAWALEVU.- Through you, Madam Chairpeson, the usage of mobiles and laptops, how long it will take, and which Members will be receiving these mobiles and laptops?

MS. J. EMBERSON.- Madam, may I seek further clarification, please, so thank you, honourable Matasawalevu. It is also wonderful to finally have a question from the honourable Member.

In terms of the gadgets that are issued to honourable Members, you may be aware that the Secretariat has issued and circulated a dissolution pamphlet. This dissolution pamphlet is aimed at advising Members what happens as we are drawing closer to dissolution.

As we are all aware as well, under the Constitution, Parliament must dissolve on 24th December, 2026, because that would be four years from the first sitting in 2022. According to that dissolution pamphlet, and also in adherence to the Parliamentary Remunerations Act 2014, Members now get to retain and keep the gadgets that are given to them. So should Parliament dissolve anytime soon, on 24th December, all honourable Members will now be able to retain and take home the ICT gadgets that have been issued to them, that is, laptops,

mobile phones, Wi-Fi devices, and any other ICT devices that our ICT Unit has issued to all honourable Members. This is according to law.

Also for the benefit of those who are tuning in, this is very much in the law. It was an amendment that was incorporated after the Emoluments Committee Report of 2024, and so we will not be collecting any gadgets from honourable Members. It is also intended for all those that have been issued by the Ministries to the honourable Ministers and honourable Assistant Ministers. The intention is for these ICT gadgets to be retained by Members when they leave office.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you for that clarification. Did you want to continue, Madam SG?

MS. J. EMBERSON.- Madam, I have just been advised by our HCS that for mobile phone SIMs, you would have to seek approval to retain those numbers because those are marked under Parliament with Vodafone. So, we will be able to work something out when the requests come in for retention of SIM numbers as well. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you very much, ladies and honourable Members. I am going to bring this meeting to a close now, but before I close this meeting, I just want to draw the attention of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji Representatives to the requirements of Standing Orders of Parliament, which provides that the Minister responsible for the relevant Government Department table a substantive response to the Standing Committee's Report within 21 days of receiving the Report. So, in this regard, the Committee looks forward to receiving Parliament's formal response to the Committee's Review Report on the Parliament of Fiji Annual Report 20232024.

With that, I thank you both sincerely and wish you a very good rest of your day, and we appreciate your time and cooperation. I bring this meeting to a close. Thank you.

The Committee adjourned at 9.57 a.m.

Written Response

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 **19 October 2026**

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 2023-2024 Annual Report

1. Reference is made respectfully to your letter of 14/10/2026 on the above subject matter.

2. I have duly taken note of the Standing Committee's request for the following –

(a) an in-person submission on the above mentioned Annual Report on Monday, 19 October 2026 from 9.00 a.m. to 10.00 a.m. at the Parliament's Big Committee Room; and

(b) summary presentation of the said Annual Report, including responding to the attached list of 30 questions, including but not limited to, a gender analysis of the Parliament's activities and the alignment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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 2023-2024 Annual Report of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji

Date: 19 October 2026

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 2023-2024 Annual Report of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji

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Purpose of the Brief

This brief provides responses to the request/questions raised by the Standing Committee on the Parliament's 2023-2024 Annual Report.

Background

Pursuant to Standing Order 38(2), the Hon. Speaker, on Friday, 17 July 2026, referred the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji 2023-2024 Annual Report to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence.

On 14 October 2026, the Standing Committee requested for a presentation on the following

–

(a) an in-person submission on the above mentioned Annual Report on Monday, 19 October 2026 from 9.00 a.m. to 10.00 a.m. at the Parliament's Big Committee Room; and

(b) summary presentation of the said Annual Report, including responding to the attached list of 30 questions, including but not limited to, a gender analysis of the Parliament's activities and the alignment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

A. GENERAL OVERVIEW

People are at the heart of the Parliament of Fiji. Guided by an ambitious vision and strategic direction, we are committed to strengthening Parliament's ability to serve the people of Fiji effectively. Central to our Strategic Plan is the role of the Parliamentary Secretariat and our dedicated staff, whose professionalism and commitment enable the successful delivery of Parliament's purpose, vision, and mission. Through a continued focus on excellence, we strive to provide high-quality parliamentary services and support.

During the 2023–2024 reporting period, Parliament continued to benefit from a strong culture of collaboration and collective effort. The experience of working together sustainably through daily challenges strengthened our resilience, adaptability, and capacity to meet emerging demands. These qualities have positioned us well to navigate future opportunities and challenges.

Change remains a constant in a parliamentary setting. To meet the evolving needs of Members and the people of Fiji, we must continue to adapt, innovate, and transform the way we deliver our services. Public expectations and methods of engagement are continually evolving, and Parliament must remain responsive to these changes. Working closely with the Honourable Speaker, Honourable Members, and the wider community, we remain committed to strengthening public trust and confidence in Parliament and the vital democratic governance it provides for Fiji.

B. RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ON THE PARLIAMENT'S 2023-2024 ANNUAL REPORT

1. **Strategic Plan and institutional performance:** The Annual Report outlines four strategic priorities for Parliament for 2023–2027. What measurable indicators does the Secretariat use to determine whether these strategic priorities are being achieved, and which areas were considered to be underperforming during the 2023–2024 reporting period?
Strategic Priority 1 **Providing Members with high-quality support and resources** The Secretariat measured performance through indicators such as: • Client (MP) satisfaction. • Delivery of support to Parliament sittings and committee meetings. • Number of Parliament sittings conducted. • Number of Standing and Select Committee sittings. • Committee reports produced. • *Hansard* reports and committee verbatims completed. • Translation and sign-language interpretation services provided. • Public broadcasting of Parliament and committee proceedings. • Capacity-building and training programmes for Members. • Protocol and inter-parliamentary engagement activities. • Accessibility of Acts, Bills, conventions, and parliamentary papers. **Strategic Priority 2** **Protecting the independence and integrity of Parliament** Performance indicators included: • Establishment of independent parliamentary ICT infrastructure. • Enhancement of ICT services. • Production and publication capabilities supporting parliamentary independence. **Strategic Priority 3**

Strengthening public engagement and participation Indicators included:

- Delivery of educational resources for schools, teachers and the civil service.
- Full staffing of Civic Education and ICT functions.
- Implementation of multi-language translation and captioning services.
- Development of Parliament TV content on the Walesi platform.
- Social media engagement and outreach content. • Community outreach programmes and public participation initiatives.

Strategic Priority 4
Developing the capabilities of Parliament's workforce
Indicators included:

- Implementation of the Performance Management System (PMS).
- Staff development and upskilling programmes.
- Staff empowerment in the use of modern technologies.
- Technical assistance and ICT support services.

For this reporting period, the principal underperforming or risk areas were:

(a) Workforce systems and staffing capacity.
(b) ICT modernisation and infrastructure resilience.
(c) Monitoring and reporting compliance. (d) Delayed implementation of some digital-accessibility initiatives.

2. **Parliamentary independence:** One of Parliament's strategic priorities is to protect the independence and integrity of Parliament. What specific measures were undertaken during the reporting period to strengthen Parliament's institutional, administrative and financial independence, and what further reforms does the Secretariat consider necessary?

Institutional –

- The Secretariat facilitated amendments to the Standing Orders to provide additional provisions for subcommittees, enhancing Parliament's investigative and scrutiny capacity. These changes strengthen Members' ability to hold the Executive accountable and improve parliamentary oversight.
- Enhanced production and publication capabilities to enable Parliament to better manage its own legislative information and parliamentary documents.

Administrative –

- Investment of approximately $4 million for Independent Parliament ICT Infrastructure under Strategic Priority 2.
- Upgrading the Chamber conferencing system, digital platforms, and infrastructure to improve Parliament's ability to operate independently and efficiently.
- Migrating services to platforms such as Microsoft Teams and SharePoint and strengthening remote work capability for Members and Secretariat staff. These initiatives were intended to provide Parliament with greater technological self-reliance and operational resilience.

Financial – Currently in the process of procuring Parliament's own accounting system and HRMIS. This was not an activity planned for this reporting period.

Parliament's independence agenda remains incomplete and requires further reform through the:

(a) Continued implementation of recommendations arising from the CPA Benchmark assessment to strengthen democratic governance and institutional effectiveness.

(b) Continued development of Parliament's own ICT security framework and digital systems.

(c) Proper establishment of an independent Parliamentary Counsel function.

(d) Completion of procurement of a new accounting system.

(e) Enactment of a Parliamentary Bill. (f) Stand-alone Parliament building and precincts.

3. **Scrutiny of legislation:** The report records that **26 Bills were tabled, but only five were referred to Standing Committees, while 20 proceeded under Standing Order 51**. Given the important scrutiny role of committees, does the Secretariat have concerns about the proportion of legislation proceeding without full committee scrutiny and public consultation? What measures could strengthen committee scrutiny of legislation?

Our role as secretariat staff is non-partisan. Whilst there have been concerns regarding the fasttracking provisions in the Standing Orders, the process in which Bills are tabled before the House is the prerogative of the Government of the day. Should members wish to address the reliance on expedited procedures and restore robust legislative scrutiny, these must be executed through established processes under the Standing Orders.

4. **Parliamentary questions:** The Tables and Journals Unit processed **192 parliamentary questions [141 oral and 51 written questions]**. What mechanisms are in place to monitor whether Ministers provide complete and timely responses, particularly to written questions, and are outstanding or delayed responses systematically tracked?
The standard procedure is that the unit writes to the respective Permanent Secretaries on the response once the written questions have been asked on the floor – the relevant Ministers are copied in the email also.
5. **Effectiveness of Standing Committees:** The Committees Unit supported **434 committee meetings, 55 public consultations, 41 site visits and 31 committee reports**. Beyond these activity numbers, how does Parliament assess whether committee scrutiny actually results in improvements in government policy, administration and service delivery? Does the Secretariat track implementation of recommendations made by Standing Committees?
The Standing Committees working within their respective mandates are extensively involved with preparation and tabling of the reports to the Parliament within the prescribed timeframes. Upon being tabled and debated in Parliament, the report is forwarded to the relevant ministry, which is expected to consider the findings and recommendations and provide a formal response, which is then transmitted to the respective Standing Committees. Therefore, beyond receiving and considering responses to committee reports, Parliament has limited ability to assess the extent to which committee scrutiny results in tangible improvements to the policies, administration, and service delivery of the relevant entities, government ministries, or agencies. While Parliament may make recommendations through its committees, responsibility for their implementation rests with the Executive branch of Government.
6. **Follow-up of Committee recommendations:** Is there currently a centralised mechanism within Parliament for monitoring Government responses to recommendations contained in Standing Committee reports? If not, would the Secretariat consider developing a formal recommendationtracking system so that Committees can assess whether their recommendations have been implemented?
At present, there is no formal mechanism within the Parliament of Fiji to track the implementation of Standing Committee recommendations after the relevant ministry or agency has submitted its

response to Parliament. Accordingly, the Secretariat does not monitor or report on the subsequent implementation status of those recommendations.

However, in following the best practices from other parliaments around the world, the Fiji Parliament may be able to establish a register that keeps a record of the Standing Committees recommendation, and its implementation track. This would enable Standing Committees to track and monitor the implementation of their recommendations through regular follow-up processes and, where necessary, determine whether the relevant ministries, agencies, or entities should be recalled before the Committee to account for progress made.

7. **Research capacity:** The Research and Library Services Unit produced **63 information briefs, 38 annual-report summaries and 25 sets of speaking notes/speeches**, while noting increased demand from Standing Committees. Does the Unit currently have sufficient staffing and specialist expertise to provide Committees with in-depth policy, financial, legal, treaty and sectoral analysis? What capability gaps remain?

The Unit's staffing capacity in 2023-2024 was only 3 research officers and 1 librarian. One research staff was on study leave overseas. During this period and up till early 2026 the Unit was affected by reduced staff numbers and performance issues by one research staff. As of April 2026, the Unit has 4 research officers and 1 librarian and capacity/capability is better than in 2023-2024.

Parliamentary research staff are mostly generalists. Specialist expertise would require an increase in staff and salary that commensurate with the required qualifications and experience in specific fields. [We are talking about MA (thesis) and PhD levels plus extensive work/field experience] As a small parliament and having regard to resource limitations, we cannot afford to have a large group specialist expertise to provide in-depth policy, financial, legal, treaty and sectoral analysis. This is also the case in parliaments across Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific (and in commonwealth jurisdiction), where specialisation is limited and researchers cover multiple thematic areas.

8. **Quality of research for Committees:** The report notes that Standing Committees increasingly requested more in-depth analysis of annual-report data. What improvements have been made to ensure that research provided to Committees moves beyond summarising annual reports and identifies trends, performance gaps, financial issues and matters requiring further scrutiny?

The Unit has been providing research support analysis of annual report as required from the Standing Committee and does provide content beyond summarising annual reports, especially with the provision of additional information to assist Standing Committees in their inquiries.

The Unit's researchers are guided by the specific requests that Standing Committees or Members make. Standing Committee research requests are often very general and do not provide specifics.

It should be noted that parliamentary researchers often cannot undertake highly in-depth analytical or evaluative work particularly when neutrality and institutional independence are involved. Parliament researchers generally should not undertake in-depth analysis that likely recommend political positions or reach conclusions that favour either government or opposition members. They have to be cautious that their analyses do not advocate for specific policy outcomes. A highly indepth analysis can sometimes require evaluative judgements about whether government policies succeeded or failed, which may be perceived as compromising neutrality.

In Westminster-style parliaments, including many Pacific legislatures, committees are the decisionmakers. Researchers support the committee by gathering data, information, analysing documents and preparing factual summaries. However, undertaking in-depth analysis that determine whether a ministry performed adequately or whether spending was effective or whether officials should be held accountable is ultimately the responsibility of committee members, not staff.

If researchers undertake the full analytical assessment, there is a risk that staff rather than Members are effectively making oversight judgements. Identifying performance gaps, financial issues and matters requiring further scrutiny is in fact the work of the Standing Committees.

9. ***Hansard* and committee verbatim:** The *Hansard* Unit achieved **100% delivery of *Hansard* reports for sitting days and produced 57 committee verbatims**. What criteria determine which committee proceedings receive verbatim transcription, and does Parliament have sufficient resources to extend transcription support to more committee hearings?

There is no set criteria, but it is usually based on the needs of the Committee secretariat. Some Committees need the verbatim as soon as possible, while others are able to work with summaries prepared by their respective secretariats while the verbatims are being finalised. With the introduction of AI, *Hansard* in collaboration with ICT, are looking for suitable tools to cater to our needs.

10. **Public participation:** Parliament identifies strengthening public participation as a strategic priority. How does the Secretariat measure whether public consultations are genuinely reaching rural, maritime, youth, women, persons with disabilities and other groups that may face barriers to participating in parliamentary processes?

Parliament measures the effectiveness and inclusiveness of its public engagement initiatives through participation records, outreach reports, visitor statistics, and stakeholder feedback.

One indicator of progress has been the increasing number of organised visits to Parliament by schools, women's groups, youth organisations, community groups from rural areas, and persons living with disabilities. These visits provide opportunities for participants to learn about the work of Parliament, interact with Members of Parliament and parliamentary officials, and gain a better understanding of parliamentary processes.

The Secretariat also extends its outreach beyond urban centres through initiatives such as the Parliament Bus Programme, which brings civic education and parliamentary awareness activities directly to schools in interior and remote rural communities. This programme helps ensure that students and communities who may not otherwise have the opportunity to visit Parliament are still able to engage with and learn about democratic governance and the role of Parliament.

While challenges remain in ensuring broad-based participation across all sectors of society, the growing diversity of groups engaging with Parliament, together with outreach initiatives such as the Parliament Bus Programme, demonstrates that parliamentary engagement efforts are increasingly reaching a wider and more representative cross-section of Fiji's population.

11. **Effectiveness of civic education:** Initiatives such as the Parliament Bus Programme reached **15 schools**, while the Women's Mock Parliament involved **58 women**. What follow-up assessments are undertaken to determine whether these programmes improve understanding of Parliament or lead to sustained civic participation?

All schools visited through the Parliament Bus Programme completed feedback forms, with responses indicating an increased understanding of Parliament, including its roles, functions and processes. This feedback provided an immediate measure of the programme’s effectiveness and showed that the visits helped participants develop a clearer appreciation of Parliament and its relevance to their lives.

Social media coverage of the visits also led to increased requests from other schools and organised tour groups, both within the same division and across other divisions. The growth in enquiries indicates that the programme has raised wider awareness and stimulated interest in parliamentary

education beyond the schools initially visited. This is particularly significant as the General Election draws nearer, when access to clear, accurate and non-partisan civic information is essential to support informed participation in the democratic process.

For participants in the Women's Mock Parliament, follow-up activities were conducted by the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection and partner organisations, including UNDP. These activities provided opportunities for participants to share their experiences and discuss practical ways to encourage more women to engage with Parliament and pursue leadership roles.

Parliament has also continued the national conversation through initiatives such as the latest Speaker's Debate, which focused on the theme, "From Participation to Representation: How Do We Increase Women in Parliament?" Together, participant feedback, follow-up engagement, outreach requests and levels of public interest provide useful indicators for assessing programme outcomes and informing the planning and improvement of future civic education initiatives.

12. **Women's representation:** The report acknowledges that women constituted only **9% of Parliament** during the reporting period and identifies initiatives aimed at encouraging women's participation in leadership. What longer-term strategy does Parliament have to support women's political participation, and how will the impact of initiatives such as the Women's Mock Parliament be measured?

Parliament's longer-term strategy is to create a sustained pathway for women's political participation, moving beyond one-off events towards coordinated and ongoing support. This includes continuing leadership and parliamentary practice programmes, strengthening partnerships with the Ministry of Women, Children, Social Protection & Cohesion, Civil Society Organisations, development partners and educational institutions, and creating mentoring and networking opportunities for women interested in public leadership. Former Women's Mock Parliament participants can also be engaged in civic education, community outreach, parliamentary consultations and future leadership initiatives, enabling them to apply and share the knowledge gained through the programme.

The impact of the Women's Mock Parliament will be assessed through participant feedback and periodic follow-up with participants and partner organisations. Monitoring may consider changes in participants' understanding of parliamentary and electoral processes, confidence in public leadership, involvement in community and civic activities, participation in political parties or electoral processes, and progression into appointed or elected leadership roles.

Qualitative feedback, including participants' experiences and the challenges they encounter, will complement these indicators. The findings will help Parliament and its partners identify areas for improvement, strengthen future programmes and determine whether the initiative is contributing to greater and more sustained participation by women in political and public life.

13. **Accessibility:** The report highlights wheelchair ramps, elevator access and sign-language interpretation during televised sittings. Has Parliament undertaken a comprehensive accessibility audit covering its buildings, committee proceedings, website, documents and public consultations, and what outstanding accessibility gaps remain?

Parliament has taken important but targeted accessibility measures, particularly through wheelchair access, elevator access, sign-language interpretation, televised proceedings, and development of multilingual translation and captioning capabilities.

However, it has not undertaken a comprehensive accessibility audit nor a systematic assessment of accessibility across buildings, committee processes, digital services, parliamentary publications, and public consultations. The Fiji Parliament understands that the most evident outstanding gaps relate to digital accessibility, accessible documentation, committee accessibility, consultation accessibility, and the absence of measurable accessibility performance indicators.

Physical accessibility Parliament
House provides:

- Wheelchair ramps.
- Elevator access to parliamentary facilities. • Accessible movement within key public areas of the parliamentary precinct.

Accessibility of parliamentary proceedings The
Secretariat provides:

- Sign-language interpretation during televised parliamentary sittings.
- Broadcast of parliamentary proceedings through television and digital platforms. • Continued efforts to improve public access to parliamentary information.

Language accessibility
Under its public engagement initiatives, Parliament progressed a Multi-language Translation and Captioning Project intended to make parliamentary proceedings more accessible to Fiji's diverse linguistic communities. During 2023–2024:

- Equipment was procured and installed.
- Testing and commissioning were undertaken. • Operational implementation was scheduled for the following reporting period.

14. **Inter-parliamentary engagement:** The Inter-Parliamentary Relations and Protocol Unit facilitated **14 overseas engagements for Members, two virtual engagements and four overseas travel opportunities for staff**. How does Parliament assess the value-for-money and institutional benefits arising from overseas parliamentary engagements, and what mechanisms ensure that knowledge gained is shared with other Members and Secretariat staff?

Parliament assesses the value and institutional benefits of overseas engagements through postmission reporting, alignment with Parliament's strategic priorities, and the extent to which engagements contribute to strengthened parliamentary practice, governance, oversight, and international partnerships. Members and staff participating in official engagements are generally required to submit reports outlining key outcomes, lessons learned, and recommendations. Knowledge gained is shared through debrief sessions, presentations, committee briefings, written reports, and internal information-sharing mechanisms, helping to ensure that insights and good practices are disseminated across the Parliamentary Secretariat and among Members for broader institutional benefit.

15. **Development-partner support:** The report acknowledges significant support from the UNDP Fiji Parliament Support Project and the Governments of Australia, Japan and New Zealand. What proportion of Parliament's capacity-building, civic education and institutional-development programmes depends on development-partner funding, and what is the Secretariat's sustainability strategy should external funding decline?

The support project frequently absorbs nearly all direct programming costs associated with specialised capacity building for MPs, staff, civic education and public outreach and institutional modernisation. The support is project specific and based on the donor's annual work plan.

In relation to our strategy should external funding decline, the secretariat will undertake gradual budget absorption onto our national regular budget and will build on our internal capacity to gradually move away from continuous reliance on internal consultants. Our internal capacity will include SOPs, institutional manuals and internal peer-training frameworks, digital outreach, resource sharing with regional networks (CPA, PIPA, etc)

16. **CPA Democratic Legislature Benchmarks:** Parliament undertook a self-assessment against the **Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures**, with an Outcomes Report containing recommendations to strengthen transparency, accountability and institutional effectiveness. Which recommendations have been implemented, which remain outstanding, and what timeframe has been established for their implementation?

RECOMMENDATION 1	
Legislation around parliamentary powers and privileges should be reviewed and updated as soon as possible to ensure there are sufficient protections in place for Members of Parliament.	*This is outstanding.*
RECOMMENDATION 2	

Consideration should be given to ensuring that the membership of the Emoluments Committee is independent of Parliament and the Executive.	*Actioned through the last Emoluments Report, and which was subsequently approved by the House. The report resolved that any future undertaking on emoluments which require members on the committee, must not include sitting MPs.*
RECOMMENDATION 3	
An annual training and development curriculum should be developed by Parliament. This curriculum should include internal and external professional development programmes and courses aimed primarily at newly elected Members, but also those more experienced Members. Especially those Members who would benefit from specialist training on the various roles and responsibilities of being an MP. Such a curriculum should be shared across Parliament, political parties and government departments.	*This is work in progress.*
RECOMMENDATION 4	
A review should be undertaken to consider whether the existing Government Building is fit for purpose in the medium to longterm, and whether a more suitable designated parliamentary building should be identified to meet the needs of Members and parliamentary staff.	*This is work in progress.*
RECOMMENDATION 5	
Standing Orders or a Speaker's Ruling should clearly state under which circumstances the SO51 provision should be applied, which	*This is the prerogative of the Standing Orders Committee, which has*

should be extraordinary, narrowly defined and transparent.	*membership from both sides of the House.*
RECOMMENDATION 6	

Standing Orders should be amended to clearly stipulate that the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee come from an Opposition Party, in line with international best practice.	*This is the prerogative of the Standing Orders Committee, which has membership from both sides of the House.*
RECOMMENDATION 7	
The Parliament, via a Speaker's Ruling or amending Standing Orders should provide greater clarity in terms of Committee composition when coalition parties are in Government.	*This has already been actioned.*
RECOMMENDATION 8	
The Parliament should prioritise as soon as possible the development, publishing and implementation of its own internal policies and procedures (around HR, Pay, IT, etc). The development of such policies and procedures should be undertaken in a consultative manner including staff and Members. The Parliament should work with relevant Ministries to ensure that such policies and procedures are compliant with the law.	*This is ongoing work in progress.*
RECOMMENDATION 9	
Led by the Speaker, the House Committee of Parliament should be reestablished and should take a leading and urgent role in reviewing the pay, performance management and welfare of the SecretaryGeneral and should consider wider constitutional reforms to the role. Consideration should also be given to drafting and passing laws or regulations which enhance the independence and governance of the Parliament by and for Members of Parliament.	*House Committee is already established under the Standing Orders.*
RECOMMENDATION 10	
The Parliament should appoint a legislative drafter or senior legal officer to provide support to Members in drafting Bills and amendments, and to provide additional legal advice to the Parliament (the	*Senior Legal Officer in already in place. Finance Ministry did not approve additional staff for the Legal Unit within Parliament. This is still being pursued.*

Speaker and Secretary-General) on legal matters.	

RECOMMENDATION 11	
The Parliament should ensure that equality impact assessments are developed and utilised when considering legislation, and Committees should undertake post-legislative scrutiny on a consistent and regular basis.	*This is work in hav tanding progress. Committees crsations these.*
RECOMMENDATION 12	
The oversight work of committees should go beyond its current approach of mainly examining dated ex post annual reports and accounts of Government departments and agencies and broaden its approach to look at policy and administrative matters.	*Standing Committees are already undertaking this.*
RECOMMENDATION 13	
The Parliament, via a special committee or cross-party group may wish to undertake an indepth inquiry into steps which could be taken to increase women's representation within Parliament and to establish recommendations for implementation prior to the next election.	*Not specifically through committees, but there is notable ongoing work on this matter.*

17. **Workforce and succession planning:** Women comprised **61% of Parliament's staff**, while the report also identifies the importance of equal opportunities to participate and lead. What is the gender composition at management and decision-making levels, and what measures are being taken to ensure equitable career progression?

Women represented **61 per cent of the Secretariat's workforce**, while men represented **39 per cent** during the 2023-2024 reporting period. This demonstrates strong overall representation of women within the Secretariat. At the senior executive level recorded in the P2P:

- the Secretary-General to Parliament was female;
- the Deputy Secretary-General was male; • the Head of Corporate Services was female; and • the Head of Legislative Services was male.

This represented equal gender participation across these four senior executive positions at that time.

The Secretariat promotes equitable career progression through merit-based recruitment and promotion processes, performance management, workforce planning and equal access to professional development opportunities. The Human Resources Unit Plan includes specific initiatives relating to implementation of the Performance Management System, development of a Strategic Workforce Plan, implementation of a Succession Plan, alignment of job descriptions, monitoring of acting appointments and promotion opportunities, and workforce establishment reporting.

In addition, the training policy monitors participation by gender across in-house, local and overseas training activities to ensure development opportunities are accessible across the organisation. These measures support Parliament's commitment to workforce diversity, leadership development and succession planning.

18. **Staffing gaps:** The Human Resources Unit identifies **staffing gaps and the absence of a comprehensive Human Resource Information System (HRIS)** as challenges. Which functional units were most affected by staffing shortages, how did these shortages affect service delivery to Members and Committees, and what progress has subsequently been made in addressing these gaps?

The Secretariat experienced staffing shortages across several operational areas during the reporting period. The most significant vacancies were within the Legislative Services Division, particularly in Committee Services, *Hansard*, Research and Library Services, and Civic Education and Media.

Key vacant positions included:

- Senior Committee Clerk.
- Deputy Committee Clerk.
- Committee Assistant.
- *Hansard* Reporter.
- Assistant *Hansard* Reporter.
- Sub-Editor.
- Librarian.
- Manager Civic Education and Media; and • Senior Civic Education Officer.

Vacancies also existed in areas such as finance, monitoring and evaluation, ICT support, asset management and administrative services. These shortages increased workloads on existing staff, limited operational flexibility, created reliance on acting arrangements and reduced organisational resilience in key specialist functions.

Evidence from the employee exit survey supports these workforce challenges. Several respondents reported concerns regarding limited staffing resources, unfilled positions, workload pressures and restricted opportunities for advancement. Some respondents specifically noted the impact of vacancies on operational effectiveness and employee development.

The Secretariat actively pursued recruitment throughout the reporting period. Managers' Forum reports recorded ongoing recruitment exercises, with several positions progressing through assessment, interview, and reference-check stages. Additional short-term support was provided through internship and temporary staffing arrangements to assist high-demand operational areas. To strengthen workforce planning, the Human Resources Unit introduced regular vacancy reporting, monthly updates of the P2P establishment report and monitoring of recruitment, promotions, acting appointments, and internal staffing movements.

19. **Staff retention:** Eight employees resigned during the reporting period and eight exit interviews were undertaken. What were the main issues identified through those exit interviews, and what measures has Parliament implemented to address staff retention, workload, career progression and employee wellbeing?

Eight employees resigned during the 2023-2024 reporting period, and exit interviews were conducted for all eight employees. Exit interviews provide the Secretariat with an opportunity to identify organisational, management and employment-related factors that may affect employee retention and workplace effectiveness.
Findings from the 2023-2024 _ Employee Exit Survey provide valuable insight into the factors influencing employee turnover.

The most common reasons identified for leaving Parliament were:

- Higher remuneration opportunities.
- Better career opportunities.
- Overseas migration.

Additional reasons included:

- Career change.
- Improved work-life balance.
- Better employment benefits.
- Organisational instability.
- Lack of recognition for performance. • Expiry of internship or contract arrangements.

Employee feedback indicates that remuneration and career progression remain the most significant retention challenges. Respondents highlighted concerns regarding limited promotion opportunities, unfilled senior positions, insufficient recognition of high performance, specialist training needs and constraints associated with outdated resources and equipment. Several respondents also noted that experienced staff should be retained to preserve institutional knowledge and organisational capability.

Despite these concerns, the survey results were generally positive. Most respondents described their experience in Parliament as either excellent or good, reported positive relationships with colleagues and supervisors, and indicated they would recommend Parliament as a workplace. Respondents consistently identified teamwork, organisational culture, professional development opportunities and exposure to parliamentary processes as key strengths of the organisation.

The survey also identified areas requiring continued attention. A small number of respondents raised concerns regarding workload management, workplace culture, discrimination, bullying and harassment. While the survey does not provide evidence of specific incidents, these findings highlight areas where management should continue to monitor workplace culture and employee wellbeing.
In response, the Secretariat has commenced work on staff retention initiatives, wellbeing measures and policy improvements, including development of retention measures and employee support policies. Workforce monitoring has also been strengthened through quarterly reporting on resignations, retirements, appointments, promotions, transfers and exit interviews.

20. **Succession planning:** With a significant proportion of employees aged 50 years and above and a relatively small proportion aged 20–29, what succession planning is being undertaken to protect institutional and procedural knowledge when experienced parliamentary staff retire?

The Secretariat recognises succession planning as a critical workforce priority to address the risks associated with an ageing workforce, employee turnover and the retention of institutional knowledge. The Parliament of the Republic of Fiji Annual Report 2023–2024 reported that approximately 30% of employees were aged 50 years and above, while only 7% were aged between 20 and 29 years. This demographic profile highlights the need to proactively develop future leaders and technical specialists to ensure continuity of parliamentary operations.

The Parliament of Fiji 2023-2024 Strategic Workforce Plan identified succession planning as a key strategic objective and highlighted 21 vacant positions across the organisation, including a number of specialised and management roles where the loss of expertise could significantly affect service delivery. The Plan notes the need to strengthen leadership development, workforce renewal and retention of critical skills to support Parliament's long-term sustainability.

To address these risks, Parliament is implementing several workforce initiatives, including:

- Development and implementation of a formal Succession Plan for critical and high-risk positions.
- Implementation of the Strategic Workforce Plan to identify future workforce requirements and capability gaps.
- Utilisation of acting appointments, job enrichment and job rotation opportunities to develop internal talent and leadership capability.
- Structured learning and development programmes to build technical, supervisory and leadership competencies.
- Expansion of graduate, internship and volunteer programmes to support workforce renewal and create future talent pipelines.
- Review of organisational structures and job descriptions to ensure positions remain aligned with operational requirements and emerging workforce needs.

The findings of the 2023-2024 _ Employee Exit Survey further reinforce the importance of succession planning. Respondents identified limited career progression opportunities as a contributing factor to employee turnover, while one respondent specifically highlighted the need to retain experienced staff to preserve Parliament's institutional knowledge and capability.

Accordingly, Parliament's succession planning approach is focused on retaining critical expertise, strengthening internal career pathways, developing future leaders and ensuring that organisational knowledge is systematically transferred and preserved. Through the implementation of the Strategic Workforce Plan and Succession Plan, the Secretariat aims to maintain workforce capability, minimise the impact of staff turnover and ensure continuity of service across all parliamentary functions.

21. **Training outcomes:** The Secretariat coordinated **45 structured learning and development programmes**. How does Parliament evaluate whether training translates into improved staff performance and better services to Members, rather than measuring success primarily by the number of programmes delivered?

The Secretariat coordinated 45 structured learning and development programmes during the reporting period as part of its commitment to workforce development and organisational capability. While the number of programmes delivered is one measure of activity, Parliament assesses training effectiveness through broader indicators that measure whether learning is applied in the workplace and contributes to improved organisational performance.

The Secretariat's training policy, plan and process includes:

- Training Needs Analysis assessments.
- Back-to-Office reports.
- Post-training evaluations.
- Knowledge-sharing initiatives.
- Participation monitoring by gender. • Performance Management System assessments.

Employee feedback indicates that training opportunities are generally viewed positively. Most exit survey respondents agreed that they had access to training and development opportunities. However, some employees expressed a need for more specialised, role-specific training aligned to their professional responsibilities and career aspirations.
To strengthen training outcomes, Parliament is increasingly linking training activities to performance plans, organisational priorities, competency requirements and succession planning objectives. This approach ensures that training investments contribute directly to improved performance and service delivery.

22. **ICT and digital Parliament:** What progress has been made towards developing a fully digital and paperless Parliament, particularly for Standing Committee documentation, public submissions, research resources, records management and remote participation? What are the major ICT infrastructure and cybersecurity constraints?

Parliament has made significant progress towards becoming more digital and paperless legislature in the areas of Standing Committees operations, Public Engagement, Research accessibility, records management and remote participation.

1. **Standing Committee**

Parliament accelerated the use of digital technologies for committee after the Pandemic. Parliamentary and committee papers began to be distributed electronically rather than in hard copy, enabling members to access documents digitally. Committee members were provided with laptops, smartphones, Wi-Fi connectivity, and cloud-based collaboration tools through Microsoft 365 platforms.

In addition, committee meetings are now supported through digital conferencing infrastructure, with committee rooms equipped with High Definition cameras, Light Emitting Diode displays, microphones, Wi-Fi connectivity, and integrated recording systems. These improvements have significantly reduced reliance on paper-based processes and enhanced document sharing and collaboration through SharePoint.

2. **Records Management and Digital Archiving.**

A notable advancement has been the integration of the 'For the Record (FTR)' digital recording system, which captures proceedings electronically and supports the preparation of *Hansard* records. Parliament has also established dedicated broadcasting and control rooms to digitally record, archive, and disseminate parliamentary proceedings.

The availability of historical *Hansard* documents and parliamentary records through the Parliament website further demonstrates the shift towards digital records management and archival preservation.

3. **Remote Participation and Virtual Committee Meetings.**

Perhaps the most significant achievement has been the development of remote and hybrid participation capabilities.

Parliament successfully utilised Microsoft Office 365 and Microsoft Teams to facilitate virtual committee operations. Parliament was able to support: virtual committee deliberations, virtual public hearings and hybrid committee meetings. Members could participate remotely while accessing parliamentary documents electronically. This capability ensured business continuity during periods of public health restrictions and established a foundation for future remote parliamentary engagement.

4. **Digital transformation and Paperless.**

Parliament of the Republic of Fiji has made substantial progress towards becoming a fully digital and paperless parliament through.

- Electronic Distribution of documents through SharePoint and virtual meetings of Microsoft Teams.
- Online publication of Parliamentary records and research materials.
- Digital records and broadcast management systems.
- Livestreaming and digital public engage mechanism.
- Virtual and Hybrid Parliament and Committee meetings, through the adoption of Microsoft 365 cloud technologies and Ai-enabled tools.

While some process may still require further modernisations to achieve a completely paperless environment. Parliament ICT is in its final stages of procurement of HRMIS (Human Resource Management Information Systems), FMIS (Financial Management Information Systems) and Automation of systems and processes.

These initiatives will further strengthen operational efficiency, improve information governance, and support parliament vision of becoming a fully digital and paperless legislature.

Through the adoption of cloud-based technologies, digital records management systems, electronic document distribution, virtual collaboration platforms, and online public engagement mechanisms, Parliament has enhanced efficiency, transparency, accessibility, and business continuity. Continued investment in enterprise systems and process automation will further advance Parliament's goal of establishing a modern, fully digital, and paperless parliamentary environment

23. **Cybersecurity:** Given Parliament's role in the Regional Pacific Islands Parliamentary Workshop on Cybercrime and the increasing reliance on electronic systems, what cybersecurity framework protects parliamentary information, committee documents and sensitive or confidential information from cyber threats?

Parliament utilizes Trend Micro Cyber Security and Microsoft Defender for Business.
Parliament utilizes Trend Micro Cyber security and solutions to strengthen its cyber resilience through advanced endpoint protection, email security, cloud security and extended Detection and Response (XDR) capabilities. The solution provides continuous monitoring, threat intelligence, ransomware protection and centralise incident response. This is to ensure confidentiality, integrity and availability of Parliamentary information systems and digital services.

Microsoft business premium (Microsoft Defender for Business).
Strengthens cyber security posture through advanced identity protection, endpoint security, email threat protection, device management and data govern capabilities. The cloud platform incorporates Microsoft Entra ID Directory, Microsoft Defender for Business, Microsoft Defender for Office 365 to safeguard Parliamentary information assets from phishing, ransomware, malware, unauthorised access, and data loss while supporting secure digital collaborations and remote work.

24. **Financial accountability:** What were the principal findings or management issues arising from the audit of Parliament's financial statements, and what corrective actions were undertaken during or following the reporting period?

Based on the Auditor-General's Report and Final Management Letter for the financial year ended 31 July 2024, Parliament received an unmodified audit opinion, confirming that its financial statements were prepared, in all material respects, in accordance with the Financial Management Act 2004 and Finance Instructions 2010.

The audit identified two medium-risk findings, and two other audit observations which were subsequently resolved.
The principal findings and management actions were as follows:

1. Misstatement of VAT expenditure: The audit identified an overstatement of VAT expenditure amounting to $33,854.10 due to incorrect VAT calculations. Management acknowledged the finding and committed to ensuring accurate VAT calculations and verification of amounts recorded on payment vouchers and reflected in the financial statements.

2. Variances between expenditure records and financial statements: Discrepancies were identified between the Expenditure Ledger and the draft financial statements across several expenditure categories. Management accepted the recommendation and commenced reviewing the Finance Unit's Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for updating the General Ledger, with the objective of strengthening reconciliations and ensuring accurate financial reporting.

3. Procurement compliance: A prior-year audit observation identified procurement of similar goods and services without the required competitive quotations or tender process. This matter was addressed through the formalisation of a supplier contract in December 2024, and the AuditorGeneral subsequently classified the observation as resolved.

4. Fixed Asset Register: The audit identified assets valued at approximately $4.29 million that had not been recorded in the Fixed Asset Register. Management subsequently updated the register to include the identified assets, and the Auditor-General classified the finding as resolved.

In addition, the Auditor-General assessed the quality and timeliness of Parliament's financial reporting as effective, while the year-end closing process was assessed as generally effective. Areas requiring improvement included the timely completion of reconciliations and clearance of interdepartmental accounts.

Overall, the audit confirmed that Parliament's financial statements met the applicable financial reporting requirements, while identifying areas requiring stronger financial controls. Management acknowledged the findings and undertook corrective measures relating to VAT verification, ledger reconciliation, procurement compliance and asset recording.

25. **Risk management:** The Monitoring, Evaluation and Compliance Unit developed a comprehensive risk registry. What were the highest institutional risks identified, particularly concerning business continuity, cybersecurity, staffing, parliamentary independence, infrastructure and financial management, and how are these risks being mitigated?

Key Institutional Risks

The highest institutional risks identified include:

- **Workforce and succession risks**, including critical vacancies, staff turnover, an ageing workforce, and the potential loss of institutional knowledge.
- **Information technology and cybersecurity risks**, arising from increased reliance on digital systems, data security threats, cyber incidents, and ageing ICT infrastructure.
- **Business continuity risks**, including disruptions to parliamentary sittings, committee operations and administrative services resulting from emergencies, system failures or resource limitations.
- **Financial management and compliance risks**, including weaknesses in financial controls, procurement processes, budget management and compliance with legislative and audit requirements.
- **Governance and reputational risks**, including failure to meet statutory obligations, governance standards and stakeholder expectations, which may adversely affect public confidence in Parliament.
- **Service delivery risks**, which may impact Parliament's ability to provide timely and effective

support to Members, Committees, and other stakeholders.

Risk Mitigation Measures

To address these risks, Parliament has implemented a range of mitigation measures, including:

- Establishment and ongoing monitoring of the corporate Risk Register
- Integration of risk management into strategic planning, operational planning and organisational decision-making processes.
- Targeted recruitment, workforce planning and succession planning initiatives to address workforce capacity and capability risks.
- Strengthening of cybersecurity controls and ICT governance arrangements.
- Progressive replacement and upgrading of critical infrastructure and systems.
- Ongoing financial compliance monitoring and review of internal controls.
- Regular reporting and review of risk mitigation actions through Executive Management and Managers' Forum meetings.

Governance and Oversight

The Risk and Compliance Policy assigns clear accountability for risk management across the organisation. Managers are responsible for identifying, monitoring and mitigating risks within their respective areas of responsibility, while Executive Management provides strategic oversight and direction. The Manager Monitoring, Evaluation and Compliance is responsible for maintaining the Risk Register and coordinating risk reporting across the Secretariat.
The Internal Audit Committee provides an additional level of assurance by reviewing Parliament's risk management framework, internal controls, compliance arrangements and implementation of audit recommendations. The Committee also assesses whether identified risks are being appropriately managed and whether existing controls remain effective.

Cybersecurity risks were significantly mitigated through the implementation of Trend Micro cybersecurity solutions, which provide security monitoring and protection for both cloud-based and on-premises devices. The deployment supports and secures machines connected to the Microsoft cloud platform, as well as systems operating outside the cloud environment, through advanced threat detection, malware protection, and continuous security monitoring.

The Parliament also undertook the upgrading of legacy software and hardware components to address security vulnerabilities and improve system performance. Additionally, critical parliamentary data is backed up to a separate cloud service provider to enhance data security, business continuity, and service availability in the event of system failures or cyber incidents.

Furthermore, Parliament has deployed CoreView, a Microsoft 365 administration, governance, and cyber resilience platform that provides enhanced visibility, control, automation, and security across the parliamentary cloud environment. The platform enables centralized administration, configuration management, governance oversight, audit reporting, license optimization, and security monitoring of the Parliament's Microsoft 365 ecosystem.

Collectively, these initiatives have strengthened Parliament's cybersecurity posture and enhanced its ability to maintain a secure, resilient, compliant, and efficiently managed digital environment while reducing operational risks, improving service reliability, and minimizing administrative overhead.

26. **Performance reporting:** The Monitoring, Evaluation and Compliance Unit identified **delayed reporting from other units and initial resistance to data collection**. What caused these difficulties, and how confident is the Secretariat that the performance information presented in the Annual Report is complete, accurate and supported by reliable data?

The establishment of Parliament's monitoring and evaluation framework required significant organisational change. The Annual Report notes that delayed reporting and initial resistance to data collection processes created challenges during implementation.
The main contributing factors included:

- Competing operational priorities.
- Delayed submission of information by some units.
- Inconsistent recordkeeping practices.
- Limited monitoring and evaluation experience. • Evolving reporting requirements and systems.

To address these issues, the Secretariat implemented structured monitoring arrangements, including monthly manager forum meetings, quarterly reporting requirements, measurable performance indicators, staff surveys, business planning processes and performance management systems.

Managers' Forum discussions were also used to reinforce reporting obligations, monitor outstanding actions and improve accountability across units. While limitations were acknowledged, the Secretariat considers the information presented in the Annual Report to be a fair and reasonable representation of activities and achievements during the reporting period. Ongoing improvements to

reporting systems, internal controls and audit arrangements are expected to further strengthen data quality and organisational accountability.

27. **SDG mainstreaming:** The report states that all Standing Committees integrate an SDG lens into their scrutiny of annual reports. How is this requirement applied consistently across Committees, and what guidance or analytical tools are provided to Members and Secretariat staff to assess substantive progress against the SDGs rather than merely identifying which SDGs relate to an activity?

The integration of a Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) lens into the work of all Standing Committees is a key component of Parliament's oversight and scrutiny functions. In reviewing annual reports and other matters referred to them, Committees are encouraged to assess not only the alignment of programmes and activities with relevant SDGs, but also the extent to which measurable progress has been achieved against national development priorities and SDG targets. To support a consistent approach across Committees, Parliament has developed and published an SDG Guidance Booklet, which provides practical guidance on incorporating SDG considerations into parliamentary scrutiny, inquiries, and reporting processes. Members and Secretariat staff are supported through this resource, as well as ongoing capacity-building initiatives, to strengthen their understanding of the SDGs and their application within committee work. While the specific focus of SDG analysis may vary according to each Committee’s mandate and the subject matter under consideration, the overarching objective is to promote evidence-based scrutiny that goes beyond identifying relevant SDGs and instead examines the effectiveness, outcomes, and broader development impact of government policies, programmes, and expenditure.

28. Parliamentary Counsel: Can Parliament provide an update on the availability of Parliamentary Counsel to advise Members of Parliament?

The Staff Establishment P2P 31 July 2024 records an approved Parliament Senior Legal Officer position. Managers' Forum records confirm that the position was filled in June 2024.
The establishment of this position represents an important step in strengthening Parliament's internal legal capability. The position provides legal research, legal advice and institutional support on matters relating to parliamentary operations and governance.

However, Parliament does not currently operate a dedicated Parliamentary Counsel or Legislative Drafting Office. As Parliament's legislative and governance responsibilities continue to expand, consideration may be given to strengthening legal resources further through the establishment of a dedicated parliamentary legal and legislative drafting function. This would enhance Parliament's capacity to support Members, provide legislative advice and strengthen institutional independence.

29. Can Parliament provide details on the money spent on catering during Parliamentary sittings (morning tea, lunch, afternoon tea, dinner) as opposed to training for staff?

Catering Activity	**Expenditure (FJD)**
Parliamentary Sittings $170,950.75 Committee Sittings $21,954.24	
Total Parliamentary and Committee Sittings	**$192,904.99**
Five In-House Staff Trainings	$3,143.66
Overall Total	**$196,048.65**

30. Future priorities: Looking across the findings of the 2023–2024 Annual Report, what does the Secretary-General consider to be the **three most significant institutional challenges facing the Fiji Parliament**, and what resources, policy changes or reforms are required to address them?

The three most significant institutional challenges facing Parliament are as follows:

1. Workforce Capacity, Retention and Succession

Key issues include critical vacancies, workforce ageing, remuneration concerns and limited career progression opportunities. Exit survey data confirms that higher pay and better career opportunities were the primary reasons employees left Parliament.

Priority actions:

- Fill critical vacancies.
- Implement the Strategic Workforce Plan and Succession Plan.
- Strengthen retention initiatives.
- Improve career progression opportunities. • Enhance workforce data and planning capability.

2. Digital Resilience, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure

Ageing ICT infrastructure, cybersecurity risks and increasing digital service requirements continue to place pressure on operational resilience.

Priority actions:

- Upgrade critical infrastructure.
- Strengthen cybersecurity controls.
- Improve disaster recovery and business continuity arrangements.
- Implement the parliamentary security framework.

3. Governance, Risk Management and Performance Accountability

Timely reporting, effective internal controls and evidence-based decision-making remain critical to improving organisational performance and accountability Priority actions:

- Strengthen monitoring, evaluation and compliance systems.
- Improve performance reporting and data management.
- Enhance risk management processes.
- Strengthen internal audit and assurance arrangements. • Improve alignment between strategic priorities, risks and resource allocation.

-ENDS-