



Statement by the Prime Minister, Hon. Laisenia Qarase

Monday 16th January 2006

"I issue these comments in support of the statement today from His Excellency the Acting President, following a meeting at Government House. That meeting was convened by His Excellency and was attended by him, the Commander of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces and myself.

"I express my support for the understanding reached at that meeting.

"I confirm that, as Head of Government, I will be pleased to receive the Commander for regular discussions. This will give him the opportunity to communicate directly to me any issues of concern from the Military Forces.

"These meetings will create a new avenue for dialogue between the Government and the Military rather than discussions through the media.

"We discussed the role of the National Security Council, which is a Subcommittee of Cabinet with membership confined to Ministers.

"I have readily agreed that both the Commander and the Commissioner of Police may attend Security Council meetings, by invitation.

"The meeting discussed concerns by the Commander about various items of legislation proposed by the Government. It was stressed that an important aspect of the democratic process for considering draft laws is public consultation with all relevant sections of society. In this process the Military will always have an opportunity to make their views known.

"It was agreed that the Military would convey its opinions directly to the Government.

"It is understood that in a democracy it is a government's responsibility to initiate legislation and determine its final form.

"Questions were raised by the Commander about the independence and integrity of the forthcoming elections. It was explained that two independent constitutional organisations have responsibility for the preparation and conduct of the elections.

"One of these is the Electoral Commission, which has responsibility for all electoral arrangements and exercises a supervisory function over the Office of the Supervisor of Elections.

"The other is the Constituency Boundaries Commission, which demarcates boundaries for the electoral constituencies.

"I stress again that the Government has no direct part in the conduct of elections. It respects the independence of the election process.

"Its main function is to ensure that all necessary resources are provided to the Office of the Supervisor for the successful conduct of elections.

"We discussed the investigations of those implicated in the events of 2000. It was explained once more that these investigations are the responsibility of the independent offices of the Commissioner of Police and the Director of Public Prosecutions.

"They must always be allowed to fulfil their statutory responsibilities without interference or pressure from any quarter.

"This morning's meeting provides an opportunity for a positive mutual relationship between the Government and the Military.

"I am grateful to His Excellency for convening the meeting. I thank the Commander for his contribution."

