



**Item 6, 28<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council  
 Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Fiji**

**Speaker: Praveen Gunaseelan**

Mr. President, the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) applauds the Government of Fiji on its receptive and apolitical engagement with the Universal Periodic Review. Though CHRI congratulates Fiji for taking the initial steps towards a revived democracy by holding elections, it hopes the government will swiftly address serious continuing human rights challenges.

Freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and political representation continues to be marred by draconian decrees and legislation adopted by the previous military regime. Independent journalism has been under siege for years. The Government lifted the Public Emergency Regulations (PER), opening space for public debate and ending official censorship. Nevertheless, journalists continue to face arrest, arbitrary detention and levying of heavy fines for criticizing the regime under the Media Industry Development Decree. The Political Parties' Decree prohibits union leaders and public officers from forming political parties and has increased the number of people required for a political party to register from 128 to 5,000. The Public Order Amendment Act restricts freedom of assembly and criminalises peaceful protest.

CHRI welcome Fiji's decision to ratify the United Nations Convention against Torture but given its ratification with reservations and past irregularities in preventing torture and other abuse against peaceful protesters, we urge the Government to repeal military decrees violating human rights and facilitate visits by the United Nations Special Rapporteurs on torture and freedom of peaceful assembly and of association.

The UPR found that there continues to be heavy political influence on the appointment, removal and working of the judges and lawyers. The Government should install necessary checks and balances to ensure the independence of the judiciary and extend an invitation to the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers.

The Fijian Constitution adopted in 2013 does little to address the above-mentioned challenges, an issue which is compounded by the document's inflexibility. The amendment procedure requires a double majority of three-quarters of all MP's and three-quarters of all registered voters. CHRI commends the UPR for recommending setting up an all-inclusive comprehensive review of the Constitution and urges the Fijian Government to implement its all other recommendations.

Thank you Mr. President.