

Fiji: No reconciliation without human rights

Suva: One year after the violent coup of May 19, Fijians are being told to forgive and forget in the name of reconciliation.

“However experience shows that sweeping past human rights abuses under the carpet will not lead to stability and security, and will fail to bring about lasting peace both among and between ethnic groups,” Amnesty International’s Researcher on Fiji, Dr Heinz Schurmann-Zeggel said today in Suva.

“If reconciliation is to work, there must be truth and accountability. Yet coup supporters who were responsible for racist attacks against Indo-Fijians have been let off the hook and are walking free,” Schurmann-Zeggel said.

“All Fijian citizens, indigenous and Indian, have been suffering from the effects of the coup. They deserve a chance to build a future for their children, based on respect for human dignity, racial equality and the rule of law.”

Fiji’s young Constitution, which was suspended following the coup, is widely considered to be a model for the protection of human rights. It includes particularly strong safeguards for the rights of indigenous Fijians, and for freedom from torture, ill-treatment and unfair discrimination.

In the lead up to the August elections, political parties should declare their leadership credentials by revealing a blueprint for human rights. They should make clear their intentions to protect and promote all human rights equally for all the people of Fiji.

Background

In the months following the coup that overthrew a democratically elected government, at least 15 people were killed and thousands of civilians were displaced. More than 1500 people were arrested for opportunistic or racist violence, but most were released. So far, few of the perpetrators have successfully been brought to justice.

For more information on the May coup see “The Wire” and other reports on Fiji at www.amnesty.org

For an interview contact Heinz Schurmann-Zeggel (+679) 244 795 or Maya Catsanis +44 7778 472 173.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>