

Oversimplifying the Fiji Situation Seriously Counter-Productive

“The current enormous pressure from western democracies for a return to a democratically elected government in Fiji, is actually sending unexpected mixed messages. And the current Western agenda is potentially taking a dangerous turn that could fuel unnecessary serious suffering.”

Mr. Paul Norman and Mr. Michael Fa'amoana Vala'auafea said in a joint statement released in Auckland New Zealand today.

“To insist on immediate elections while acting in ignorance of what went down, makes Western democracies sound like they are supporting a corrupt election process – which is not at all what they want to mean.

“The politically based decision of a previous New Zealand Government to withhold entry visas for medical treatment of ordinary Fijian citizens has already cost unnecessary suffering and loss of life. Western democracies need to show the benefits of democracy by mercifully continuing to do things that help the average Fijian in health, employment and housing—traditional economic support from western governments needs to be fine tuned, but not withheld.

“As unacceptable as the current developments in Fiji are to many people, the situation can not be resolved without a capable and thorough addressing of the real build up and causes of it.

“At the grass roots level most Fijians know that their last so-called 'democratic election' was not clean.

“International Parliamentary Observers of that election appear unaware of the clever and often subtle widespread electoral fraud and voter disfranchisement that took place.

“International Observers saw the outward appearance of a fair election taking place especially in areas where the Observers were likely to be, but out of their sight, Polling Clerks were physically threatened and intimidated, whole bundles of votes in booths in districts favourable to the opposition were forcibly destroyed, and clever rigging of the Electoral Roll made it physically impossible for a multitude of people in opposition strongholds and marginal areas to vote.

“There were strong inter-racial and inter-tribal overtones in the way this was executed.

“While these matters were reported in the local national media at the time, International Parliamentary Observers either did not “hear” or were already out of Fiji.

“Locals joke that the overseas contingent must have observed a “fair election” from the comfort of their resort hotel rooms!

“Required to turn up at their registered polling booths, a very large number of people in opposition areas found inexplicitly on Election Day that they were suddenly required to vote at a Polling Booth in an area too far away for them to get to on time. There being no allowable Special Vote in those circumstances, they were physically stopped from voting.

“There is absolutely no doubt in many locals' minds that this was planned and calculated.

“To be handled in the Pacific Way, and without any sense of condoning the present circumstances, Fiji needs to be assisted in every way possible to replace the corrupt officials who were compliant in the last staged elections. And building upon the valuable work of the past— replace the current electoral system and apportionments with an even better plan.

Democratic Elections in Fiji can not be democratic if the last fiasco is not sorted first.

“For now, without the necessary changes being made, “free and fair elections” in Fiji are an impossibility.

“The calls by western democracies for immediate free and fair elections are seen as hollow and counter productive unless western democracies practically show mercy to the common people of Fiji, and positively and creatively assist in setting the environment for genuine free and fair elections.

“Continued strong arm sanctions are counter productive against the background of what has happened, and might only lead to civil unrest and disorder—which some Western government advisers appear to be wrongly advocating as a working strategy to their Ministers.

“Instead the West and others need to be constructively helping those running Fiji get to the desired goal; and avoiding the dangerous descent into chaos that further insurrection would bring – must be paramount in international thinking.

“Compared to what might happen in other parts of the world, the people in charge in Fiji have shown considerable restraint to date, and this should be recognised and rewarded, and not exasperated by strong armed tactics against Fiji.

Fiji citizens and others can ill afford loosing the restraint that is being shown by the current leadership, it would be tragic if Western pressure brought about a dangerous “sea change” or personal change there, through overpowered blunt sanctions or other actions.

As unpalatable as it is, the current possibilities may be the most stable thing on the table for the next twenty years and the opening for progress being made now emphatically must not be lost.

“Equally, given the actual genesis of what happened in Fiji, previous calls from certain Western leaders for the Fijian people to riot in the streets, are dangerously unhealthy. Such calls highlight how out of touch with what actually happened on the ground, certain previous Government advice has been in the West.

“To insist on immediate elections in Fiji, while acting in ignorance of what went down, wrongly makes Western democracies sound like they are supporting an unfair and corrupt election process – which is not at all what should be happening.

Finished Mr. Paul Norman and Mr. Michael Fa'amoana Vala'auafea,

“There is a more peaceful and socially safe way forward, and it really should be followed.”

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