

PRESS RELEASE: FTRC COMMISSIONERS PROFILE



Captain Rajendra Dass, a former senior pilot with Fiji Airways, now serves as a Commissioner on the Fiji Truth and Reconciliation Commission (FTRC).

Rajendra Dass: From the Skies to the Heart of Reconciliation

Thursday, 22 May 2025: For over 40 years, Captain Rajendra Dass was a steady presence in Fiji's skies, guiding generations of travelers as a senior pilot with Fiji Airways. His calm authority in the cockpit and deep commitment to excellence made him a respected figure among colleagues and the wider Fijian community. One of the longest-serving employees of the national carrier, Captain Dass accumulated over 27,000 flight hours, having flown nearly every type of aircraft operated by Fiji Airways. Now retired from aviation, Mr Dass has taken on a different kind of journey. This time, his focus is not on altitude but on the pursuit of healing.

Today, he serves as one of five Commissioners on the Fiji Truth and Reconciliation Commission, an independent body tasked with examining past political upheavals and their impact on people's lives since 1987. From emotional trauma and loss of life to displacement and

systemic injustice, the Commission is addressing the difficult truths that have shaped the country's history.

This national effort, he explained, is not about blame or punishment. It is about acknowledging pain and honouring the lived experiences of survivors by creating space for truth-telling, dialogue, and understanding. Through this process, the Commission aims to foster reconciliation and lay the foundation for a more just, united, and peaceful Fiji for generations to come.

Commissioner Dass's transition from aviation to reconciliation is a powerful reminder that leadership is not confined to uniforms or titles. It is reflected in service, empathy, and the courage to listen. His journey from the flight deck to the Commission desk reflects a continued devotion to the people of Fiji, this time helping to navigate the country through its most complex emotional landscapes.

*He recently sat down with Commission's Communication Specialist Maria Vula to reflect on this new path, sharing how the same values that guided his aviation career continue to steer his mission of national healing. **This profile is part of a series on the Commissioners of the Fiji Truth and Reconciliation Commission.***

Q: Tell us a bit about yourself?

I'm Rajendra Dass, originally from Nausori, and I've been privileged to serve Fiji Airways for 43 years. My aviation journey began in the late 1970s when I was awarded a scholarship to train as a pilot in Australia. After completing my training, I returned home and worked my way up to captain. Throughout my career, I was guided by professionalism, discipline, and a strong commitment to service. Now, in my retirement, I continue to serve Fiji through the Commission, bringing the same values and leadership I practiced in the cockpit.

Q. How did you start your career?

After completing Form Six in 1976, I applied for a Commonwealth Pilot Training Scholarship but was not selected due to a delay in my University Entrance exam results. Undeterred, I pursued Foundation Science at USP in 1977. Later that year, Air Pacific launched a Cadet Pilot Training program. I together with about 400 others applied, and after going through various tests, was selected as the first Air Pacific Cadet to be trained at NASA in Cessnock, NSW, Australia. After obtaining my commercial pilot's license with an instrument rating, I returned to Fiji in mid-1979 and officially joined Fiji Airways on December 1, 1979.

Q: What inspired you to pursue a career in aviation?

I was born in Nausori, where I grew up watching airplanes fly over our house daily, sparking my initial interest in aviation. At the time, I thought it was something beyond my reach. However, in 1973, a field trip from Lelean Memorial School to the Air Pacific hangar in Nausori gave me the opportunity to speak with someone who outlined the requirements for becoming a commercial pilot. That conversation made me realise that pursuing this dream was possible, so I decided to focus on the necessary subjects, like Math and Physics, in high school.

Q: What was the first aircraft you flew, and how did your flying career evolve after that?

My aviation career began in 1980 flying the Super Kingair 200, followed by the Bandeirante. In October 1983, I transitioned to BAC1-11 as a first officer and had the opportunity to fly it to London on a delivery flight in March 1984. Eight months later, I started flying our Boeing 737, also as a first officer, until early 1985, when I was selected for Boeing 747 training with Qantas in Sydney. In July 1989, I was promoted to captain on the Boeing 737-200, and a year later, following the acquisition of Fiji Airways' first Boeing 767, I was appointed captain of that new aircraft. Seven years later, I was promoted to captain on the Boeing 747-200, and in June 2003, advanced to the Boeing 747-400.

A major turning point in my career came in 2012 when Fiji Airways introduced the Airbus A330. Having spent my entire career flying Boeing aircraft, the shift in technology and operational philosophy was significant. However, with strong training and support, the transition was smooth and successful.

Q: After an extraordinary aviation career, what drew you to the Fiji Truth and Reconciliation Commission?

It was a new calling, but one that felt right. After a lifetime in aviation, I wanted to find a meaningful way to continue contributing to Fiji. When the opportunity arose, I saw the Commission as a powerful platform for national healing. While the field is very different, the underlying principles of duty, service, and responsibility were very familiar. The work of the Commission touches on truth, justice, and unity. These are values I've always believed in deeply. This felt like the right way to give back.

Q: How has your background as a captain influenced your work with the Commission?

Being a captain taught me how to make tough decisions under pressure, how to lead diverse teams, and how to remain composed during high-stakes situations. All those skills translate surprisingly well into reconciliation work. We deal with complex, emotional topics that require sensitivity, sound judgment, and, above all, listening. My experience in aviation taught me to remain steady and empathetic in all situations. These qualities are essential when helping people share their stories and find common ground.

Q: The Commission focuses on healing and unity. How do these goals align with the values you've lived by throughout your life?

In every flight, unity and cooperation are essential to success. The same applies to a nation. Healing and unity are not just ideals to me. They are necessities for moving forward. During my years of service, I learned that you can't build anything without trust and mutual respect. The work we're doing at the Commission resonates deeply with those principles. We are creating space for truth to be heard and for wounds to begin to heal so we can build a stronger, more united Fiji.

Q: Integrity and trust are fundamental in both aviation and reconciliation. How do you apply those values in your new role?

In aviation, integrity is non-negotiable. You are trusted with lives, and every decision matters. That level of accountability stays with you. I carry that same mindset into this role. People need

to feel that they are being heard honestly, respectfully, and without bias. The ethical foundation I built in aviation helps me approach every situation with fairness and compassion. Building trust is a slow process, but it is essential for meaningful reconciliation.

Q: You come from Nausori and have represented Fiji around the world. How has your connection to home shaped your perspective on reconciliation?

Nausori is where my roots are. It's where I learned the importance of community, humility, and shared values. Representing Fiji abroad was always an honor, and it gave me a deep appreciation for our country's richness and potential. But it also reminded me that we still have work to do at home. My connection to where I come from makes this work very personal. I want every Fijian, regardless of where they're from or what they've experienced, to feel included in our nation's future.

Q: What do you hope your contribution to the Commission will achieve?

I hope my role helps foster understanding, encourages dialogue, and lays a foundation for unity. Even small steps toward reconciliation matter. My message to Fijians is that healing takes courage, but it is possible. We must face our history with honesty and empathy and commit to walking forward together. There is great strength in unity. Let us build a future where every voice is valued and every citizen feels seen and respected.

About FTRC:

The FTRC is an independent entity set up for truth-telling, reconciliation, and national healing. The mandate of the FTRC is to examine past political upheavals and their impact on people's lives. The Commission is looking at the physical and emotional harm, loss of life and property, and systemic injustices on people.

The purpose of this work is to foster unity and social cohesion in a society where everyone feels safe, equal, included and able to thrive. The Commission seeks to honour the lived experiences of survivors by providing a platform for voices to be heard, validated, and acknowledged.

The Commission emphasises that truth-telling is not about retribution. It is about recognition, healing, to ensure that history is not repeated. Through reconciliation, the Commission aims to build a stronger, more just, and peaceful Fiji for future generations.

Note: The Commission is encouraging members of the public to contact us in relation to any of the above. We look forward to hearing from you.

Reach us by phone, email, or through our Facebook page, where a contact form is also available.

Phone: 9909003

Email: info@fijitrc.org or comms@fijitrc.org

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/FijiTRC>

Source: Fiji Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Media Queries Contact:

Maria Vula

Communications Specialist

Fiji Truth and Reconciliation Commission

M: +679 9909003