

## PRESS RELEASE



# Why These Conversations Matter: Nadi and Lautoka

OPED piece by Commissioner Ana Laqeretabua

**Tuesday, 2 September 2025:** The Fiji Truth and Reconciliation Commission (FTRC) team recently travelled to the Western Division to conduct public awareness sessions in Nadi and Lautoka.

While the turnout at both sessions was relatively small in number, the questions and the courageous conversations that took place are encouraging as the Commission embarks on this phase of its work.

This is encouraging because it reflects a willingness by individuals who have suffered human rights abuses as a result of the political upheaval the nation has endured since 1987 to engage in a process that has been instituted specifically for them.

For Commissioners Ana Laqeretabua and Rachna Nath, the questions they were asked during the Q&A sessions reflected the concerns in the minds of many Fijians, and it was encouraging to have these addressed as part of the Commission's formal processes.

Commissioner Laqeretabua said: "We are very grateful to those who chose to give up their Friday afternoons and Saturday mornings to engage with the Commission and to ask us pertinent questions related to their experiences.

"It is clear to us that many of our people are living with the trauma of their lived experiences and through engagement in the sessions and our processes we are able to work together to provide the support we are mandated to provide to survivors and witnesses under the FTRC Act," Commissioner Laqeretabua noted.

Commissioner Nath said: "What struck me in Nadi and Lautoka was the courage it takes for people to show up and ask hard questions. Reconciliation for our people is rooted in

their lived experiences, values and hopes for the future. Our role is to listen with empathy and ensure this process truly serves our people.”

The Commissioners were asked to respond to questions such as “Is this a waste of time? How is reconciliation supposed to happen, and what is the point if under the Constitution, the perpetrators have immunity?”

The Commissioners responded by sharing their deep commitment to the process and to doing right by the people of Fiji and for many of the Commissioners the work required great personal sacrifice, so they were committed to ensuring the process is not a waste of time.

In response to the question on reconciliation, the Commissioners shared that those who come forward to share their experiences will be given an opportunity to express what healing and reconciliation look like for them, which is why it was important for survivors and witnesses to engage in the FTRC processes.

In relation to the immunity provisions in the Constitution, the FTRC works within the bounds of the FTRC Act 2024 and has no influence over the immunity clause in the Constitution.

The FTRC Act specifies survivors and witnesses, not victims and perpetrators, with the Commission mandated to create safe spaces for survivors and witnesses to share their experiences for the purpose of healing and reconciliation towards social cohesion.

As such the Commission are mindful not to retraumatise but to support those who come forward to share their experiences with counseling and psychosocial support and to facilitate reconciliation.

At the Nadi session, one of the attendees, Are Wakowako, commended the way Commissioners Nath and Laqeretabua facilitated the open discussions.

“The current FTRC mandate offers a neutral, legal framework for truth-telling and redress, supporting national unity,” said Mr Wakowako, who previously served as National Unity Coordinator with the Ministry of National Reconciliation under the late Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase.

He added that, for the Fiji TRC to be effective, clear engagement strategies and a neutral approach are essential.

“A proper introduction of counselors is also vital, and their roles need to be explained more clearly in terms of what they do, how they do it, and how they contribute to healing within such a sensitive process. Counselling booths could also be made available as a resource for participants when needed,” Mr Wakowako said.

The Commission is committed to a learning approach to the community engagement and reconciliation work and is appreciative of the support received from stakeholders and individuals in this important process of nation building.

### **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.

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**Source: Fiji Truth and Reconciliation Commission**

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