



Peter Waqavonovono Calls for Constitutional Reform and National Healing at Fiji TRC Hearing

2026: A youth advocate and survivor of abuse during Fiji's political upheavals has called for sweeping constitutional, institutional, and cultural reforms, saying genuine reconciliation must be grounded in truth, accountability, and justice.

Peter Waqavonovono, 42, from Tubou Village in Lakeba, Lau, shared his story and recommendations for healing and reconciliation during a Fiji Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearing in Suva on Wednesday, 20 May in the presence of the Chairperson Joaquim Fonseca, Commissioners Ana Laqeretabua and Rachna Nath.

Mr Waqavonovono, who serves as a youth coordinator for the Archdiocese of Suva under the Catholic Church, has worked extensively in advocacy relating to human rights, dignity, and youth development. He said his experiences during the period of political upheavals highlighted the urgent need for national reflection and reform.

According to his account, he was detained multiple times by police and military officers under directives of the then interim military government. He recalled being unlawfully taken to the Queen Elizabeth Barracks (QEB) in Suva on Christmas Eve in 2006, where he reports that he was physically assaulted, threatened, and intimidated while in custody.

“Before the coup of 2006, I was known in my community simply as someone who would not stay silent in the face of injustice.

After 2006, he recalled: “I have been arrested, placed on travel bans, blacklisted from national and regional events, and have had to face brutality at the hand of military officers – people who were sworn to protect me.

“The media have covered my beatings, my detainments, and perhaps more difficult for some to understand my forgiveness of those who acted to hurt me.

“With the rules held against me, the system not in my favour, and an institution meant to protect me used instead to silence me, forgiveness and truth became my only weapons.

“I have since welcomed those who sought to silence me, not because I have forgotten, but because I refuse to become what they were.”

Mr Waqavonovono said the experiences left lasting physical, emotional, and psychological impacts, including ongoing pain, nightmares, anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal. Despite these challenges, he credited his family, faith, church community, and pro-democracy supporters for helping him recover and rebuild his life.

"I am not here for revenge. I am here because the truth must be written down while we who lived it are still alive. I am here because carols should never again be sung over the sound of beating. I am here because no one should ever have to wonder, as I did, whether saying, Merry Christmas to a soldier would be their last words.

“But truth alone is not enough. If we do not act on what you uncover, then this Commission becomes only a monument to our suffering—visited, then forgotten.

“I therefore humbly submit the following practical means by which Fiji can end impunity and torture. These are not academic ideas. They are born from the ground where I was kicked, from the room where I was raped, and from the road where I was thrown like rubbish.

“I do not offer it because this testimony to undo that reconciliation. I offer it because truth and reconciliation are two sides of the same coin.

“Without truth, reconciliation is just performance. Without reconciliation, truth becomes only bitterness. But neither should be used to excuse impunity.

“The men who apologised to me in November 2025 did so voluntarily, in a cultural framework. That is honourable. Yet the state must still answer for the system that made their actions possible – and for the many perpetrators who have never apologised, and never will, unless the law compels them,” Mr Waqavonovono said.

As part of his recommendations, he called for the review and amendment of constitutional immunity provisions, particularly Sections 155 to 158 of the Constitution, to ensure survivors can seek justice and legal redress. He also urged the country to strengthen truth and reconciliation processes by creating safe spaces where survivors and former military personnel can openly discuss trauma, accountability, and healing.

Mr Waqavonovono further recommended reforms within military training and culture, including the introduction of human rights, democracy, and anti-torture education, alongside rehabilitation and re-education programmes aimed at preventing future abuses.

Recognising the lasting effects of political upheaval on individuals and families, he also called for expanded psychosocial and mental health support services, stronger survivor protection measures, and broader legal reforms to strengthen accountability and human rights protections.

“Protect whistleblowers and victims who speak out. Fiji needs a Witness Protection Act with real resources.”

On ending torture, he said: “Ratify and domesticate the UN Convention against Torture (CAT) fully. Fiji has signed but has not fully incorporated CAT’s provisions into domestic law. Make torture a distinct, non-bailable offence with mandatory minimum sentences.

“Mandatory human rights and anti-torture training for all security personnel. Training must be repeated annually, with testing. But more than training, there must be consequences: the first soldier who puts a boot on a prisoner’s head must know he will go to jail, not receive a promotion.”

While acknowledging the value of culturally grounded reconciliation practices such as bulubulu and faith-based approaches, he stressed that reconciliation should not replace justice. Instead, he said traditional reconciliation efforts must work alongside constitutional and legal reforms to ensure lasting peace and national unity.

Through his call to action, Mr Waqavonovono urged Fiji to continue national conversations on truth and reconciliation while strengthening institutions, protecting survivors, and ensuring that past abuses are neither ignored nor repeated.

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 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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