

## PRESS RELEASE



# Beyond Politics: Personal Relationships, Forgiveness, and the Human Path to Reconciliation

**2026:** Former politician and educator Dewan Chand recently appeared before the Fiji Truth and Reconciliation Commission, offering a deeply personal account of his experiences during the political upheavals from 1987.

Seated beside him was his daughter, Prameeta Chand, a quiet yet powerful symbol of generational continuity and resilience.

Mr Chand's testimony detailed human rights violations and abuses, including ethnic, religious, and cultural discrimination, and painted a vivid picture of fear, displacement, and long-term socio-economic consequences.

"I had come fully prepared to speak my experiences during and after the coups of 1987, 2000 and 2006 and its devastating impact on the country," Mr Dewan said.

"As a Hindu I took oath on holy Bhagavad Gita. I swore to speak truth and nothing but the truth."

He recounted some of the events of the political upheaval in 1987 that he experienced, while serving as Principal of Ba Provincial Secondary School in Lautoka.

"In 1987, I was the Principal of Ba Provincial Secondary School in Tavakubu, Lautoka. In the chaos three armed soldiers came to my principal's house and ordered that I vacate the premises within 24 hours or face the consequences.

"My family and I were terrified and the trauma still lives on. I sought help from the villagers and sought shelter in my house in Vomo Street. I thought I had lost my job and no one was

listening.

“Finally, Kuini, from Lautoka Education Office came to my rescue by posting me to Drasa Secondary School. In the coup chaos I survived there for three years and was subsequently promoted as the Principal of Bhawani Dayal High School in Nakasi (now Bhawani Dayal Arya College).”

His journey continued through education, trade unionism, and eventually politics, where he secured a parliamentary seat before it was cut short by the 2006 political upheaval.

He described the disruption not only ended his tenure but also impacted his financial security and access to pension entitlements. He raised concerns about institutional reforms affecting pensioners and access to justice, reflecting systemic challenges and a broader culture of impunity experienced by many.

Despite these experiences, his testimony also reflected on shared responsibility and the human dimension of reconciliation. In all honesty, he shared that the current Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka and his family had been great neighbours in Namadi Heights.

He reflected that while the public face of Mr Rabuka is often associated with the 1987 political upheaval, living as neighbours revealed a different side to him and a different personality.

Ms Chand noted that although they experienced the impact of the coup at a young age, they had come to understand that politics and neighbourly relationships could not be mixed.

Mr Chand described Suluweti Rabuka as a kind and generous person, recalling how they would always share food, including lovo, with their neighbours. He added that this spirit of reciprocity was mutual, as his late wife would also cook and share meals, reflecting a sense of community that existed then and continues today.

He recounted that following a recent mild heart attack and hospitalisation, Mrs Suluweti visited him, describing the gesture as rare and a reflection of genuine care beyond status.

He explained that his perspective is shaped by personal experience, as he has come to know Mr Rabuka beyond his political role, while acknowledging that many within the Indo-Fijian community are still not ready to forgive despite the apologies that have been made.

In contributing to national dialogue, he outlined key recommendations for healing and reconciliation. These included making iTaukei and Hindi compulsory in primary schools, strengthening the teaching of religious and family values, and encouraging greater inter-racial understanding, including through marriage.

He emphasised the need for inclusivity within national institutions, particularly the military, and the importance of discipline through cadet training in schools.

He further stressed the importance of accountability, calling for clarity on the figures behind the political upheavals, the removal of immunity provisions, and the need for justice to be seen to be done. Central to his recommendations was the creation of safe spaces for truth-telling, ensuring that individuals can come forward without fear.

He concluded by encouraging more survivors and witnesses to come forward and share their experiences with the Commission, describing it as a vital step toward national healing.

His testimony stands as a reminder that reconciliation is not only about addressing the past, but also about recognising shared humanity and building a future grounded in understanding, accountability, and unity. Meanwhile, Commissioner Rachna Nath presided over the hearing, accompanied by Commissioners Sekove Naqiolevu and Rajendra Dass.

### **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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