

PRESS RELEASE



From Pain to Purpose Qiolevu Calls for Truth, Healing, and National Reconciliation

2026: A powerful account of pain and resilience emerged as Simione Qiolevu recounted his unlawful arrest and mistreatment in Labasa during the 2000 political upheaval in Fiji.

He shared his story with the Fiji Truth and Reconciliation Commission during a hearing before Chairperson Joaquim Da Fonseca and Commissioner Ana Laqueretabua on Thursday, 26 March in Lautoka.

Mr Qiolevu shared his experience of being detained without charge, subjected to severe physical abuse, and held in inhumane conditions before his eventual release. The ordeal, he recounted, left deep and enduring psychological scars that have affected his health, family life, and overall well-being.

His story went beyond recounting past harm.

He offered a deeply personal understanding of what healing and reconciliation mean for those who have experienced such trauma.

“To me, healing and reconciliation mean being able to live without the fear and pain of the past controlling my life,” he said.

“It means that the truth about what happened is acknowledged, that victims like myself are heard and understood, and that there is a genuine effort to prevent such events from happening again.”

For Mr Qiolevu, healing is not abstract. It is about restoring a sense of safety and peace, both for himself and his family, and being able to move forward without carrying the daily burden of anger, fear, and trauma.

He emphasised that reconciliation must go beyond forgiveness, calling for justice, understanding, and the rebuilding of trust within communities and across the nation.

“What would help me move forward is knowing that my story, and the stories of others who suffered, are recognised,” he said.

“Support for victims, acknowledgment of our experiences, opportunities for open dialogue, and counselling would help restore some of the pieces that were lost.”

Under the FTRC Act 2024, the Commission facilitates access to trauma support services, including faith-based or pastoral support, counselling, translators, sign language interpreters, or other support mechanisms for survivors.

As a survivor, his reflections also pointed to a broader vision for the country, one grounded in dignity, hope, and a return to normalcy for those affected.

In outlining his recommendations, Mr Qiolevu called for stronger systems of accountability, stressing that no individual should be above the law, particularly during times of political upheaval or social unrest.

“I believe there needs to be stronger system of accountability for those who commit acts of violence during political or social unrest. No one should be above the law and those responsible must be held accountable.

“It is also important to have proper support systems for victims. This includes access to counselling, legal assistance and programmes that help families recover emotionally, mentally and socially from traumatic experiences.

“Education and awareness are also crucial. People, especially security forces need to understand the importance of human rights and the consequences of violating them,” he said.

Finally, he called for the creation of safe spaces where victims can share their experiences without fear, and where their stories are heard and acknowledged.

“This will not only help victims heal,” he said, “but also help our communities understand and prevent such events in the future.”

Source: Fiji Truth and Reconciliation Commission

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.

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