

PRESS RELEASE



The Cost of Violence Must Not Be Forgotten: Former Constable Shares 2000 Coup Experience

2026: More than two decades after the 2000 coup, a former Special Constable says the lessons of political violence remain relevant, warning that communities and institutions suffer when law, leadership, and public order break down.

Mosese Waqavolau, a traditional chief from Dawasamu in Tailevu and former Special Constable with the Fiji Police Force, shared his experiences before the Fiji Truth and Reconciliation Commission (FTRC).

During the joint hearing, he reflected on the challenges faced by law enforcement officers and community leaders during one of the country's most turbulent periods.

The hearing was presided over by FTRC Commissioner Sekove Naiqiolevu, accompanied by Commissioner Ana Laqeretabua and the FTRC Chairperson Joaquim da Fonseca.

Mr Waqavolau recounted being tasked with responding to incidents of violence and unrest in the northern part of Tailevu following the 2000 political upheaval.

"When the coup occurred, the people from Tailevu North, including those from Nayavu and Dawasamu, went down to Korovou. They took the vehicles and police fleet and began moving around the area."

As the son of a chief and a police officer with strong local connections, he was selected to help calm tensions and protect affected communities throughout the Dawasamu area.

One of the incidents he recalled involved responding to the burning of a farmer's home. While he was able to assist the family and ensure their safety, he also witnessed the devastating impact of the violence on ordinary families.

"People had entered their home and poured hot water on them. Looking back on those events was not easy for me."

During subsequent investigations at the height of the unrest, Mr Waqavolau was attacked by unknown individuals and sustained injuries to his hand and thigh. On another occasion, while carrying out his duties, he was assaulted and later lost consciousness.

"When I woke up, it was the next morning. I could feel pain all over my body. I noticed that my pants had been cut open, so whatever needed to be done had been done."

Following the assault, he reported the incident through official channels but said the response left a lasting impression on him.

"I reported what had happened to me and made a complaint. Their response was that this had happened because I chose to go there. They said they did not care whether I was the son of a chief, a police officer, or related to anyone. They told me to remember my duties and said I do not want to see you again at this station."

He told the Commission that opportunities to seek accountability were limited at the time, as normal systems of authority had been disrupted.

"While I was at the station, the officers instructed me to remain there on standby because the post was empty."

Despite the challenges, threats, and injuries he endured, Mr Waqavolau remained committed to his responsibilities as a police officer and to protecting public property and maintaining order.

"The sergeants, corporals, and CID officers all told me to leave, but I remained. At that time, I was not afraid. I told myself that if the station burned down, I would burn down with it."

The injuries he sustained continue to affect him today, particularly during cold and wet weather. He said the long-term impact on his health ultimately contributed to his resignation from the Fiji Police Force in 2011 on medical advice.

Beyond the physical injuries, Mr Waqavolau reflected on the emotional toll of witnessing violence within his own community and carrying those experiences for many years.

"I still did not tell them. Even when I returned, I did not discuss it with them. By then, I had seen enough and wanted to carry the burden myself. I kept everything to myself and chose not to speak about it."

Reflecting on the broader consequences of the upheaval, Mr Waqavolau said political instability undermined both state institutions and traditional leadership structures, leaving lasting impacts on individuals, families, and communities.

He emphasised the importance of accountability, respect for lawful authority, and ensuring future generations understand the consequences of political upheaval.

"I remained committed to my role as a police officer. When I looked at what was happening, I saw another chief and others were eventually being released and brought in for interviews regarding their actions. They had to face the legal process and be held accountable under the law for what they had done."

He said his experiences reinforced his belief in truth, responsibility, and the rule of law.

"I thought to myself that even if I was the son of a chief and a police officer, if I had to go through it all again, I would still stand up for what I believed was right and for the truth."

Mr Waqavolau also reflected on his survival and the role faith played throughout the ordeal. "I thank God for keeping me safe during that time."

His testimony underscored the importance of truth-telling, accountability, and reconciliation in helping Fiji heal from its past. He also highlighted the need to preserve public trust in both traditional and state institutions while fostering a culture of respect, responsibility, and peaceful dialogue for future generations.

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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