

PRESS RELEASE



Rev. Akuila Yabaki Reflects on Faith, Justice, and the Cost of Speaking Truth

2026: At 84 years old, retired Methodist minister and long-time civil society advocate Reverend Akuila Yabaki offered a reflective and deeply personal account of Fiji's turbulent political history, drawing on his experiences during the political upheavals of 1987, 2000, and 2006.

His testimony presents a life shaped by faith, public service, and moral conviction, while highlighting the intersection of religion, politics, civil society, and human rights in Fiji. Through decades marked by political upheaval and social tension, Rev. Yabaki's account illustrates the personal and communal consequences of challenging authoritarianism and speaking out against abuses of power.

Rev. Yabaki appeared before FTRC Chairperson Joaquim da Fonseca, together with Commissioners Sekove Naqiolevu and Rachna Nath, during a public hearing held in Suva on Thursday, March 12, where he shared his testimony.

A Life Rooted in Faith and Service

Born and raised in Tavuki, Kadavu, Rev. Yabaki's early life was grounded in strong community and spiritual foundations. His theological journey took him beyond Fiji, with studies in Australia and England before his ordination in 1970.

He went on to serve in several roles within the Methodist Church, including minister, chaplain, and later General Secretary for Christian Citizenship Social Services. Alongside his pastoral work, he became deeply engaged in ecumenical activism. His advocacy

extended to regional issues such as opposition to nuclear testing in the Pacific, support for residents of informal settlements, and leadership in civic organisations including the Citizens Constitutional Forum.

Confronting the 1987 Coup

The 1987 coup marked a turning point in Rev. Yabaki's life and ministry. At the time serving as the Methodist Church Communication Secretary, he publicly opposed the coup, stating that it contradicted Christian principles.

His position placed him at odds with powerful institutions. As a result of his outspoken stance, he was dismissed but still an ordained Minister with the Methodist Church. The aftermath brought a period of isolation, during which he was accused of speaking only for himself rather than representing the views of the institution.

Continuing Advocacy During the 2000 Crisis

He returned on to Fiji in 1999 after working at an international institution. His relationship with the Methodist Church remained strained, and he was dismissed but still an ordained Minister with the Methodist Church following a minor allegation related to drinking beer on a plane.

Despite this, he continued his ministry independently, preaching at St. Andrews Presbyterian Church and Holy Trinity Cathedral.

During this period, he also joined the Citizens Constitutional Forum as Executive Director, where he became a prominent voice advocating constitutional governance and human rights. In this role he publicly criticised Methodist Church leaders for supporting George Speight's coup and efforts to alter Fiji's constitutional framework.

Engagement and Disillusionment After the 2006 Coup

Following the 2006 coup, Rev. Yabaki initially participated in the national reform efforts. He worked alongside Bainimarama and the late Archbishop Petero Mataka on the People's Charter for Change, which sought to address governance and constitutional issues.

However, his support shifted as concerns emerged about the direction of the administration. He later condemned the government then for human rights abuses, restrictions on civil society, and limitations on media freedom.

Through his work with the Citizens Constitutional Forum, he documented cases of brutality against prisoners and activists, raising concerns about government impunity. He also organised educational forums with United Nations human rights experts in an effort to highlight and address reported violations.

After years of sustained advocacy, Rev. Yabaki left the organisation in 2017.

Personal and Social Consequences

Rev. Yabaki described the personal cost of his convictions. Within church structures he was often treated as an outcast and denied leadership opportunities. His activism also affected his family and community relationships.

Members of his Kadavu community, concerned about the implications of his public stance, reportedly sought to apologise to the Great Council of Chiefs on his behalf.

Despite these challenges, he explained that his faith deepened through adversity. Even outside formal church structures, he continued to preach and engage with congregations.

His activism also strengthened relationships with Indo-Fijian communities and other marginalised groups, fostering broader alliances in the pursuit of justice and equality.

Reflections for Fiji's Future

Reflecting on Fiji's political journey, Rev. Yabaki emphasised the need for structural reforms to safeguard democracy and human rights. Among his key recommendations is the removal of immunity clauses within Fiji's Constitution.

He also called for greater civic education and public participation in national discussions on reconciliation and constitutional reform.

Central to his vision is the role of an active civil society, which he views as essential to ensuring accountability and preventing the emergence of authoritarian governance.

A Legacy of Moral Conviction

Rev. Yabaki's testimony offers a powerful reflection on the cost of moral conviction in Fiji's turbulent political history.

His journey through Fiji's political upheavals reveals resilience in the face of institutional rejection, a steadfast commitment to justice and human rights, and an enduring belief that reconciliation must be grounded in civic participation, constitutional integrity, and collective responsibility for the future.

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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