

PRESS RELEASE



Witness to History: Tarakinikini Shares His Story Before Truth Commission

2026: In a hearing marked by reflection, resilience, and calls for national healing, former Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) and Fiji's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Filipo Tarakinikini, appeared before the Fiji Truth and Reconciliation Commission (FTRC).

Speaking with measured composure, Mr Tarakinikini shared a reflective account of Fiji's political upheavals dating back to 1987, with particular focus on the 2000 political upheaval that shook the nation and tested the resilience of its democratic institutions.

Mr Tarakinikini's reflections underscored the need for shared responsibility across society, highlighting truth-telling, moral leadership, and ethics education as key pillars for sustainable reconciliation.

The hearing, held in Suva, was presided over by FTRC Chairperson Joaquim da Fonseca and Commissioner Ana Laqeretabua.

At the time of the 2000 political upheaval, Mr Tarakinikini was serving as a Lieutenant Colonel in the RFMF. His role in the military during the crisis placed him at the centre of one of the most delicate and volatile situations in Fiji's modern history. As events unfolded at Parliament during the 2000 political upheaval, he recalled becoming involved in communications and negotiations that required balancing military command decisions with the urgent responsibility of protecting lives.

His story provided insight into the complex institutional pressures, operational realities, and difficult decisions that defined the period. In recounting these events, Mr Tarakinikini

described the tension between maintaining military discipline and navigating a rapidly evolving national crisis.

Beyond recounting the historical events themselves, Mr Tarakinikini used his testimony to reflect on the broader lessons Fiji must confront as it continues its reconciliation journey.

He emphasised the importance of re-professionalising the military, strengthening ethical leadership, and ensuring that national resources are used responsibly and transparently.

According to Mr Tarakinikini, the relationship between military culture and political influence has shifted over time, and these changes have had lasting implications for governance, public trust, and the stability of national institutions.

His reflections underscored the need for shared responsibility across society, highlighting truth-telling, moral leadership, and ethics education as key pillars for sustainable reconciliation.

“If Fiji is to move forward,” his testimony suggested, “the country must confront its history honestly, acknowledge the suffering experienced across communities, and commit to building trust through transparency and national unity.”

Seated quietly in the hearing room was Mrs Amele Tabuya-Tarakinikini whose presence provided emotional support as her husband, seated next to her, revisited deeply personal and nationally significant events.

When she spoke, her words brought a powerful human dimension to the proceedings.

Mrs Tarakinikini described the personal toll that the aftermath of the 2000 crisis took on their family. She shared about the allegations made against her husband, the uncertainty and displacement that followed, and the emotional and financial strain that weighed heavily on their marriage, their children, and their extended family.

She briefly recalled years marked by fear, social isolation, stigma, and hardship. She shared how their children carried the emotional burden of those years, including the discovery that one daughter’s learning difficulties were linked to trauma experienced during that period.

Yet amid those hardships, Mrs Tarakinikini spoke of resilience. She described how faith, trusted friendships, counselling support, and a shared commitment to family helped them endure the years of uncertainty.

“We made the decision to stay together and keep moving forward,” she reflected, describing the strength that sustained them through difficult times.

For the FTRC, hearings such as this represent an important step toward documenting Fiji's history and understanding the experiences of those who lived through its most difficult chapters.

Together, the shared experiences of Filipo and Amele Tarakinikini illustrated both the institutional and personal dimensions of Fiji's political crises. Their experiences reflected resilience in the face of adversity and underscored the importance of confronting difficult truths as Fiji continues its journey toward reconciliation, national unity, and lasting peace.

Mr Tarakinikini's appearance before the Commission also drew attention to his long career of service both in Fiji and internationally.

About Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Filipo Tarakinikini

Born in Delailasakau, Naitasiri, he began his military career in the late 1970s and was commissioned as an officer in 1981. Over the next two decades he served in senior operational and staff roles within the RFMF, including Aide-de-Camp, Adjutant, Senior Plans Officer, and Battalion Commander with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

His military training included studies at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in the United Kingdom and the Senior Command and Staff College in Camberley, reflecting his advancement through the officer corps.

Following his departure from the military in 2002, Mr Tarakinikini embarked on a distinguished career with the United Nations Department for Safety and Security, serving in senior advisory roles in Israel, Nepal, and across the Middle East and North Africa, including missions in Iraq, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, and Libya. In 2018, he returned to the UN HQ in New York and served as Chief Middle East and North Africa with UNDSS (Department of Safety and Security) until taking early retirement in December 2022.

In 2023, he returned to public service as Fiji's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York.

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.

Source: Fiji Truth and Reconciliation Commission

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