



PACIFIC CENTRE FOR PUBLIC INTEGRITY
"Working to promote good governance and zero tolerance on corruption"

Press Release

Prime Ministers Anti-Corruption Stance Challenged by Civil Society

Suva, 23rd Nov 2006: "The Prime Minister is good at making public promises in relation to curbing corruption which basically amounts to nothing", says prominent civil society groups. *

This criticism of the government comes after the Prime Minister failed to table the Freedom of Information (FOI) Bill in cabinet on Tuesday despite last weeks cabinet decision that the final Bill would be passed by cabinet this week.

"This week the Prime Minister has expressed shame at the amount of corruption in the government, yet his government has done very little in terms of concrete policy or legislation to curb this practise," says Pacific Centre for Public Integrity Chairperson (PCPI), Mrs Siwatibau.

She added that it is one thing to draft bills, but the three anti-corruption bills have been in draft bill for over the last two years, and have not amounted to anything yet. "Where is the demonstrated political commitment to push this important Bill through."

Civil Society groups have also challenged the Minister of Justice to come clean on why he as Chair of the Cabinet Legislative Committee has not sent the Prime Minister the final FOI bill and report for endorsement in this week's cabinet meeting.

"We can excuse once or twice if it a work load issue, but the constant delay in passing this bill in Cabinet to enable it to be tabled in Parliament does raise our suspicion on whether this government fully intends to table this bill in Parliament and it's overall commitment to good governance", said Executive Director of PCPI, Angie Heffernan.

A Freedom of Information Law if passed with wide public disclosure provisions will allow ordinary citizens, even at the local community level to have greater access to state information such as government policies and processes, budgets and procurement contracts for example, that would otherwise be impossible to access from government.

Furthermore an effective FOI Law would require the state to proactively release information regularly without the public having to ask for it.



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The NGO's stated that a good FOI law would provide the public and ordinary citizens with immense power to hold the state and civil servants accountable and transparent in the way it conducts its affairs.

"An FOI Law in essence would ensure and promote an open system of government, which would make corruption very difficult to thrive", says group spokesperson Heffernan.

Fiji's 1997 constitution requires that an FOI law be legislated after the commencement of the constitution and the current government had failed to meet its constitutional obligation in its previous term in government.

*** Civil Society Groups attributed to this Press Release :**

Pacific Centre for Public Integrity (PCPI)

ECREA

Commonwealth Human Right Initiative (CHRI)

Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM)

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