

Pacific Freedom Forum

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Media Release

Pacific leaders must speak out against anti-media attacks in Fiji

For immediate release: Thursday 12 March, 2009 – Another round of media-related incidents led by Fiji's military regime has sparked condemnation and disgust from regional media watchdog, the Pacific Freedom Forum.

Forum chair Susuve Laumaea of Papua New Guinea says Pacific leaders must speak out for a free media in Fiji if they want to stand true to their promise of serving the region, and the promise of good governance and security for all Pacific people as committed within the Pacific Plan.

According to Fiji media reports, at 2am on the 10 March, three men broke into the private home compound of Fiji Times Editor Netani Rika and vandalised his car. They remain at large. The same day, police waving search warrants scoured the newsrooms of the Fiji Times and Fiji TV on the pretext of finding letters quoted from during routine news reports.

“The nature of the letters and their sources are convincing proof that the search warrant exercise was not about protecting the public safety, but growing an atmosphere of fear amongst Fiji journalists,” says Laumaea.

“It also calls into question the process of securing search warrants in this instance, and what reasons or justifications were used to grant the warrants for letters whose contents seem so mundane in terms of the level of attention used.”

He says it's time for Pacific Forum leaders to make known to Fiji their support of democracy and the critical role of the media in keeping Pacific communities informed.

“The latest round of incidents provide a disturbing picture of the level of fear-mongering blatantly being practised by Fiji's law enforcers, against media professionals,” says PFF co-chair Monica Miller, of American Samoa.

“The Pacific Freedom Forum has long made clear its total condemnation of the current tactics from the Fiji regime clearly aimed at intimidating media workers from doing their jobs fearlessly and without favour,” she says.

“It is time for Forum leaders to step up and make known their concern over the ongoing campaigns and human rights abuses becoming ever more prevalent in Fiji.”

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The Pacific Freedom Forum are a regional and global online network of Pacific media colleagues, with the specific intent of raising awareness and advocacy of the right of Pacific people to enjoy freedom of expression and be served by a free and independent media.

We believe in the critical and basic link between these freedoms, and the vision of democratic and participatory governance pledged by our leaders in their endorsement of the Pacific Plan and other commitments to good governance.

In support of the above, our key focus is monitoring threats to media freedom and bringing issues of concern to the attention of the wider regional and international community