



**International
Federation
of Journalists**

JACQUELINE PARK
IFJ Asia-Pacific Director
AIDAN WHITE
General Secretary

September 23, 2009

Australian Society of Travel Writers
Secretariat
Fax: 02-9807-1176
Email: secretariat@astw.org.au

RE: ASTW and Media Restrictions in Fiji

Dear members of the ASTW Secretariat,

I am writing in reference to reports that the Australian Society of Travel Writers is considering holding its 2010 annual general meeting in Fiji.

As you know, the media in Fiji is currently subject to severe restrictions and intimidation through the enforcement of strict censorship under emergency regulations in place since April 2009.

The effort to silence independent media reporting in Fiji has been a mainstay practice of the regime since the 2006 coup led by Frank Bainimarama. Constitutional provisions guaranteeing freedom of speech were suspended after the coup. However, the situation for local media and foreign journalists seeking to report on Fiji worsened considerably through 2008.

Anti-media actions through 2008-09 include police raids on media offices, deportations of publishers and editors, calls by military officers for media houses to be shut down, a “watch list” and bans on foreign journalists, and contempt of court rulings carrying hefty punishments. The editor-in-chief of the *Fiji Times*, Netani Rika, has been especially targeted for attack by unknown persons. He receives regular threats and suffered a firebomb attack on his home in March 2009.

The April 2009 appeals court ruling that the 2006 coup was illegal triggered a full-scale crisis. Reappointed as Prime Minister, Bainimarama imposed emergency regulations which include orders that journalists and media outlets submit “sensitive” news reports to officials.

These orders remain in place. The Ministry of Information, backed by the police, has placed full-time censors in newsrooms and continues to enforce strict censorship. Media organisations face closure if they do not comply with censors’ directives.

The situation in Fiji is deeply troubling for all journalists committed to an independent and critical media, in Fiji and elsewhere. At a regional freedom of expression workshop that was held in Samoa in May 2009 after originally being scheduled for Fiji, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and 40 media and press freedom advocates from 12 Pacific States voiced strong concerns about regional complacency in reporting on the reality in Fiji.

In view of the regime’s hardline in preventing all locally based reporting that it deems critical, the IFJ strongly urges the ASTW to reconsider any plans it may have to hold its AGM in Fiji while restrictions continue against local media.



The IFJ alerts the ASTW that while its members may be encouraged by Fiji's regime to visit and report favourably on Fiji, other foreign journalists risk being banned from entry while local journalists must daily bow to the demands of the newsroom censors.

The IFJ reminds the ASTW of its code of ethics, which states that members will "encourage responsible professional standards of reporting" and "safeguard the professional independence of travel writers". We also note the society's stated mandate to promote "unbiased reporting of information on travel topics".

The IFJ believes that the staging of the AGM in Fiji would risk compromising the ASTW. While ASTW members may seek to present a realistic picture of Fiji's current circumstances in their professional work as travel writers, they would be denied this right within Fiji and any critical commentary in their journalistic or other work would be blocked from circulation within Fiji.

Fiji is therefore not a suitable venue in which the ASTW can reasonably promote professional travel writing in keeping with the ASTW's code of ethics and international journalistic standards that support freedom of the media, expression and association.

The IFJ does appreciate that any decisions by regional and international organisations not to conduct activities in Fiji will have repercussions for the local economy and local people. However, the IFJ believes that promotion of Fiji as a holiday destination cannot be done honestly by professional journalists without reference to the severe repressions currently in place. ASTW members would be compromising their integrity to accept the hospitality of the regime in the current circumstances.

For more information, see <http://asiapacific.ifj.org/en/tags/81/contents>

Kind Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light pink background. The signature appears to read 'Chris Warren'.

Christopher Warren

Member, IFJ Asia-Pacific Steering Committee
Federal Secretary, Media Entertainment & Arts Alliance

For further information contact IFJ Asia-Pacific on +612 9333 0919

The IFJ represents over 600,000 journalists in 120 countries worldwide