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Verbatim Report

[VERBATIM REPORT]

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS & DEFENCE

ANNUAL REPORT

2019-2022 Annual Reports

INSTITUTION: Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF)
VENUE: Big Committee Room (East Wing)
DATE: Tuesday, 28th January, 2025

VERBATIM REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE HELD AT THE COMMITTEE ROOM (EAST WING), PARLIAMENT PRECINCTS, GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS, ON TUESDAY, 28TH JANUARY, 2025, AT 8.35 A.M.

Submittee: Republic of Fiji Military Forces

In Attendance:

- | | |
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| (1) Brigadier General Sapenafa Motufaga | - Chief of Staff, RFMF |
| (2) Colonel Aseri Rokoura | - Director Force Development and Strategic Commitment |
| (3) Commander Alfred Fox | - Chief of Staff, Fiji Navy |
| (4) Major Savenaca Rabuka | - Chief of Staff Officer for Force Development |
| (5) Lieutenant Merelesita Cakau | - Staff Officer, RFMF HQ |

Ministry of Home Affairs & Veteran Affairs Representative

Mr. Eroni Rokisi - Manager Defence

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Members of the media and members of the public, Secretariat, viewers, ladies and gentlemen; very good morning to you all. It is a pleasure to welcome everyone, especially to the viewers who are watching this proceeding.

For information purposes, pursuant to Standing Orders of Parliament, specifically Standing Order 111, all Committee meetings are to be open to the public. Therefore, this submission from the Republic of the Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) is open to the public and the media. Any sensitive information concerning this submission that cannot be disclosed to the public can be provided to the Committee either in private or in writing.

But do note that this will only be allowed in a few specific circumstances, which include:

- (1) national security matters;
- (2) third-party confidential information;
- (3) personnel or human resource matters; and
- (4) committee deliberation and development of our report and recommendations.

I wish to remind honourable Members and our invited submittee that all comments and questions are to be asked through me, the Chair, or the Deputy Chair, and for viewers watching this live on *Facebook*, questions can be asked via the comments section and only relevant questions will be considered by the Committee.

Please, note, that if there are any questions from members of the Committee, they may interject at any point, or if you prefer, Sir, we will wait until the end of your submission to ask our questions. This is a Parliamentary meeting, and all information gathered is covered under the Parliamentary Powers and Privileges Act and the Standing Orders of Parliament. Please, bear in mind that we will not condone any slander or libel of any sort, and any information brought before this Committee should be based on facts.

In terms of other protocols of this Committee meeting, please, be advised that movement within the Committee room will be restricted and we ask that you minimise the use of mobile phones.

I would like to now introduce the members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, who I am sure are no strangers to you.

[Introduction of Committee Members & the Secretariat]

Today, the Committee is hearing an oral submission from the Republic of the Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) in relation to its 2019 to 2022 Annual Reports, and I will take this time to invite our submission guests to introduce themselves before we ask you to proceed with your written submission.

BRIG-GEN. S. MOTUFAGA.- Madam Deputy Chairperson, esteemed Members of the Committee and the Secretariat, thank you very much for this opportunity - for the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) to be present for further consultations and questions on the submission of our Annual Reports for the years 2019 to 2022.

[Introduction of RFMF Officers]

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, Brigadier. How would you like to begin with your presentation, Sir?

BRIG-GEN. S. MOTUFAGA.- I think we have provided you a nine-page summary of our Annual Reports for those three years, so instead of me reading them again to the Committee, I propose that you ask us questions for clarification and confirmation.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- In which case, may I begin as the Deputy Chairperson, welcome each one of you. I know I have met a few of you before, and I welcome you to this meeting. Thank you for bringing such a high-powered team this morning, Brigadier. So, to core business, when was the last time the RFMF reported, presented Parliament with an annual report?

BRIG-GEN. S. MOTUFAGA.- Thank you, that is a good question. I cannot recall, but I think it was in 2005, if I can, I may be wrong.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, Brigadier. It is just because as representatives of the people, as you know, the RFMF gets the biggest block of funding during budgeting. First of all, my question is, why do you think it has taken so long for the RFMF to report back to Parliament about how you use the funds that are given to RFMF?

BRIG-GEN. S. MOTUFAGA.- Thank you. I cannot answer that question directly, why it has taken that long, because for myself, I was appointed into this position in 2021. So, I cannot speak for my predecessors but what I can say is that for RFMF, we are audited every year on our finance by Government.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Brigadier, I note though that in the 2019-2020 Annual Report, there are no audited financials included in the Report.

MAJOR S. RABUKA.- Madam Deputy Chairperson, we were not furnished with an audited report from the Auditor-General. We were not able to acquire a published report, so all the audited reports that we have included with the Annual Reports from 2020-2022 have been published by the Auditor-General.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Just to cover the whole presentation today, we note that we have three Annual reports before us from 2019-2022. May I just ask that going forward, we use a similar format. It is really hard for us civilians to understand what is happening in your Annual Reports. So, it would be really, really helpful for the Committee if you follow one reporting format to make it easier for us to be able to digest and also go through the Annual Reports.

I will leave the floor open now to the honourable Members, who I know have burning questions.

BRIG-GEN. S. MOTUFAGA.- Can I make some comment on that? If you look at our Annual Reports for 2019-2022, the first two Reports - 2019 and 2020, were from January to December. But then, as from the last Report, 2021-2022, we have realigned it to the budget year, so that is the difference. The first two were annual calendar years from January to December, and then the third Report was reconfigured and aligned to the financial year.

HON. I. TUIWAILEVU.- Madam Deputy Chairperson, through you, this is a question on the constitutional mandate of the RFMF. The public perception and confidence in the security agencies in being able to deliver on their role as stipulated under Section 131(2) of the Constitution, has been undermined by human rights abuse in the past. What has been done by the RFMF to change public perception on the same?

BRIG-GEN. S. MOTUFAGA.- I think 2021 was a transition period for the RFMF. You may know that towards the end of 2021, the leadership in the RFMF changed. We had a new Commander and we also had changes to the various senior appointments within the RFMF from 2021.

From 2022, the new leadership implemented a new Strategic Plan to take the RFMF forward in the absence of a comprehensive National Security Strategy, so that was implemented in 2022. One of the aims of the new Strategic Plan, 'Beyond 2022' is to strengthen the professionalism of the force of the RFMF.

You know our history. In terms of strengthening that professionalism, it is to:

- (1) improve and maintain competency in terms of leadership and members of the RFMF;
and
- (2) the adherence to the rule of law.

So, as part of that, the RFMF is embarking on building our people along those lines - improve competency, building our leadership and adherence to the rule of law.

HON. I. TUIWAILEVU.- Thank you, Sir, for your explanation this morning.

Another question, through you, Madam Chairperson, this is for the Military's justice system. If there are allegations of misconduct or breaches of protocol, how many cases were reported and completed during the reporting years? Is there any Whistleblower Policy within the RFMF?

BRIG-GEN. S. MOTUFAGA.- As I have mentioned, we have our RFMF Regulations, our Manual of Military Law, which is currently being reviewed and is before Government to be endorsed. That will change the whole way the RFMF does things in terms of our regulations.

We do not have a Whistleblower Policy, as you have highlighted, in the RFMF because our system works along a chain of commands. We have allowances within our regulations for redress of wrong. If you think, or you are not happy with the decision that was made by your immediate superior, there is a regulation that deals with redressing wrongs within the RFMF. So those are some of the ways or means that we have within the RFMF, but we do not have a Whistleblower Policy as highlighted.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Would you want to introduce a Whistleblower Policy in going forward?

BRIG-GEN. S. MOTUFAGA.- We will have to consult with our legal. We did not bring one today, in terms of that. I have not heard any discussion about that, but we will have to consult with our Legal Department.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Chairperson, through you; in the past, political instability was dealt with through military intervention and we all aware of that. We are all aware of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission being set up as well. So, the 2013 Constitution talks about the Military Force as the guardians of Fiji, and to ensure the wellbeing of all Fijians. Now, what has been speculated or widely spoken of is this part, or clause, to be amended for the 2013 Constitution, but that is a different matter.

I am glad you spoke about new appointments and new strategies. So, in going forward, let us say that the Government, at the end of the day, introduces a new policy, reform, or law, where the people feel that their wellbeing is at risk. My question is, how does the RFMF define 'wellbeing of Fijians'? My second question to that is, how does the RFMF continue to uphold its values and credibility and ensure that they are not used as a political tool in the future?

BRIG-GEN. S. MOTUFAGA.- In terms of the use of the Military as a political tool in the future, as I have highlighted earlier, we are building people at the moment in terms of competency, leadership and adherence to the rule of law. That is part of our Strategic Plan - to build people.

Secondly, our members of the Military come from communities outside. We are a reflection of the communities outside, so there will be influences on the military, or its members. We are part of the community of the wider Fiji society. We are not isolated from our communities outside, so there will be influences.

However, to counter that is building our people to be more professional in terms of adherence to the rule of law, ethics, ethical in decision-making and that is what we want to produce at the end of what we are doing - people who adhere to the rule of law, leadership that will adhere to the rule of law, leadership that will be ethical in our decision-making. We as members of society are never free from the influences of the community that we live in because we are a part of that community.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, I do agree with you that ethics should always be beyond the influence of society because it is about doing the right and the wrong. Just a question in terms of our maritime, in terms of our fishing and surveillance patrol, the Committee noted that in the 2019-2020 Report, there were 42 offshore boardings, 97 inshore boardings and 51 sailing vessels boardings with four offshore infringements and 37 inshore infringements. For the benefit of the Committee and our viewers, can the RFMF provide an update on the statistics for 2020-2021 and 2021-2022? What were some of the challenges faced and how were those challenges addressed?

BRIG-GEN. S. MOTUFAGA.- Before I give the opportunity for our representative from the Fiji Navy to highlight the data, let me just say something about those reports. Those reports, especially the 2020-2021 period was during COVID. It was an unprecedented and extraordinary period for Fiji and the whole world, so most of our activities were, in a way, reduced because of the COVID-19 health emergency. So that is something I just wanted to highlight before I hand over to Commander Fox to comment on that.

COMMANDER A. FOX.- Madam Chairperson, with regards to maritime operations in 2019 to 2022, as the Brigadier-General has mentioned, we were restricted by COVID-19. Most of our operations had to deal with the protocols of COVID-19.

The sailing vessels had their protocols in place. We even introduced the Blue Lane protocols where sailing vessels came in, but they were restricted from sailing. They came in during quarantine and then we sent out sailors on other ships where they went out to beaches that we chose for them to select which was isolated from the communities.

With regard to data, we will try and get this Committee all the rest of the data that you may require as I do not have them with me right now, but the main effort at that time was on protecting Fiji's maritime security. Most of our operations, we were just looking at satellite pictures of the vessels coming in. We could hardly do physical operations because of COVID-19. We did our best at that time.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- So do you have the data? I understand the data is not reflected and I understand the challenges during COVID-19. So, would you have to collect the data, or do you have the data, or how much time would you take to get this data?

COMMANDER A. FOX.- We have the data with us with the Fiji Maritime Surveillance Centre. By the end of this week, I will get the data to you, Sir.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Thank you.

Madam Deputy Chairperson, a follow-up to that, when it comes to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our EEZ, what percentage of our EEZ are we not able to monitor?

We have seen the infiltration of drugs into our society and my understanding is, most of it comes through the shores. So, please, let us know the challenges, financial aid or technology that is required in order to combat this and in monitoring 100 percent of our EEZ. I understand there is a BBNJ Treaty as well but, please, I would like to hear more from you in going forward.

COMMANDER A. FOX.- Madam Chairperson, we have 1.3 million square miles of ocean. Currently, we have only one patrol vessel, and there is one in Australia. There are another two small boats. We work with our stakeholders because we know that with the little capacity, we are working with Fiji Revenue & Customs Service, Department of Immigration, Fiji Police Force and even with regional partners. We work with the French, with aerial surveillance. There is a lot of support from the Australians with aerial surveillance. We try to work with the communities, with the *Turaga ni Koros* and fish wardens out in the ocean. It is too vast a space for us to fully guarantee 100 percent.

We have a Maritime Surveillance Centre, and we are moving into our new Maritime Essential Surveillance Centre next month, which is our new headquarters up in Lami. We are trying to increase

our capacity on maritime domain awareness. We are also trying to collaborate with the local agencies and international agencies.

You are true, we have very little capacity. The intelligence, the trans-national threats, they are all using tactics which is trying to cut us down. They are becoming more sophisticated in their use of technology.

We have a lot of gaps that we are trying to bridge the intelligence gap not only by monitoring surveillance, but we need people out in the field, working with the communities. Sometimes, it is the community too who creates the problem and contribute to the problem, especially when they allow vessels, especially with drugs that is all over Fiji and the community. There are new threats of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, climate change, and we understand that drugs will be a very big problem for Fiji, especially if it goes out into our communities.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Madam Chairperson, just a follow-up question on that, Commander, the level of awareness that you do for the community, especially in the maritime areas, for the people out there, can you just confirm to the viewers and to the members of the public the importance of their role and how impactful is your awareness strategies in educating them the importance of looking after foreign vessels that may come around the shores, just for their information as well?

COMMANDER A. FOX.- Madam Deputy Chairperson, yes, it is very important because these are problems that come externally. We will assist with these problems if we allow these vessels that come in to get out activities that are not legally right or that will affect the communities. Fiji Navy will go out on patrols. We try and talk to the villagers, we talk to the local communities, the maritime communities about not only the weather, but these issues of drug trafficking, human smuggling, et cetera.

We also rely on our partners, the local, up to the Ministry of iTaukei Ministry, Fiji Revenue & Customs Service, the Fiji Police Force, who are embedded in most of the outer islands, and they also contribute to this awareness, in trying to make the people aware of the problems of drugs, human trafficking, and other national or other cases of crime.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Commander Fox, if I may just ask a follow-on question from that one, based on your Annual Report from 2019-2020, on page 16, key strategy 2 - strengthening border security, I know you have your strategy, but when can we see the outcomes and the measurements of the outcomes? Would you be able to supply that to us? Because you talk about strengthening border security, enhanced monitoring mechanisms, improved maritime domain awareness, which you have just spoken about, Commander, upgrading and modernising fleets, upgrading the naval capacity, improving maritime mapping and survey, would it be alright for us to send you some more questions based on this particular key strategy 2?

COMMANDER A. FOX.- Madam, we are currently in the process of establishing a strategy for this but this maritime security, we believe it is a whole of Government approach, not only the Navy can create the results. We will be getting new capabilities next year, especially with the assets, but I cannot say what time we will be able to study this because we need the whole-of-government approach on this maritime security.

COL. A. ROKOURA.- Madam Deputy Chairperson, through you, just to support that, I think the honourable Members are aware of the National Security Review that is going to be reviewed, and

part of the outcome is the Maritime Security Strategy for Fiji, so that will address some of the things that the maritime needs.

BRIG-GEN. S. MOTUFAGA.- Just an addition, you will know that we are talking about reports three or four years back. Now, we have a National Security Strategy which is coming online this year. So now, we will link all our outcomes and outputs into this National Security Strategy.

We are talking about a period when there was no comprehensive national guidance for the RFMF, so now we have a National Security Strategy, we are linking all our outputs and outcomes into this Strategy.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Just a follow-up question on that, I am glad the Maritime Security Strategy is coming out, but where are we in terms of technology, CCTV monitoring, surveillance monitoring, drone monitoring, and aerial surveillance which you have mentioned, where are we? Are we even at 10 percent? Do our ports or borders require this, or every seaport that this should be required?

That is something that we need to hear and the public needs to hear as well because, like I said, they are very porous. So, the gaps we lack in is an opportunity for people to smuggle through things. So that is what my question is based on.

MR. E. ROKISI.- For Navy, we have certain capabilities that we have for them, but there are also agreements that we have with our defence partners, to provide these capabilities to us. One is in terms of addressing our porous maritime borders where we have ship rider agreements with our different bilateral partners. They provide the assets, and we provide the manpower. Those are some of the ways that we address that capability deficiency that we have.

COMMANDER A. FOX.- Just follow up, with satellite pictures, it is 100 percent 24 hours Vessel Monitoring System (VMS), which is a system that is operated in co-operation with Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA). We have other monitoring systems; we monitor sea vision as well.

As alluded to by Official from the Ministry of Defence, the Australians give us a period of flights every month, so there are monthly flights. There is one going almost from 3rd to 14th February. We can also call in the French if they are carrying out patrols, and crossing over to Wallis and Futuna, then sometimes they provide some aerial surveillance.

The only risk, of course, there are gaps, but I can assure you with the monitoring of foreign fishing vessels, it is 100 percent. We are working on the other gaps or bridge the other gaps.

HON. I. TUIWAILEVU.- Madam Chairperson, this is a follow-up question to Mr. Rokisi and Commander Fox; would there be any collaboration of functions between the National Integrated Coordination Centre, Ministry of Home Affairs Headquarters and Maritime Essential Services Centre?

COMMANDER A. FOX.- The end-state of the new Maritime Essential Services Centre in Lami, which is the new headquarters that was built by the Australians, is a local and international collaboration. So, as soon as we embed into it next month, there are already some agencies that are embedded with us. Right now, Customs has been with us for more than four years. The other agencies that are coming in is the Ministry of Fisheries, the U.S is also there with us and they are conducting training to us. The other agencies will be invited to this as well.

Of course, the Ministry of Defence, everything that is done with us, will be through the Ministry of Defence.

BRIG. GEN. S. MOTUFAGA.- The new Maritime Essential Coordination Centre at the new Navy Headquarters is a collaboration with other government agencies and with our bilateral partners. That is the main objective. It is a collaboration between us and other government agencies and our bilateral partners using technology and other means.

MAJOR S. RABUKA.- Madam Chairperson, just to go back to the honourable Sharma's question on the percentage and the progress that the RFMF has done, I believe it would be safe to say and it would be good to inform the public that we are in a much better space in terms of our surveillance capability as compared to 20 years ago. I would say we would have gone past the 50 percent if it was in the development phase. We have gone past that phase, so we are in a very advanced phase in terms of our maritime capability to surveil our borders.

As for the MESC that Brigadier General has alluded to, that is a new capability that is being established here and that will surely be coming out in our report to you in our next reports.

Just to summarise, we are now in a much better position to surveil and conduct our security operations, as compared to 20 years or 10 years ago.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, Major Rabuka. So just to give us an idea, an overview, what is the percentage of your annual funding that is divided between forces on land and forces at sea?

BRIG-GEN. S. MOTUFAGA.-I do not have the figures off hand with me, but they are not the same, especially due to the differences in the percentage of manpower. Our Navy is about 20 percent of the whole army, so there is a huge difference in terms of the budget.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, Brigadier General. I wanted to move straight away from that and wanted to talk about violence against women and children at the barracks and in private homes. Are these treated differently? None of us have lived in the barracks, and I really wanted to know what the difference is if there was a report of domestic violence in a camp or at barracks, as opposed to a private home. Where do military police come in? Where does the Fiji Police come in? Can you just go through that, please?

BRIG. GEN S. MOTUFAGA.- Let me highlight that we, in the RFMF, apart from our military law and the laws of Fiji, we have three major policies that deal with this. We have zero tolerance on:

- (1) domestic abuse or domestic violence, you might say;
- (2) sexual harassment; and
- (3) drugs.

So, those are no-drop case policies. So as long as we hear or it is reported to us, we will deal with them the manner that it warrants.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- You have said before, Brigadier-General, that you do not have a Whistleblower Policy. Is that something that you might want to think about?

We have had several submissions from different independent organisations and representing their own organisations, who mentioned that whistleblower policies are great. But in an environment

where they fear that they could be subjected to victimisation by their seniors, it is not something that is very easy to organise.

BRIG-GEN. S. MOTUFAGA.- Yes, thank you. That can be a consideration, but as I mentioned earlier, it is for us to discuss with our legal. But you know that we are a small society, very closely linked communities, so there is nothing that can be hidden. It will eventually come out and for us, once it is reported or once we hear about it, we will investigate and conduct the necessary procedures.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Still on human resources and your people within the organisation, there was something in the 2019-2020 Annual Report, an admin instruction that was approved on the use of social media by RFMF personnel. Can you tell us a little bit about that? That was, kind of, fascinating. What are your terms of usage of social media by RFMF personnel?

MAJOR S. RABUKA.- Thank you, Madam Deputy Chairperson. The approval for use of social media, basically, for the RFMF to participate in marketing itself out to the public, as well as a transparent way of showing the public what we are and what we stand for. We believe that utilising the social media platform is one of the best ways to do that. That is why the Commander approved the use of social media for the organisation.

In terms of personal use by members, they are guided, as we all are, by the Official Secrecy Act. Therefore, there are certain things that are not allowed to be shown on social media, in the operational areas, as well as for our security here. So, all our soldiers have been briefed, and instructions have been put out, and they are aware that those things are not allowed to be shown, because that is official Government security issue. Otherwise, our members are free to use the social media, and there is no policy in restricting them from using it.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, Major Rabuka. Something that came out and surprised us from the 2019-2020 annual report is the review of the RFMF dress code. Now, you are talking to civilians here, so that kind of piqued our interest. Can you tell us a little bit about that? I mean, what exactly changed?

MAJOR S. RABUKA.- Madam Chairperson, the review of the dress code is just a review of our uniforms and what we wear. That is something that is part of the development of the RFMF.

In terms of technology and where we are operating at the moment, the use of uniforms of normal cotton material can now be picked up by infrared. So, we are doing research on how we can best pick out materials that are available worldwide on the best way forward to go for the types of uniforms that we can use that would add an added security to our soldiers. So, that was basically a research that was being done on our uniforms.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, very interesting. I wanted to ask about your engineering corp. How much use are you getting out of your engineering corp? What are they doing right now at Cunningham? Are they out in the field? I apologise; it has got nothing to do with the Annual Reports. I am just really interested because as we are in cyclone season now, are the humanitarian assistance and disaster relief plans at the ready?

BRIG-GEN. S. MOTUFAGA.- If I can recollect from this morning's report, the engineers have six projects at the moment. They are out there on six projects. The plant troop are doing some minor works in terms of road and those doing vertical construction, and one project that they are

building for Government is the Cakaudrove Provincial Council House in Savusavu. That has been an ongoing project since last year.

The year has just started, so the projects are quite small. Most of the projects now are a continuation from last year. But as we move on through the year, there are a lot of requests. We turn down some because we do not have the manpower, and we also are closely linked to the Ministry of Rural Development in terms of priority projects.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Through you, Madam Deputy Chairperson, I noted in your 2021-2022 Annual Report, the RFMF did not carry out a board of survey. Can you have an explanation on that, especially on your asset in the plant.

BRIG-GEN. S. MOTUFAGA.- Yes, that is true. We are clearing up some of those outstanding issues in terms of our stores management, which is required on an annual basis. So that is something that is a work in progress at the moment, but we have definitely conducted a board of survey since those reports.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Through you, Madam Deputy Chairperson, I also noticed in the Auditor-General's Report expenditure totalling 58,204 incurred by the Force was charged under Head 49 for peacekeeping mission and this does not reflect on your receipts and expenditure of the Force. According to the Auditor's comment, the Force would have overspent its appropriation budget for operating expenditure and all the expenditure were correctly recorded in the statement of receipt. As a result, the total operating expenditure of the Force is understated by that amount at that particular reporting year.

BRIG-GEN. S. MOTUFAGA.- That is a concern. Last week, our Director for Logistics and Acquisition fronted up to the relevant committee to answer questions on those anomalies in our financial reporting that was noticed.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- There are some very critical comments by the Auditor-General and I thank the Force for highlighting that the issues will be looked into. It is important because it is contrary to the Financial Management Act 2004 where there is misappropriation of funds or taxpayers' money. So, it is good that the RFMF is picking that up and trying to improve on it.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Chairperson, for the 2020-2021 Report, it says that a bulk of RFMF budget was diverted towards the construction of an intensive care unit at the GMMC in Queen Elizabeth Barracks. The facility was constructed after there was a need to find a separate facility, should the CWM be overwhelmed because of the pandemic. So now, is this still operational? Is it still budgeted for or if not, what has it been utilised for since the pandemic? If you can also highlight, what was the bulk of the budget gone into?

BRIG-GEN. S. MOTUFAGA.- Thank you, I cannot tell you the amount of funds that were used, but this was during COVID-19. Like I said, it was a different moment for the nation. There was a lot of panic and fear because of that health emergency, and that was one of the decisions by Government - to do an extension of a health unit in camp as a backup to CWM in case the problem gets out of hand. So that was the reason. We were directed to do an extension, and the equipment was brought over by the Ministry of Health.

MAJOR A. ROKOURA.- Just to add on what Brigadier-General Motufaga has elaborated, in fact, the facility was just developed to cater for our health personnel who were conducting the outreach. So, this was research done from a case study in Africa, the Ebola, where the health

personnel refrained from working because when they got the virus, they were all put up at the same facility as the normal civilians. So, the Government of the day had to decide on preparing something for our health personnel who were conducting the facility, the nurses and the doctors who were the frontliners during COVID. That is why there is a more focus on that facility.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Deputy Chairperson, just a follow up on that; I understand that you have a health unit facility within the barracks so, please, enlighten me and the general public whether the RFMF is purchasing medical equipment and supplies from the Ministry of Health or outsourcing or directly importing and if they are facing issues with what the Ministry of Health is facing as well in terms of procurement.

BRIG-GEN. S. MOTUFAGA.- We have a hospital in camp. You can compare it to a subdivision hospital. It is a 12-bed hospital and mostly, it is for our soldiers, our members, their dependents and their immediate families, so that is our health centre.

There is another one that was established in Black Rock Camp. That is in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, and it is for certain hours that the health centre in Black Rock is open to members of the public in the surrounding area. That is a collaboration with the Ministry of Health.

We have amended our health procurement system to the Ministry of Health, so we procure all our health supplies through their system. I do not know whether we are having problems at the moment, I have not heard about it because for us, it is just normal members having back aches, knee aches, and most of our cases seen at our hospitals are not serious cases. There are some exceptions, but just normal working, apart from our dependents.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Thank you. Madam Deputy Chairperson, through you, one thing that most people talk about in public space is the MFO funding or the funding from offshore. In the report, we noticed only the allocated budget within government. Would you be able to highlight the funding distribution or whether we have money coming out from MFO or even from the military farm that you have? Are you generating revenue from this area, under your leadership in the RFMF?

Part of the question is external funding. It does not reflect in the reporting period and the other one is the military farm that you have somewhere at your base. We will come and have a look when we come around next week.

BRIG-GEN.- S. MOTUFAGA.- Am I correct in saying that the first question is about the peacekeeping remittances or the investments?

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Yes.

BRIG-GEN.- S. MOTUFAGA.- That money is sent through to Government, so we have no idea but we have an idea of how much is it every year. For UN peacekeeping, I think it is just over \$12 million a year, but it is sent directly to Government, so we are not part of that reinvestment process.

As for the farm, you know that we have a farm that was initially started when we moved to the Force Training Group in Nasinu. We are not making money out of the farm. At one time, we used that farm to supply root crops and vegetables to RFMF, but then to adhere to Government financial regulations, you cannot do that. You have to do it through contracts, so we stopped that.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Madam Chairperson, through you, thank you Brigadier. Just the last question along that line is the review of the Veteran Affairs allowance and the benefits that the military may have in place on your way forward.

BRIG-GEN.- S. MOTUFAGA.- I think Mr. Rokisi will be in a better position to answer that, since he is from the Ministry.

MR. E. ROKISI.- Madam Chairperson through you, now that Veteran Affairs has come to our Ministry, this discussion has started on how to review the existing allowances, et cetera. Some of the privileges that we might discuss for the benefits of the ex-servicemen, but the talk is beginning to take place.

HON. I. TUIWAILEVU.- Just the last question on nation building, given the high number of bullying and disciplinary issues in schools and the benefits of cadet training and team building programme offered by RFMF to schools, what is the stance of the RFMF in establishing this disciplinary factor in school curriculum?

BRIG-GEN. S. MOTUFAGA.- We are ready to stand prepared to support the Government agencies in whatever they want but we will give it to the relevant agency or Ministry to take the lead in that. We will just support in whatever way they want us in whatever means to do that.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- One final question, when will be your next salary or wages review? When was the last one and when will be the next one for men and women in uniform?

BRIG-GEN. S. MOTUFAGA.- The last one was in 2003. I think it is time that there is another job evaluation review done for the RFMF, not only for the RFMF but for other Ministries of Government.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you very much Brigadier-General, Colonel, Commander, Major Rabuka, Lieutenant Cakau and Mr. Rokisi. *Vinaka saka vakalevu* for your time today. It has been very, very helpful to us. We plan on submitting reports to Parliament at the March Sitting, and we thank you for your time today. Thank you for answering the questions very openly. If we have other questions, we will be sending them through to your office, Brigadier-General.

I wish you all a very blessed day.

The Committee adjourned at 3.41p.m.

Written Responses



REPUBLIC OF FIJI MILITARY FORCES
HEADQUARTERS

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IN REPLY, PLEASE QUOTE:

J10/6/1A

Chairperson

Parliamentary Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence
P.O. Box 2352
Government Buildings
SUVA

**REPUBLIC OF FIJI MILITARY FORCES SUBMISSION ON
THE 2019 TO 2022 ANNUAL REPORTS**

1. Find attached the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) submission to the Parliament Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence on the RFMF 2019 to 2022 Annual Reports.

S.K.MOTUFAGA
Brigadier General
for Commander Republic of Fiji Military Forces

27 January 2025

REPUBLIC OF FIJI MILITARY FORCES (RFMF) SUBMISSION ON 2019 TO 2022 ANNUAL REPORTS

References:

- A. 2013 Constitution, Chapter 6, Part B, Section 31
- B. RFMF Act CAP 81
- C. Queens Regulations 1955
- D. RFMF Volume 1 & 2
- E. Fiji Financial Regulations
- F. National Disaster Management Office Act
- G. Human Rights Commission Decree
- H. Fiji National Oceans Policy
- I. National Climate Change Policy (NCCP) 2018-2030
- J. Commander RFMF Intent 2019-2022
- K. RFMF Strategic Plan, Beyond 2022
- L. Fiji and Australia 'Vuvale' Partnership Program

GENERAL

1. The Republic of Fiji Military Force (RFMF) Annual Reports for 2019, 2020 and 2021 to 2022 covered mostly an unprecedented period for the organization. The global health emergency caused by the COVID 19 virus was a once in a lifetime event, that immobilized the world and Fiji, creating widespread panic and fear. At the end of 2021, there was a change in Command in the RFMF resulting in changes to the organization and the way it works.

2. Despite all these major events, the RFMF continued to strive to fulfill its responsibilities under the Fiji Constitution of, "It shall be the overall role of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces to ensure that all times the security, defence and well-being of Fiji and all Fijians."

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

3. The 2019 to 2022 annual reports highlighted all activities by the RFMF under these Strategic Priorities.

- a. National security and stability.
- b. Regional cooperation and security.
- c. Support to government and national wellbeing.
- d. Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR).
- e. International peace and security.

4. The journey to achieving these tasks was challenging, yet the RFMF rose to the occasion to achieve them, thus contributing to the national effort for the government of the day. In achieving its tasks, the RFMF has also aligned itself to UN Strategic Developments Goals

(SDGs). These RFMF Strategic Priorities are closely linked to these four (04) core Sustainable Development Goals show below. However the RFMF's work also influences other SDGs.

- a. SDG 4. Gender Equality.
- b. SDG13. Climate Action.
- c. SDG 14. Life Below Water.
- d. SDG 16. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.

National Security and Stability

5. In safeguarding Fiji's national sovereignty, the RFMF has been influential in striving to secure our maritime borders through regular maritime patrols conducted by the Navy in collaboration with other Government Ministries in Fiji's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The Fiji Navy works in close cooperation with Fiji Maritime Security Authority, Fisheries and Customs to secure our maritime borders.

6. The RFMF's Land Forces Command also contributed to securing the land domain through cooperation with the Fiji Police Force (FPF) and other key security agencies of government. The key readiness levels portrayed in the tabulated summary above indicates the Land Forces Commands readiness to deploy within Fiji. From 2019-2022, the RFMF was involved in four (04) HADR operations in response to; TC Harold, TC Yasa, TC Ana and TC Bina. The COVID 19 in 2020 did not stop the RFMF from supporting government and contributed 100% in terms of man power and specialists to assist government in securing the nation. The RFMF's close cooperation and support to the Fiji Police Force (FPFZ) ensures the stability and security of our internal borders.

Regional Cooperation and Security

7. To strengthen regional security, the RFMF has continued to work closely with its bilateral partners in and outside the region. This is reflected in the joint military and maritime exercises shown at Table 2 above, whereby RFMF troops conduct joint exercises with troops from the Australian Defense Force (ADF) and New Zealand Defense Force (NZDF). The military exercises are referred to as Exercise Cartwheel and Exercise Coral Warrior. From 2019-2022, the RFMF has conducted three (03) joint exercises with its regional partners in Fiji and Australia.

8. In terms of support for regional security and stability, the government of Fiji deployed the RFMF to the Solomon Islands in early 2022, in support of a regional peace support force led by Australia. The RFMF plays a key role in engaging and supporting regional defense partners on defense and security collaboration.

Support to Government and Well Being of All

9. The RFMF has supported government in infrastructure development projects, and these have included constructions of hospitals, health centres, teachers' quarters, roads, bridges and the provision of access and utilities in remote areas of Fiji. From 2019-2022, the RFMF Engineers constructed 13 teachers' quarters, a hospital in Rotuma and various road improvements on Viti

Levu and Vanua Levu. The RFMF also conducted school cadet training in collaboration with the Ministry of Education in five major schools around Fiji, graduating more than 2000 students from the program.

Humanitarian Assistance & Disaster Response (HADR)

10. The RFMF plays an active role in disaster response in collaboration with other Government Agencies. As a tool of government, the RFMF provides government with the capability to respond to natural disasters, providing critical assistance such as evacuations, response and rebuilding efforts. The RFMF also provides the government of the day with the option of assistance to neighboring countries in the region. In early 2020, the Bula Force, consisting of 54 RFMF and National Fire Authority (NFA) personnel deployed to Australia to assist in responding to the Black Summer Bushfires.

International Peace and Security

11. The RFMF continues to participate in UN Peacekeeping around the world as part of the Governments Foreign Policy. From 2019-2022, the RFMF has deployed a total of 480 peacekeepers and observers in:

- a. UN Administration in Iraq (UNAMI).
- b. UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) Golan, Syria.
- c. Multinational Forces and Observers (MFO), Sinai, Egypt.
- d. UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).
- e. UN Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO), Israel.
- f. UN Interim Force In Lebanon (UNIFIL).
- g. UN Mission to support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA), Yemen.
- h. Solomon Island.

TRENDS

12. The security environment in the region and internationally has grown more complex and unpredictable due to various reasons. This requires the RFMF to adapt to ensure that it is responsive and relevant. From 2022, the RFMF has implemented a Strategic Plan to reconfigure the RFMF to be responsive, strengthen professionalism and be relevant. Confronted with budgetary constraints, the RFMF has prioritized resource allocation towards essential areas such as disaster response, training, and modernization, ensuring operational continuity despite financial limitations.

13. Strategic shifts have emphasized addressing non-traditional threats, including climate change and maritime security, reflecting Fiji's unique vulnerabilities and regional responsibilities. Furthermore, the RFMF has diversified its operations by integrating advanced technologies, enhancing situational awareness, and fostering partnerships with international and regional stakeholders to strengthen interoperability and readiness. These trends underscore the RFMF's commitment to remaining a resilient and agile force, capable of meeting emerging challenges while supporting Fiji's national and regional security goals.

a. **Budgetary Constraints**

The RFMF has consistently navigated financial challenges, leveraging limited resources to maintain operational readiness and address evolving security demands:

- (1) **Declining Budgets.** Between 2020 and 2022, the RFMF saw budget reductions, such as the decrease from FJD 95.4 million to FJD 81 million in the 2020-2021 fiscal year. Despite these constraints, it strategically prioritized funding for critical areas, including disaster response, training, and international peacekeeping operations.
- (2) **Efficiency Measures.** The RFMF implemented cost-saving initiatives by optimizing resource allocation. This includes focusing on areas that deliver maximum impact, such as enhancing logistical and training support for operations
- (3) **Collaboration with Partners:** To bridge funding gaps, the RFMF increasingly relied on international defense cooperation. Partnerships with Australia, New Zealand, and other allies have provided equipment, technical expertise, and training opportunities, especially for HADR and maritime security initiatives

b. **Strategic Adaptation**

Over recent years, the RFMF has demonstrated agility in responding to non-traditional threats and aligning its strategies with evolving security demands:

- (1) **Climate Change as a Priority.** As a nation highly vulnerable to climate-induced risks, the RFMF has incorporated climate resilience into its core security strategy. This includes investing in disaster preparedness and response capabilities and developing infrastructure resilient to natural disasters, such as the Blackrock Camp in Nadi
- (2) **Maritime Security Focus.** Fiji's position as a key transit point in the Pacific has made maritime security a strategic priority. Efforts include safeguarding its 1.3 million square kilometer Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and countering illegal activities like drug trafficking and human smuggling
- (3) **Global Peacekeeping Contributions.** Fiji's continued participation in international peacekeeping missions aligns with its strategic aim of contributing to global stability, achieving Governments Foreign Policy and building the RFMF's reputation and operational capabilities

c. **Capability Development**

To remain effective in an increasingly complex security environment, the RFMF has diversified its operations and capabilities:

- (1) **Technological Advancements:** The adoption of advanced technologies has enhanced the RFMF's capabilities in key areas such as surveillance, communication, and intelligence. For example, upgrades in Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (C4ISR) systems have improved situational awareness and decision-making
- (2) **Training and Skill Development:** Modernization efforts extend to soldier and sailor training programs, which emphasize the use of new technologies, tactical mobility, and engineering capacity to meet contemporary challenges
- (3) **Integrated Response Frameworks:** The RFMF has strengthened inter-agency collaboration domestically and regionally. This approach ensures coordinated responses to challenges such as natural disasters, transnational crime, and cybersecurity threats
- (4) **HADR Specialization:** The RFMF's capabilities in disaster response and humanitarian assistance have been honed through active involvement in post-cyclone recovery efforts and partnerships with regional defense forces like the Australian Defence Force (ADF)

Gender

14. The Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) has acknowledged the importance of gender inclusion and the role of women in advancing peace and security, aligning with the global Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. This commitment is reflected in operational planning and strategic documents that emphasize gender equity as a critical component of sustainable peace and resilience. However, the lack of explicit data on women in leadership positions within the RFMF indicates a gap in tracking and reporting progress on gender representation at decision-making levels.

15. Efforts to address this gap could include instituting policies and programs that actively promote women's recruitment, retention, and advancement within the military, while addressing systemic barriers such as biases in leadership selection processes or limited access to training opportunities for women. Additionally, the integration of gender perspectives into operational frameworks ensures that military activities, such as humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping missions, are inclusive and responsive to the diverse needs of affected populations.

16. The RFMF's regional partnerships and participation in international peacekeeping missions also present opportunities to champion the WPS agenda by showcasing female leadership roles and encouraging gender-balanced contingents. Strengthening internal accountability mechanisms, including transparent data collection and reporting on women's participation and leadership, can further reinforce the RFMF's commitment to gender inclusion and demonstrate measurable progress towards equity in leadership within the armed forces. This approach would not only align with global standards but also enhance operational effectiveness and social cohesion within Fiji's security framework.

Link to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

17. The Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) plays a vital role in advancing Fiji's achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by integrating global priorities into its operations and strategic planning.

- a. **Climate Action (SDG 13):** Recognizing climate change as an existential threat to Fiji and the Pacific, the RFMF has positioned climate resilience at the core of its operations. It actively engages in disaster preparedness, rapid response, and long-term recovery efforts, particularly in the wake of tropical cyclones and rising sea levels. Through initiatives like the development of climate-resilient infrastructure, such as the Blackrock Camp, and partnerships with the Australian Defence Force and other regional actors, the RFMF enhances national and regional capacity to mitigate and adapt to climate-induced risks.
- b. **Life Below Water (SDG 14).** The Fiji Navy in collaboration with Customs and Fisheries work on ensuring that Fiji regulations on sustainable use of maritime resources within Fiji's EEZ are observed.
- c. **Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (SDG 16):** The RFMF's contributions to international peacekeeping missions underscore its commitment to global stability and adherence to the rule of law. By participating in United Nations-led operations in conflict zones such as Iraq, South Sudan, and the Golan Heights, the RFMF reinforces its dedication to fostering peace and justice globally. Domestically, its support for maintaining sovereignty and territorial integrity strengthens institutions critical to Fiji's national security.
- d. **Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17):** The RFMF actively fosters partnerships with regional and international allies, including Australia, New Zealand, and France, to enhance capacity-building and ensure readiness for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations. Collaborative training exercises and shared technological advancements contribute to building a resilient and integrated regional security framework, showcasing the RFMF as a model for international cooperation.

18. By aligning its strategic priorities with the SDGs, the RFMF not only addresses immediate security concerns but also contributes to Fiji's long-term sustainable development, ensuring a resilient, peaceful, and equitable future for its people and the wider Pacific region.

Challenges

19. The Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) faces a dynamic array of challenges in its mission to safeguard Fiji's security and stability. From resource constraints and emerging security threats to the escalating impacts of climate change, the RFMF continues to adapt and innovate to address these pressing issues while maintaining operational readiness.

- a. **Resource Constraints.** Declining budgets have significantly affected the RFMF's capacity to modernize its infrastructure and expand operational capabilities. The reduction in financial resources has forced the organization to prioritize essential activities such as disaster response, peacekeeping training, and minimal equipment upgrades. Limited funding also impacts the recruitment and retention of skilled personnel and the procurement of advanced technologies, leaving gaps in the RFMF's ability to address complex, modern threats. These financial limitations necessitate greater reliance on partnerships and international support to bridge capability gaps and maintain operational readiness.
- b. **Emerging Security Threats.** The evolving security landscape poses significant challenges for the RFMF, with cybercrime, transnational crime, and geopolitical tensions being the most pressing concerns. Cybersecurity breaches and disinformation campaigns threaten critical infrastructure and public trust, requiring the RFMF to develop robust cyber defenses and intelligence-sharing frameworks. Transnational crimes such as drug trafficking and human smuggling have intensified in the Pacific, leveraging Fiji's geographic location as a transit hub. Moreover, geopolitical tensions, particularly the strategic competition between the United States and China, add complexity to regional security dynamics. The RFMF must navigate these challenges carefully while preserving Fiji's sovereignty and fostering balanced international relations.
- c. **Climate Change.** Climate change remains an existential challenge for Fiji and, by extension, the RFMF. Rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and coastal erosion threaten infrastructure, displace communities, and exacerbate resource scarcity. The RFMF frequently mobilizes for disaster relief operations in response to cyclones and floods, straining its manpower and logistical capacity. Additionally, climate change impacts Fiji's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), complicating maritime security and the management of marine resources. While the RFMF has prioritized climate resilience through infrastructure upgrades and regional collaboration, the scale and frequency of these challenges demand sustained investment and innovation. The Pacific Response Group which the Fiji is represented by the RFMF is established by regional partners to unify regional response to HADR.

20. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach, including improved budgetary allocation, enhanced inter-agency collaboration, technological modernization, and stronger partnerships. These efforts will help the RFMF adapt to resource limitations, tackle emerging threats, and mitigate the growing impacts of climate change.

WAY FORWARD

21. The Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) is charting a forward-looking path to address emerging challenges and enhance its operational effectiveness through its Strategic Plan, Beyond 2022.

- a. **Modernization.** The RFMF is investing in advanced technologies to strengthen its capabilities in command, control, communications, and mobility. Upgrades to the C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) systems are aimed at improving situational awareness and better support decision-making. Additionally, modernization plans include acquiring resilient infrastructure and state-of-the-art equipment to address contemporary security needs.
- b. **Regional Cooperation.** Recognizing Fiji's strategic position in the Pacific, the RFMF aims to solidify its role as a regional security provider. This involves fostering partnerships with regional and international partners, to conduct joint training, capacity-building initiatives, and humanitarian assistance operations. Through these collaborations, the RFMF seeks to bolster interoperability and collective resilience across the Pacific.
- c. **Capability Enhancement:** Guided by Fiji's National Development Plan, the RFMF is prioritizing initiatives in climate resilience, maritime security, and counterterrorism. Efforts to safeguard Fiji's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) are central to maritime security, while disaster response capabilities are being expanded to address the growing risks of climate change. The RFMF's focus on counterterrorism underscores its commitment to addressing non-traditional security threats that could destabilize the region

22. This strategic vision positions the RFMF as a modern, adaptable force capable of addressing complex security challenges while fostering peace, stability, and resilience both at home and within the Pacific region.

CONCLUSION

23. The RFMF has emerged as a pivotal institution in ensuring Fiji's security, stability, and global engagement, as highlighted in the annual reports 2019-2022. Despite facing significant challenges such as declining budgets, emerging non-traditional security threats, and the growing impacts of climate change, the RFMF has demonstrated resilience, adaptability, and strategic foresight in its operations and planning.

24. Key achievements include active participation in international peacekeeping missions, solidifying Fiji's reputation as a contributor to global peace and stability, and significant roles in HADR within Fiji and the Pacific region. The RFMF's commitment to addressing climate-induced risks and prioritizing climate resilience underscores its proactive approach to one of the most pressing challenges facing the Pacific.

25. Trends in the RFMF's development reveal a clear trajectory toward modernization, operational diversification, and strategic adaptation. By aligning with Fiji's National Development Plan and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the RFMF has integrated climate action, peace and justice, and regional partnerships into its core objectives. Investments in advanced technologies, infrastructure resilience, and inter-agency collaboration demonstrate its efforts to remain a capable and agile force in an increasingly complex security environment.

26. Looking forward, the RFMF's strategic vision focuses on modernization, enhancing regional leadership, and strengthening capabilities in climate resilience, maritime security, and counterterrorism. By fostering international partnerships, promoting gender inclusion, and leveraging technological advancements, the RFMF is well-positioned to meet future challenges while continuing to uphold its mandate of protecting Fiji's sovereignty and contributing to regional and global security.

27. The RFMF's journey reflects a balance between addressing immediate security concerns and building a sustainable, resilient force ready to navigate the evolving geopolitical landscape. Its commitment to adapting to changing environments, fostering innovation, and maintaining regional and international cooperation ensures that it remains a cornerstone of Fiji's national and regional security framework.

Additional Information

Re: Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence - Written Response to Questions



freddy fox <ffox10@gmail.com>

To Susana Korovou

Cc Elesi Waiwalu; s.korovou@parliament.gov.fj

If there are problems with how this message is displayed, click here to view it in a web browser.



Navy Response to Parliamentary Standing Committee.docx
18 KB



Reply

Reply

Ni bula Vinaka Ma'am

The written response to the question raised during the submission on Tuesday, 28 January 2025 by the Hon. Rinesh Sharma is attached. The question was as follows:

1. For the benefit of the Committee and our viewers, can RFMF provide an update on the statistics for 2020-2021 and 2021-2022? What were some of the challenges faced and how can these challenges be addressed?

Thank you for your support

Alfred Fox
CMDR
Commander Fleet Operations
Fiji Navy
RFMF

On Tue, Jan 28, 2025 at 11:04 AM Susana Korovou <susana.korovou@legislature.gov.fj> wrote:

Bula Vinaka Commander Fox,

As discussed, this is to kindly request a written response to the question raised during the submission today by the Hon. Rinesh Sharma:

1. In terms of Fisheries and Surveillance Patrol, the Committee noted that in 2019/2020 AR (page 18), there were 42 offshore boardings, 97 inshore boardings and 51 sailing vessels boarding with 4 offshore infringements and 37 inshore infringements. For the benefit of the Committee and our viewers, can RFMF provide an update on the statistics for 2020-2021 and 2021-2022? What were some of the challenges faced and how can these challenges be addressed?

U

Thank you again for the assistance and we shall be in contact should there be any additional questions.

Vinaka saka



Susana J. Korovou (Mrs)
Senior Committee Clerk - Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence
Legislative Services Division

FIJI NAVY 2020 / 2021 STATISTICS**1. SHIP DEPLOYMENTS**

TYPE	NUMBER	SEA DAYS
Surveillance and Enforcement Patrols	05	60
Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief	04	67
Hydrographic Survey and Hydrographic Support Ops	06	131
Search and Rescue	03	10
Medevac	01	02
Regional Exercise	Nil	Nil
Regional Fisheries Operations Patrols	03	40
Training (workup, sea check, passex)	06	19
Other tasking (Covid Ops)	02	17
TOTAL	28	341

2. BOARDING DETAILS

TYPE	NUMBER
Offshore	27
Onshore	73
Sailing Vessels	27
Offshore Infringements	01
Inshore Infringements	42

FIJI NAVY 2021 / 2022 STATISTICS

1. SHIP DEPLOYMENTS

TYPE	NUMBER	SEA DAYS
Surveillance and Enforcement Patrols	03	33
Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief	01	07
Hydrographic Survey	01	35
Search and Rescue	Nil	Nil
Medevac	01	02
Regional Exercise	01	10
Regional Fisheries Operations Patrols and Joint Patrols with International Partners	04	37
Training (workup, sea check, passex, pilotage trg, Recruit Spt)	06	17
Other tasking (Govt Task, VIP Security Tasking, Spt Govt Agency)	03	12
TOTAL	20	153

2. BOARDING DETAILS

TYPE	NUMBER
Offshore	12
Onshore	15
Sailing Vessels	02
Offshore Infringements	Nil
Inshore Infringements	Nil

Challenges faced in 2020/2021 and 2021 / 2022

1. COVID-19 – Due to the easy transmission of COVID, the Navy had to carry out contactless boardings (use of radio). The Navy had to rely on analysis of surveillance systems (Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency Vessel Monitoring System, US Department of Transport Sea Vision and Marine Traffic) to try and detect infringements.
2. Limitations with Expert Analysts – Navy is continually trying to increase this capacity through training (In agency, regional agencies, UN agencies and international partnership cooperation); attachments in regional fisheries operations and the embedding of a US Marine Domain Awareness expert with the Navy.
3. Intelligence gaps – COVID pandemic forced a lot of inter-agency collaboration which is still being built on to this day. Personnel from the department in Customs which deals with sailing vessel entry approvals has been embedded within the Navy in the last six years. Fiji Navy is still building on interagency collaboration both local and with overseas partners.
4. Dilemma with traditional Maritime Law Enforcement Role and new Disaster Management role (Covid Restrictions) – Most of the infringements were from non-adherence to COVID restrictions which limited the movement of people. The humanitarian aspects then had to be examined; people fishing to survive; people moving from islands to urban centres to withdraw FNPf assistance etc.
5. Inadequate Reach in Presence and Visibility – Navy needs a few more patrol boats that could sustain itself at sea for two weeks (Another three would bring the total number of patrol boats to five which would adequately fit into the Duty / Standby / Patrol / Maintenance Cycle; the schedule of utilisation of patrol boats in the Fiji Navy. Navy is currently deploying Forward Bases (Teams of 12 personnel) on two monthly rotations to the North (Labasa) and West (Lautoka) to assist in the exertion of presence and visibility.

Images Taken During the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Site Visit to the Republic of Fiji Military Forces from Monday, February 10th – Thursday, February 13th, 2025.

Day 1 – Monday 10 February 2025

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence began their site visits on the Republic of Fiji Military Forces 2019-2022 Annual Reports. The Committee had an opportunity to experience the operations of the RFMF at the RFMF HQ, Force Training Group at Nasinu, RFMF Engineers Regiment at Nabuni, RFMF QEB Nabua, RFNS Stanley Brown at Walu Bay, Maritime Essential Services Center (MESC) in Lami and RFNS Viti at Togalevu.

RFMF HQ



RFMF Engineers Regiment at Nabuni



Force Training Group at Nasinu



RFMF QEB Nabua



RFNS Stanley Brown at Walu Bay



Maritime Essential Services Center (MESCC), Lami



RFNS Viti at Togalevu



Day 2 – Tuesday 11 February 2025

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence continued its site visit at the Republic of Fiji Military Forces Blackrock in Nadi.



Day 3 – Wednesday 12 February 2025

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence continued its site visit to the Republic of Fiji Military Forces 3rd Battalion Fiji Infantry Regiment, Echo Company based at the Duke of Edinburgh, Lautoka.



Day 4 – Thursday 13 February 2025

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence continued its site visits at the Republic of Fiji Military Forces Sukunaivalu Barracks, Nabouwalu Base and the Savusavu Base.

Sukunaivalu Barracks



Savusavu Base



Nabouwalu Base

