



# **STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE**

## **Consolidated Review Report of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces 2019-2020, 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 Annual Reports**



**PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI**  
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## Acronyms

EEZ	-	Exclusive Economic Zone
FMRCC	-	Fiji Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre
HADR	-	Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief
MESC	-	Fiji's Maritime Essential Services Centre
MFO	-	Multinational Forces and Observers
RFMF	-	Republic of Fiji Military Forces
RFN	-	Republic of Fiji Navy
SAR	-	Search and Rescue
SCFAD	-	Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence
SDG	-	Sustainable Development Goal
SO	-	Standing Order
TC	-	Tropical Cyclone
UNAMI	-	UN Assistance Mission for Iraq
UNDOF	-	UN Disengagement Observer Force
UNIFIL	-	UN Interim Force in Lebanon
UNMISS	-	UN Mission in South Sudan
UNMHA	-	UN Mission to support the Hudaydah Agreement
UNTSO	-	UN Truce Supervision Organisation

## Chairperson's Foreword

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence (Committee) hereby submits to Parliament the Consolidated Review Report of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces 2019-2020, 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 Annual Reports.

The Committee called for a face-to-face public submission from the Republic of Fiji Military Forces on 28 January 2025. This session was broadcast live on the Parliament Facebook page and aired on the Walesi Parliament channel. This was followed by site visits to RFMF in the Central, Western and Northern Divisions from the 10-15 February 2025.

The 2013 Constitution provides the key functional roles of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) in terms of protecting Fiji and Fijians at all times by employing the latest technology and determining its defence strategies to address emerging security threats and working with the international community to reduce conflict and forge peaceful solutions, in volatile regions around the world.

The RFMF as part of its core role to effectively respond to threats, acquires accurate information and effectively processes it through a functional chain of command. The report captures the trends in the various activities reported in the reporting period. The Committee has provided a series of recommendations aimed at strengthening the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) and the Republic of Fiji Navy (RFN), focusing on improving public relations, enhancing workforce development, addressing human rights concerns, and increasing maritime security capabilities. These recommendations emphasize the need for better transparency, stronger oversight, enhanced training, and increased resources to address national security challenges and improve operational effectiveness.

I wish to extend our sincere thanks to the Commander RFMF and his team for their unwavering support during the review of this report. The Committee acknowledges the good work already undertaken and encourages continued efforts to enhance the RFMF's public image and accountability.

On that note, I thank the members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for compiling this bipartisan report and also acknowledge the Secretariat for their invaluable support.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I submit this report to Parliament.



**Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua**  
**Chairperson**

## Recommendations

- 1.0 The Committee recommends that the RFMF submit its annual reports to Parliament on time, adhering to the fixed timeframe outlined in the Financial Instructions 2010 and Financial Management Act 2004, while reducing delays since 2005. Additionally, the RFMF should standardize the reporting format to ensure consistency, readability, and comparability in both the narrative and financial sections (*refer to paragraph 3.3.1*).
- 2.0 The RFMF should establish independent oversight mechanisms, such as audits, civilian bodies, or partnerships with human rights organizations, to ensure compliance with legal and human rights standards and rebuild public trust (*refer to paragraph 3.3.2*).
- 3.0 The Committee recommends that the RFMF consult legal experts to implement a whistleblower policy within its operational regulations after the Manual of Military Law is approved, strengthening trust and grievance redress in the military justice system (*refer to paragraph 3.3.3*).
- 4.0 The Committee recommends that the government increase the RFN's budget allocation to address capability gaps in maritime surveillance, law enforcement, and combatting illegal activities, enhancing national security in Fiji's maritime borders (*refer to paragraph 3.3.6*).
- 5.0 The Committee recommends a job evaluation and review of the RFMF's compensation and benefits to retain skilled officers, considering factors like allowances, career progression, and non-monetary benefits (*refer to paragraph 3.3.15*).
- 6.0 The Committee recommends integrating anti-bullying and conflict resolution into the cadet training program, with the Ministry of Education and RFMF developing a standardized curriculum focused on physical fitness, leadership, and values like respect and integrity to address school behavior and culture (*refer to paragraph 3.3.16*).
- 7.0 A strong public relations strategy will be key to addressing concerns, particularly those stemming from past human rights abuses, and positioning the RFMF as a positive force for national security and community development (*refer to paragraph 3.3.17*).
- 8.0 The Committee recommends that the RFMF establish a mechanism similar to the Ministry of Education, where officers returning from further studies or training have their salary bands reviewed and adjusted based on new qualifications or skills, motivating professional development and enhancing operational effectiveness (*refer to paragraph 3.3.18*).

- 9.0 The Committee recommends developing a comprehensive maritime law enforcement framework to improve the efficiency of RFN duties, with the RFN's role prominently featured in Fiji's upcoming maritime strategy (*refer to paragraph 3.3.19.1*)
- 10.0 The Committee recommends a coordinated, cross-sectoral, and interagency approach, similar to New Zealand's National Maritime Coordination Centre, to effectively address Fiji's maritime security challenges and improve outcomes despite financial limitations (*refer to paragraph 3.3.19.2*).
- 11.0 Given the current resources of RFN, there is inadequate reach in presence and visibility in our Fiji waters. Therefore, the Committee recommends that as per practice in Australia and New Zealand that our naval officers be trained and empowered to become coast guard which would centralize and coordinate maritime security responsibilities and that RFN should be equipped with additional vessels and modernized fleets to increase patrol frequency, extend patrol reach, and reduce response times to illicit activities. This could involve the acquisition of faster, more durable, and technologically advanced vessels designed for long-range operations (*refer to paragraph 3.3.19.3*).
- 12.0 The Committee recommends giving careful consideration to the idea of creating a 'Department of Maritime Affairs,' comprising government agencies responsible for managing maritime issues such as maritime safety, boundaries, and marine environmental protection. Establishing such a body would help streamline reporting lines and facilitate the prompt resolution of urgent matters (*refer to paragraph 3.3.19.4*).
- 13.0 The RFN should continue to expand its attachment programs with regional navies and global forces, offering opportunities for RFN officers to gain hands-on experience in real-world maritime operations. These attachments allow personnel to observe best practices in diverse operational environments and bring back valuable knowledge to strengthen the RFN's own operations. An increased number of exchange programs will foster strong bilateral ties with partner nations, facilitating better cooperation on joint maritime security operations (*refer to paragraph 3.3.19.5*).

## 1.0 Committee Remit and Composition

Under Standing Order 109(2)(e) the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence is mandated to look into matters related to Fiji's relations with other countries, development aid, foreign direct investment, oversight of the military, and relations with multi-lateral organizations. The members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence are as follows:



**Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua**  
**Chairperson**

*Deputy Speaker of Parliament*  
*Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs*



**Hon. Rinesh Sharma**  
**Deputy Chairperson**



**Hon. Ratu Isikeli Tuiwailevu**  
**Member**

*Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Heritage and Arts*



**Hon. Penioni Ravunawa**  
**Member**

*Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services*



**Hon. Virendra Lal**  
**Member**

## **1.1 Committee Secretariat Team**

Supporting the Committee in its work is a group of dedicated Parliament Officers serving as the Committee Secretariat. These officers are appointed and delegated by the Secretary-General to Parliament by Standing Order 15(3)(i). The Secretariat officers are as follows:

- Mrs. Susana Korovou – Senior Committee Clerk
- Mrs. Elesi Tabuyaqona – Deputy Committee Clerk



## **2.0 Background and Terms of Reference**

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence (the Committee), was referred to the Republic of Fiji Military Forces 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 Annual on 06 December 2024. The referral of the Annual Reports was done in accordance with SO 38(2), whereby the Committee was assigned to investigate the contents of the report and provide a report to Parliament at a future Sitting. This report is within the mandate of the Committee.

## **2.1 Procedure and Program**

### **Public Submission (written submission and oral submission)**

In relation to Standing Order 111 (1), the Committee is committed to upholding public trust in Parliament, by ensuring that there is public participation and that all such participation is given due consideration. The Committee had called for an oral public submission from the Republic of Fiji Military Forces on 28 January 2025. This session was broadcasted live on Parliament Facebook page and aired on the Walesi Parliament channel. The Committee also conducted site visits on the annual reports to the Central, Western and Northern Divisions from the 10-15 February 2025.

A summary of the submission is provided in a later part of this report, under the heading ‘Committee’s Deliberation and Analysis’. Copies of the written submission and the verbatim from the meeting can be obtained from the online Appendices of this report, which can be accessed from the Parliament website: [www.parliament.gov.fj](http://www.parliament.gov.fj).

## 3.0 Committee Deliberation and Analysis

### 3.1 Introduction

The 2013 Constitution provides the key functional roles of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) in the protection of Fiji and all Fijian people. The organization does this by employing the latest technologies and determining its defence strategies to address emerging security threats, working with the international community to reduce conflict, and forging peaceful solutions in volatile regions around the world.

The RFMF as part of its core role to effectively respond to threats, acquires accurate information and effectively processes it through a functional chain of command.

The 2019 to 2022 annual reports highlighted key activities of the RFMF:

1. National security and stability.
2. Regional cooperation and security.
3. Support to government and national wellbeing.
4. Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR).
5. International peace and security.

### 3.2 Summary of the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 Annual Reports

#### 3.2.1 Key Strategy 1: National Security and Stability

In safeguarding Fiji's national sovereignty, the RFMF has been influential in striving to secure Fiji's maritime borders through regular maritime patrols conducted by the Republic of Fiji Navy (RFN) in collaboration with other government agencies in Fiji's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The RFN works in close collaboration with the Fiji Maritime Safety Authority, Fisheries and Customs to secure Fiji's maritime borders. Fiji plays a key role in shaping maritime security in the Southwest Pacific, with Australia's Pacific Patrol Boat Program providing the largest defence cooperation platform. For the years under review, the RFN was involved in a number of ship deployments as shown in table 1.

Type	2020-2021		2021-2022	
	Number	Sea Days	Number	Sea Days
Surveillance and Enforcement Patrols	05	60	03	33
Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief	04	67	01	07
Hydrographic Survey and Hydrographic Support Ops	06	131	01	72
Search and Rescue	03	10	Nil	Nil
Medavac	01	02	01	02
Regional Exercise	Nil	Nil	01	10
Regional Fisheries Operations Patrols	03	40	04	37

Training (workup, Sea check, passex)	06	19	06	17
Other tasking (COVID Ops)	02	17	03	12
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>341</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>153</b>

Table 1: Summary of Ship Deployments in 2020-2021 and 2021-2022

#### a) Fisheries and Surveillance Patrol

For the years under review, RFN conducted offshore and inshore boardings for vessels with infringements as imposed by respective agencies.

TYPE	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2020
Offshore boardings	42	27	12
Onshore boardings	97	73	15
Sailing Vessels	51	27	02
Offshore Infringements	04	01	Nil
Inshore Infringements	37	42	Nil

Table 2: Number of Offshore and Onshore Boardings from 2019-2020

#### b) Search and Rescue Operations

The RFN Ship is one of the first responders to any maritime search and rescue cases coordinated by the Fiji Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (FMRCC). The newly constructed Fiji's Maritime Essential Services Centre (MESC) in Lami will enhance Fiji's maritime capabilities. This state-of-the-art facility will bring together Fiji's maritime security authorities, enhancing capabilities to protect local fishing industries, provide natural disaster assistance and rescue services, and address the shared challenges faced by our Blue Pacific<sup>1</sup>.

In 2019-2020, RFN reported conducting a total of 121 Search and Rescue (SAR) operations with 63 lives saved. These cost a total of \$192,000. However, no SAR operations was reported for the 2020-2021 period whilst in 2021-2022, a total of 135 SAR operations were reported with 389 lives saved and 37 lives lost during the operations.

#### c) RFMF's Land Forces Command

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 the government. In terms of crisis response during these reporting periods, the RFMF had participated in the Bush Fire assistance in Australia, HADR operations during the cyclone and heavy flooding in all of the four division as well as the COVID-19 response nationwide. In terms of annual commitment, the RFMF

<sup>1</sup> The Blue Pacific concept is based on the idea that the Pacific Ocean and its island nations are not just a collection of individual states but a single, interconnected entity that is united by shared geography, culture, and challenges.

commits 60 percent of its total manpower and equipment in the course of any HADR operations.

### 3.2.2 Key Strategy 2: Regional Cooperation and Security

The Boe Declaration on Regional Security was adopted on 5 September 2018. It recognizes the new declaration on an expanded concept of security including human, cyber and environmental security, and frames regional responses to emerging security issues. A summary of outputs during the years under review is tabulated below:

Years	Reporting of Achievements
2019-2020	Exercise Cartwheel – a Battalion exercise conducted with Bravo Company 1 <sup>st</sup> Battalion, 27 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of 2 <sup>nd</sup> Combat Brigade and US 25 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Division hosted by Delta and Golf Companies of the 3FIR.
	Attended the Coral Warrior Planning Conference, Australia and conducted the Coral Warrior Program later in February.
	Bula Force Taskforce: Through the Vuvale Partnership, deployment of Engineering detachment to assist the recovery efforts of post Australian Bushfires.
	Deployment of Fiji Contingents to work in unification with global security allies, like the United Nations.
2020-2021	The operational output for the RFMF had been hampered during this reporting period due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
	CONOPS – Concept of Operations was established by RFMF in collaboration with other stakeholders which specified the role of RFMF during and after COVID-19
	RFMF’s engagement on Peacekeeping; Middle East Deployment – 1,114 troops; 341 in Sinai; 197 in Iraq, 146 in Lebanon and 284 in Syria.
	Bula Force – continued the deployment at the height of Bushfire in 2020 on a 6-week program
	Coral Warrior Engagement -deployment of 37 RFMF troops to Gallipoli Barracks in Brisbane for training.
2021-2022	Deployment to Solomon Islands – to date Fiji maintains a fifteen men squad to assist the Australian in maintaining security on Honiara.
	Continued to maintain relations with the United Nations Peace Keeping Operations (PKO) and Observer missions in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and Sudan.

*Table 3: Summary of output achieved during the reporting periods from 2019-2022*

### 3.2.3 Key Strategy 3: Support to Government and Well-Being of All

The RFMF has shown support to the government in terms of infrastructure development projects including construction of hospitals, health centers, teachers’ quarters, roads, bridges and the provision of access and utilities in remote areas of Fiji. A summary of achievements are highlighted below:

Years	Reporting of Achievements
2019-2020	Construction of 13 teachers' quarters, a hospital in Rotuma and various road improvements on Vanua Levu and Viti Levu.
	HADR Assistance – TC Harold, COVID-19 Response
	Blue Lane Initiative – conducted by RFN with quarantine enforcement and security operations.
2020-2021	HADR Assistance – 3 recorded hurricanes and COVID-19 (first and second wave) operation continued.
	Assisted the Fiji Police Force and the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji in the eradication of the Giant Invasive Iguana in Qamea Island, Taveuni.
	Joint operations with the Fiji Police Force on drug enforcement tasks and other security related issues.
2021-2022	Coral Warrior Engagement

Table 4: Summary of Output achieved under Key Strategy 3 during the reporting periods from 2019-2022

### 3.2.4 Key Strategy 4: Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR)

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, provide 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.

Years	Summary of Activities
2019-2020	TC Sarai and TC Harold (Category 4). RFMF responded in two phases and included the delivery of immediate relief supplies. RFMF also assisted in opening up telecommunications which were affected by the cyclones.
	RFMF Covid Response – deployment of 60 personnel in various covid assistance tasks throughout Fiji.
	Blue Lane Initiative – The RFN was involved in the assistance rendered to BAF and Ministry of Health and Medical Services through quarantine enforcement and security operations.
2020-2021	The RFMF was employed to bolster HADR manpower during the heights of the first and second wave of COVID-19
2021-2022	The RFMF provided HADR in the aftermath of three Tropical Cyclones that hit Fiji during this fiscal year – TC Ana, TC Bina and TC Cody

### 3.2.5 Key Strategy 5: International Peace and Security

The RFMF continued to participate in UN Peacekeeping around the world as part of the Governments Foreign Police. During the periods under review, the RFMF deployed a total of 480 peacekeepers and observers in:

1. UN Administration in Iraq (UNAMI);
2. UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), Golan Heights, Syria;

3. Multinational Forces and Observers (MFO), Sinai, Egypt;
4. UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS);
5. UN Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO), Israel;
6. UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL);
7. UN Mission to support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA), Yemen; and
8. Solomon Islands.

### **3.3 Committee Findings**

The Committee's findings are outlined below:

#### **3.3.1 Presentation of Annual Reports**

The Committee discussed the RFMF's failure to submit annual reports to Parliament for an extended period, with the last known submission believed to be in 2005. The Committee expressed concern over the lack of accountability, given the RFMF receives significant funding. The RFMF clarified that the 2019–2020 report lacked audited financial statements due to the Auditor-General's delay, but subsequent reports (2021–2022) included them. The Committee emphasized the need for a consistent reporting format, as variations in the 2019–2022 reports made them difficult to interpret. RFMF explained that the earlier reports followed a calendar year, while the 2021–2022 report was realigned to match the fiscal year, accounting for format differences.

The Committee recommends that RFMF should ensure the timely submission of its annual reports to Parliament, with a focus on reducing the delay that has been observed since 2005. Reports should be submitted within a fixed timeframe as per the Financial Instructions 2010 and Financial Management Act 2004. The RFMF should also standardize its reporting format across all reports. This will ensure consistency and improve readability and comparability. A clear and uniform structure should be adopted for both narrative and financial sections of the reports.

#### **3.3.2 Constitutional Mandate of RFMF**

The constitutional mandate of the RFMF was discussed, highlighting concerns over public perception and trust due to past human rights abuses. In response, it was noted that 2021 was a transitional period marked by leadership changes, including the appointment of a new Commander and adjustments to senior positions. In 2022, a new strategic plan was introduced to guide the RFMF's progress, especially in the absence of a national security strategy. A key focus of this plan is enhancing professionalism through leadership development, competency building, and strict adherence to the rule of law. The RFMF aims to rebuild trust by strengthening its personnel and ensuring compliance with legal standards.

To rebuild public trust, the RFMF should establish independent oversight mechanisms to ensure compliance with legal standards and human rights norms. This could include independent audits, civilian oversight bodies, or partnerships with human rights organizations to review RFMF actions.

#### **3.3.3 Military Justice System**

An inquiry was made regarding the military justice system, including the handling of misconduct allegations, reported and resolved cases, and the existence of a whistleblower

policy. It was stated that the RFMF follows regulations outlined in the Manual of Military Law, which is under review and awaiting government approval. Once endorsed, these changes will impact operational regulations. While there is no formal whistleblower policy, the system functions through the chain of command, providing mechanisms for grievance redress. When asked about the possibility of introducing a whistleblower policy, it was noted that legal consultation would be required, and no discussions on the matter had taken place yet.

The Committee suggests that RFMF engage in consultations with legal experts to explore the implementation of a comprehensive whistleblower policy and incorporate it into their operational regulations once the Manual of Military Law is approved. This will enhance the trust and confidence of both personnel and the public in the military justice system, ensuring a more robust mechanism for grievance redress and ethical conduct.

#### 3.3.4 Upholding Values and Credibility

A question was raised regarding how the military defines the “well-being” of Fijians and how it maintains its values and credibility to avoid being used as a political tool. In response, it was stated that the military is focused on developing its personnel through competency, leadership, and adherence to the rule of law to build a more professional force. It was emphasized that military members come from the wider community, meaning external influences will always exist. However, efforts are being made to counteract this by fostering professionalism, ethical decision-making, and integrity. The goal is to ensure that personnel uphold the rule of law while remaining committed to ethical leadership.

#### 3.3.5 Maritime – Fishing and Surveillance Patrol

An inquiry was made regarding maritime operations, including fishing surveillance patrols and challenges faced between 2020 and 2022. It was noted that activities during this period were significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to operational restrictions. While physical patrols were limited, monitoring continued through satellite imagery. The relevant data was confirmed to be available and would be provided to the committee.

Concerns were raised about the monitoring of Fiji’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), drug infiltration, and the challenges of ensuring full surveillance. Fiji's EEZ spans 1.3 million square miles, but monitoring is limited due to the availability of only one patrol vessel and two smaller boats. Collaboration with regional partners, local communities, and government agencies helps to address these limitations. A new Maritime Essential Services Centre (MESCC) is being established to enhance maritime domain awareness.

Questions were also asked about efforts to educate maritime communities on security risks. Patrol teams engage with coastal villages on issues such as illegal vessel activities, drug



trafficking, and human smuggling. Collaborative efforts with agencies like Customs, the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, and police are ongoing to strengthen awareness programs.

Regarding border security, it was acknowledged that strategy implementation requires a whole-of-government approach. New capabilities and assets will be introduced, but a timeline for full implementation is not yet available. A national security strategy, which was previously lacking, is now in place to guide future security efforts.

Further discussions focused on technological advancements in surveillance, including CCTV, drones, and satellite imagery. It was noted that Fiji has made significant progress in maritime security, with monitoring now at an advanced stage. International agreements help provide additional support, such as aerial surveillance from Australia and France. The new MESC will play a crucial role in coordinating efforts among various agencies, with embedded teams improving efficiency. Surveillance capabilities have advanced beyond 50 percent, positioning Fiji much better than in previous decades for maritime security operations.

### 3.3.6 Annual Funding for Forces on Land and Forces on Sea

Fiji continues to be a significant transit country for heroin and a major Pacific hub for synthetic drugs, including methamphetamine, leading to increased addiction, corruption, and gang violence. The possibility of locally made meth and the role of Fiji as a transit point for cocaine highlight the growing domestic market and the need for robust international cooperation to combat these threats.

An inquiry was made regarding the allocation of annual funding between land-based and maritime forces, specifically the percentage split. It was stated that exact figures were not available, but the distribution is not equal. The Navy accounts for approximately 20% of total personnel, leading to a notable difference in budget allocation. The table below shows a summary of budgetary allocations for RFMF and the percentage allocated to RFN:

	2019 -2020	2020 – 2021	2021 – 2022	2022 – 2023	2023-2024	2024 – 2025
Total allocation for RFMF	\$95.9M	\$81.0M	\$79.70M	\$94.1M	\$103.1M	\$169.6M
RFN Allocation	\$15.4M (inclusive of hydrographic Unit)	\$16.1M (inclusive of hydrographic Unit)	\$14.6M (inclusive of hydrographic Unit)	\$16.3M (inclusive of hydrographic Unit)	\$18.3M (inclusive of hydrographic Unit)	\$20.2M (inclusive of hydrographic Unit)
RFN Percentage	16.1%	19.9%	18.3%	17.3%	17.7%	11.9%
Remaining RFMF	83.9%	80.1%	81.7%	82.7%	82.3%	88.1%

Given the importance of maritime security in an archipelagic state like Fiji, it is recommended that the government prioritize an increase in the RFN's budget allocation. This will address current capability gaps, especially in maritime surveillance, law enforcement, and the fight against drugs, illegal fishing, transshipment of contraband, and people

smuggling. By making these budgetary adjustments, the RFN will be better equipped to address the complex challenges of policing Fiji's maritime borders, combating illegal activities, and ensuring national security in the maritime domain.

### 3.3.7 Violence Against Women and Children

The Committee inquired about how incidents of violence against women and children are handled differently in military barracks compared to private homes. They sought clarification on the procedures, particularly regarding the involvement of military or Fiji police.

In response, it was explained that, in addition to Military Law and the Laws of Fiji, three key policies address such issues: a zero-tolerance policy on domestic abuse or violence, sexual harassment, and drugs. These are classified as "no-drop" cases, meaning they are taken seriously and acted upon immediately once reported.

The Committee noted the absence of a whistleblower policy and highlighted concerns from independent organizations about the challenges of implementing such policies in environments where fear of victimization by superiors exists.

It was stated that while a whistleblower policy could be considered, it would require legal review. However, the military operates as a small and closely-knit community where issues typically come to light, and once reported, they are thoroughly investigated and addressed.

### 3.3.8 Review of the RFMF Dress-code

The Committee inquired about the review of the RFMF dress code mentioned in the 2019-2020 annual report, particularly regarding changes relevant to civilians.

In response, it was explained that the review focused on evaluating the uniforms worn by the RFMF as part of ongoing development. With advancements in technology and operational needs, traditional cotton uniforms have been found to be detectable by infrared. Research is being conducted to identify alternative materials that enhance security and improve the functionality and safety of uniforms, considering options available globally.

### 3.3.9 Engineering Corps Responsibility

The Committee inquired about the utilization of the engineering corps, specifically their activities at Cunningham and whether they are deployed in the field. Although not directly related to the annual reports, the question arose due to the ongoing cyclone season. In response, it was stated that the engineering corps is currently working on six projects. Plant Troops are handling minor tasks, while those involved in vertical construction are engaged in a government project in Savusavu, which has been ongoing since last year. Most current projects are continuations from the previous year, but additional requests are expected as the

year progresses. Some requests are declined due to limited manpower, and engineers coordinate with the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development to prioritize projects.

### 3.3.10 Board of Survey

An inquiry was made regarding the absence of a board of survey in the 2021–2022 annual report, particularly concerning the RFMF's assets. The response confirmed that the RFMF is addressing outstanding issues related to stores management, which is an annual requirement. It was noted that this is still a work in progress, but a board of survey has been conducted since the report's publication.

### 3.3.11 Auditor General's Report

An inquiry was raised about an expenditure of \$58,204 for peacekeeping missions that was charged under Head 49 but not reflected in the RFMF's receipts and expenditures. The Auditor General's report indicated that this discrepancy led to an understatement of the total operating expenditure for the reporting year. In response, it was acknowledged that the issue had been identified, and the Director for Logistics and Acquisition had addressed the anomalies in financial reporting before the relevant committee. The concern was highlighted further, with an emphasis on the importance of resolving the matter as it violates the Financial Management Act of 2004, particularly regarding the proper allocation of taxpayers' money. It was noted that steps are being taken to address and improve the situation.

### 3.3.12 Construction of an Intensive Care Unit – George Mate Medical Center

An inquiry was made regarding the construction of an Intensive Care Unit (ICU) at the George Mate Medical Center (GMMC) at Queen Elizabeth Barracks (QEB) during the COVID-19 pandemic, including its current status, budget allocation, and any use of funds since the pandemic. It was explained that the ICU was built as a backup to the Colonial War Memorial (CWM) hospital in case it became overwhelmed during the health crisis. Equipment for the facility was provided by the Ministry of Health and Medical Services. The facility was mainly intended to support health personnel conducting outreach efforts, ensuring their safety by keeping them separate due to the risk of contracting the virus.

It was clarified that the GMMC is used by RFMF personnel and their families. Furthermore there is a health center at the Joint Task Force facility at Blackrock Camp in Votualevu Nadi which operates in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and serves RFMF personnel and the surrounding community. Regarding medical supplies, the RFMF follows the Ministry of Health's procurement system and has not encountered significant procurement challenges, as the medical needs are generally minor.

### 3.3.13 Funding Sources

An inquiry was made regarding the funding sources for the RFMF, specifically whether any funds come from MFO (Multinational Force and Observers) or the RFMF's own military enterprises, and whether the RFMF generates revenue under its current leadership. It was clarified that the funds from peacekeeping remittances are sent directly to the government, and the RFMF does not handle the reimbursement process, though they are aware of the amount, which is approximately \$12 million annually for UN peacekeeping operations.

With regards to the farm at the Force Training Group, Nasinu, it was explained that the farm was initially set up to supply root crops and vegetables to the RFMF but no longer generates income due to government financial regulations. The RFMF must now go through formal contracts for supplies.

### 3.3.14 Review of Veteran Affairs Bonuses and Benefits

An inquiry was made about the review of veterans' affairs allowances and the benefits available to RFMF veterans, as well as any plans for future improvements. In response, it was stated that since Veterans Affairs is now under the Ministry of Defence, discussions have begun to review the existing allowances and benefits. Considerations are being made regarding potential privileges for ex-servicemen, and discussions on this matter are ongoing.

### 3.3.15 Job Evaluation Exercise

The Committee was informed that the last job evaluation undertaken by RFMF was in 2005. The Committee feels that this may be a contributing factor to officers leaving for greener pastures. Given the number of training attended by officers, that mechanism must be in place to retain these skilled and experienced officers. The Committee recommends a job evaluation followed by a review of the RFMF's compensation and benefits packages. Competitive salaries and benefits are crucial to retaining skilled and experienced officers, particularly in a competitive job market where officers may be tempted to leave for better opportunities. The review should consider factors such as allowances, career progression opportunities, and non-monetary benefits.

### 3.3.16 Cadet Training and instilling discipline amongst schools in Fiji

The Committee was informed that while at the Force Training Group, that only two schools are Gazette to be part of the RFMF Cadet Training; Natabua Secondary School and Queen Victoria School. Other interested schools intending to offer cadet training would require approval from the Ministry of Education and RFMF with the understanding that all associated costs will be borne by the school.

The Committee is of the view that the cadet training program should be seen as part of a broader initiative to address bullying and discipline issues in schools. In addition to cadet training, the Ministry of Education and RFMF should consider integrating anti-bullying and conflict resolution components into the program to further enhance student behavior and school culture. The RFMF, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, should develop a comprehensive and standardized cadet training curriculum tailored to meet the educational and developmental needs of secondary school students. This curriculum should include elements such as physical fitness, leadership development, military history, and values like respect, integrity, and discipline.

### 3.3.17 Public Relations

For the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF), public relations is crucial for maintaining public trust, fostering positive relationships with stakeholders, and ensuring transparency in its operations, which is vital for its constitutional role. The public perception and confidence in the security agencies in being able to deliver on their role has been undermined by human rights abuses in the past, the Committee feels that public relations can help the RFMF address these concerns effectively, manage negative publicity, and restore trust and social cohesion when necessary. The Committee acknowledges the good work already undertaken and encourages continued efforts to enhance the RFMF's public image and accountability. A strong public relations strategy will be key to addressing concerns and will position the RFMF as a positive force for national security and community development.

### 3.3.18 Accredited Officers – Training/Courses/Further Studies

The Committee was informed that officers are given opportunities to undergo further studies (leave with pay), and attend training and short courses, however, there are no mechanisms in place to increase the salary band for these officers returning to work after the completion of their courses.

The Committee recommends that the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) establish a structured mechanism similar to the one employed by the Ministry of Education, where officers returning from further studies or training are given the opportunity to have their salary bands reviewed and adjusted based on the additional qualifications or skills they have acquired. This mechanism would recognize and reward the professional development of military personnel, providing an incentive for continuous learning and growth. By aligning salary adjustments with the completion of further studies, specialized training, or short courses, the RFMF can motivate officers to enhance their skills and expertise, ultimately benefiting the Force's overall operational effectiveness.

### 3.3.19 Republic of Fiji Navy

#### 3.3.19.1 Need for Overarching Legal Mandate and National Policy for RFN to be empowered

As an archipelagic state with a large sea area under its jurisdiction, Fiji has always had difficulties policing its maritime borders and guarding against illegal fishing, illegal transshipments of contraband and people smuggling. Fiji's naval capacity has traditionally been under resourced, resulting in capability gaps. However, RFN relies heavily on regional partners for information sharing and capacity building.

The RFN's effectiveness can be significantly improved if it is governed by clear and robust legislation, adequately resourced, and follows a coherent strategy. The RFN's responsibilities in maritime law enforcement must be explicitly outlined in the relevant legislation. Currently, these responsibilities are often unclear, requiring annual government gazettes to enable RFN officers to carry out these critical tasks. At present, the RFN relies on the Fisheries, Customs, Immigration, and Marine Act to perform its duties, but its enforcement powers under the Act remain ambiguous. Additionally, the process of granting enforcement powers to naval officers is lengthy and complicated.

The Committee recommends that a comprehensive maritime law enforcement framework be developed and implemented to address the broad range of RFN duties that would significantly improve the efficiency of naval officers in fulfilling their roles. Fiji is currently developing its first maritime strategy, and the RFN's role is expected to be prominently featured in this document.

#### 3.3.19.2 Close Collaboration between Maritime Enforcement Stakeholders

The RFN must enhance its collaboration with other maritime enforcement stakeholders in the country, including the Ministry of Fisheries, the Police Transnational Crime Unit, the Police Maritime Unit, Fiji Revenue and Customs Services, Biosecurity Authority of Fiji, the Ministry of Environment, the Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji, and the Department of Immigration.

Sharing information and intelligence is essential for addressing maritime security issues. The Committee was informed that in the past, these organizations have often operated in isolation, which can result in disconnected decisions, inefficient use of resources, and missed opportunities. Given the sensitive nature of certain intelligence, it is crucial to prioritize the development of systems that facilitate information sharing and to revise legal frameworks to include data security measures.

The Committee recommends a coordinated, cross-sectoral, and interagency approach which is a more effective and efficient method for tackling these challenges. There have been successful examples of interagency coordination in the region, such as New Zealand's National Maritime Coordination Centre, established in 2003. This center integrated the work of multiple agencies and developed a unified national strategy for addressing maritime risks. Through interagency cooperation, outcomes were more favorable, especially considering the financial limitations of individual agencies. Fiji should consider adopting a similar approach to address its diverse maritime security challenges.

#### 3.3.19.3 Fight against Drugs

As mentioned in 3.3.6, Fiji remains a key transit point for heroin and a major hub for synthetic drugs, such as methamphetamine, in the Pacific. This has contributed to rising addiction rates, corruption, and gang violence. The possibility of locally made meth and Fiji's role as a transit route for cocaine underscores the expanding domestic market and the urgent need for stronger international cooperation to address these challenges.

Given the current resources of RFN, there is inadequate reach in presence and visibility in our Fiji waters. Therefore, the Committee recommends that as per practice in Australia and New Zealand that our naval officers be trained and empowered to perform duties similar to that of coast guards. Further, RFN should be equipped with additional to increase patrol frequency, extend patrol reach, and reduce response times to illicit activities and search and rescue. This could involve the acquisition of faster, more durable, and technologically advanced vessels designed for long-range operations.

#### 3.3.19.4 Need for cohesion within the national security architecture

During its site visit to RFNS Stanley Brown in Walu Bay, the Committee was informed that Fiji has numerous laws concerning maritime and national security, with several organizations having overlapping responsibilities. The Committee recommends giving careful consideration to the idea of creating a 'Department of Maritime Affairs,' comprising government agencies responsible for managing maritime issues such as maritime safety, boundaries, and marine environmental protection. Establishing such a body would help streamline reporting lines and facilitate the prompt resolution of urgent matters.

#### 3.3.19.5 Limitations with Expert Analysts

The Committee was informed that RFN 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.

The RFN should continue to expand its attachment programs with regional navies and global forces, offering opportunities for RFN officers to gain hands-on experience in real-world maritime operations. These attachments allow personnel to observe best practices in diverse operational environments and bring back valuable knowledge to strengthen the RFN's own operations. An increased number of exchange programs will foster strong bilateral ties with partner nations, facilitating better cooperation on joint maritime security operations.



## **4.0 Sustainable Development Goals**

### **4.1 Relevance to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

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

The RFMF prioritizes climate resilience (SDG 13) by engaging in disaster preparedness, rapid response, and recovery efforts, especially after cyclones and rising sea levels. It works on building climate-resilient infrastructure, like the Blackrock Camp, and partners with regional actors to strengthen capacity for climate risk mitigation.

In line with SDG 16, the RFMF ensures justice is accessible to vulnerable groups and non-discriminatory, supporting the criminal justice process at all stages. It also works with Customs and Fisheries to enforce sustainable maritime resource use within Fiji's EEZ (SDG 14).

The RFMF supports international peacekeeping missions (SDG 16), contributing to global stability and peace, while enhancing national security. It also fosters partnerships (SDG 17) with regional and international allies to strengthen capacity for humanitarian and disaster relief operations.

By aligning with the SDGs, the RFMF addresses both immediate security needs and long-term sustainable development, promoting a resilient, peaceful, and equitable future for Fiji and the Pacific region.

### **4.2 Gender Equality in Parliamentary Scrutiny**

The Parliament of Fiji Standing Orders 110 (2) requires the Committee to give full consideration to the principle of gender equality so as to ensure all matters are considered with regard to the impact and benefit on both men and women equally.

The RFMF recognizes the importance of gender inclusion and women's role in advancing peace and security, aligning with the global Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. While gender equity is emphasized in operational planning, there is a gap in tracking women in leadership positions within the RFMF. To address this, the RFMF could implement policies promoting women's recruitment, retention, and advancement, while overcoming barriers such as biases in leadership selection and limited training opportunities. Integrating gender perspectives into operations ensures that military activities, including peacekeeping, are inclusive and responsive to diverse needs.

Through regional partnerships and international peacekeeping, the RFMF has the opportunity to highlight female leadership and encourage gender-balanced participation. Strengthening internal accountability and transparent data collection on women's roles can further advance gender equity and improve operational effectiveness, aligning with global standards and enhancing Fiji's security framework.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence has carried out an in-depth review of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) Annual Reports for the years 2019-2020, 2020-2021, and 2021-2022. This review process was thorough and carried out in a bipartisan manner, ensuring that members from different political backgrounds worked collaboratively to evaluate the performance and operations of the RFMF during these years. The review focused on several key areas of military governance, operational efficiency, resource management, and overall strategic direction.

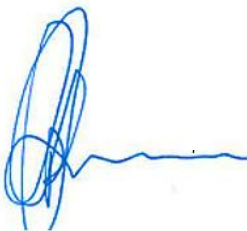
The Committee's report includes thirteen (13) detailed recommendations that aim to enhance the effectiveness, accountability, and transparency of the RFMF. These recommendations cover various aspects such as improving the timeliness of annual reports, standardizing reporting formats for consistency, introducing independent oversight mechanisms like audits and civilian involvement, and strengthening the RFMF's human rights compliance. Additionally, the report calls for better resource allocation for maritime security operations, improvements in personnel compensation and retention strategies, and the development of more effective training programs, especially in conflict resolution and anti-bullying.

## 6.0 Committee Members' Signatures



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Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua  
**Chairperson**



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Hon. Rinesh Sharma  
**Deputy Chairperson**



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Hon. Ratu Isikeli Tuiwailevu  
**Member**



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Hon. Penioni Ravunawa  
**Member**



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Hon. Virendra Lal  
**Member**

## **7.0 Annexure**

### **Published evidence**

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Written evidence, transcripts, and supporting documents can be viewed on the Parliament website at the following link:  
<https://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-foreign-affairs-and-defence/>