



**Pacific Media Watch**

**TRANSCRIPT – INTERVIEW BETWEEN BULO AMALAINI  
LIGALEVU – LEGGE AND REVEREND AKUILA YABAKI –CHIEF  
EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF THE CITIZENS CONSTITUTIONAL FORUM  
IN FIJI - ON NIU FM/531PI FIJIAN PROGRAMME  
SATURDAY 6<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2009.**

**Special Introduction of the Rev Akuila Yabaki to the listeners**

**BAL:** Good evening Rev. Yabaki.

**RAY:** Good evening Bulou Amalaini.

**BAL:** We are indeed most grateful to you for agreeing to this interview whereby we can discuss issues regarding current events happening back home at this time so that you can inform us the Fiji people living in Aotearoa who are listening to this programme. As I have already informed you we will be discussing other issues first before we address issues regarding the Methodist Church in Fiji. We believe that the CCF does not agree with Media Censorship whereby freedom of the media is being curtailed and information cannot be transmitted freely around Fiji and also regionally and internationally. What are your views on this?

**RAY:** The censorship of media means that it is difficult to get national news broadcasted out of Fiji without it being censored by the Regime. We have to find an alternative way of transmitting these information to the outside world particularly when we are depending on the international community to help out in this situation. So we must find a way to get such information across to Aust, NZ and Great Britain and also for the people to exercise their basic human right of freedom of speech or to express an opinion freely.

Yes it is true that our Constitution has been abrogated, however, basic human rights still exist globally and this includes the right of freedom of speech . Every human being has the right to freedom of speech and although the Public Emergency Regulation is in force in fact this is the second one in place there is a censorship on news items being broadcasted or are being edited in Television as well. We have to try and work a way around these censorship.

I have just returned from a meeting of the United Nations in Geneva whereby a topic on the Freedom of Expression was discussed. We can apportion some of the blame of this freedom of

expression to the ousted Government for allowing a lot of hate speeches to be heard in Parliament but these speeches could not be overruled because the freedom of expression was being upheld. The members used the freedom of expression as smokescreens to certain topics instead of speaking the truth.

**BAL:** I find that many people cannot use this same freedom of expression these days especially so when we ask them to be interviewed on what is happening back home.

**RAY:** Yes people are not so forthcoming for fear of victimization whereby they could lose their jobs and all interviews are being screened as directed by the Regime. This does not augur well for a solution instead we need to keep the dialogue open. And as I have mentioned before there were some discriminatory overtures in the last Parliament but that does not mean that the freedom of expression should be curtailed altogether.

**BAL:** Well its no wonder people are not so eager to discuss these issues when we approach them for such interviews. Another disturbing factor that I would now like to address is the continuing arrests and detention of civilians by both the Police and the Military. I thought they had done away with such detentions.

**RAY:** We are concerned at the arrest and detention of people by the police and military. Following the abrogation of the Constitution on April 10<sup>th</sup> the Public Emergency Regulation (PER) was promulgated for thirty days which concluded on 10<sup>th</sup> May then it was extended for a second term of thirty days and it should end sometime this week, however, rumours are rife that it will be extended yet again.

This PER is embedded in our Constitution and can be executed by Parliament as a security measure if there is civil unrest or disturbance in the country. It has never been used before until the coup was staged in December 2006 and more recently after April 10<sup>th</sup> 2009. Although it is being said that an extension is imminent I hope that it will not be renewed for another term and we can get on with our freedom of speech and also media freedom.;

**BAL:** What about the freedom of Religion and Belief ? What rights does an individual have with regards to this ?

**RAY:** The main reason for the imposition of the PER was to control the various opposition groups who counteracted all statements that the Regime put out with regards to its Clean Up Campaign when it first staged the Coup. These and such comments were contrary to the objectives set up by the National Council for Building a Better Fiji in their efforts to move Fiji forward. So the PER was executed as a measure of controlling freedom of expression and also freedom of religion and belief.

**BAL:** Another area of great concern to us living outside of Fiji is the topic of Discrimination – what are your views on this ?

**RAY:** There are many types of discrimination – racial discrimination, colour, creed, womens rights and the rights of a child which has been signed by Fiji and which reports must be submitted to the UN on a regular basis. These reports have been sent, however another form of discrimination is also seen in the electoral process .Before the 2006 Coup the CCF have already recommended the doing away of the Communal Voting System ie voting on racial lines and have recommended the adoption of a voting system similar to that being used in New Zealand whereby people vote across

the board and not on racial lines. This is the type of electoral reform needed in Fiji because in the past elections there have always been a lot of animosity between the two major racial groupings. A lot of negative energy is being wasted on racial discrimination instead of addressing relevant issues such as electricity, water, roads and transportation.

**BAL:** And so are we going to adopt this NZ system in the upcoming elections ?

**RAY:** I had recommended this change whilst I was still a member of the NCBBF committee out of which was borne a Presidential Forum to address the implementation of such a system. It would have required the contribution of all the major political parties and such a forum was well underway until the events of 10<sup>th</sup> April 2009 when it was put on hold until now.

**BAL:** Now we will move onto the issue of the Methodist Church and the cancellation of its Annual Conference by the regime. It is believed that the interim Prime Minister is demanding for the sacking of two senior Methodist Church Ministers whom he says are the cause of incitefulness and causing instability between the Regime and the Church.

**RAY:** I was not part of that discussion., however, I was talking to a former President of the Methodist Church of Fiji who now resides in New Zealand and who has just recently returned there and who is very much involved. His name is Dr Tuwere and he informed me that there were certain items on the Agenda that were not relevant to the Conference matters but had political connotations. In fact there was this 10 point plan that was sent to the Church for discussion at the Conference by the Department of Social Welfare which had some political issues. The interim Prime Minister wanted these removed and it was done so. In addition to this request the Interim Prime Minister also called for the removal of these two Methodist Church Ministers not from their role as Ministers of the Church but from the Conference Organising Committee.

It is interesting to note that a similar case was put into effect by the Methodist Church before the 2008 Conference whereby a senior church member of 40 years standing, Mrs Lorini Tevi, was asked by the Church to hand in her resignation because of her involvement in the NCBBF committee. That is what the interim PM is saying that if she was asked to step aside because of her political involvement then the same treatment should be given to these two Ministers. This is seen as double standards

**BAL:** Dont you think that Bainimarama's request is really moving the country backwards and is not in line with what his Regime is proposing in the Charter which is to move Fiji forward?

**RAY:** The Methodist Church chose not to be a member of the NCBBF, hence the reason for their asking Lorini Tevi to resign from the Methodist Church.. The Methodist Church is very much in disarray if you look at the history of the stand that the Methodist Church has taken in the past twenty years you will note that it supported the first Coup of 1987 and also George Speights Coup in the year 2000. But it opposed the Coup of 2006 because it believed that Fiji should be governed by Fijians who are their members as if it were their Divine Right. This was the case when Dr Bavadra and Mahendra Chaudrys Labour Party won the General Elections of 1987 and 2000. The Methodist Church did not support because these two were not members of the Church.

**BAL:** A few Church members that I have spoken to in Fiji are of the opinion that the Conference Agenda should concentrate on issues affecting their members such as : Youth Imprisonment, Unemployment and Poverty. What are your thoughts on these ?

**RAY:** These issues have been raised at all the Methodist Church Conferences in the past but they have not been actioned. They get a mention and then shelved again for the next conference. These are issues that many NGOs for example can help with if they are approached but it is not done and the Church should be involved in a continuous process rather than waiting for the next conference to table the same old issues.

**BAL:** These are the exact comments and remarks I heard from some Church members in the Western Division whilst I was there last week. They reiterated that these issues have been tabled time and time again but nothing concrete has been done about them.

**RAY:** Indeed this is the work of certain NGOs looking after the various problems such as the ones you have mentioned but the trouble with the Church is they seem to reaffirm their numbers rather than looking at ways and means of solving these problems by having the required dialogue with these specialist groups who are always open to assisting various groupings such as the Church. These issues should be addressed on a daily basis and not only when the Conference is held once a year.

**BAL:** Thank you Rev. Yabaki . Is there anything else you would like to add or comment further upon ?

**RAY:** There must be continuous dialogue, respect and finding solutions along the way and the Church should be reminded that dialogue does not only take place when a problem arises but it should be present at all talks concerning the way forward for a better Fiji. The fact that they chose not to be a member of the NCBBF depicts them as floating and not being stable enough to help move the country forward.

In as far as showing opposition to the Coup, I for one have always opposed all the Coups that we have had in Fiji in the past twenty years. But the question is what can we do now. The answer is found in the Charter of the NCBBF. The Methodist Church did not want to be a member and have suspended their members who volunteered to be a part of it and so now they want answers to the way forward. The answer lies in them having continuous dialogue with the Government who have been elected to lead the country and they should be left to govern without interference. If they had followed this path they would'nt have faced all these problems but the trouble is they refused to be a member of NCBBF when they were invited and when they wanted to push certain issues through they thought that they could just come in and seek an appointment to make these changes and found that it was not the case.

**BAL:** Today, the Marama Roko Tui Dreketi issued a statement saying that they have accepted the decision made by the Interim Government reagrding the cancellation of the Conference which the province of Rewa is hosting and have yet to receive a confirmation from the Head of the Methodist Church. The people of Rewa are also awaiting the outcome.

**RAY:** I still believe that the Conference can still go ahead if the Church deletes those political items from the Agenda and at this stage I am not sure whether the issue on the two Ministers refer to their removal as Church Ministers or as members of the Conference Committee. If it is the latter then I have no doubts that permission will be given for the Conference to still go ahead as planned.

**BAL:** Thank you very much Rev.Yabaki for taking time off your busy schedule to talk to us the Fiji people living here in New Zealand and around the world through our website. It was very informative and we wish you well in your term in office. It is our prayer that you will be blessed during your time of leadership. Thank you once again.

Research and educational resource provided by the Pacific Media Centre | Creative Industries Research Institute  
School of Communication Studies | AUT University | Private Bag 92006 | Auckland 1142 | Aotearoa/New Zealand  
[pacific.mediawatch@aut.ac.nz](mailto:pacific.mediawatch@aut.ac.nz) [www.pacmediawatch.aut.ac.nz](http://www.pacmediawatch.aut.ac.nz) | [creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/nz/](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/nz/)

