

To Hon. Josaia V. Bainimarama  
Prime Minister of the Republic of Fiji

11 October 2021

Re: Position Government Statistician of Fiji

Your Excellency,

The International Statistical Institute and the International Association for Official Statistics express their grave concern over the decision of the Fiji government to arbitrarily terminate the employment of the Government Statistician of Fiji on 15 September 2021. We ask the Government of Fiji to urgently address several issues that are vital to maintaining confidence in the current and future official statistics of Fiji.

Many of the statistics regularly produced by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics, as with other national statistical offices, are used by investors, international rating agencies and others who trade and engage with Fiji. International, regional and national concerns are significant, not only among the global and regional statistical community. The government's decision has damaged trust in the Fiji Bureau of Statistics and its excellent international reputation, as well as its practices, staff, and in its future work.

We are concerned that the Minister of Economy took a view on the methodology of the survey, and used this as a reason for the dismissal, without apparently seeking professional statistical advice. Article 2 of the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Statistics states:

*Principle 2. To retain trust in official statistics, the statistical agencies need to decide according to strictly professional considerations, including scientific principles and professional ethics, on the methods and procedures for the collection, processing, storage and presentation of statistical data.*

The termination of the appointment of the Government Statistician by political direction without due process would be a breach of this principle and would in many countries be seen as unconstitutional. It is the Government Statistician who guarantees to those outside the country that their trust in official statistics is well founded. The Government of Fiji needs to act urgently to provide vindication of its actions independent of political process so it can rebuild trust in Fiji statistics.

The international statistical community, represented by the International Statistical Institute and the International Association for Official Statistics, believes that this must involve:

1. Taking urgent action to have independent professional expert persons review the quality of the HIES report to determine the degree of confidence that can be placed in its findings.

2. Establishing a proper administrative process, as expected with the termination of a top-level civil servant in a statutory role, to determine the context in which the stated conflict with the actions of the Government Statistician has occurred, and whether the response on this matter has been justified. This process would determine whether Mr Kemueli Naiqama should retain the position of Government Statistician.

3. Appointing any new Government Statistician by a process that prevents this recent action by the Minister for Economy from politicizing the role of Government Statistician. The long tradition of appointing the head of the Fiji Bureau of Statistics based on professional competence must continue.

4. Clarifying and reinforcing the extent of independence of the Fiji Bureau of Statistics, and if necessary, strengthening the Statistics Act of Fiji on this matter.

The Government Statistician in all countries is the key publisher of evidence about the economic and social conditions within the country, and of social and economic progress. The Government Statistician has a degree of political independence that is greater than others who also do this. When such persons are removed from office for what appear to be political reasons, then the practice of science in other fields is more likely to come under political pressure. If the issues we have raised are not resolved, there will be many who have heightened concerns about the integrity and independence of any persons involved in producing trustworthy evidence about the conditions and progress of Fiji in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Stephen Penneck  
President  
International Statistical Institute

Misha Belkindas  
President  
International Association for Official Statistics