



COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

Brussels, 24.07.2000
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COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL

**on the opening of consultations with the Republic of the Fiji Islands under
Article 366 (a) of the Lomé Convention**

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Recent events

On 19 May 2000, seven armed and masked men under the leadership of George Speight stormed Fiji's Parliament at 10.00 am, taking hostage the Prime Minister, Mahendra Chaudry, and some 40 Members of Government and Parliament. Mr. Speight declared that he had acted in the name and interests of all indigenous Fijians. He also claimed to have taken all executive power, including the powers of the President, and to have revoked the amended Constitution, passed by Parliament in 1997 and put into application in 1998.

Following this unlawful act,

- the President, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, on 27 May, was obliged to remove the democratically-elected Prime Minister and his Government, as they were no longer considered to be in a position to perform the functions of their office. The President also announced that the House of Representatives would be suspended for six months;
- on 29 May, Armed Forces Chief Commodore Frank Bainiramara, with the consent of Ratu Mara who stepped aside, assumed executive power and declared martial law;
- on 30 May, the new Military Government issued a decree revoking the Constitution of 1998.

On 6 June, the Military presented an outline of a plan which is expected to restore civil order. The plan foresees that three months after the resolution of the hostage crisis, power would be handed over to a civil interim President, who would appoint a new interim Prime Minister and Government. The main task of the interim Government would be to work out a new constitution and call new elections. The hostage-takers should be granted amnesty, but by no means become members in any civil interim Government.

Throughout the current hostage crisis, the security situation in Suva has remained relatively stable, despite occasional arson attempts and looting activities by members of the Speight group.

The armed insurrection of 19 May was condemned on the same day by a statement of the Presidency of the EU; a second statement was issued on 29 May.

The International Community has unanimously condemned the attempt by the hostage-takers to jeopardise the successful process of democratisation which has been taking place over the past decade. While it is generally deemed too early to impose sanctions, various forms of sanctions are being considered and prepared, should this attempt to overthrow democracy in Fiji succeed, resulting in a racially-biased Constitution and Government.

In light of the above, and pursuant to Articles 5 and 366 (a) of the Lomé Convention, the Commission proposes to the Council:

- to invite Fiji, as an ACP State, to hold consultations, with a view to assessing the situation in detail and, if necessary, remedying it in accordance with the terms of the attached letter. The aim of the consultations is to underline the importance attached by the European Union to respecting the essential elements referred to in Article 5 of the Lomé Convention and to ascertain Fiji's intentions regarding compliance with these provisions.

ANNEX

DRAFT

Brussels,

His Excellency Isikel Mataitoga
Ambassador of the Republic of the Fiji Islands
Mission of the Republic of the Fiji Islands
Av. de Cortenberg, 66
1000 Bruxelles

Sir,

In a statement of May 19th 2000, the Presidency of the European Union condemned the use of armed force against a democratically elected Government, called for the immediate release of hostages and for the prompt return to democratic procedures and government within the terms of the Fijian Constitution. In a second statement of May 29th 2000, the European Union expressed its deep concern about intentions to replace the democratically elected Government by an interim administration and requested Fiji leaders to find a constitutionally acceptable way out of the crisis. It finally was emphasised that a non-democratic solution would certainly have implications for the EU's continuing cooperation with Fiji.

On May 30th 2000, your Government issued a decree revoking the Fiji Constitution Amendment Act 1997.

Pursuant to Article 366 (a) of the Lomé Convention we have the honour to invite the Republic of the Fiji Islands to enter into consultations with a view to assessing the situation in detail and, if necessary, remedying it.

We suggest that these consultations take place on in Brussels in the premises of the Council of the European Union.

Please accept, Sir, the assurance of our highest consideration.

For the Council

For the Commission

Copies: Chairman of the Committee of ACP Ambassadors
 Secretary General of the ACP Group of States