



Australian Federation of University Women Inc.

2/12 Tollington Ave, Malvern East, Vic 3145

<http://www.afuw.org.au>

September 4, 2008

The Hon. Stephen Smith MP
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Smith

URGENT: Re 'People's Charter for Change, Peace and Progress' of the National Council for Building a Better Fiji'

At its Council Meeting on 20 August, the Australian Federation of University Women noted with admiration and concern the document prepared by the Fijian Association of University Women in response to the proposed 'People's Charter' for Fiji. I am enclosing a copy of the document for your attention.

We agree particularly with the following arguments made by FAWG:

- That in attempting to produce long-term solutions to Fiji's problems the Charter fails to take into consideration the interests, needs and views of women, as required by Security Council Resolution 1325 on the role of women in resolving conflict situations and Millennium Development Goal 3 on the empowerment of women;
- That the avowed intention to reduce poverty is flawed by a failure to connect poverty with a lack of education or to recognize the role of education in poverty alleviation;
- That the money required for the proposed expansion of the role of the military would be better spent on education;
- That the high degree of racial and gender imbalance in the military makes it particularly unsuited to bring about the gender and racial equality the Charter professes to support;
- That, above all, any Charter cannot replace and must not be allowed to supersede Fiji's Constitution and will be illegal if passed before free and fair elections are held.

We also consider that the anxiety expressed about possible victimization of those who provide negative feedback on the proposed Charter is well-founded, and that the document represents a very courageous stand by the women of the Fijian Association. We have written to them expressing our admiration and support and noting that we will be meeting representatives from Fiji at the meeting of the Pacific Graduate Women's Network Council in Tonga on 17 September. We would very much like to be able at that Meeting to assure the Fijian Association that they have the support, not only of AFUW but also of the Australian Government, especially given the Government's recent commitment to being a Torch Bearer for MDG 3. We urge you therefore to give a commitment to do everything in the Government's power to bring about a speedy restoration of constitutional parliamentary government in Fiji,

Yours Sincerely,

(Dr) Jennifer Strauss AM
President, Australian Federation of University Women
(encl. FAWG Charter Feedback)
cc: The Hon Andrew Robb AO MP, Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs

