



International Solidarity Network

Statement by Women Living Under Muslim Laws 12 January 2010

The international solidarity network, Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML), condemns the politically-motivated charges brought against human rights lawyer, Imrana Jalal, by the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC) on 1 January 2010. FICAC, as with most significant government bodies since the coup, is headed by a military officer. FICAC was established to investigate and prosecute corruption, but instead has been used to also persecute persons not supportive of the military regime.

A former Fiji Human Rights Commissioner, who has worked with WLUML on law reform and related issues, Ms. Jalal has a long record of public opposition to all unlawful (military and non-military) undemocratic regimes. These include the regimes of Sitiveni Rabuka, George Speight and now, Voreqe Bainimarama; her stance against Fiji's 2006 military takeover is public knowledge.

On 5 January 2010, Fiji's Military Forces Land Force Commander, Brigadier Pita Driti, warned Fiji citizens that they should remember "who is in control." He went on to threaten any dissenters "...there are only a few people who [we] could term as adversaries, but I would discourage them from doing anything and I would like to tell them to keep low and try to cooperate with us in trying to maintain peace otherwise they will be in for something really hard in terms of how we will treat them this year." (Radio Fiji interview)

Ms. Jalal was served with seven charges alleging breaches of the Public Health (Hotels, Restaurant and Refreshment Bars) Regulations, the Food Safety Act and the Penal Code. The charges relate to a business operated by Bottomline Investments. Ms. Jalal is a director of this company but has not been involved in its day to day operations. The restaurant charges normally attract a penalty of FJD20.00 (USD10.00) and are Suva City Council offences. A large number of businesses in Suva operate without a licence, whilst their applications for licences are being processed. This is not a corruption matter, nor one which FICAC is legally permitted to prosecute, according to lawyer, Ms. Jalal.

Threats of rape

WLUML furthermore abhors the military regime's repeated use of grave threats against the person of Ms. Jalal, and her husband. In December 2006, after her published opposition to the military takeover, Ms. Jalal was threatened with rape, via an anonymous call to her mobile phone, and warned to "shut her mouth" or 'they' would shut it for her. The call was traced to a phone booth outside the gates of the Queen Elizabeth Barracks, home of the Fiji Military Forces. Twenty minutes prior to the call, Colonel (now Brigadier) Mohammed Aziz had asked Major Davina Chan to call Ms. Jalal's office to obtain her mobile phone number. Imrana Jalal made a police complaint about the threat of rape, which is a matter of public record.

FICAC has initiated these actions against human rights lawyer and Co-Founder and Board Member of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement, in order to harass and intimidate her into halting her public opposition to undemocratic regimes. Imrana Jalal categorically denies the allegations and intends to strenuously defend herself against the charges. WLUML applauds her for her courageous resistance to aggressive efforts to silence her, and asks international civil society groups and governments to put pressure on Fiji to ensure the safety and freedom of expression of Imrana Jalal, and her husband, and to uphold the rights of Fijian citizens to freedom of speech and dissent.