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P R E S S R E L E A S E

Eni F.H. Faleomavaega
Chairman

The Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and the Global Environment

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Washington, D.C.

**FALEOMAVAEGA RESPONDS, IN PART, TO PM TUILAEPa'S
ALLEGATIONS ON CRISIS IN FIJI**

Congressman Faleomavaega announced today that he is responding to recent comments made by Prime Minister Tuilaepa on the crisis in Fiji.

"My response to PM Tuilaepa is not to argue but to clarify the issues so that the public will be better informed," Faleomavaega said. "In response to the PM's comment that I should only comment on American Samoa-U.S. relations, with all due respect, the people of American Samoa and their elected leaders have every right to speak out about issues affecting the Pacific region and elsewhere, including Fiji," Faleomavaega said.

"The U.S. government is based upon a fundamental system of checks and balances, and provides for three separate but equal branches of government. The legislative branch, or the U.S. Congress, makes the law. The Executive branch, headed by the President, carries out the laws, and recommends new ones. The judicial branch, headed by the U.S. Supreme Court, explains and applies the laws."

“The U.S. Congress is made up of the Senate and the House of Representatives. American Samoa is represented in the House. Every Member of the House and Senate is responsible for representing his/her constituents, and each Member of Congress is also assigned to work on Committees in which he/she represents broader U.S. interests. My Committee assignments include service on the House Committee on Natural Resources and the House Committee on Foreign Affairs where I serve as the third most senior Democratic Member on both Committees as a result of having been elected 11 times by the people of American Samoa, and having served for over 20 years in the U.S. Congress.”

“Currently, I serve as the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs’ Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment. The Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and the Global Environment has broad oversight for all U.S. foreign policies affecting Australia, Brunei, Cambodia, China (including Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan), Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, French Polynesia, Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kiribati, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, North Korea, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Samoa, Singapore, Solomon Islands, South Korea, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Tokelau, Tonga, Turkmenistan, Tuvalu, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Vietnam, Wallis and Futuna, and Fiji. The subcommittee also has jurisdiction over issues relating to the global environment, international fisheries agreements, and the law of the sea.”

“Although space will not allow me to respond point by point to PM Tuilaepa’s allegations, I will say that the people of American Samoa who elected me to office know how the U.S. Congress operates, and they understand my role in representing their interests at home and abroad both as their Representative to Congress, and as Chairman of the Subcommittee which has broad jurisdiction for U.S. policy affecting Asia and the Pacific, which specifically includes Fiji. The voters of American Samoa also understand the role of the U.S. Congress in shaping U.S. policy not only domestically, but also in different regions of the world.”

“When the U.S. engages in dialogue or when I meet with leaders in the region in my official capacity as a Subcommittee Chairman, it is not *‘meddling’*, as the PM suggests. Instead, it is my duty as Chairman to fully engage in the process of bringing about peace and stability, and promoting American interests in this region of the world. This is why I have every intention of fulfilling my responsibilities and working closely with Secretary Clinton to develop a more comprehensive U.S. policy for the Pacific Island nations, and to engage in a more pro-active and constructive dialogue with Fiji’s interim government leaders.”

“Like any other sovereign nation, the U.S. has every right to have an opinion about Fiji, and it should be noted that the United States has a fully accredited Ambassador and embassy in Fiji. Our U.S. Ambassador in Fiji is also accredited to Tonga, Tuvalu, Kiribati, and Nauru.”

“Given the importance of Pacific Island nations to U.S. interests, I stand by my position that Australia or New Zealand should not dictate policy for the U.S. when it comes to relations with Fiji or any other Pacific Island nation. While at times I can appreciate New Zealand and Australia’s efforts, the U.S. cannot afford to abdicate its responsibilities but must participate actively in the process.”

“With respect to PM Tuilaepa’s comments about the hearing with Secretary Clinton which was recently held by the Foreign Affairs Committee, several points need to be explained.”

“First, PM Tuilaepa alleged that the hearing was chaired by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. On the contrary, the hearing was chaired by Congressman Howard Berman, Chairman of

the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, who invited Secretary Clinton to explain to nearly 50 Members of Congress that make up the Committee what President Barack Obama's foreign policy will be around the world. Next week, I will be providing media outlets throughout the region with DVD copies of the hearing so that the public will be able to view how this process between the U.S. Congress and the President's Administration works."

"Secondly, the PM's release states that I told the Committee that Fiji was not ready for democracy and elections. This is misleading. As a member of the Committee, I was given the opportunity to have a five-minute dialogue on whatever subject I wanted to bring to Secretary Clinton's attention, and I raised three main issues, including the crisis in Fiji, the need for the U.S. to have a more comprehensive policy towards the Pacific Island nations, and the current political and economic situation in West Papua, Indonesia. About the crisis in Fiji, what I said is that it makes no sense for the leaders of New Zealand and Australia to demand early elections just for the sake of having elections in Fiji while there are fundamental deficiencies in Fiji's electoral process, which gave rise to three military takeovers and even a civilian-related takeover within the past twenty years – along with three separate constitutions to govern these islands."

"Thirdly, the PM stated that *'the leaders of the Forum (not just New Zealand and Australia)...have been unanimous in their condemnation of this military dictatorship in Fiji and now a mere Congressman in Washington is barking up the wrong tree.'* On the contrary, in an April 15, 2009 report, Kiribati's President Anote Tong says a new approach is needed to sort out Fiji's problems. He also stated that *'talks should proceed without input from New Zealand and Australia, because the two countries foreign policies have failed on many levels.'* President Tong also said, *'Pacific leaders may have a better understanding of how to reach Commodore Frank Bainimarama.'*"

On April 15, 2009, Radio New Zealand International reported that *"some leaders in Pacific nations are calling for more dialogue with Fiji's interim government but they say input from New Zealand and Australia won't be helpful, and the failure of the two countries' foreign policies in bringing about a return to democracy needs to be taken into account."*

The report quoted Cook Islands Deputy Prime Minister, Sir Terepai Maoate, as saying, *"Fiji's Commodore Frank Bainimarama feels cornered and bullied...and talks should be pursued."* The Deputy PM continued by stating, *"You only have to find a process where there will be trust in the two parties to sit down and go through the process of dialogue."*

In a newspaper article dated April 17, 2009, Tonga's Prime Minister Dr. Feleti Sevele said, *"Fiji needs help and the Pacific Islands Forum countries should engage and maintain an ongoing dialogue with the Fijian regime and help them to find their way back to normality."*

On April 20, 2009, Solomon Islands Prime Minister Derek Sikua stated, *"The Pacific Islands Forum should not rush into implementing sanctions against the Fiji government."*

"So, while PM Tuilaepa may prefer to simplify the issue, the reality is Fiji's history is complex. The legacy of Fiji's colonial past has never been fully resolved since Fiji gained its independence in 1970. To date, no resolutions have been established to provide balance and fairness to both Fijians and ethnic Indians. In fact, Fiji has had four coups in the past 19 years. In the two coups of 1987 and the political crisis of 2000, ethnic tensions played major roles. Indians control many of the small businesses while New Zealand and Australia control major banking and commercial enterprises. However, indigenous Fijians control much of the communal land and military establishment, with serious divisions existing between traditional leaders and lower-ranking Fijians."

“Fijian rural land is mostly leased to Indian sugar cane farmers, and indigenous Fijians view land as their leverage against Indian economic power. In 2000-2002, most of the long-term land leases were due to expire. According to the Congressional Research Service (CRS), *‘many native Fijians feared that the government would impose lease terms that were too long at prices that were too low.’*”

“While these factors played into the political crisis of 2000, other analysts, according to CRS, suggest that the coup attempt *‘was also a product of conflicts between western and eastern confederacies of indigenous Fijians, rich and poor.’*”

“Now, as a result of the 2006 coup, we have a situation where the interim government is insisting that the electoral process be reformed before an election takes place, in order to address, as he states, ‘raced-based’ politics that contributed to coups in 1987 and 2000.”

“Regardless of what anyone’s opinion is about these developments, we must work together to resolve this crisis. Now is Australia’s opportunity to demonstrate its leadership by offering constructive dialogue rather than isolating Fiji from the regional community. By the same token, New Zealand’s current policy of disallowing Fiji’s citizens to travel to New Zealand is shameful and should be revised.”

“Recently, I met with one of Fiji’s most celebrated and distinguished public leaders, Mr. Paul Manueli (Rotuman and Samoan descent). Mr. Manueli is a former Commander of the Royal Fiji Military Forces, former Fiji Cabinet minister, former Senator and successful businessman who once served as General Manager of BP in the South Pacific. He is also a graduate of the Sandhurst Royal Military Academy in England. Because of Mr. Manueli’s previous association with Fiji’s military operations years ago, he was denied entry to New Zealand for medical treatment, and instead had to travel to India to have an operation on both of his knees.”

“Mr. Manueli is slowly recuperating now, but one can only imagine the hardships that Mr. Manueli and many other Fijian families have had to endure because of New Zealand’s narrow-minded policy regarding travel restrictions for Fijian citizens. This policy on travel to New Zealand should be revised or eliminated entirely.”

“Furthermore, while some may perceive my meetings with PM Bainimarama as an endorsement of his policies, this is not so. I met with PM Bainimarama because I believe in active engagement with the leaders of Fiji’s interim government and, despite our differences, every effort should be made to assist and not isolate or condemn Fiji, especially when Fiji is at a critical point in its political, social, and economic development. This to me is the Pacific way of dealing with our neighbors in crisis.”

“Bearing in mind the seriousness of this crisis, now is not the time to condemn but to build. Now is not the time for verbal attacks and heavy-handed tactics. As neighbors who care, now is the time for dialogue, for offering new ways to resolve Fiji’s unique problems that are very much unlike any other Pacific Island nation. Now is the time for smart diplomacy and continued engagement which is the hallmark of President Obama and Secretary Clinton’s new foreign policy initiatives, which I totally agree with and fully support,” Faleomavaega concluded.

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