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

Eni F.H. Faleomavaega
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The Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and the Global Environment

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**FALEOMAVAEGA SAYS AUSTRALIA/NEW ZEALAND
HEAVY-HANDED APPROACH TO FIJI MAKES
MATTERS WORSE; U.S. ROLE REQUIRED**

Congressman Eni F.H. Faleomavaega, Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and the Global Environment, today published an op-ed in *The Sydney Morning Herald* and its sister publication, the *Brisbane Times*, concerning the failure of New Zealand and Australian policies toward Fiji, and the need for a more pro-active and independent American role in addressing Fiji's problems.

In the op-ed, Faleomavaega stated that, "For too long, the United States has deferred to Australia and New Zealand in the region, despite their obvious policy failures. With regard to Fiji, Canberra and Wellington have employed heavy-handed tactics and misguided sanctions that have hurt average Fijians far more than the interim government at which they were targeted. Punishing average Fijians will never solve the country's problems. Rather, by making life in Fiji increasingly difficult, Canberra and Wellington may well be sowing the seeds of civil unrest and violence."

Faleomavaega recently visited Fiji and met with leaders from all sides involved in the current crisis, including interim Prime Minister Bainimarama, and former Prime Ministers Qarase and Chaudhry.

“Based on the discussions I had with Fijian leaders, I am more convinced than ever that the United States should play a more pro-active and independent role, one offering the country a better chance of emerging from its current crisis, eliminating its ‘coup culture’ once and for all and establishing a more stable government,” Faleomavaega said.

The consequences of the failed policies of Australia and New Zealand and the absence of American leadership may even lead to the development of a new strategic reality in the Asia-Pacific region. “As Australia and New Zealand attempt to strong-arm Fiji into complying with their dictates, China has moved in to fill the vacuum, offering grants, concessionary loans and enhanced trade opportunities. Of course, as a country with global economic reach, I commend China’s efforts to provide economic and financial assistance to these island nations. After all, China is just as much part of our Pacific community as Japan, New Zealand, Australia and the United States,” Faleomavaega wrote.

Faleomavaega noted that the unique cultural and traditional circumstances must be taken into account in addressing Fiji’s crisis, stating that, “Foreign policy elites in Australia and New Zealand erroneously view the region with a Eurocentric mentality without having a better sense of appreciation of Fiji’s colonial history. In Fiji, for example, the country’s complex ethnic mix – coupled with its chiefly, provincial, religious and family rivalries – is not adequately appreciated by Canberra and Wellington. Fortunately, the Obama Administration is gaining a better understanding of Fiji – and how our friends in Canberra and Wellington have dropped the ball.”

“Fiji’s interim Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama has made it clear that he intends to draft a constitution that will reflect the country’s unique culture and history. He has also promised to enact electoral reforms that will establish equal suffrage and to hold free, fair and democratic elections. I believe the United States should take the interim Prime Minister at his word, and help Fiji move that process along as swiftly as possible,” Faleomavaega concluded.

The op-ed is available at <http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/us-should-act-smart-and-help-fiji-make-reforms-20090527-bnm2.html> and at <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/opinion/us-should-act-smart-and-help-fiji-make-reforms-20090527-bnm2.html>.

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