

FIJI JOINT SEMINAR

Main Theme

CRIME PREVENTION AND CONTROL

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The seminar recognized that the maintenance of law and order is a serious issue and the present situation warrants deep concern and consistent efforts towards prevention and control.
It felt strongly that Government must allocate adequate resources towards this end. At the same time, it was recognized that Government alone cannot prevent and resolve the problem and that the community as a whole must supplement the efforts of the Government and Police.
2. The extent of the involvement of our youth in crime must be a cause of anxiety. Evidence from statistics suggest a large number of young indigenous Fijians succumbing to crime and forming a majority in our prisons. This necessitates special attention towards resolving this problem as it affects indigenous Fijian youths.
All available measures should be utilised towards changing this reality, including the strengthening of the family unit, the knowledge and practice of religious values and traditions and customs among these young people.
3. Any strategy that is aimed at fighting crime necessitates compilation and analysis of reliable data. Research will facilitate the work of those involved in law enforcement and others to detect the trends, its causes and thus enable effective and efficient approaches to crime containment, and eradication.
4. The seminar endorses the view that government, the private sector and NGO's should give priority to addressing poverty, unemployment and inequality of income in all areas of national development planning, bearing in mind the importance of social development.
The seminar felt that poverty, unemployment and crime were related but could not define the exact relationship between these variables. However, it did feel that the growing inequalities in income distribution was a key factor in the increasing crime rate.
There is an urgent need for ongoing discussion and analysis to address the root causes of crime.
5. As there was a dearth of reliable data on unemployment and on the availability of jobs, it is recommended that a register be developed and regularly updated and that a job exchange scheme be established.
6. Community centred correction is an important method, with adequate training for counsellors. Towards this end, the establishment of probationary offices, use of respected retired personnel, the involvement of NGOs and development of half-way homes, should all be effectively pursued.
7. The relevant laws should be reviewed so offenders who have paid their debt to society and who have been proved to have reformed, can have their convictions cleared so they could be gainfully re-employed, including in government services. Government is in a position to address and identify the ways to effect change, most importantly, attitudinal change. Private sector employers willing to assist in such re-employment and rehabilitation schemes should be identified.
8. Community education must be pursued and broadened to include social, cultural and moral ethics that would help eliminate domestic violence, child abuse, sexual violence and mistreatment of the elderly.
Successful existing methods should be encouraged and strengthened. At the same time, the police and the courts must be encouraged to take prompt, firm and effective countermeasures.

9. The seminar recommends that there be an enactment of a specific law relating to domestic violence and that it includes extended family and de facto relationships.
10. The seminar strongly recommends that the Juveniles Act should be repealed and that a Children, Young Persons and their Families Act should be passed to create a Family Court, provide for special protective measures for children under the age of 20 years, create offences specific to children and allow for community-based punishment.
11. Because alcohol is a contributing factor in 80% of all crime, this seminar recommends that there is an urgent need to educate the public on its consequences, right from the home, school, and beyond. This would include counselling and treatment for the addicted and strict enforcement of deterrents. Greater awareness needs to be created regarding the existence of Alcoholics Anonymous. Information is considered vital to any campaign condemning and stigmatising over indulgence while reinforcing moderation.
12. The seminar recommends that breathalyser tests should be expanded and current legislation be reviewed.
13. It is recommended that the Police should be adequately equipped to deal with property crimes, while care must be taken in minimizing exposure of society to occurrences of violence and depravity.
14. The views of victims need to be given a strong voice in the criminal justice system and provision be made for the cases of families put in need as a result of crime. The appropriate authorities should address and devise legislation or compensation for victims of crime.
15. One of the important associations with crime is rural to urban movement and the resulting disillusionment from non-fulfilment of educational, job, housing and other expectations. The seminar recommends and encourages Government to provide for our rural people, basic infrastructure, wage employment opportunities, and the amenities and utilities found in urban areas. The provision of these services would complement or enhance rural lifestyles but should not be aimed at a wholesale duplication of urban conditions. The Government, in formulating and executing policies for our rural people, should ensure the participation of the private sector.
16. Town planning should take into account the social and cultural issues of its inhabitants. The need for recreational facilities and open space is an essential spiritual and human requirement. Relevant legislation should be consolidated for these needs. An integrated, multisectoral and consultative approach is essential.

Therefore it is recommended that a holistic approach to urban housing should be adopted. Schools, religious centres, industrial areas, shopping facilities, and other amenities need to be located within accessible distances. The tenants of housing estates have to feel they have a stake in their community. A sense of ownership is essential and it is recommended that housing be geared towards private ownership.

There is an urgent need for government to address the important issue of affordable or subsidized low cost housing. A very large sector of the community is earning wages inadequate to qualify them for present low-cost housing. Currently this is giving rise to growing squatter settlements and serious overcrowding with consequences for education, family life, health and public order in the community.

17. The seminar acknowledged Government's role .in the formal education process and the provision of life skills. The role of private organizations and enterprises has not been fully utilised. It is suggested that the education of young people is a partnership between Government, the private sector and the various community organizations including religious bodies who are the "consumers". The responsibilities of both for providing skilled training and job creation is acknowledged by the seminar participants.

The stigma of academic failure should be redressed. Greater emphasis should be given to vocational as well as non-formal education.

18. The role of the community is vital and basic in instilling or inculcating moral values. These values guide young people in their future lives. The seminar therefore recommends that the role of the family should be reinforced and facilitated through Government concessions including tax benefits, housing and other means.

19. It is recommended that the community should become involved in decision-making and take responsibility for its members. Crime and deviance is not an individual problem; it affects the community at large and it is only right to encourage the community to accept the responsibility and take the appropriate action.

Government and the private sector should consider assistance to community-based projects. This will show tangible support, commitment and foster civic culture. However, continued support is very necessary to foster this civic culture.

20. The seminar acknowledged the crucial role of the media in educating the public, portraying positive images and displaying sensitivity in reporting crime. It is recommended that a campaign against crime be launched with the support of the Fiji Media Association.

21. The seminar recommends that government should provide all necessary training for the establishment of a National Prosecution Service.

22. The seminar recommends that special courts should be set up to deal with young persons, presided over by Magistrates. Specialisation must be encouraged to deal with juvenile offenders.

23. The seminar recommends that government should make available resources to enable the Community Work Act 1994 to be brought into effect as this legislation provides for alternative sentencing as opposed to imprisonment. All other options of sentencing should be further explored.

24. In order to ensure the ready access of the people of this country to the Courts, it is recommended that legal aid needs drastic revision and it is timely that all efforts be made to introduce new legislation to include customary laws and the establishment of legal aid centres in the shortest possible time frame.

25. The seminar recommends that the funding for legal aid should come from interest on solicitors' trust accounts and from a Government grant.

26. The relevant authorities should take appropriate measures to shorten the delay period in bringing cases to trial and improve court administration.

27. The seminar recommends that government should encourage and provide funds for rehabilitation of prisoners coming out of correctional centres so as to minimise re-offending by them. Government should recognize the role of NGOs and religious organizations in the rehabilitation of prisoners.

28. There is an urgent need to revise the Laws of Fiji.

29. The issue of the introduction of Casinos to Fiji should be examined thoroughly taking note of all diverse views before determining the course of action.
30. Bearing in mind the successful completion of this seminar in partnership with UNAFEI and JICA and the need for a follow-up, research into the implementation of a future action programme is necessitated. The government is requested to ask JICA to send Japanese experts to assist in the improvement of crime prevention and control.