

# THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

REPUBLIC OF FIJI

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## **Statement by the Electoral Commission Chairperson**

**Mr Suresh Chandra**

**Introduction to Elections:**

**A Learning Module for Year 10 Social Science**

**11/01/18 - SUVA**

The Attorney General and Minister for Education

Members of the Electoral Commission

Permanent Secretary for Education

The Supervisor of Elections,

Representatives from the Ministry of Education,

Staff of the Fijian Elections Office

And Invited guests.

Bula vinaka and a very happy new year to you all.

It gives me great pleasure to officiate at this joint event to handover year 10 school curriculum on elections to the Minister for Education.

I am informed that the final product has been through a joint effort by the Curriculum Development Unit of the Ministry and the team at the Fijian Elections Office.

Personally I have had the opportunity to sight the materials and I am impressed by the simplicity of the content while at the same time the visual graphics are quite captivating.

According to section 75(2)(b) of the Constitution, the Electoral Commission has the overall responsibility to conduct voter education in Fiji.

It is the wish and intention of every election management body the world over to enter training on elections in school curriculum. We are fortunate in Fiji through our Ministry of Education to achieve this.

Ladies and Gentlemen, one must not simply regard a person who is over 18 as one who should receive election information. We strongly believe that every Fijian has a right to know the election process – and know that elections are the means to form government.

The curriculum handed over this morning will train 16 year olds about the Fijian Electoral Process. In 2 years' time, these 16 year olds will join the over 620,000 already registered Fijians as voters. Today marks the beginning of Fiji's investment in its future democracy.

The European Union Election Observation Mission to the 2006 Fiji Election at paragraph 12.2 found that the voter education was not effect in sufficiently reducing the invalid votes. In 2006 the invalid votes according to International IDEA was 6.9%

In 2014, the total invalid votes was just 0.75% which certainly speaks volumes about the ultra-simple voting system in Fiji under the legal framework. At the same time, the FEO had done a good job at educating voters on how they are required to vote in the new system.

The Multi-National Observer Group in its recommendations noted "Voter and civic education should be introduced in the secondary school curriculum in order to raise voter awareness in future elections"

I am excited that there will come a time when invalid votes will be insignificant and the voter awareness focus shifts from an extensive 'how to vote' to 'lets all vote'

I thought it best that at this occasion I reminds all of us in this room that 2018 is election year. The eyes of the world will once again be on us. We must show the world that Fijians can participate in an election while at the same time respect each other, respect each other's opinion, respect each other's beliefs. We must not create divisions in our societies based on ethnicity, religion or opinion. Our future generations expect nothing less from us.

I would like to congratulate the Supervisor of Elections and his team for another milestone achievement and I thank you all for your attendance here today.