

# THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

## REPUBLIC OF FIJI

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

**Mr Suresh Chandra**

### **2018 General Election Publications Launch**

**Suva – 18th January, 2018 – 3:00pm**

Fellow Electoral Commissioners, Heads and Members of the Diplomatic Corp, Leaders and members of Political Parties, The Commissioner of Police, Members of the Media, Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen;

Ni sa Bula Vinaka and a very warm welcome to you all this afternoon.

Today, we will launch some important publications that will be used in preparation for, during and after the 2018 General Election.

This afternoon, we will unveil to you all, the Candidates Handbook, the Media Handbook, the Provisional Voter List and the Provisional Polling Venue List.

Ladies and gentlemen, generally in Fiji, an election is viewed as an exercise to be conducted by the Electoral Office. It is viewed as something that is the complete responsibility of the Electoral Office and at the end of the Election, after the results, when the observers do a report, the whole report is sort of slapped onto the Electoral Office as – ‘this is your report’.

But that is not the case. An election is something that deals with several stakeholders. For instance, one – yes, of course, the Electoral Office. But two is Parliament because Parliament makes the laws based on which elections are held.

Then there is the Parliamentary Standing Committee. The Parliamentary standing committee is charged with reviewing electoral reports and then dealing with the necessary legal requirement that need to be looked at. Then of course there are political parties. The

political parties are the key players in an election so they cannot be said to be not part of the elections.

Speaking generally, looking at the world politics, political parties are sometimes good players and political parties are sometimes bad players.

In some countries, political parties so powerful they even stop people from going into polling stations. They are so rich that they buy votes. But in Fiji we have laws that protect Fijians against that.

Then we have voters. Voters are the most essential component for an election. They are the whole reason why there is an election.

And then, we have the media. The media is sort of the conduit between a voter and the information. Whatever information the media produces is absorbed by the voter and it is up to the voter to then siphon the information for one that is most relevant it and then use it to determine who he or she votes for.

Media also plays another important role in terms of the being the voice of individual voters by highlighting matters of national importance.

It is very important that the media ensures that it is reporting facts. Facts that are verifiable. Facts that have been actually verified.

It is not sufficient for the media organization to report if one politician stands and says, 'OK, the river has dried up', and the media just says that the river has dried up without even checking if the river is actually flooded.

Media also plays a significant role in terms of transmitting electoral information from the Electoral Office to the voter. In this sense, the media must make sure that the information that it transmits from the Fijian Elections Office [FEO] or from the Electoral Commission is reported accurately. Don't lose it in paraphrasing.

The FEO informs us that there was a case where we published a feature article and the title of the feature article was amended without consent of the FEO. This must have caused some confusion but it was sufficiently covered in the article.

Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, the Electoral Act, the Political Parties Act and the Registration of Voters Act specifically lays out the roles and responsibilities of parties and the media. The FEO has compiled all these responsibilities in booklets to assist the media and the candidates to understand their roles within the process. We believe that once all stakeholders beef up their capacities on elections, it will contribute to the enhancement of the credibility of the elections. The concept of free and fair election does not only rest with the Electoral Commission. The concept of free and fair election is the responsibility of every stakeholder. And in this case, free and fair elections mean political parties, voters and the media and any other stakeholder must conform firstly to the legal principles. And secondly, they must respect the rights and beliefs of every other person.

The Candidates Handbook is designed, and it's been produced in the major languages as well, to assist any potential candidate to understand the candidate requirements, the legal requirements as well as the process for elections.

The Media Handbook of course, is only in English to facilitate media organizations in understanding the process and what they can and what they cannot cover.

I would like to congratulate the team at the FEO for the hard work they have done they have in producing these important booklets.

Ladies and gentlemen, as we are all aware, the election may be held between April and November this year. And it is a good thing that we have managed to produce some of these essential capacity building material in January 2018. I hope that it will be put to good use. Moving onto the Provisional Voters List.

Ladies and gentlemen, the provisional voters list, as the director will explain later on, this is the first time we are able to produce the first provisional voter list months away from an election.

This is to assist Fijians ascertain where they will be voting and in the event changes are necessary, they can do so.

I just hope it is not the case when it is election time, say sometime later on in the year, someone stands up and says, 'I did not change my details'. At that time, you only have yourself to blame.

Another publication being launched today is the 2018 Provisional Polling Venue List. There were 1361 polling venues in 2014 and the numbers have increased to 1435 after assessments of polling venues in 2016 and 2017.

Ladies and gentlemen, these publications before you today are in line with the Commission's theme – 'Raising the Standards in the Delivery of Elections in Fiji.' The materials and content for all publications have been well researched and thoroughly verified to be authentic, apolitical and transparent.

My fellow Commissioners and I have had the opportunity to sight the materials and we are impressed by the simplicity of the content especially since the material will be available for anyone to use.

And the Supervisor of Elections tells me that there will be more publications in the coming months as the FEO gears up to be in full elections mode by April, 2018.

With these few words, I wish the FEO all the best for their preparations.

Thank you for your attendance today ladies and gentlemen and I encourage you to peruse through these materials.

Vinaka Vakalevu

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