



## International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples

BY RATU TEVITA MARA, 12 August 2011

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I take this opportunity to extend to you my indigenous Fijian and Rotuman brothers and sisters, warm felicitations and sincere greetings on the occasion of the International Day of the World's Indigenous People. It was a day for us, you and I, indigenous peoples.

On Tuesday, August 9, member countries of the United Nations observed and celebrated International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples.

Indigenous Fijians are among the 370 million people of the some 5,000 indigenous groups of people throughout the world.

And while the Special Day for Indigenous Peoples was celebrated throughout the world, in Fiji it passed with no fanfare.

The illegal Military Junta in Fiji deliberately sidestepped any major observance of the International Day and the fact that Fijians and Rotumans are indigenous peoples.

But that was to be expected because of the policies and plans of the illegal regime, and illegal Attorney-General, puppeteer, and Aiyaz Khaiyum and his Muslim family.

The repressive illegal regime declared war against and began to destroy the foundations, tradition and custom of the indigenous Fijian people since the infamous coup of December 2006 removed the elected SDL government from office.

Tyrant Bainimarama and his sidekick Khaiyum took steps to dissolve and do away with the powerful and paramount institution of the indigenous Fijian people, the Bose Levu Vakaturaga (BLV)...the Great Council of Chiefs.

The reason was obvious. As the protector of the rights of the indigenous Fijian people, and also the body which appoints the President and Vice-President of Fiji, inter alia, the BLV stood in the way of Bainimarama and Khaiyum from exercising total and absolute control over the indigenous Fijian people and the other citizens of Fiji. So it had to go.

The illegal power hungry pair turned their attention next to the Methodist Church, the spiritual institution of a majority of indigenous Fijians. The Church is now under heavy pressure from the military junta.

The first two sinister moves prepared the way for what was to come next...the Big Steal of the ancestral lands of the indigenous people. Hatched and plotted by Khaiyum and his Muslim family, the military junta came up with a plan called a Land Bank. According to the plan, Fijian land was to be used by the junta for national, economic and social development. The underhand of it was for Bainimarama and his family and Khaiyum and his family to become national estate brokers to acquire and share out indigenous Fijian land through corrupt practices from which they will acquire huge financial benefits.



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And to ensure that the insidious abuse of office and Big Steal received little or no opposition, Bainimarama launched a plot to divide the indigenous people with development bribes and promises. The old colonial strategy of divide and rule.

The removal of the BLV, the suppression of the Methodist Church and the Big Steal of the ancestral lands of the Fijian people, explain why the military junta paid little attention to the observation and celebration of the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples on August 9.

Other countries of the world and the United Nations did not.

The UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, told the world, "I encourage all (UN) Member States to take concrete steps to address the challenges facing indigenous peoples - including marginalisation, extreme poverty and loss of lands, territories and resources," The UN Secretary-General may have had in mind the situation in Fiji.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms Navi Pillay, pointed out that "indigenous peoples around the world have lost or are under threat of losing their ancestral lands...and natural resources as a result of unfair exploitation for the sake of development."

She added, "...all too often we see conflict between corporations, indigenous peoples and the State over development projects which are initiated without the consultation or consent of the indigenous people..."

"The indigenous people have the right to decide and determine their own development," the High Commissioner declared.

Bravo Secretary-General. Bravo High Commissioner. Your words reflect what is taking place in Fiji.

I urge the Chiefs of Fiji, the Provincial Councils and the indigenous Fijians to heed what the UN Secretary-General and the High Commissioner have said and **stand up for your rights, defend your inheritance** from your ancestors, **be proud** of your indigenous heritage.

I urge all of you to obtain and read the United Nations Declaration on The World's Indigenous Peoples of June, 2006 which sets out the rights of the indigenous peoples of the world to maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures and traditions and to pursue their development in keeping with their own wishes, aspirations and self-determination.

**Thumbs up for Democracy in Fiji**

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