



**Human Rights Council
Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Fiji
48th Session (January 2025)**

Joint Stakeholders' Submission on:

Human Rights in Fiji

Submitted by:

Marist International Solidarity Foundation (FMSI)

(NGO in Consultative Status with ECOSOC)

and

Marist Star of the Sea Province

Marist Brothers, Fiji, Trust Board

Marist Brothers High School

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. This stakeholders' report is a joint submission of the above-mentioned organizations. The report highlights key concerns related to **children's rights** in Fiji, particularly **gender equality, drugs, teenage pregnancy, education, increase in poverty and climate change**. Each section conveys recommendations to the Fijian Government. Although it does not appear as a specific theme, the increase in poverty directly affects all other themes. Poverty will therefore be a cross-cutting element throughout the report.

2. The data and information obtained for this submission came from various sources and includes information from young students, teachers, educators, and other civil society actors living and working in Fiji. All information concerned the period from March 2019 to July 2024.

With this report, we would also like to acknowledge the efforts made by the Government of Fiji on the issues presented in this report since the end of the 3rd UPR cycle to date.

3. **Marist International Solidarity Foundation (FMSI)** is an international organization promoted by the Marist Brothers, present in 80 countries. FMSI has more than 10 years of experience working in the field of international solidarity, advocating for children's rights especially in the field of education. It works at the international level, participating in the UN human rights mechanisms in collaboration with other organizations with similar interests. It has been accredited by ECOSOC since 2011.

4. The **Marist Star of the Sea Province** is the international administrative unit for the **Marist Brothers Fiji Trust Board** of which **Marist Brothers High School** is part. Within these units we find young students, the next generation, who are guided by educators who are expert and committed to teaching and capacity building of children and young people and marginalised group. Their approach is based on the pedagogy of St. Marcellin Champagnat of holistic education and human development for making people autonomous and protagonists of their lives. Currently, the Marist Brothers run two Secondary school, two primary schools in the country, mainly around Suva, the capital city.

5. The **Star of the Sea Province** is the canonical entity in which Marist Brothers High School comes under. The Star of the Sea Province governs and manages Marist Brothers High School under the blessing of the Roman Catholic Church Archdiocese of Suva. The Marist Brothers Fiji Trust Board is the local entity who is the proprietor of Marist Brothers High School. They are the civil owner of the school and is the local entity who carries out this role on behalf of the Star of the Sea Province. Marist Brothers High School is an educational institution that is both recognized by the Government of Fiji as well as the Roman Catholic Church as a school owned and managed by the Fiji Marist Brothers Trust Board.

II. GENERAL REMARKS AND COOPERATION WITH THE UPR MECHANISM

6. Fiji was reviewed in November 2019 at the 34th Session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review. This NGO coalition welcomes the constructive participation of Fiji in the

Universal Periodic Review (UPR). On that occasion, Fiji received 242 recommendations and supported 207 recommendations while noting 35 recommendations. The present joint submission represents the follow-up to the UPR recommendations accepted by the State in 2020.

7. The implementation of recommendations is critical in order to ensure a true advancement of human rights in the State under review. Therefore, Fiji must pay particular attention to effectively follow-up those recommendations in consultation with Civil Society.

III. METHODOLOGY FOR DATA COLLECTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE TOPIC

Methodology:

8. An essential part of the report has been carried out after listening to the voices of children and young people, as well as adults who are in contact with them. This listening directly involved a group of about 20 adolescents, from both the capital and from some of the surrounding villages. So, the main themes, which will be developed later, are taken directly from the voices of children, adolescents and young people.

9. The report highlights the main themes generated by conversations with, young people, as well as listening to their educators. All these voices have also been referenced to the information available from the previous UPR.

Overview:

10. **Education:** the aim is to strengthen the country's education system, asking the State to take measures to this end. It is considered necessary for all young Fijians to have access to the education system, as this will favour adult life, full development and economic independence.

11. **Gender Equality:** It recognises the urgency of working for equality between all Fijians, in particular with regard to women's equality in society, where their voices are heard and in the case of LGBTQ organizations, who are fighting for recognition of their rights throughout society.

12. **Teenage pregnancy.** The number of teenage pregnancies is perceived as an important situation, especially because of the repercussions that this has for adolescent girls. The higher number of pregnancies means an increase in the number of births, although this is not supported by an increase in aid, which leads to a poorer quality of life for newborns, as well as implying a possible increase in infant mortality.

13. **Drugs.** Drug use and abuse is increasing, especially among school children and young people. There is also particular concern about the increase in young people, still of school age, transporting and distributing drugs, especially in areas close to schools. This also leads to poorer levels of public safety, especially at certain times and in certain places.

14. **Climate change.** The consequences of climate change can be easily seen in various parts of the country. These consequences also have a direct impact on the lives of many people. It is enough to see how sea levels are rising, and how this leads to the forced displacement of some populations

near the coast. These displacements also entail the loss of traditions, languages, dialects, cultures, etc., in addition to the economic difficulties that any forced displacement entails.

15. All these issues, moreover, come together when poverty is present, so that the greater the poverty, the more the consequences of each of the issues presented above are suffered. Therefore, it is our understanding that by monitoring poverty levels, and bringing them down, the government will be supporting the other issues outlined above. In the same way, by promoting and developing the points outlined in this report, we are convinced that poverty levels in the country can be significantly reduced.

IV. EDUCATION

16. Our organisations appreciate the work done by the Government of Fiji on this issue. Particularly noteworthy is the government's acceptance of some of the recommendations offered in the previous cycle, such as 140.19¹.

17. There is clear agreement on the need for adequate and comprehensive educational structures that are inclusive of the whole population, especially those of educational age. A society with positive, inclusive and easily accessible education is conducive to future development in all areas of society.

18. We join the recommendation to improve transport to enable easier access to education, especially for those children and young people who live further away from schools and/or cities (139.120). Access to education should not depend on where one lives. This implies the need to ensure that those living in more remote areas or farther away from cities have equal access to education. Similarly, there is a need to ensure access also in contexts of migration², knowing that it is often girls who are first deprived of access to education.

19. To address the education crisis, especially for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children, we recommend the Government of Fiji to:

- a. Redouble efforts to get all children and young people into school, especially in the most vulnerable areas and in rural territories.*
- b. Increase the means for full access to education, ensuring school materials, free school meals and adequate facilities. This is especially relevant for those living in more remote areas³.*
- c. Increase dedicated resources to allow access to higher education for the whole population, providing transport and/or accommodation close to these centres.*

¹ 140.19 Ratify the Convention against Discrimination in Education, as recommended by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Serbia).

² 139.126 Ensure access to quality education for all, in particular for vulnerable children in rural areas or urban migration contexts, and address the high dropout rate, especially among girls (Holy See).

³ Recommendations 139.121 Strengthen measures to improve financial and social services incentives for teachers posted to schools in remote areas (Myanmar); 139.122 Continue its efforts to narrow the gap in the quality of education between urban and rural areas and strengthen the basic infrastructure of rural schools, such as access to water, electricity and communication (Myanmar).

- d. Built more High Schools in Suva to cater for the large number of graduates from the Primary schools.*

V. GENDER EQUALITY

20. From our organisations, we highlight the greater relevance of issues related to gender equality between men and women, as well as in all matters concerning the relationship between people of the same sex. We echo, and appreciate, the measures accepted by the Fiji government on this issue, such as the adoption of the recommendations 139.38 & 45⁴.

21. On women's rights, several recommendations were adopted by the Government of Fiji following the submission of the 3rd UPR cycle, such as the following numbers 139.34-35-36⁵.

22. We join, as a coalition, the government's effort to implement concrete measures, in its laws, to prohibit all forms of discrimination, as outlined in the acceptance of the recommendations. 139.43, 46-48.

23. In order to further improve government policies against gender-based or sex-based discrimination, we recommend the government of Fiji to:

- a. Ensure that the law is enforced against possible gender-based or sex-based violations; - Include women in discussion and decision-making forums.*
- b. Strengthen the role of women in public policies, especially in actions to combat climate change.*
- c. Ensure that the law is applied to possible violations based on gender or sex.*
- d. Include women in discussion and decision-making forums.*

VI. TEENAGE PREGNANCY

24. Teenage pregnancy can be a major problem for individuals, their families, and society in general. Adolescence is a crucial time for personal growth and development, and we believe that certain rights should be guaranteed to this age group.

25. Pregnancies during adolescence can occur for various reasons, which are often complex and not easily identifiable. We are particularly concerned about adolescent pregnancies related to discrimination, difficulty accessing secondary or higher education, and lack of economic resources.

⁴ Recommendations 139.45 Repeal provisions in the Criminal Code that criminalize consensual sexual relations between adults of the same sex (Spain).

⁵ Recommendations 139.34 Strive continuously to enhance the rights of women and other vulnerable groups, such as persons with disabilities and the elderly (Bhutan); 139.35 Take effective measures to better protect the rights of women, children, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups (China); 139.36 Continue to engage positively with human rights organizations to protect all vulnerable groups (Guyana).

26. We support and acknowledge the efforts made by the Government of Fiji to adopt several recommendations of the previous UPR cycle, where it committed itself to redouble its efforts to reduce poverty (139.102⁶).

27. As a civil society coalition we highlight the small number of recommendations in the previous cycle regarding teenage pregnancies, especially unwanted pregnancies. Of particular importance here is the elimination of all forms of sexual violence against women and girls (139.145).

28. For the sake of those who suffer from early pregnancy, and so that this fact is not an impediment to their further full development as individuals, we would like to invite and propose to the government of Fiji to:

- a. Develop, implement and resource a national plan to prevent early pregnancy.*
- b. Implement laws and policies to help teenagers and young women who become pregnant.*
- c. Provide these policies with material resources so that those who experience early pregnancy do not have to drop out of the education system.*
- d. Ensure access to health care, especially for those who belong to vulnerable groups or who live in rural areas that are farther away from adequate health services.*
- e. Encourage spaces where teenage mothers can continue their education while caring for their babies, especially in the first months of life.*
- f. Strengthen the system of aid for young mothers to facilitate the continuation of their studies or their professional and employment development.*
- g. Eliminate and monitor possible child marriages, prohibiting them in all their forms, and taking the appropriate legal measures against those who favour these practices or other abuses against the law in this regard.*

VII. DRUGS

29. We are aware of the work and efforts of the Government of Fiji in adopting measures to eliminate and/or minimise problems related to different types of drugs. We recall, for example, the adoption of recommendation 139.17⁷ of the previous cycle.

30. We also appreciate the efforts to reduce poverty levels in the country, which is often closely linked to drug use and trafficking, as these tend to cause greater problems among the most vulnerable populations (139.105⁸).

31. With regard to the drug trafficking and consumption situation in the country, our coalition invites the government to take into account the following recommendations:

⁶ 139.102 Continue national efforts to reduce poverty through more support for protection programs and social pension schemes (Qatar).

⁷ 139.17 Ensure the effective implementation of the Proceeds of Crime Act in relation to drugs (Somalia).

⁸ 139.105 Continue strengthening the successful social programmes to combat poverty, in the areas of education, health and food, with particular attention to the most vulnerable sectors (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela).

- a. *Provide adequate training to the State security forces, so that they have the capacity and knowledge in procedures related to drug use and trafficking⁹.*
- b. *Implement educational policies to raise awareness in schools, at all stages.*
- c. *Increase vigilance in the streets, especially in school environments, to eliminate as soon as possible any type of substance trafficking in the vicinity of spaces where children and young people are found.*

VIII. CLIMATE CHANGE

32. As young Fijians we are concerned about the situation caused by climate change. We therefore endorse the recommendations accepted by the Fiji government itself at the last UPR in this regard. We consider, with the government, the need to enhance knowledge and awareness of the need to care for the environment, especially relevant in the Pacific Islands. The government's support for recommendations 139.55-56-57¹⁰.

33. We are aware, and we also show our concern, that it is the most vulnerable groups who suffer most from the effects of climate change. Also, sometimes, some problems generated by climate change are linked to other issues we have already mentioned above: education, discrimination. You can see these links in some of the recommendations of the last UPR cycle (139.58 and 139.61).

34. In order to fight climate change and its consequences for the population, we make some recommendations to the government of Fiji to:

- a. *Continue and strengthen concrete actions to fight climate change (as already pointed out in the previous UPR cycle (139.65)).*
- b. *Establish clear and concrete policies and protocols, particularly benefiting the most vulnerable population (children, adolescents, women, elderly...).*
- c. *Provide budget allocations for climate change policies.*
- d. *Increase resources offered to families who are already suffering the consequences of climate change, particularly in coastal areas.*
- e. *Increase resources and strengthen policies to make houses, streets and public spaces more resilient to increasingly frequent environmental problems.*
- f. *Establish relations with civil society organisations, both nationally and internationally, that support and energise government policies. This activity would build mutual trust.*

⁹ 139.30 Further develop and implement the training programmes for officers of the Fiji Police Force, to build up their capacity, in addressing the effective implementation of the Proceeds of Crime Act in relation to illicit drugs (Somalia).

¹⁰ 139.55 Further intensify awareness-raising programmes for vulnerable groups on the National Climate Change and National Disaster Risk Reduction Policies to ensure their inclusive implementation (Philippines); 139.56 Continue its mainstreaming of climate change adaptation across its development activities with the assistance of the international community (Rwanda); 139.57 Continue to advance efforts in response to the negative impacts of climate change with a focus on vulnerable groups, including women and children (Viet Nam).

IX. CONCLUSION

35. As members of Civil Society, we would like to thank the Government of Fiji for accepting recommendation 139.16¹¹, which proposes to work with civil society entities. In this regard, and following recommendations 140.21 and 139.5, also accepted by the State, we are available to assist in the process of implementing measures, particularly through awareness raising.

36. We again encourage the Government of Fiji to continue its efforts to ensure the well-being of its people, and particularly those who are among the most disadvantaged or vulnerable groups in society. At the same time, we appreciate the efforts made in this regard since the adoption of the measures/recommendations of the previous cycle.

37. The main themes presented in this report come from the voices of children and young people in the country – the next generation! As we pointed out at the beginning of the report, it seems particularly important to us to gather the direct voices of people living in the country. We are aware of the need for reports to be of a technical nature, and we have therefore followed the information provided directly by the United Nations.

38. We understand that developing a report of a technical nature is not contrary to including direct voices in it. In our case, due to the nature and objectives of our coalition, the fundamental weight falls on the children and young people of society, since they are the next generation of our organisations.

39. We thank the government of Fiji for its efforts to continue to listen to the voices of civil society, especially children and young people, and encourage it to continue to make its best efforts to improve the situation of rights in the country in all areas.

¹¹ 139.16 Continue working with all stakeholders, including the International Labour Organization, to progress issues raised in the joint implementation report (Australia).