



December 27, 2017

Human Rights Director and MIDA Chair reeks of political puppetry

~ MIDA Chair breaches his own Law

National Federation Party Leader Professor Biman Prasad has today hit out at the appalling display of political puppetry by the so-called Director of Human Rights, Ashwin Raj, ably aided and abetted by the FBC 'Speak Your Mind' host, Shammi Lal Lochan on their segment which was broadcast on radio on Tuesday, 19 December 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqui15-4SCO> (*Speak your Mind Link*)

"The ludicrous situation where a public servant clearly colludes with host of a show of the State broadcaster, FBC — the head of whom is Riyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, the younger brother to the Attorney General who is already reeling under public disquiet on his handling of the ATS employee-owner crisis — to make political statements is so laughable its almost not worth responding to, but we are obligated to respond because taxpayers are not "gullible" as Shammi Lochan suggests, and need to hear a counter view.

The theme of the show was supposed to discuss "hate speech on social media". As the Director of Human Rights, we expected more maturity and leadership in his responses. The listeners and viewers of the show will not need much convincing whether this is what they witnessed or not.

Ms Lochan's maladroit attempt to take pot-shots at the NFP and reframe our public statement of 02 April 2017 is politically motivated twaddle with the objective of inferring that NFP is racially segmented or promotes xenophobia. This is grossly defamatory and we will be seeking legal advice on this.

If Shammi is an intending candidate of Fiji First party she should do the honourable thing and resign instead of using the publicly funded airwaves to raise her profile. The people are not "gullible" and see right through this shameless self-promotional marketing, using a similar approach of a former radio announcer of that same station who now sits in Parliament.

Ashwin Raj, on the other hand continues to over-extend himself both as the Director of Human Rights and Chair of the Media Industry Development Authority (MIDA). Obviously he confuses himself on which hat he wears on any given day because if he was thinking rationally, instead of using publicly funded air-time to "campaign" on hate speech on social media, he should have exemplified balance and advocated for a wider spread of opinions with more studio guests as per Schedule 1 Media Code of Ethics and Practice, of his OWN enabling MIDA Decree.

Even as the Human Rights Director he of all people should be the first to promote balanced dialogue, instead of hogging the airwaves to promote a skewed worldview on "deliberative democracy".

All correspondence should be addressed to the general secretary

If Raj was so concerned about international law and Fiji's compliance on human rights international law, he should firstly restrict himself to what he can immediately control, and what he is getting paid for, and ensure compliance with the Paris Principles instead of shamelessly kowtowing to the government and speaking with glossy eyes fawning over them.

The State broadcaster FBC, the Human Rights Commission and MIDA all have not tabled Annual Reports in Parliament and are supercilious by not humbling themselves and show accountability to taxpayers funding their operations. This is the height of arrogance that is prevalent from this Government down to their stooges like those we see campaigning for them on public funds.

The Chair of the Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission must remove Ashwin Raj immediately. Furthermore, the Prime Minister should remove him as the MIDA Chair.

He has failed to uphold his independence or at least try to show it in the public domain and serious questions arise as to his competence for both roles and his self-aggrandised continuous use of 4 syllabled words is an indictment of his inability to communicate effectively.

Ashwin Raj, by advocating for laws to curb hate speech on social media is a thinly veiled attempt to muzzle the negative publicity of this Government, and he should be speaking to Parliament with facts and figures, instead of hogging the airwaves to promote an unsolicited and tyrannical "campaign" with no public mandate.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Biman Prasad', written in a cursive style.

Professor Biman Prasad
Leader