

Human Rights and Social Justice: Moving beyond the Divide

The Annual Rev. Paula Niukula Lecture

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The December 5 military takeover split opinion on a range of issues often polarizing views from the legal aspect to the value of human life. Amidst the furor of analysis and debate brewed a tense often unkind commentary pitting Social Justice against Human Rights. Part of the Christian faith seemed to be at loggerheads with Human Rights. Is one more important or more right than the other? If so, which is it? Or is the way of looking at the problem the problem itself?

INTRODUCTION

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentleman, Ni sa Bula Vinaka and Namaste, it is a honour and privilege to deliver the 2007 Reverend Paula Niukula Lecture. I knew him as a mature student majoring in Sociology at this university in its very early years and got to know him even better during his later years as he strove to work for social justice, interfaith understanding and co-operation, and for a genuinely multicultural Fiji. He helped found the Fiji Council of Churches' Research Group, the predecessor of ECREA, Interfaith Search and the Citizens Constitutional Forum. He had served as a progressive and popular President of the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma. He was a man of God, a scholar and a visionary. He sought to build bridges amongst our people by reaching out to those of other faiths and ethnicity. After the first military coup de'tat of 1987, the Reverend Paula Niukula provided inspiring leadership and warm friendship and guidance to those of use seeking to find solutions to the political impasse. He was a caring and loving father who received the unreserved support of his equally loving and caring wife and children.

The late Reverend Paula Niukula was our counterpart to the many Christian leaders who have over the years struggled for peace, tolerance, good will and social justice.... I am both honoured and humbled by this invitation to speak at his commemorative lecture.

I wish to acknowledge the vanua of Rewa on which the Laucala Campus and this lecture theatre is located.

As some of you would know my family and I only returned from Aotearoa New Zealand a little more than two months ago. I was allowed leave without pay by Mr Savenaca Siwatibau, the then Vice Chancellor who kindly accepted my reason for seeking leave. Basically, I needed a break from post-2000 coup Fiji politics. Coup fatigue had got me and I needed time out.

I had four years of relative peace in Wellington as an expatriate academic and enjoyed this position thoroughly. My family and I kept abreast with events in Fiji by regular visits and email and phone contacts with relatives and friends. But when asked by Radio NZ's Richard Tamatato if the recent coup was inevitable, I had said that it was unlikely as the outstanding issues between the military Commander and Prime Minister Qarase would be resolved through dialogue. This optimism about the 'Pacific Way' in Fiji was misplaced!

I have been invited in this lecture to address the issue of dissension in the NGO community. There is division of a complex kind in civil society and NGOs over the coup. Things are not black and white but grey and opaque. There is some degree of simplification and reductionism in my dichotomizing of NGOs as Rights Based and Social Justice NGOs. There has been some overlap in the programme of activities and advocacy of these NGOs. In other words these NGOs, both individually and together have been in the struggle for social justice and human rights.

Besides their important work with the poor, children, women, youth, and the disable and on constitutional matters, they became actively involved in the efforts to save the 1997 Constitution. Individually and together, they supported the litigation of Chandrika Prasad against its abrogation.

As the NGO Coalition on Human Rights, they made a joint submission to the UN Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in its session in August 2002. Both the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) and the Fiji

Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) are on record advocating for disadvantaged people. The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre has researched and advocated on land matters and the escalation in the rate of suicides in the late 1990s that correlated with the expiry of land leases.

In 2000 FWCC contributed senior staff time and material resources in our humanitarian activities among the farming families of Muaniweni and Baulevu. They met and held counseling sessions with families and especially women who had been traumatized by the harassment and violence perpetrated against them. Subsequently, FWCC remained among the few organizations that provided on-going support to the displaced people who took shelter at the Girmit Centre Complex in Lautoka.

So the supposedly Rights Based organizations do have a track record on working on social justice issues.

Since 5 December the relative solidarity in the NGO movement has been seriously disrupted. A rupture has happened between certain NGOs that I have labeled (for ease of analysis) as Rights Based and those that claim to stand for Social Justice.

On the one hand the Rights Based NGOs oppose the coup on the grounds that it violates human rights as enshrined in our bill of rights (replacing ballot box with the barrel of the gun); and on the other hand there are advocates of social justice who maintain that the overthrown government was racist (evidenced by affirmative action programmes based on 'race'), pro-wealthy (manifested by increased indirect tax, the value added tax from 12/2% to 15%, privatization of water), failed the poor (seen in increasing inequality, 40% below poverty line, increase in squatter settlements), and was characterized by financial mismanagement and corruption. Its failure to deal with the land question in Fiji as well as the introduction of extremely divisive bills are other reasons for their willingness to 'move on'. While both sides of this particular debate agree that the coup is not legal, the latter see the current situation as providing a unique opportunity to reconstruct a Fiji society that is non-racist and fair to all. This optimism is not shared by those who emphasise human rights violations. Perhaps partly because they experienced threats to their person and military violence at first hand, and they do not trust what is being said in public?

This talk is an extremely modest attempt at shedding some light on the reasons for the division and makes even more modest suggestions on the way forward. If it engenders a modicum of debate and discussion that may lead to more dialogue within the NGO community, it would have achieved its limited purpose. While references are made to civil society organizations, there is no attempt at comment on religious or faith based entities, trade unions, cultural and community organizations.

PUTTING MY CARDS ON THE TABLE

I believe that for the last five years Commander Voreqe Bainimarama was the leading moral voice in Fiji who firmly pushed for satisfactory investigation and prosecution of those who instigated the 2000 coup and mutiny. This contrasted with the stance of those he had installed in power and elements of the Christian clergy.

For much of his tenure as Prime Minister of Fiji, Mr Qarase opposed the 1997 Constitution, did not comply with its power sharing provision, expressed negative views about human rights even after signing the Pacific Plan and the Pacific Leaders' vision statement which commits them to promoting human rights, and his governments made a mockery of the social justice chapter of the Constitution.

Let me make it absolutely clear that I do not support military coups. I am aware of a couple of academics describing the December overthrow of the SDL led multiparty government of Prime Minister Qarase as 'lesser of two evils' and 'a civilized coup'. It is also a fact that a great many ordinary people from all walks of life in Fiji support the overthrow of the Qarase government. They want corruption to be eradicated, and have enjoyed a sense of security and safety that has been unprecedented in recent years. International experience of coups, however, shows that the law of averages is weighted against positive outcomes from military rule or military backed rule. Our own experience of Rabuka's coups and the George Speight debacle provide more than ample evidence of the negative consequences of military involvement in the political process. I know of one significant exception to this generally bleak picture and that is Costa Rica, a central American country. Wikipedia has this excerpt on the history of the country:

"In 1949, José Figueres Ferrer abolished the army; and since then, Costa Rica has been one of the few countries to operate within the democratic system without the assistance of a military.

With more than 2,000 dead, the 44-day Costa Rica Civil War resulting from this uprising was the bloodiest event in 20th-century Costa Rican history, but the victorious junta drafted a constitution guaranteeing free elections with universal suffrage and the abolition of the military. Figueres became a national hero, winning the first election under the new constitution in 1953. Since then, Costa Rica has held 12 presidential elections, the latest in 2006”(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Costa_Rica).

I support the Interim Government’s roadmap to return Fiji to democratic governance and its willingness to implement recommendations of the Eminent Persons’ Group (EPG) through its membership in the Pacific Islands Forum –Fiji Working Group, and urge the Interim Prime Minister to move the country towards a democratically elected government as speedily as possible.

Besides the concerns about corruption, there are significant structural issues facing the country. These include law and order, equitable access to resources and opportunities, unemployment, social inequality and poverty, and the challenges of building an inclusive non-racial multicultural society. Investor confidence is pivotal to expanding the economic cake and this is a product of getting the fundamental rights – political stability and the rule of law which can only be assured in the intermediate and longer term by our return to democratic governance.

The 1997 Constitution’s preferential electoral arrangement has compounded racial divisions, disenfranchised ordinary voters in favour of political party bosses and contributed to on-going political instability. There is some urgency in changing our electoral system to proportional representation.

From the difficulties of building a national consensus on the way forward, it is evident that the freedoms that people have enjoyed in the limited democratic space that we have had in Fiji cannot be switched on and off. The media, trade unions, civil society organizations and NGOs have continued to carry out their functions even though there are emergency regulations in place. I believe that the process is as important as the outcome(s) and it augurs well for our future that there is a vibrant civil society which can hold state power holders accountable now and even more so when the country is returned to parliamentary democracy. To sustain accountable government and to rid the country of those who abuse public office, we need to break from the culture of silence and

conformity and shift to a culture of participatory democracy in which women, youth, disable persons and those who are marginalized have a large say.

5 DECEMBER COUP and DIVISIONS AMONGST NGOS

Since 1987 Fiji has experienced more than a dozen governments and regimes, 4 general elections, a significant by-election, 4 coups and 3 constitutions. Comparing the four military coups that Fiji has experienced, Dr Sandra Tarte points out that until the most recent military take over of government, the coups were to return power to the chiefly establishment, used paramountcy of indigenous rights as justification, abrogated the constitution to put in place more racially based constitution, alienated 'minority and non-indigenous races' and created a dichotomy between indigenous rights and the rule of law. She also identifies the parallels this coup has with previous coups. These include the view that Fiji is not ready for democracy, the political role of the military, "the clampdown on certain freedoms (such as freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of movement) and the exposure of the deep divisions within Fiji society-"and created new ones".

According to her,

"The divisions are racial –which have always marked Fijian society; they are class; they are regional. But ultimately they are political and in a post-coup environment these political divisions run very deep. And what makes the situation so unstable – I guess – is the absence of any peaceful channel to resolve or bridge these divisions. One side holds the guns and that is why they have power. The other side must be silent. In the absence of democratic institutions, there are no obvious ways – short of violence – of redressing this situation. New divisions have also manifested themselves in this latest coup. I alluded to this earlier when I mentioned how some human rights and civil society activists who have traditionally stood against coups have come out in support of (or at least sympathetic to) this one. This is due to their animosity towards the deposed government (and its policies). Some members of the legal fraternity have also given their support to the new regime. As a result, the judiciary is divided; so is civil society – traditionally two of the most progressive forces in society."

My task this evening is to explore one of these 'new divisions'. The coup of 5 December, 2006 has polarised the NGO community and wider civil society. The division is deep and is reflected in frayed relationships but I am told that a number of NGOs have begun the painstaking process towards dialogue. The rupture in their relationships was primarily about trying to deal with the extra legal overthrow of a democratically elected government and its aftermath. The latter has included the detention, interrogation and the violation of human rights of vocal coup protestors as well as those who were exercising their cherished fundamental human right of free speech.

Obviously, tensions and divisions within and between NGOs and CSOs are not unusual. Personality, competition over leadership, differences in views and over the use of resources and competition over donor funding provide much of the 'grist for the mill' of NGO politics. This has been the case here but the deeply felt sense of being let down by fellow travellers and the feelings that this evoke is something very different.

A certain amount of division and even antagonism amongst NGOs resulted from previous coups. In 1987, the now infamous "democracy is a foreign flower" declaration emanated from a statement by a prominent and hitherto progressive Christian women's NGO. The regional Pacific Concerns Resource Centre, the secretariat of the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific (NFIP) Movement, our regional peace movement, wanted to hear both sides of the story – from those who opposed the coup and stood for multicultural democracy and the Taukei ethno nationalists who had fomented instability and celebrated the first rape by Rabuka of our peculiar democracy. In 2000, a number of indigenous organisations, including some Christian church groups very openly supported George Speight's group's putsch and hostage taking. However in a general sense, progressive NGOs including those that formed the Fiji NGO Coalition on Human Rights have stood against the extra-legal overthrow of democratically elected governments.

With the most recent coup, rather serious inter-NGO as well as intra-NGO rifts have emerged. A significant reason for the schism evolves around interpretation of human rights and social justice as well as on the question of who are the genuine human rights advocates. Also, no previous coup offered a 'social justice' agenda, and an 'anti-racist' agenda, like this one. It has therefore split the 'anti-racists' or the 'moderates' that represented 'the middle ground'.

To some extent the division in Fiji replicate the split over human rights in the international community during the period of the Cold War.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ratified December 1966, came into force March 1976), the Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ratified December 1966, came into force January 1976), and the Declaration on the Right to Development (came into force in December, 1986) provide the international charter of human rights applied to all countries of the world. These documents provide the 'bill of rights for the world'.

While the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights provide for various 'individual' freedoms including the right of citizens to elect governments of their choice, 'without discrimination of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status', the Covenant for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights stipulate such 'social' rights as the right to work for fair wages, the right to belong to trade unions, the right to food, housing, education, health and cultural expression. During the Cold War, the United States and its allies dwelt on civil and political rights in contrast to socialist countries which pushed economic and social rights. The former tended to view economic and social rights as not human rights as they were not individual human rights. The latter placed a greater emphasis on meeting the basic needs of their people rather than the niceties of individual liberty. A new consensus emerged in Vienna at the Second UN World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 with the adoption of the Right to Development as a universal and inalienable right.

Professor Arjun Sengupta derives four main propositions from the Declaration: "(A) The right to development is a human right. (B) The human right to development is a right to a particular process of development in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized-which means that it combines all rights enshrined in both the covenants and each of the rights has to be exercised with freedom. (C) The meaning of exercising these rights consistently with freedom implies free, effective, and full participation of all the individuals concerned in the decision making and implementation of the process. Therefore the process must be transparent and accountable, individuals must have equal opportunity of access to the resources for development and receive fair distribution of the benefits of development (and income). (D) Finally, the right confers unequivocal obligation on duty-holders: individuals in the community, states at the

national level, and states at the international level. National states have the responsibility to help realize the process of development through appropriate development policies. Other states and international agencies have the obligation to cooperate with the national states to facilitate the realization of the process of development” (2000, 5).

More generally, the lead UN agencies have accepted a human rights approach to human development:

“A human rights approach to human development is not only about expanding people’s choices and capabilities but about empowerment of people to decide how this should be achieved...claims to rights are ways that powerless and marginal groups can enlarge their political space. Development becomes a right not a gift...including the right to food, the right to good health, the right to housing, the right to education, the right to access to the means of livelihood, the right to have rights, and the right not to be poor”.¹

So what is social justice? Mick Dodson, the Australia’s Social Justice Commissioner, stated in the 1993 Annual Report of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commission that:

“Social justice is what faces you in the morning. It is awakening in a house with adequate water supply, cooking facilities and sanitation. It is the ability to nourish your children and send them to school where their education not only equips them for employment but reinforces their knowledge and understanding of their cultural inheritance. It is the prospect of genuine employment and good health: a life of choices and opportunity, free from discrimination.”

Social Justice is about both sets of rights –it is about fairness of treatment and equity of all citizens of a country. The denial of access to the various freedoms and to the essentials of survival such as work, food, shelter, education and health to categories of the population is grossly unjust. Increasing social inequality and poverty are tantamount to government and state failure to uphold social justice. It is also about building caring and cooperative communities.

¹ UNDP, Thailand Human Development Report, Bangkok, 64

It appears that there is a broad consensus that Human Rights do not differ in importance and that they are indivisible as each one flows on from the others. However, at the level of implementation difficulties can and do arise. Inserting a bill of rights provision in a country's constitution is a relatively easy exercise compared to securing these rights for everyone. With the widely varied contextual cultural, political, economic and social conditions of countries in the world, their capacity and will to secure everyone's human rights in a just way can be very different indeed.

This brings us back to post-December coup Fiji.

SPLIT IN NGOS

While nearly all NGOs accept that the overthrow of the multiparty-SDL led government by the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) was extra-legal, their responses have been very different. Rights –based NGOs have tended to make a rigorous and robust challenge against the coup. Besides their principled objection to the overthrow of an elected government by the threat of force of arms-the substitution of the ballot box by the barrel of the gun - their protestation is also due to their experience of the consequences of political uncertainty and authoritarian rule. Women's participation in decision making is affected and there is an escalation of various forms of violence against them. Increased unemployment affects families and increases the negative effects of poverty on children.

By contrast to human rights oriented NGOs, those working in the social justice area have not been so outraged and indeed there are leaders who seem almost to welcome (in the perception of others) the overthrow of what they perceived as a government that was anti-poor, corrupt and divisive. Such organisations have direct experience of working with Fiji's poor and dispossessed. (Please keep me mind what I said earlier about the overlap in the work of both sets of NGOs in this regard). They have seen the steeply growing number of squatters, the hardship of farming families whose agricultural leases were not renewed, the rise in Indo-Fijian suicide rates with the expiry of land leases, the dire consequences of poverty, children having to drop out from school to eke a living for their family, the alienation of youth who have no prospects of acquiring skills and employment, young girls forced into prostitution, the rising number of street children and the corrosive effects of alcohol and drugs. To them the deposed government's policies relating to taxation and public goods such as water supply were against the poor people of the country.

ECREA for instance in its statement on the current political crisis maintains that “We have and we will always fight for the poor and marginalized in our society” and expresses the organisation’s disappointment at “how the democratic mechanisms of the parliamentary processes were being manipulated to promote extreme nationalistic Bills pushing the rest of our society aside”. It goes on to state that, “even before the build up of the impasse we had stated that we should focus on the issues being raised by the commander and not the person. We had been asking all along about the government’s wisdom on the promoted Bills, the VAT increase, and the Corporatisation of water and how it would affect the different communities especially the poor. We had unceasingly raised the issues even though they seemed to fall on deaf ears”.

The position paper indicates that ECREA had been “raising similar and common issues with the military” but that this does not mean that the organisation supports the overthrow of the government. “We believe that the fact remains from an ethical position that the End does not justify the Means. As a Christian based organisation we will also raise the concern that the means taken will further have bilateral sanctions and collateral damages but moreover the further added difficulties (sic) faced by the people, especially the poor of our society”. By extension it is apparent that organisations such as ECREA will work with the Interim Government to alleviate the plight of the poor in Fiji.

More broadly those sympathizing with the coup because of their social justice work have been making the following arguments:

- ““It seems regrettable that those who have condemned the military takeover seem obsessed with the violation of democracy perspective and fail to recognize the anti-racist and pro-people aspects of the take-over, which could be termed the social justice perspective’. So this is seen as a ‘pro-people’ and ‘anti-racist’ coup, which makes it legitimate.
- Furthermore it has been claimed that the previous government (the one overthrown) ‘clearly showed how democracy could be manipulated to serve the narrow Fijian nationalist interests’. In other words, our democracy was not real democracy. It was in fact deeply flawed, especially when measured against Western standards, and based on the criteria of ‘free and fair elections’. Such a flawed democracy is not as sacred or as worthy of protection. One person even argued that we need a ‘benevolent dictator’ in Fiji to solve our problems. Until then we are not ready for democracy” (Tarte, 2007).

This is in sharp contrast to a number of rights based organisations. It is noteworthy, here that NGOs such as FWRM and FWCC individually and in conjunction with the NGO Coalition on Human rights had also firmly voiced their opposition to government's policies. In a number of instances civil society and NGOs had successfully influenced public opinion against government's initiatives. Thus the joint parliamentary select committee on the 'Reconciliation Bill' recommended that it be shelved.

The schism between NGOs has been replicated within certain NGOs with some members refusing to have anything to do with the Interim Government and others seeing an opportunity to bring about a more just order. The Citizens Constitutional Forum opposed the coup from the outset and has sought to prevent the abrogation of the Constitution. It has asked the Commander to withdraw from the position of Prime Minister but has shown willingness to dialogue with the Interim Government on the road map to democratic governance. This more cooperative approach was the product of several meetings and much deliberation.

At the inter-NGO level, there has been acrimony over the persons who were labelled as 'pro-democracy and human rights activists' by the media and whose human rights were violated by the military and or by supporters of the coup. It is argued that some of those involved were simply SDL supporters with no track record of working for either human rights or social justice. Indeed, the SDL leadership and the Assembly of Christian Churches (ACCF) have publicly opposed and even protested the sexual orientation provision of the Bill of Rights. The ACCF has described the constitution as 'demonic' and SDL throughout its rule maintained constitution change as a priority. As pointed earlier SDL-led governments disobeyed the constitution in several ways. The Methodist Church –led protests in particular created considerable fear and anxiety amongst sexual minorities.

The fact of the matter is that there is no doubt that some NGO and CSO leaders' have had their human rights violated. Two deaths have occurred in custody of persons who were not even 'political'. Those concerned about social justice are duty bound to ensure fairness and respect of human dignity for everyone. Otherwise they stand accused of discrimination – a charge that they make against the ousted government.

Disagreement and tension amongst NGOs have also centred on strategies taken by some NGO leaders in the immediate aftermath of the coup. Some sought to directly confront

the military in various ways including jamming the Commander's mobile phone. This was seen as a very legitimate form of protest internationally that made use of new technology. Previously massive 'fax' attacks had been canvassed as part of campaigns against government policy. However others saw the jamming of the Commander's cell phone as counterproductive and provocative. It was alleged, perhaps unkindly that some NGOs were vociferously opposing the coup to attract more donor support. The very public announcements of new donor funding to a certain NGO and the signalling of donor displeasure to certain other NGOs for not being more forthcoming in their opposition to the coup have fuelled this view.

A particularly unpleasant and regrettable dimension of the division was utterances made by Social Justice advocates in the public arena that ridiculed and trivialised human rights violations by the military of Rights Based NGO leaders. This was most hurtful and will take a long time to heal.

The fact too that the Fiji Human Rights Commission did not immediately take up the cudgel on their behalf intensified the hurt. The FHRC itself has been undermined by dissension. To many the Commission appears to have acted at odds with its remit to uphold, protect and promote citizen's human rights.

FIJI HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

As the division in the NGO community, there is a schism within the Fiji Human Rights Commission and between FHRC and the wider community. It is evident that the relationship between FHRC and deposed Prime Minister Qarase and his government took a turn for the worse following the publication of the findings of an independent consultant on the affirmative action programmes instituted since 2000. There appears to have been a lack of consultation between the government and FHRC before the affirmative action bill was passed by parliament. The independent consultant reported that these programmes were discriminatory in nature and based almost entirely on selective use of data on inequality, disadvantage and poverty. In short they were racist and political in nature. Given this backdrop of systematic violation of human rights of a large category of Fiji citizens, the Director of FHRC understandably had a negative view of the supposedly democratically elected government. On the matter of the affirmative action report, she had support of the other Commissioners.

However it is apparent that her views were further affected by the maladministration of voter registration, the printing of extra-ordinarily large number of ballot papers for some constituencies and allegations of vote rigging. The failure to implement a regular census in 2006 together with the promulgation of controversial and divisive bills further alienated her.

Her 'Investigative Report' on the coup, published almost a month after the take over of government by the military has been widely criticised as unwarranted and compromising the Commission. As a result of the report, it is said that those who have been 'taken in' by the military are not inclined to go to the FHRC for redress. Currently the Commission appears to be isolated from wider civil society.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE ARE NOT SEPARABLE

Both human rights and social justice advocates are concerned about the dignity of human beings. The 'Rights Based Approach' to development requires that development is participatory, that it is democratic and it ought to be inclusive, meaning that gender, race, religion, status by birth etc should not be used to discriminate against citizens. Moreover, it is imperative that all disadvantage groups and categories are given special attention so that their disadvantage(s) are addressed.

In the light of the convergence of first and second generations of human rights and the Declaration of the Right to Development, Fiji NGOs working in the social justice arena ought to accept that their counterparts advocating and promoting human rights are doing equally important work. After all if there is to be participation by and empowerment of those who are currently marginalised –the poor, women, young persons and children, the disable, the elderly and those living in rural areas and in squatter settlements as well as some ethnic minorities their rights to free speech and association are critical. This will ensure accountability on the part of the government and contribute to more equitable and just development.

THE WAY FORWARD

First, the acceptance by NGOs that there are doing work that ultimately contributes to everyone's well being and that social justice and human rights are closely linked will help towards building a new understanding amongst them. Social justice and human rights are not about doing charity but about empowerment of the marginalised and holding duty bearers to account. There is therefore considerable scope for collaborative work. The recent video documentary on squatters is an excellent example of collaborative work between CCF and ECREA as well as the European Union and Larry Thomas of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community.

Second, there is an urgent need to open lines of communication and dialogue amongst NGOs. NGO leaders who are friends to both sides need to act to promote dialogue and rebuilding of relationships. The rifts that have occurred as a consequence of the coup should not detract from the considerable possibilities of working together in the future. NGO and CSO solidarity will contribute to their capacity in expanding democratic space for all citizens.

Third, when the dust settles from this period of uncertainty, NGO leaders must discuss a code of ethics that would regulate their relationships and conduct. The code of ethics would include amongst other things the process of resolving differences, restraint on personal vilification in public including the media, and forms of dispute settlement and mediation.

CONCLUSION

There have been some initial steps in the direction of rebuilding relationships amongst NGOs. The process will require time but there is some need for haste as the struggle to secure human rights for all which is at the very heart of social justice can only be achieved by every citizen's participation. Such participation can only be ensured in a democratic framework.

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