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**ALHR calls on Pacific Islands Forum Leaders to encourage Fiji to lift PER**

Stephen Keim, President of [Australian Lawyers for Human Rights](http://www.alhr.asn.au), today, strongly urged Pacific Islands Forum Leaders to take action to encourage Fiji to lift Public Emergency Regulations and other restrictions on freedom of expression.

Mr. Keim said: “Since April 2009, the Public Emergency Regulations have been used to suppress criticism of the military and intimidate journalists, politicians, lawyers, human rights activists, church leaders and union representatives. These laws are reinforced by provisions in the Media Industry Development Decree 2010 and the Crimes Decree 2009. The regulations violate freedom of assembly, opinion, expression and movement, the right to a fair trial and freedom from arbitrary detention.”

“Fiji committed to removing these regulations in July 2010 before the UN Human Rights Committee for the Universal Periodic Review. However, the regulations have continued to be re-issued on a monthly basis since April 2009. In practice, the regulations have been strictly adhered to. On 23 August 2011, the Methodist Church was due to hold its annual conference in Suva. At the 11<sup>th</sup> hour, the permit for the conference was cancelled and the Police issued a directive banning all Church bazaars, fundraising, rallies, camping, open air meetings, and sports days. The only services now permitted are regular Sunday services.”

“A recent survey conducted by the Lowy Institute showed that 98% of Fijians value the right to a media free from censorship. The Pacific Islands Forum can help give a voice back to the people of Fiji by taking decisive measures to encourage Fiji to lift Public Emergency Regulations and other restrictions on freedom of expression.”

Mr Keim also commented that restoring media freedom should include the removal of all government censors from major newsrooms and revoking any similar provisions in Decrees that curtail freedom of expression. While the Australian Government has strongly encouraged a return to democracy in Fiji, lifting restrictions on freedom of expression should be a key priority.

Article 18 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights protects the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and Article 19 protects freedom of opinion and expression. This includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information of all kinds through any form of media.

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