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When no one is left to tell the story,
would there be no history?

On History:
Fact,
Fiction,
&
Factions

Dialogue

**Message from Fiji Media Watch:
World Press Freedom Day, 3 May 2015**

Agatha Ferei Furivai

Greetings from Fiji Media Watch! Thank you for coming out tonight to join us in our celebration of Press Freedom Day. I wish to acknowledge our Chief Guest, Dr Shalendra Singh and his staff, our state dignitaries, civil society and non-government heads, members of FMW and all present tonight! I wish to thank you all for accepting our invitation to celebrate today's World Press Freedom Day here at the Damodar Premium Cinelounge in Suva. The FMW Board and Staff share the same sentiments and call for Press Freedom, Freedom of Expression and Opinion and the Right to Information. In supporting the independent role of reporters and the safety of journalists in Fiji, FMW decided to screen the 2016 Academy Award winning film *Spotlight*. This film draws light on investigative journalism. This is our way of commemorating our journalists and all media personnel here in Fiji.

As you view the film tonight, please note the role of the journalists and the processes used to follow up on details, documents and institutions for their story or report. Also note the role of institutions and leaders in the process and their impact on the work of reporters.

On May 3, 1993 following a Recommendation that was adopted at the 26th Session of UNESCO's General Conference in 1991, the world celebrated its first World Press Freedom Day. The year 1993 was also the same year some members of the public in Fiji got together and Fiji Media Watch was formed, initially as a monitoring body to raise concerns over inappropriate language usage and images in advertising aired mainly through broadcast media. Today, FMW joins the rest of the world to celebrate the fundamental principles of Press Freedom. It is also the day where public

members and media personnel alike can look back and evaluate press freedom at local, national and global levels. It is also a day that serves to remind us all of the significant role media and communication play in our communities. Today, we not only challenge media industries on their role to be independent but also pay tribute to journalists who have lost their lives in the exercise of their profession.

The theme of this year's World Press Freedom Day - *Access To Information And Fundamental Freedoms: This Is Your Right!* - is significant as it highlights the link between freedom of information and sustainable development. Global support for Press Freedom such as the Sustainable Development Goals released last year recognised the need to 'ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements' (SDG 16 point 10). Similarly, the Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, spoke about UNESCO's promotion of press freedom and freedom of information, and action to enhance the safety of journalists and to end impunity, during the opening of the two day conference this year.

I agree that in order to have a good functioning democratic society, our citizens must have proper access to appropriate information and fundamental freedoms. That information is power, and power must belong to the people. There is a need for Fiji to review legislations that discourages media from its role as a watch dog and limits its confidence to perform. Similarly, there is a need to review the role of MIDA as a government regulatory body and opt for an independent or self regulatory one.

FMW not only recognises our established and upcoming journalists in mainstream media but also those in community media. I wish to congratulate Salanieta Weleilakeba and our Media Monitoring Team, in particular, the FMW Junior Press who had contributed to the publication of FMW's community print media the *MAC Post*. Members of the Media Awareness Club (MAC) now have a space to share their own stories.

In conclusion, I believe that it is especially important to encourage spaces of communication for the young. Today's children are different from those of the earlier generation. They are media babies, the dot.com generation and the digital natives. Education for our young people will need to expand in all aspects and fields.

In Fiji today, the home, school and community need to be talking. We need to dialogue with our children. Our young will need to

be included in dialogues, discussions in meetings, awareness raising and workshops, and conferences and training. Spaces must be provided to allow the young to willingly share their emotions, worries, aspirations and dreams and they need to be encouraged to do so. In doing so, we will enable our young to develop critical understanding and participate actively in decision making processes in the communities. Additionally, this enables them to become producers of media in their own right and become empowered. I leave this message for all of us to emulate. I thank MAC for the initiatives it is taking in raising awareness of the nation on this.

I wish you all here tonight, and all Fiji citizens a happy World Press Freedom Day. Those of you who are gathered here tonight, let me say: enjoy the Spotlight.

Author

Agatha Ferei Furivai is Executive Director of Fiji Media Watch.