



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

25 SEPTEMBER 1987

I am very shocked and saddened at the news of a second coup by the Army under Colonel Rabuka in Fiji. I believe all Australians will share this reaction.

The information available so far is incomplete. But it is clear that the Army has taken over newspapers and radio stations and closed them down, that Suva is effectively under military control and that Colonel Rabuka, as he said on the radio in Fiji, has moved to prevent the formation of a bipartisan Government. He has said that he will move quickly to introduce Constitutional change in Fiji.

What this amounts to is that the Army in Fiji has decided to abort, through the use of force in an utterly illegitimate way, the formation of a Government which, as I said in Parliament yesterday, would have represented a major step forward in resolving the problems of Fiji. That the Army has done so, is, from Australia's point of view, deplorable.

The Australian Government has attempted to support and encourage the efforts of the Governor-General and other moderate leaders in Fiji in overcoming an extremely difficult problem already created for Fiji by the first coup. It is those leaders in Fiji who are striving to restore democratic government in Fiji who have our support. We condemn those who have opposed those efforts.

We are well aware of the complexities of Fiji society and the delicate balance needed to ensure that the racial communities in Fiji feel secure and are accorded their legitimate role and rights. An action of the kind which has occurred today threatens to shatter this situation and the imposition of Constitutional arrangements which amount to anti-democratic oppression of a particular community could not be accepted.

It is to be hoped that Rabuka's behaviour in defying the Governor-General and the country's political leadership will not be tolerated and that this latest coup will be quickly ended and its leaders controlled and brought to justice.

The Government will be urgently reviewing policy towards Fiji in the light of this development and consulting with other interested countries including those in the South Pacific.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has advised against any inessential travel to Fiji.

Despite the interruption of communications in Fiji, effective contact is being maintained with the High Commission and all necessary steps will be taken to protect Australian nationals and Australian interests.

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