

UniFiji In Collaboration with CCF Host Public Forum

The University of Fiji in collaboration with the Citizens Constitutional Forum (CCF) hosted a public forum themed “Freedom of Expression: Recognition and responsibility about this right and me” on Friday, October 5, 2018.

The forum was part of CCF's “Fiji in Transition: Towards a Sustainable Constitutional Democracy” project funded the European Union (EU). The project focused on strengthening a participatory and inclusive constitutional democracy in Fiji through empowering citizens.

The panelists at the forum included, Justice Devendra Pathik School of Law Dean, Professor Shaista Shameem, Member of Parliament, Honourable Ashneel Sudhakar, Activist, Ms. Roshika Deo, UniFiji Student Association President, Sailosi Dawai and famous human rights lawyer, Mr. Aman Ravindra-Singh.

At the forum, Professor Shameem explained that the freedom of expression had been protected in Fiji since the 1970. She also compared the 1997 constitution and the 2013 constitution with respect to rights of freedom of expression and its limitation. Conclusively she stated that the limitations cannot undermine the right to freedom of expression itself.

Mr. Ashneel Sudhakar asked a critical question- where do we draw the line between freedom of expression and other's freedom from hate speech, violence and to live a peaceful life? He stated that the 2013 constitution provided that one person's freedom of expression did not impact on other persons rights. In conclusion he stressed that freedom of expression must be performed under the provisions or realms of the law.

Ms. Deo centered her discussions on the Online Safety Act and the Information Act. She also spoke about the shrinking civil society and how student movements in Universities had decreased over the years. Conclusively she questioned whether people had become passive citizens instead of active citizens. Dawai spoke about empowering youth through the right of education which he felt complemented the freedom of expression right. Mr. Aman Ravindra-Singh addressed on the importance of freedom of expression.

The session ended on high note with discussions from various attendees on freedom of expression right.