

## **UniFiji Signs MoU with Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF) and United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)**

The University of Fiji's Acting Vice-Chancellor Professor Subramani signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and Pacific Island Development Forum (PIDF) on Thursday, July 18, 2019.

The MoU is regarding the JDP SoL's Institute of Human Rights Research (IHRR) which was also launched at the signing ceremony. The primary focus of the Institute is to carry out cutting-edge and policy-oriented research and analysis in human rights.

Giving his keynote address, Speaker of Parliament of Fiji and Chancellor of The University of Fiji, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, said the Institute was an important initiative of the University of Fiji and its partners and stated that change brought about by the research and policy could take many forms.

These included removing discrimination in laws and policies, improving the practices of law enforcement and government officials, promoting better ways of doing business, and challenging negative stereotypes about vulnerable groups in the community.

“However, it is long term work and requires everyone to get involved and who will work as partners- civil society organisations, governments and international organisations- to help build communities where human rights of all people are respected, protected and fulfilled. Which is why this partnership is important- while the academia focus on the research, the development organisations focus on the applicability of the research blending this with international practice and experiences. Research done through this institute should be done with the aim to inform national policy and review laws,” he explained.

Dean of the Justice Devendra Pathik School of Law (JDP SoL), Professor Shaista Shameem explained that Institute would provide a deeper understanding of human rights norms.

She said that the Institute aimed to facilitate a rigorous exchange of ideas where both practical human rights work and new approaches to policy would be debated and analyzed in an environment of collegiality and common purpose- not only to understand the world, but to transform it for the public good.

She said that the MoU represented a milestone for the University.

“The University of Fiji's Strategic Plan states that the University's work includes being the critic and conscience of society and thus we see this Institute as epitomizing for us that progressive KPI; not only that, but it will employ academic freedom, which is protected by a special provision in the University of Fiji Act, in achieving it,” she said.

July 18 is also known as Mandela Day, in memory of Nelson Madela, one of the pioneers of human rights advocacy in the world.

His Excellency, Bingo Thamanga, Chargé d’Affaires, South African High Commission to Fiji said that the late Mandela personified human rights and the struggle for justice and equality for all.

He also said that Mandela embodied the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, including the 9 core human treaties.

“As our greatest human rights champion of our time, the late Mandela cherished, lived and was prepared to die for an ideal world of democracy, human rights, social justice and equality for all. He exuded paramount values of compassion of compassion, love, forgiveness, forgetting, healing, reconciliation, peace, dialogue, unity, solidarity, fairness and shared prosperity. As the South African Commission, we fully embrace the launch of this Research Institute, which undoubtedly destined to provide a pedestal for the cutting edge research in the Pacifica,” he concluded.

Those attending the MOU ceremony were members of the diplomatic corps, NGOs and academics. Professor Shameem said the University was fortunate to have attracted the partnership of the PIDF and OHCHR to this initiative and the JDP School of Law looks forward to working closely with both the partners to produce world class research in human rights.