



The University of Fiji

(An Entity of Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Fiji)

Press Statement

The University of Fiji Launches Online Student Newspaper *'UniFiji Watch'*.

The University of Fiji launched its very first online student newspaper, UniFiji Watch, on Monday 12 September, 2022. UniFiji Watch was created by pioneer students of the University's new Bachelor of Journalism and Media Studies programme (BJMS).

UniFiji Watch was launched virtually by the Managing Editor of Islands Business Samantha Magick. Attending the launch were senior journalists of Fiji and members of the media and communications industry as well as members of the public by video link.

The Guest Speaker Samantha Magick advised journalism students to read from a variety of sources, to listen well and watch events carefully in order to learn the art of storytelling in journalism. She emphasized that because the Journalism and Media Programme students were based in the West of Viti Levu at the University's Saweni Campus, they had a good opportunity to cover stories and experiences with a different perspective. She encouraged the students to connect community stories to their newspaper. Samantha Magick emphasized that students needed to also become very familiar with digital journalism and reporting as every news medium now had a digital component. She encouraged journalism students to explore issues from every angle before deciding how to best represent a story in Fiji or the region.

The Vice Chancellor Professor Shaista Shameem, explaining the process of starting a new Journalism and Media Programme, said the University was determined to consult with senior journalist and media industry from the very beginning so that the Programme could be enriched by insights from the experts in the media. As a result, the programme facilitated placements for students in the media industry newsrooms from Year 1 and encouraged students to develop their own newspaper and also radio broadcasts through the University's Vox Populi Radio Service. Having these practical interventions early in the Programme allowed the students to receive hands-on training from the start to help them gain confidence and knowledge in their chosen careers as journalists, broadcasters and, indeed, in any profession in the media industry. At the University of Fiji, the students were taught journalism in context and as a craft. The media was also known as 'the Fourth Estate' and journalists had to be aware of their roles as educators and not just as providers of information to the public, Professor Shameem said.

The UniFiji official launch was followed by a High Level Panel discussion moderated by Professor Shameem on the topic "Issues for Fiji Journalists During Election Year 2022." Renowned journalists Mr Nemani Delaibatiki, Editor Fiji Sun, Mr Mataiasi Akauola Nimataiwalu, Mr Vimal Madhavan, Ms Samantha Magick, and Mr Sitiveni Halofaki, General Manager of Fiji Television, were amongst the speakers.

All panelists said that covering elections in previous years was very different from covering elections after the 2013 Constitution. Senior journalist and Fiji Sun Editor Nemani Delaibatiki said that reporting had come a long way since he first started in the Fiji Times newsroom in the 1970s. The challenge today was to report on issues in such a way that people could put them into context. He stated that the media must present factual and accurate information in order for voters to make informed decisions on polling day, he said.

Journalism lecturer at The University of Fiji, Mataiasi Akauola stated that the landscape had indeed changed, posing new challenges for journalists. However, as a former Director of the Media Industry Development Authority (MIDA), he advised journalists to play by the rules.

Vimal Madhavan, another lecturer, with background in the Fiji Times, Islands Business and Welsh newspapers, said that while the world had changed a lot the principles of journalism remained the same; these were accuracy, understanding of the social context and an ability to judge the quality of news as events unfolded, and an understanding of what people wanted to know about. That was the sentiment behind UniFiji Watch which his students had developed as part of their course in semester 1.

UniFiji Watch will be produced by the Journalism and Media students regularly during the academic year. It is available on-line on the University of Fiji website.