

Trouble in Paradise: A Study of Media Censorship in the South Pacific

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**Abstract**

In the United States freedom of the press and freedom of speech is a cherished ideal. In many countries in the South Pacific that ideal is espoused, but the reality is often different. The broadcast media are censored and newspaper publishers face harassment and governmental interference. The big debate over the last 20 – 30 years has been that news flows from the developed countries into the lesser-developed countries. That will continue in the South Pacific unless change occurs. If a Pacific centered flow of news and information is to exist the press needs to be able to operate in an atmosphere free from intimidation.

In the United States and, indeed, in any democracy freedom of speech and freedom of the press are cherished ideals. John Milton in Aeropagitica wrote “Let [truth] and falsehood grapple; whoever knew truth put to the worse in a free and open encounter” (qtd. in Press Freedoms Under Pressure, 1972, p. 4). His premise, and that of Andrew Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson and others, was that in the marketplace of ideas truth would prevail. In today’s society not everyone is able to gain access to that marketplace, but the ideal of a press free from government interference remains. That ideal may exist in many countries, but in other countries around the world the reality is very different. One such region of the world where media censorship is at the fore is in the South Pacific.

This paper examines the issue of censorship and the media in the South Pacific with primary attention paid to examples of censorship involving radio and newspapers. Radio is still the primary mass medium in the South Pacific (Waqavonovono, 1981, Ogden, 1999) and broadcast stations and journalists have recently faced censorship in the Solomon Islands. In Samoa, the government has had a reputation for controlling the content of the media and denying the opposition political party access to government owned stations. Newspapers in the Pacific are continually battling government criticism and censorship, and the issue has been highlighted in the last few years in Fiji and Samoa. Following a look at cases of censorship, this paper will examine attempts to provide a Pacific centered flow of news.

Before looking at the issue of censorship and news flow it is necessary to have an understanding of the unique geographic and demographic make-up of the South Pacific Islands.

## Geography and Demography

There are about 10,000 islands in the geographic region known as the South Pacific spread across an area of almost 29 million square kilometers, (Ogden and Hailey, 1988) and a total population of almost 7 million people. (Seward, 1999)<sup>1</sup> One nation may comprise many islands such as Fiji with 320 islands, and they may be spread over a large distance such as the Cook Islands with 93 square miles of land spread over 750,000 miles of ocean (Lent, 1978). The Pacific Islands comprises three main ethnic groups: Melanesians, Micronesians, and Polynesians. In addition, many other immigrant communities exist with the most prominent being the Indians who comprise almost half the population of Fiji. (Tuimaleali'ifano, 1999)

Melanesia is made up of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, and Fiji all in the western half of the Pacific closer to Australia and Indonesia. Papua New Guinea is the largest island in the region with six times the population and 25 times the land area of Fiji, which is the next largest land area in Melanesia. (Ogden, [www2.hawaii.edu/~ogden/piir/pacintro.html](http://www2.hawaii.edu/~ogden/piir/pacintro.html)) The total population of the area is about 5.8 million. (Seward, 1999)

Micronesia comprises the multitude of islands in the western part of the Pacific with many having an affiliation with the United States. These islands include the Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Kiribati, Guam, and the Marshall Islands. There are more than 2,000 islands in Micronesia, but fewer than 100 are populated. They are spread across an area larger than the continental United States, but with a land area of only 3,100 kilometers. (Ogden, [pacintro.html](http://www2.hawaii.edu/~ogden/piir/pacintro.html))

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<sup>1</sup>For a good map of the region, and other Pacific Island resources visit <http://www2.hawaii.edu/~ogden/piir>

Polynesia, excluding New Zealand and Hawaii covers a sea area of 39 million square kilometers. The total land area is about 8,260 square kilometers, with the largest island being Tahiti (1,042 kilometers). In the late 1990's only French Polynesia and Western Samoa had populations over 100,000. In contrast, the population of Pitcairn Island is about 100. (Ogden, pacintro.html) Politically the Polynesian islands are diverse. Tonga is an independent kingdom that was under British protection until 1970. Western Samoa and Tuvalu became independent in 1962 and 1978. The Cook Islands and Niue are self-governing in free association with New Zealand, Tokelau is a territory of New Zealand but is administered by New Zealand from Apia, Western Samoa. French Polynesia and Wallis and Futuna are overseas territories of France, Pitcairn Island is a British Colony, American Samoa is an unorganized, unincorporated territory of the United States, and Easter Island is a province of Chile. (Ogden, pacintro.html)

Despite the diversity of the many islands in the region, there is one thing that many of the islands have in common: media censorship. Most recently, incidents in Samoa, Fiji, and the Solomon Islands have drawn international attention to the subject of media censorship in the South Pacific. The Solomon Islands has faced civil unrest, and in an effort to ensure the peace the government passed a constitutional amendment banning foreign news broadcasts and banning foreign journalists. Samoa has a history of media censorship, and of denying opposition politicians access to the media. In Fiji the government is at odds with the press and has proposed restrictions governing the media. Governmental interference restricts the flow of information within the Pacific and forces people to look to sources in developed countries within the region for information. The next section looks at cases of censorship in the Solomon Islands, Samoa, and Fiji, and

also at an organization that is working to be an independent Pacific centered source of news and information.

## **Solomon Islands**

The Solomon Islands was once a colony of Great Britain. The island chain became self-governing in 1976 and independent of Britain in 1978. Like many of the island nations in the Pacific the Solomon Islands are known mainly as a tourist destination.

Early in 1999 tension began to escalate between militants native to Guadalcanal<sup>2</sup> and settlers from the neighboring island of Malaita. The fighting that resulted forced thousands of Malatians from their homes. In June 1999 the Governor General<sup>3</sup> amended the Emergency Powers Act of 1999 and imposed restrictions on the media. It was claimed that reporting on the fighting was hampering the government's attempts at peace. (Solomon Islands, 1999) The consequences for journalists who ignored the restrictions was up to two years in prison or a fine of SI \$5,000 (US \$1,050) or both. The restrictions prevented reporting that "may incite violence...is likely to cause racial disharmony" or is "likely to be prejudicial to the safety or interests of the state." (CPJ Protests, 1999) As a result of the government's actions all foreign journalists left the Solomon Islands by June 30<sup>th</sup>, and the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation stopped all live newscasts from the BBC World Service, Radio Australia, and Radio New Zealand International. (CPJ Protests, 1999)

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<sup>2</sup> The capital of the Solomon Islands, Honiara, is on the island of Guadalcanal.

<sup>3</sup> Since the Solomon Islands are members of the Commonwealth, the Queen of England is still the head of state. The Governor General is the Queens representative in the country.

This effort at censorship by the government was met with condemnation from organizations in the Pacific and around the world. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) based in New York wrote a letter to the Solomon Islands Prime Minister, Bart Ulufa'alu protesting the government's action. CPJ in the letter said:

CPJ joins our colleagues on Solomon Islands in expressing deep dismay over the emergency regulations, which sharply limit the ability of journalists to report on issues of great public importance. In an editorial published on 30 June, the English-language daily Solomon Star noted that "The wording of the regulations comes straight from the colonial era...[and] do Solomon Islands' democracy a major disservice." The regulations are a flagrant violation of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – which guarantees the "right to freedom of opinion and expression" and includes the right to "seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media" – and disregard the principles established by the Commonwealth's Harare declaration of 1991. (CPJ, 1999)

What is ironic is the Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands was a vocal supporter of Radio New Zealand International (RNZI) when the New Zealand government looked as though it would close down the station in 1998. At the time Prime Minister Ulufa'alu said cuts to RNZI would be a great loss to Pacific nations. The Prime Minister said RNZI provided a "life-saving service" with the broadcast of cyclone warnings, a major factor in reducing casualties and damage from the cyclones Ron, Susan and Katrina which struck the region. He also said that RNZI was a vital news source for the Solomon Islands, which could not afford to subscribe to other overseas news agencies. (Guyon, January 19, 1998) Yet here is the same man a year later banning foreign journalists from the

country, and banning radio stations in the Solomon Islands from re broadcasting news and other programming from RNZI, Radio Australia, and the BBC World Service.

Michael Field, a reporter for Agence France-Presse says there are a variety of factors that make it difficult for the local media to cover the situation in the Solomon Islands. He says because of concerns over safety neither the Solomon Islands Broadcast Corporation nor the Solomon Star newspaper wanted to send reporters into the countryside where the militants were operating. The Police Commissioner of the Solomon Islands has also done his part to hinder objective news reporting by the media. According to Field the Police Commissioner “accused the media of not doing their job – and then had reporters thrown out of a courtroom when they were doing just that.” (Pacific Media Watch, August 4, 1999) All of these factors have combined to make it difficult for information to flow freely from and within the Solomon Islands. Like the Solomons, the Fijian media has faced blatant censorship by the government. Currently there is more freedom of speech, but the current climate does not always favor journalists, especially those that question the government.

## **Fiji**

Fiji gained independence from Great Britain in 1970 and remained a member of the Commonwealth until 1987 when, as a result of a military coup, Fiji was dismissed from the organization. In 1987, Fiji became a republic, in 1990 a new constitution was introduced, and in 1992 a civilian government was elected. Fiji has a President appointed by the Great Council of Chiefs<sup>4</sup>. There is also a Prime Minister who is the leader of the party with the majority in the House of Representatives. Ethnic tension has run high in



Fiji with the population split almost fifty percent Indian (descendants of workers brought from India by the British to work in sugar cane fields) and fifty percent indigenous Fijians. (Ogden, Republic of Fiji)

Possibly, the most widely publicized attempt at censorship by a South Pacific government came in 1987 during the coup d'état. The only reports coming out of the island were those that were censored by the new regime, or that were smuggled out by foreign correspondents still in the country. Indeed even inhabitants of Fiji were often unaware of events taking place within their own country. Many islanders rely on shortwave radio broadcasts for their source of information. People not owning shortwave radios are still able to listen to rebroadcasts of international stations over the local AM and FM stations. In Fiji in 1987 the coup leaders forbade the retransmission of Radio Australia after reports were broadcast criticizing the coup.<sup>5</sup> Shortwave radios became very popular and shops sold out of the receivers. The army even resorted to confiscating shortwave radios in an attempt to restrict access to overseas news reports. (Ogden and Hailey, 1988) In fact Radio Australia had its highest ratings in the region during the coup. (Hodge, 1995)

Radio was actually used for several different purposes by different entities during the coup. Radio broadcasts were being used by Lieutenant-Colonel Rabuka, the coup leader, to promote the need for military intervention in Fiji's political affairs. The governments of New Zealand, Australia and other Western countries used radio to undermine the efforts of the coup. The leaders of the coup shut down all newspapers, and said papers must not print anything that would provoke unrest. A Ministry of

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<sup>4</sup> The Bose Levu Vakaturaga (Great Council of Chiefs) is a meeting of traditional indigenous Fijian leaders.

Information representative had to visit each newspaper to check the pages before publication, and newspapers were instructed not to publish blank spaces on pages indicating that stories in those spaces were censored. The coup leaders also restricted reports by local radio stations. (Associated Press, 1987) At the time there was no television station in Fiji. A correspondent for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation was detained and deported accused of “reporting lies” on Australia’s shortwave service Radio Australia. Trevor Watson of Radio Australia said that because “the station had no jamming equipment the army considered confiscating every shortwave radio in the country.” (Associated Press, 1987) The leaders of the coup recognized the power of shortwave to give the island residents the view of the outside world.

In Fiji restrictions have been imposed on how the media can cover the Great Council of Chiefs meeting. Previously the media had not been allowed to cover the meeting, but were allowed to approach council members during breaks. Now that access is being taken away, instead, a press conference is held after the meeting when Adi Kuni Speed [the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Fijian Affairs] will decide what the public can be told. (Fiji, 1999) The Fiji Times notes that under the newly elected Labor Party-led coalition government coverage is more restricted than in the past. However, Prime Minister Chaudry has alleged that the Times is biased against his Labor Party particularly during the general election in 1998. Editors of the paper deny the charges and a complaint by the Labor Party to the Fiji Media Council over bias was dismissed. (Fiji Times, 1999)

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<sup>5</sup> At that time Radio Australia was the primary Pacific international broadcaster. The coup in Fiji was the catalyst that spurred the rebirth of what would become Radio New Zealand International.

The Fijian government appears to believe that the media in Fiji is guilty of poor reporting and needs to be held accountable by some authority for what it publishes and reports. In January 1999, then Fijian Assistant Minister for Information, Ratu Josefa Dimuri, wrote a letter highlighting what he termed “good examples of very bad journalism” in the two daily Fijian newspapers. He accused the papers and journalists of writing unsubstantiated stories, and of “false, malicious and biased writings.” He also outlined his intention to lodge a complaint with the Fiji Media Council. (Dimuri, 1999)

In response to the allegations Pacific Media Watch<sup>6</sup>, noted that the Fiji Post is locally owned and is run by the country’s most experienced editor. The organization says the paper tries to provide fair and accurate reporting of events in the Fiji Islands. (Pacific Islands Report, January 21 1999)

Support for the media has come from among other sources the Fiji Trades Union Congress (FTUC). The Acting General Secretary of the FTUC, Attar Singh, says restricting the media “does not nurture and preserve democracy, but kills it.” He said “the press is there to serve the governed and not the governors.” He also said “the media has played a very important role in the restoration of democracy in the country.” (Pacific Islands Report, October 18, 1999) However not everyone agrees. The current Assistant Minister for Information, Lekh Ram Vayeshnoi, says “The views and opinions of our people must be broadly canvassed and presented in the media in a fair and accurate manner without fear or favor, and without unseen editorial control.” (Pacific Media Watch, June 24, 1999) He said that before the media can criticize or hold the government accountable it must first have integrity itself. (Pacific Media Watch, June 24, 1999)

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<sup>6</sup> Pacific Media Watch is an independent, non-profit, non governmental organization that examines issues such as censorship, media freedom and ownership in the Pacific.

There have been reports of manhandling of journalists who have tried to get near the Prime Minister. In response a government official said security has been tightened and that journalists needed to accept that there were some meetings they were not invited to. (Pacific Islands Report, June 12, 1999) This comes despite promises from Vayeshnoi who said “This is an open government and we want to ensure the flow of information.” (Pacific Islands Report, June 12, 1999) Vayeshnoi has been criticized by an organization called Media Freedom Movement that is established to defend the media, both print and broadcast, in Fiji. It is just one of a number of organizations that have attacked the government complaining that although the government promised openness and a free media as directed by the 1997 constitution, the government is in fact “authoritarian.” (Pacific Islands Report, July 3, 1999)

Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudry has been very vocal in his criticism of the media. Recently he said, “The media in Fiji needs to take stock of how it is behaving and whether it is facing a crisis of ethics. Since taking office, my government has had occasion to be extremely disgusted by the antics of some elements in the media who have used the medium of the newspaper and television to further their own personal agendas to discredit the government.” (Asia Pacific Network, 29 October, 1999) He criticized papers, broadcast stations, and individual journalists. Chaudry threatened to institute a media tribunal to adjudicate over defamation cases. The president of the Pacific Island News Association labeled the proposal draconian. Chaudry has also said the media is “not above the law, and media freedom was not total freedom.” (PACNEWS, October 27, 1999) Chaudry says he is committed to a free and unfettered media. (PACNEWS, October 27, 1999)

Ironically the man who has done much to threaten media freedom in Fiji has come out against a media tribunal. Former Prime Minister and 1987 coup leader Sitiveni Rabuka says “it is unbecoming of the elected leader of the people to turn around and threaten the voice of the people.” (Pacific Islands Report, October 29, 1999) He was also reported as saying “the media has the responsibility of making known to the public the people’s feelings on topical issues of interest to the nation.” (Pacific Islands Report, October 29, 1999)

The Committee to Protect Journalists reported that through December 1998 the Fijian government was moving towards more openness with a new constitution that contained protections for the press. In January, 1998 “the government initiated a thorough reexamination and reform of the country’s repressive media laws, many of which have their origins in harsh legislation passed by fiat during the British colonial period.” (Country Report: Fiji) In July 1998, former Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka passed the Emergency Powers Act of 1998. “The measure gives the government the power to impose direct censorship on the media should a national state of emergency be declared.” (CPJ, 1998)

Despite the tension another media group, International Press Institute, from Austria notes, “Fiji’s news media are among the most free and robust in the Pacific Islands region.” (PACNEWS, May 13, 1999) The Institute in its publication World Press Freedom Review 1998 says the Fiji Times<sup>7</sup> has upset some Members of Parliament because of its reporting which has led to the threat of repercussions. The Times [was found] guilty of a breach of parliamentary privilege for reporting, and editorializing on the cost to taxpayers of a 20-minute meeting by Senators. The Senators warned the paper

that any further articles breaching parliamentary privilege would lead to jail time or fines for those found guilty. However the Institute says the good news is that the government is replacing “the British colonial era Officials Secrets Act with an Official Information Act” which is intended to give open access to a lot of official information. However, information from the office of the President and the Great Council of Chiefs will still be off limits. (PACNEWS, May 13, 1999)

## **Western Samoa**

Western Samoa became an independent country in 1962 when it severed its ties with New Zealand. Samoa became a member of the British Commonwealth in 1970, and the United Nations in 1976. Like the other countries it has the reputation for being an island paradise, but it is also increasingly gaining a reputation for media censorship.

The government in Samoa restricts access to the government run media, including TV Samoa, Radio 2AP, and the newspaper Savali, by the opposition political party and other dissenting voices. (Commonwealth, 1997, CPJ, 1998, Pacific Islands Report, January 26, 1999) TV Samoa is Samoa’s only television station so limiting access to the opposition political party severely hampers efforts to reach the masses.

The situation in Samoa highlights the problem of having a government so closely involved in the content produced by the media. Radio Station 2AP has been in existence for many years. However, because the government controls the content particularly related to news, listeners in the more remote areas are receiving only a one sided view of the political situation in the country. Residents of the American Samoan island group of

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<sup>7</sup> The Fiji Times is the largest daily newspaper in Fiji and is owned by Rupert Murdoch.

Manu'a rely on the broadcasts of 2AP for weather information particularly during the dangerous hurricane season. They can't get a signal from the radio stations that service the rest of American Samoa. What that means is the islanders benefit from the information that the station provides, but as far as news all they receive is the view of the Western Samoan government unless of course they are able to listen to international broadcast stations like RNZI, Radio Australia, or Voice of America.

In March, 1999, the Committee to Protect Journalists sent a letter to the Samoan Prime Minister expressing concern about the lack of independent voices in the Samoan media. CPJ noted that recently Radio Polynesia used to carry interviews with members of the opposition party, and with anti-government protesters but as a result the station was subjected to attacks by the government. Now Radio Polynesia has decided not to carry local news at all. (Pacific Media Watch, March 5, 1999)

An editorial on the death of the former Samoan Prime Minister noted, "Under his 15-year leadership, the independent press in Western Samoa suffered immensely from a government fearful of facing the truth about some of its questionable acts and decisions. Press censorship was one of the hallmarks of his leadership." (Post Courier, 1999) This illustrates that, as in Fiji, such censorship is not an isolated event.

In another issue that highlights the difficult relationship between the media and the government in Samoa, the Samoan government announced in May 1998, that officials could use public funds to pursue civil libel claims. This follows a law introduced in 1997 compelling reporters charged with libel to reveal their sources. According to the CPJ, "Such suits, brought by officials vexed by news coverage of corruption and irregularities, have become drearily routine." (Committee to Protect Journalists, 1998)

Earlier in 1999 in Samoa a government minister was assassinated. The government has banned media coverage of aspects of the case saying it could harm the trial process. Under an injunction handed down by Samoa's Supreme Court, all media are prevented from communicating aspects of the case, and a conspiracy to kill the Prime Minister. New Zealand papers, which reported "revelations" about the case, would be banned from the country if they contain offending stories. The injunction was deemed necessary after the New Zealand Herald and other overseas media printed from confession given to police by one of the killers. The court agreed that media exposure could hurt the government's case. (Pacific Islands Report, August 18, 1999)

There are also reports of members of the media receiving death threats. The assistant editor of the Samoa Post,<sup>8</sup> Molesi Taumoe, says Telecommunications Minister Leafa Vitale threatened him with death in May 1998 to prevent the newspaper from publishing a letter containing allegations of corruption against the minister." (Committee to Protect Journalists, 1998) In 1998 the publisher of the Samoa Observer, Savea Malifa was given several international awards<sup>9</sup> for fighting for a free press. According to the Pacific Islands News Association the Samoa Observer is Samoa's only daily newspaper, and is also its main independent news voice. (Pacific Islands Report, August 13, 1999) In response the Samoan Prime Minister said the government should have received the honors for allowing the newspaper to be published freely in Samoa. The Prime Minister also maintains Malifa is biased because he ran as an opposition candidate in the last general elections. (Pacific Islands Report January 26, 1999)

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<sup>8</sup> The Samoa Post is a weekly Samoan-language newspaper.

<sup>9</sup> Malifa was awarded the Commonwealth Press Union's Press Freedom Award and the Index on Censorship Golden Award for Press Freedom.



In recent years the Samoa Observer's printing plant has been burned down under suspicious circumstances, and relatives of a government minister have assaulted Malifa. The government has withdrawn advertising from the paper, threats were made to impose newspaper licensing, and a law was passed requiring journalists in libel actions to reveal their sources. The paper's staff have also faced numerous legal proceedings and injunctions to prevent them from publishing information. (Pacific Islands Report, August 13, 1999) In defense of Malifa, David Robbie, journalism Coordinator at the University of the South Pacific noted, "Freedom-loving, active, imaginative and committed journalists are hard to find. But they are truly needed in defense of freedom of the press." (Vanuatu attack condemned May 6, 1999)

### **Other Nations**

There are other island nations in the Pacific that have had problems with media control and censorship. In Tahiti a ban had been in effect on a radio station that was pro-independence. The government says the ban is lifted but according to the news director Vito Maamaatua the ban is still in effect. He says the President still chooses which journalists attend his press conferences, and he tells them what they should and should not cover. (Tahiti Radio Ban, 1999) Maamaatua said "In Tahiti we have a special situation; we have four kinds of media – colonial media, government media, opposition media, and commercial media. You will have to learn to read between the lines because [the media] will never write the truth; it is very rare." (Tahiti radio ban, 1999)

In Vanuatu the publisher of the independent newspaper, the Vanuatu Trading Post was attacked by associates of the Deputy Prime Minister reportedly over coverage of an election dispute. (Vanuatu attack condemned May 6, 1999)

This shows that such tactics of intimidation and censorship are commonplace throughout the Pacific. But it is not all bad news, attempts are being made to encourage a Pacific centered flow of news free from government intimidation.

### **News Flow**

The big debate over the last 20 – 30 years has been that news has flowed from developed countries to the lesser-developed countries and that there has been no news flow originating from the lesser developed countries. That criticism has been raised in the Pacific as well, but there are attempts to encourage the establishment of a Pacific based news organization and to provide much needed training to journalists and broadcasters. The Pacific Islands Broadcasting Association (PIBA) is one such organization. PIBA's slogan is “Serving the needs of broadcasters throughout the Pacific” and it does this in a variety of ways including providing technical support, training, and the establishment of ties with outside organizations such as UNESCO. (Seward, 1999)

PACBROAD is the training and consultant arm of PIBA. It conducts both in-country and regional training courses educating participants in broadcasting and journalism skills as well as programming, marketing, and management skills. ([www.piba.org.fj/Pacbroad/Default.htm](http://www.piba.org.fj/Pacbroad/Default.htm)) PACBROAD began in 1985 with funding from UNESCO and the Friedrich-Ebert-Siftung (FES), a German foundation which funds

broadcasting projects in developing countries. FES has been instrumental over the years in promoting and developing a more interregional flow of news. (Seward, 86)

One of the organizations under the PIBA umbrella that has benefited from FES is the Pacific News Service (PACNEWS). PACNEWS receives news from stringers in the region as well as broadcasters (both local and regional) and from print media around the region. It then distributes three bulletins each weekday, with each bulletin containing six - ten stories, via e-mail and fax to organizations throughout the region and beyond. ([www.piba.org.fj/pacnews/Default.htm](http://www.piba.org.fj/pacnews/Default.htm))

While media outlets make up the majority of the PACNEWS clients, there are also other recipients. Government embassies, information services, universities, libraries, and other organizations in countries like USA, Japan, France, Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji use PACNEWS bulletins to keep informed about issues and events in the Pacific. Despite the service that PACNEWS provides it is not easy for such an organization to exist. PACNEWS has less than 100 subscribers to its service and seems destined to rely on PIBA unless it is able to generate more subscribers to its service and is able to become financially independent. (Seward, 98)

It is essential that PACNEWS is able to survive because the organization plays a vital role in the flow of news in the region ensuring that the news flow originates in part from the lesser developed countries in the Pacific and not just from developed countries. Not only does it encourage local broadcasters to contribute news stories, it enables those stories to reach a wider audience than the island from which the story originated. One way this happens is when international broadcasters like Radio New Zealand International (RNZI) receive the PACNEWS bulletins. RNZI receives the bulletin,

incorporates stories in its newscasts, which are then broadcast via shortwave throughout the Pacific and further afield. News and programming from RNZI is also rebroadcast by local stations completing a cycle where the local station sent the story to PACNEWS and then it came back via another channel.

Even with the crisis in the Solomon Islands and the restrictions placed on the media, PACNEWS still received information from the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation and other sources in Honiara. The Chief Executive of the Pacific Islands Broadcasting Association says Radio Australia and Radio New Zealand International also continued to cover the issue well. (Ofotalau, 1999) The role of the international broadcasters including RNZI, Radio Australia, BBC World Service, Voice of America and others must not be overlooked. Individuals and broadcasters alike rely upon these broadcasters to provide accurate and impartial news about the region and the world.

A study conducted in 1985 by Richsted showed that countries in the Pacific favored receiving programming from countries they were politically or historically aligned with. For example the countries in French Polynesia favored Radio France Internationale, whereas the Cook Islands which has a strategic political relationship with New Zealand favored programming from RNZI. The Pacific Island Broadcasters surveyed said that international stations were of great importance to them particularly in the coverage of local, regional, and world news. One interesting point from the survey is that “ ‘home country’ news of the [international] broadcaster may also be seen in some cases to be ‘local news’ for the receiving country.” (Richsted, 1985, p.14) This may be true for countries like the Cook Islands, Niue where residents have New Zealand passports, and where many Cook Islanders and Niueans live in New Zealand. Richsted

noted in his survey that news was seen as having more authority when it came from an international broadcaster. (Richsted, 1985, p.14) It was also noted, and it is still the case, that many Pacific Island broadcasters cannot afford to subscribe to wire services which often do not feature much in the way of Pacific news. Hence the reliance of free programming from international broadcasters. (Richsted, 1985 p.35)

What is evident from this study of censorship and intimidation of the press in the Pacific Islands is that freedom of the press may be an ideal that is strived for, but it is an ideal that is not always achieved. While freedom of the press is an ideal that is upheld in many developed nations it is an ideal that is struggling to survive in many Pacific Island countries. Journalists in the Pacific still have to deal with years of tradition where those in power answer to no one but themselves and where the role of the press is to support those in power and to not offer a dissenting voice. Dr. Ian Ward Deputy Director for Australia's Center for Democracy, and a faculty member at Queensland University says "The preservation of a genuine free press depends upon the day to day work routines of journalists. Given all the PR resources which modern governments and political parties have to hand journalists are too easily captured." (Vanuatu attack condemned May 6, 1999) It is up to the journalists in the region to make sure that this does not happen. Organizations like PIBA can help by training and providing support to journalists and broadcasters.

The countries in the Pacific are reliant on aid from organizations like UNESCO and the U.N. and developed countries like New Zealand, Australia, and the United States. If change is to occur it is up to them to put pressure on the Pacific Island governments to allow for freedom of the press. If the media is allowed to develop and flourish in

atmosphere free of censorship and intimidation only then will there be a free flow of news and information originating from, and circulating within, the Pacific region.

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