

THE METHODIST CHURCH
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NEWS RELEASE

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Methodists encouraged to fast for Fiji

- February 25 will mark solidarity with oppressed Church

The Fijian Methodist Church is under increasing pressure from the country's government, led by Commodore Bainimarama, which has forced the Church to cancel its annual Conference and choir festivals until 2014. Local districts and circuits are also having their activities restricted, with administrative meetings banned.

Revd Stephen Poxon, ex-president of the British Methodist Conference and Secretary of the Methodist Missionary Society, said; "In the UK, it's easy to take our religious freedoms for granted. The Methodist Church in Fiji simply desires to worship God and serve the people of Fiji with their ministry, but the government's unreasonable restrictions are making the Church's daily life almost impossible. Through fasting and prayer, we want to show our solidarity with our Fijian brothers and sisters."

All members of the Fiji Methodist Church Standing Committee have been charged with attending an unauthorized meeting (held last April), and have been held for questioning by police. A number of church ministers have also been accused of spying on the government, although the allegations have yet to be substantiated.

The Fijian Church has requested a meeting with the government to discuss the ban and explore alternatives. 'We are a people who believe in knocking,' said one minister, 'even 'til midnight!' However one superintendent was overheard saying he would hold meetings anyway, and was reported to the military, who took him in for questioning.

Despite the pressures, the Fijian Church's chaplains continue to serve the police and the military, leading devotions frequently in churches and barracks.

Under new legislation, speaking out against the government is deemed treason, and sending criticisms of the regime to or from abroad will be regarded as sedition. As any such criticism (whether made in Fiji or abroad) is now being treated as a criminal act.

People can donate to the World Mission Fund online at <http://www.justgiving.co.uk/fast-for-fiji>, or by sending a cheque payable to "The World Mission Fund" to *Fast for Fiji* c/o Dave Bennett, Fundraising Coordinator, at Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Road, London, NW1 5JR.