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Earlier this year Fijian Police banned the Annual Conference and Choir Festival of the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma scheduled for August 2009.

The Church engaged in discussions with the military regime to reach a compromise to allow the Conference and Festival to proceed. Although these discussions were unsuccessful, last Friday, 17 July 2009, the Church's Standing Committee confirmed that both the Conference and Festival would nonetheless go ahead.

On Monday 20 July the General Secretary of the Methodist Church, the Reverend Tuikilakila Waqairatu, was taken by police for questioning. He was returned that night but was taken again on Tuesday 21 July. Deputy General Secretary, the Reverend Tevita Banivanua, and four members of the Standing Committee were also taken. Reports suggest that the questioning was civil.

At 11 p.m. Tuesday, the General Secretary along with Reverend Tomasi Kanailagi and the Reverend Manasa Lasaro, both Past Presidents, were taken to the Army Camp. The two Past Presidents were targeted as the army believes them to be the most active and vocal opponents of the present Fiji Government and supporters of the democracy movement.

This morning the Church's Accountant, Mr Viliame Gonelevu, was also taken to the Army Camp. Reports indicate that Ro Teimumu Kepa, the Chief of the Rewa Province, was also taken in by police.

This action represents a significant escalation of Fiji Government pressure on the Methodist Church. In the past the Army Camp has not been a safe place for people to go.

In this situation the Methodist Church says:

"The Church is firm with its faith to the Lord and will steadfastly hold on to its teachings and belief. We ask you to pray with us during this trying time that the Church is facing and seek the Lord's blessing to be with us so that decisions made will be decisions made by God only."

The recently concluded Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia unanimously agreed to convey its support and solidarity with the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma. It resolved to invite members of the Uniting Church to pray for the Methodist Church particularly at the time of the scheduled Annual Conference in August. UnitingWorld will provide practical expression to the decision, offering suggestions for Uniting Church members to support the Methodist Church.

The President of the Uniting Church, Rev. Alistair Macrae, sent a message of support to the Methodist Church.

"You will be aware that the Uniting Church Assembly in its triennial meeting this past week has been receiving reports about developments with deep concern; and during our meeting prayed for you all on a number of occasions. Please be assured of our solidarity with you in prayer and in any other ways that our sisters and brothers in the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma may consider helpful. May our Lord, who is our rock and our refuge, a very present help in time of trouble, hold and uphold you all in this time of trial. Special prayers for the leaders of the Church currently being questioned and for their families in this very anxious time. In Christian love and solidarity, Rev. Alistair Macrae, President National Assembly, Uniting Church in Australia.

UnitingWorld will remain in close contact with the Methodist Church and provide any updates on its website at www.unitingworld.org.au

Kerry Enright
National Director
UnitingWorld



An Agency of the National Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia
UnitingWorld was previously known as Uniting International Mission and Uniting Church Overseas Aid

