**FIJI COUNCIL OF CHURCHES**

**Caritas Fiji Building, Hercules St. Suva**

**Fiji Council of Churches submission to the Medicinal Marijuana Industry consultation.**

The Minister for External Trade Cooperatives and SMEs

Hon. Mr. Manoa Kamikamica

Dear Sir,

This is the submission of the Fiji Council of Churches to the proposed Medicinal Marijuana Industry consultation. The Fiji Council of Church’s (FCC) submission is based on the bible and Church’s teachings. This submission is born out of three consultative meetings with Church communities.

1. Christian Social Teaching teaches that the economy must serve the human person rather than peoples serving the economy. Our economy must be people-centered rather than company centered. All economic life should be shaped by moral principles. Economic choices and institutions must be judged by how they protect or undermine the life and dignity of the human person, support the family and serve the common good.

The government must be transparent on how the cultivation of medicinal marijuana will benefit the Fijian people, common good and planetary good and not only serve the company’s interest, as well as the negative impacts.

1. A fundamental moral measure of any economy is how the poor and vulnerable are faring. How will medicinal marijuana farming help the poor and vulnerable?

Transparency and Accountability are foundations for good governance. The government and company must be transparent about how marijuana industry will help the poor, common good and planetary good.

1. All people have a right to participate in the economic, political, and cultural life of society. It is a fundamental demand of justice and a requirement for human dignity that all people be assured a minimum level of participation in the community.

The Fijian people must participate and be part of the decision-making process. “All people have a right to participate in the economic life of society. How do the Fijian people participate in the proposed marijuana industry? Three important questions must be clarified in the decision making: How do people participate? What does the marijuana industry do for the Fijian people? What will the marijuana industry do to the Fijian people?

1. The Church’s Teaching state that “The use of drugs inflicts very grave damage on human health and life. Their use, except on strictly therapeutic grounds, is a grave offense” (No.2291).

The Church teaches that the recreational use of a substance merely for its intoxicating effects, rather than therapeutically, is not permitted. Deliberate intoxication, whether through alcohol or marijuana, is wrong for several reasons.

The Church condemns the use of marijuana for purely recreational and not for therapeutic reasons.

Pope Francis teaches that “Legalization of the recreational use of marijuana would be a disaster for our state.”

The Fiji Council of Churches opposes the legalization and the recreational use of marijuana in Fiji.

The Fiji Council supports ONLY the medicinal use of marijuana.

1. The bible teaches that we humans are not the ultimate owners of these goods, but rather, the temporary stewards. We are entrusted with the responsibility of caring for these gifts and preserving them for future generations.

Over cultivation and especially massive cutting of trees have proven to be one of the main drivers of climate change. FCC requests that research should be done that over-cultivation of marijuana will not have negative impacts on the environment and human life.

**Other matters to be seriously considered:**

1. FCC requests that the government and the company provide firm information on how they will monitor and control marijuana assuage to ensure that it is not used for recreation.
2. FCC requests that the government and Fiji Medical Association provide strong scientific evidence on the medicinal benefits of cannabis. Marijuana literature has a mixture of information regarding the medicinal benefits of marijuana. Some medical experts state that while there a lot of purported benefits of marijuana in terms of things like anxiety and well-being and other health benefits, there is not enough scientific evidence.
3. FCC requests that the Fiji Government carries out her own research on local marijuana to explore its medicinal and other benefits rather than being limited to the proposals of foreign companies. There are stories going around Fiji that local marijuana has proven to be a healing remedy for skin diseases.
4. FCC requests that more time be given to the consultation because this is a very important to the Fijian people.

# FCC requests that the Fiji government considers the suggestions of the Samantha Cook’s article, Fiji: Cannabis should be high on the government’s agenda

(<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/fiji-cannabis-should-be-high-government-s-agenda>)

Samantha Cook writes: “A cannabis industry in Fiji would not be limited to growing the crop. A whole value-add supply chain could be created, for example, through hemp fibre production (Fiji’s garment manufacturing industry has also [felt the pinch](https://fijisun.com.fj/2020/04/03/covid-19-garment-factories-feel-impact/) under Covid), as well as labs to extract the [valuable CBD oil](https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/cannabidiol-cbd-what-we-know-and-what-we-dont-2018082414476), which is used for pain relief and various other ailments. This could all be carried out in Fiji and create jobs for Fijians.

From a business perspective, there is a chance for Fiji to be the region’s “first mover” in the cannabis industry. Research and a feasibility study should be first undertaken to determine the viability and opportunity that a cannabis industry could present. From there, a better judgement can be made about what would be required to regulate it.”

**A PROPOSAL FOR FIJI MEDICINAL MARIJUANA INDUSTRY**

That Fiji government studies the benefits of local marijuana. This to ascertain that the positive benefits outweigh the negative impacts. Fiji develops a Fijian Medicinal marijuana industry. What we expect is that all local marijuana will be sold for medicinal value. The market price should be higher than the street value. This will potentially see that marijuana will not be sold in streets thus decrease the leisure abuse of marijuana. This will provide income for the Fijian people. If this proposal is possible then we should stop overseas marijuana

The Fiji Council Churches prays for the Holy Spirit to guide our decisions for the proposed Medicinal Marijuana Industry.

Yours sincerely

Archbishop Peter Loy Chong

President of the Fiji Council of Churches.