

The hardest battle for the Government in its attempts to remove racial discrimination has been to dismantle social and legal structures, Prime Minister Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama has told the United Nations. He said these structures institutionalized racial discrimination and fuelled attitudinal suspicions between communities.

Commodore Bainimarama made the comments while speaking during the High Level Meeting of the General Assembly to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action at the United Nations in New York yesterday.

Commodore Bainimarama said Fiji had a history of racial discrimination, entrenched by its colonial past, and perpetuated by post-colonial governments to preserve power by dividing Fiji's societies on ethnic lines.

"Until 2009, the Fiji Constitution created a Parliament which preserved "communal seats", in respect of which a voter could only vote if he or she came from the same racial group as the candidate," he told the UN.

"Reserving seats for racial groups in Parliament and government bodies has not worked well in Fiji. The reservations were not based on the disadvantage, and they led to the creation of privileged groups from ethnic communities which then continued to perpetuate ethnicity as a distinguishing feature to access financial services, housing, education and political favors.

"These features of institutionalized racism in Fiji, perpetuated a lack of national unity, a culture which was undemocratic and led to the growth of nationalistic violence in our society, and which is one of the most important reasons for the reforms which my government is determined to implement for the sake of the Fijians who will call Fiji home in the next generations."

He said declarations of equality in the law, in constitutions, in human rights provisions, were only the beginning of a long and hard battle to transform unequal societies into communities committed to equality.

I think I like this guy