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PRESS RELEASE

**Council Demands Urgent Action Over Student Accommodation Chaos at University of the South Pacific Laucala Campus**

Serious concern has been raised by students and parents over ongoing accommodation issues at the University of the South Pacific (USP) Laucala Campus. The Consumer Council has been requested to intervene, citing a lack of transparency and serious delays in the University's accommodation process.

Following a visit to the Campus on 23 February, the Council observed a deeply concerning situation. With classes already underway, many students still do not know if they have secured accommodation and are forced to seek answers instead of focusing on their studies.

Applicants were not informed of outcomes in a timely manner, resulting in large crowds gathering daily outside the Halls Office. Students were later advised that confirmation emails would be issued, a step that came far too late. Those told at the last minute they will not receive a hall room have no choice but to turn to the private rental market without preparation, often accepting inflated prices due to urgent need.

The situation is particularly distressing for regional students. Some have been seen on campus with luggage and nowhere to stay, while others are temporarily bunking with friends, creating overcrowded conditions. Students who were told their applications were successful have in some cases been informed that rooms are "not ready" and placed in temporary accommodation reportedly in poor condition, raising health and safety concerns.

The Council is also disturbed by reports that the accommodation office closes its doors when large crowds gather, and that staff absences can bring operations to a standstill.

**Testimonials from affected families:**

- **Testimonial 1:** A parent from Rakiraki has been travelling daily with his daughter since last week, only to be turned away each afternoon without a definitive answer. This repeated travel is both financially draining and emotionally exhausting. He broke down in tears whilst speaking to our officers.

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- **Testimonial 2:** A young woman received a confirmation email that she had secured a room and travelled to Suva relying on that confirmation. However, when she went to collect her key, she was informed her allocation had been cancelled with no prior notice.
- **Testimonial 3:** A mother from Tonga, whose son is a first-year student, remains in Fiji waiting for him to secure accommodation before she can return home, incurring additional living expenses. She now has serious reservations about sending her daughter to USP in the future.

“Many students at USP are first-years, new to Fiji, or unfamiliar with Suva. The university has a clear duty of care to ensure students are not left stranded without safe and secure housing,” says Consumer Council CEO Seema Shandil. “This situation is a student welfare crisis.”

#### **The Council calls on USP to:**

1. Immediately resolve the accommodation backlog and publicly communicate a clear processing timeline.
2. Improve frontline communication and the treatment of students.
3. Provide a formal explanation outlining the cause of these failures and the corrective measures being implemented.

The current approach by USP is unacceptable. For a university with a strong reputation, this failure points to a significant breakdown in internal processes. If USP knew it could not meet its commitments, the lack of transparency is egregious and completely unacceptable.

The Council has formally raised this matter with the Fiji Higher Education Commission to ensure appropriate oversight and accountability. Students and their families deserve certainty and respect, accommodation is fundamental to accessing higher education. The Council has also written to USP for their response and immediate action to rectify this issue at the earliest. We will continue to monitor closely and pursue further action if urgent corrective measures are not taken. Students who continue to face these issues should reach out and lodge complaints via the National Consumer Helpline 155.

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