



HUMAN RIGHTS AT SEA



Human Rights at Sea Case Study **A Family Perspective in their Own Words**

The story of Josaia
and Virisila Cama, Fiji.
Human Rights Abuse in
Fijian Crewed Fisheries.



Human Rights at Sea

CASE STUDY - IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“We were supposed to work in short shifts in the bottom freezer (held at minus 40 degrees) but we had to stay there because we couldn’t get out. My hands were frozen and I couldn’t talk properly because my jaws wouldn’t work.”

Josaia Cama



Josaia and Virisila Cama

“ My name is Josaia Cama. I will be 40 years old on 11th May this year; my wife, Virisila, is 38. I am from Fulaga Island in the Lau Group; I came here with my sister when I was young; she married a man from Waiqanake (near Suva).

My first job on a fishing vessel was in 1998. A man called Finau came from Wailokutu, and asked me to join a fishing vessel; he was already a crewman on the vessel. So I began working for the CKP Fishing company (South Korean) on the Bo Seong 315: my partner and I had one child, and little income. They gave me a contract form to fill out. The form said that I would receive USD100 each week, or US\$400 a month (which was about F\$800) but at the end of each month, the amount I received was only F\$400; the portion Virisila received from my monthly salary was F\$135. When I asked where was the other money, I did not have a copy to prove that I was owed more - but I do not know whether the company took part of the money to pay for my food, rain jacket and boots.

After four months, that vessel broke down and I moved onto another vessel owned by the same company - it was the Oryong 322. The captain said we would get bonuses from the sale of shark fin. Livai (the other Fijian on board) and I had worked hard and caught many sharks and some big ones but when the vessel brought them to port to sell, we were only given \$800 from the shark fins but we knew that the senior crew would have made a lot of money. This was not fair as we’d worked hard.

On that vessel, there were about 30 crew - the Captain, Chief Engineer and three more engineers, the Chinese cook, two Chinese, four Vietnamese, two Fijians, and the rest South Koreans and Indonesians. It is a large (50m) vessel. On the vessels we slept in bunks, one above the other, double deck, or even triple deck; my bunk wasn’t long enough for me. The space in the sleeping area was small - maybe two metres wide, and three metres long, for up to six people. The food was alright but the same every day: rice, fish, and kimchi (South Korean vegetables). We often were hungry, so we would take the chopped-off ends of the tuna and roast them on the engine boiler. When the line was being hauled, or fishing was very busy, we only had time for three hours’ sleep. There was just a bucket for the toilet, and there was only sea water to wash ourselves in.

The accident happened to me on 14 December 1999. On that day we were in port, somewhere in Japan; it was very cold as it was winter time. The fish from the main freezer were being offloaded to the upper deck and then ashore. Three Indonesian crewmen, Livai and I were working on the upper deck. The bosun looked up and told us to come down and help unload the catch because all of the fish had to be unloaded before 7 o’clock. So we went down. The bosun put a ladder down to the fish hold and we climbed in. There were other men there, already working.

The bosun threw us some gloves - and then he pulled up the ladder. The gloves were only cotton gloves, the ones used for hauling the lines - not the thick gloves used by the iceman on the vessel. I found out later that the reason he gave us the thin cotton gloves was so that our fingers would hold the fish more easily than the thick ones (and therefore move the fish along more quickly). I also found out that the other men had rubbed Vaseline on their hands, and had drunk rum before they started working in the fish hold; but us and the three Indonesians didn’t know that. I got so cold - I was shaking and hugging myself. We were supposed to work in short shifts in the bottom freezer (held at minus 40 degrees) but we had to stay there because we couldn’t get out. My hands were frozen and I couldn’t talk properly because my jaws wouldn’t work.

After all the fish were unloaded, the bosun put the ladder in again and we climbed out. My friend Livai had to help me because I was stuck in the ice.

Then I found that I couldn’t feel anything with my fingers: I couldn’t hold things, like when I went to eat. I held my fingers against the engine boiler but they didn’t get warm, and also they were very, very painful, and swollen: they felt as if they had been hit with a hammer. ”

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CASE STUDY - IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“ The Captain noticed me and asked ‘what’s wrong with you?’ Then he sent me to a private hospital where three nurses tried to fix my fingers: they put my hands into a basin of hot water and put ‘Deep Heat’ on them and then wrapped them in bandages. But later I was told that they should have used ordinary (cold) water instead of warm water. I couldn’t do anything with my fingers and my friend Livai had to do everything for me, like feeding and dressing me, and helping me go to the toilet.

The boat then went to Seoul. They put us on a plane to Auckland, and then we flew back to Fiji. We stayed with Virisila’s parents in the village. After that I went to the Labour Department, which sent me to the CWM Hospital (in Suva). They had to amputate my fingers because of gangrene. I remember how humiliated I was at the CWM Hospital because I couldn’t use my hands to go to the toilet. A woman nurse had to help me. I lost my self-esteem: a grown man having to be helped at the toilet by a woman. Later, a male friend would help me at the toilet.

I had worked on that ship for eight months and my contract said I would get \$432 a month - \$144 of it going to Virisila, the rest coming to me when I finished my contract. But altogether they only gave me F\$3,200. I asked the company for compensation for my fingers: a man from the company came to see me and then they gave me F\$60 a week; they said that if I wanted more, I would have to get a lawyer. The money stopped when the 2000 Military Coup happened and then there were no Courts. The Labour Department didn’t know what to do then. But the Department of Social Welfare gave F\$5,000 to the Red Cross which hired a carpenter, who built a house for us. And then the 2006 Coup happened.

In 2011, people from the FBC (Fiji Broadcasting Commission) came to my house and took a photo of me; they told my story on the TV News. A year after that the Labour Department took the company to Court. The company argued against paying me compensation: they said they had paid worker insurance cover to an Insurance company, but it said that my fingers weren’t actually lost while I was on the vessel so it wouldn’t pay.

Finally, in November 2013, the Court ruled that it had to pay within 30 days; and The Fiji Times published a story about me. On Valentine’s Day, 2014, I received F\$24,000 from the Government (via the company); the doctor at the Hospital had only recommended compensation for my fingers and not for the effect of their loss on me. When I got the money, Virisila and I got married, and we bought some sheets of tin to add another room to our house.

My wife and I have seven children but we gave the seventh to my brother. Each month we receive a Government food voucher of F\$50, F\$50 cash, and \$130 for my family - but the payment is irregular: sometimes we only get \$30 or \$50. We live day to day.

We have five children living with us: the eldest is 21 now but he uses marijuana, and our 16-year old boy is starting to follow him. Our 12 year old daughter is deaf and can’t speak; she attends Hilton Special School. Only Amelia (14 years) has reached high school, and the youngest (9 years) is in primary school.



Josaia's fingers

When our daughter Bernadette, was in Class 12 (about 12 years old) she was raped by a boy from Wailokutu and became pregnant. The boys’ family came and offered us bulabula (traditional offering to ask for forgiveness and a ‘burying of the hatchet’); my daughter and grandson live at their village and we never see them.

Because of my disability I cannot help care for my family as a man should so Virisila has had to take on that task as well as doing the jobs women do in a family. She fishes every day and harvests sea urchins which she sells at Suva market on Saturdays. But recently she has not been well - coughing and headaches - and all we have to bathe in is an outside area with a tub and cold water. Over all these years, Virisila only gets a break when she spends a few days with her parents in the village. I farm cassava for us to eat but can’t do much else. Because I am not from this area, the villagers here do not help us: the only time they visit us is to ask for church, village, or vanua contributions; only a man living here but from Kadavu Island gave us some cutlery, and household items. ”



The Cama family with neighbours

Disclaimer

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“They had to amputate my fingers because of gangrene. I remember how humiliated I was at the CWM Hospital because I couldn’t use my hands to go to the toilet.”

Josaia Cama

World Map: Josaia Cama, a Fijian fisherman who worked for CKP Fishing Company (South Korea) on the Oryong 322



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Human Rights at Sea is a Registered Charity in England and Wales No. 1161673. The organisation has been independently developed for the benefit of the international community for matters and issues concerning human rights in the maritime environment. Its aim is to explicitly raise awareness, implementation and accountability of human rights provisions throughout the maritime environment, especially where they are currently absent, ignored or being abused.

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