

IN THE HIGH COURT OF FIJI

AT LAUTOKA

[CRIMINAL JURISDICTION]

CRIMINAL CASE NO: HAC 96 of 2025

STATE

V

IOWANE SALATO

Counsel : Ms. Michelle Lomaloma for the State
Mr. Felix Singh for the Accused

Sentence Hearing : 2 December 2025

Sentence : 6 March 2026

The name of the complainant is suppressed. Accordingly, the complainant will be referred to as "KT".

SENTENCE

[1] Iowane Salato, as per the Information filed by the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), you were charged, with the following offences:

COUNT ONE

(Representative Count)

Statement of Offence

RAPE: Contrary to Section 207 (1) and (2) (b) and (3) of the Crimes Act 2009.

Particulars of Offence

IOWANE SALATO, between the 1st day of January 2024 and the 10th day of July 2025, at Lautoka, in the Western Division, penetrated the vulva of **KN** with his finger, being a child under the age of 13 years.

COUNT TWO

Statement of Offence

SEXUAL ASSAULT: Contrary to Section 210 (1) (a) of the Crimes Act 2009.

Particulars of Offence

IOWANE SALATO, sometime between the 1st day of January 2024 and the 10th day of July 2025, at Lautoka, in the Western Division, unlawfully and indecently assaulted **KN** by forcing her to touch his naked penis.

- [2] This matter was first called before the High Court on 31 July 2025. The Disclosures relevant to the case were filed and served on 30 September 2025; while the Information was filed and served on 6 October 2025 and the matter was adjourned for plea. Thereafter, the State filed and served Additional Disclosures on 8 October 2025 and 10 November 2025 respectively.
- [3] On 10 November 2025, you were ready for your plea. Accordingly, you pleaded guilty to the two counts in the Information. This Court was satisfied that you pleaded guilty on your own free will and free from any influence. Court found that you fully understood the nature of the charges against you and the consequences of your guilty plea.
- [4] On 26 November 2025, the Summary of Facts were filed in Court and were read out and explained to you. You said you understood and agreed to the same. Accordingly, Court found your guilty plea in respect of the two charges of Rape and Sexual Assault to be unequivocal. I found that the facts support all elements of the counts of Rape and Sexual Assault in the Information, and found the said counts proved on the Summary of Facts agreed by you. Accordingly, I found you guilty on your own plea and I convicted you of the two counts of Rape and Sexual Assault as charged.
- [5] Iowane Salato, as per the Psychiatric Evaluation Reports submitted to this Court by the St. Giles Hospital (dated 3 September 2025 and 24 September 2025), it is stated that you have been diagnosed with Schizophrenia which is in remission. However, the said reports confirmed that you were fit to plead and fit to stand trial.
- [6] Iowane Salato, I now proceed to pass sentence on you in respect of the counts of Rape and Sexual Assault.
- [7] The Summary of Facts filed by the State was as follows:

BRIEF BACKGROUND

The complainant is KN, 9 years old, student of Link Road, Lautoka.

The accused person is Iowane Salato, 60 years old, Link Road, Lautoka.

Relationship: The accused is the complainant's grand uncle.

The Accused was charged with the following offences:

Count 1: Rape, contrary to Section 207 (1) (2) (b) and (3) of the Crimes Act 2009.

Count 2: Sexual Assault contrary to Section 210 (1) (a) of the Crimes Act 2009.

The accused has pleaded guilty to both counts.

FACTS:

- 1. Sometime during Term 1 in 2024 the accused entered the complainant's bedroom at night whilst she was sleeping. The accused removed her pants and panty and began to touch her thighs and then 'poked' the complainant's 'pee pee' meaning vagina with his finger. The complainant was scared of the accused and stated that she felt pain when the accused poked her vagina. The next morning, when the complainant went to the washroom she saw blood coming out. The complainant stated that the accused would do this to her every night.*
- 2. The complainant also stated that the accused had made the complainant touch his penis on one occasion. The complainant had refused. However, the accused threatened to slap her and made her touch his naked penis.*
- 3. The matter came to light when the complainant told her teacher Mrs. Wilson, during their Parents Day on the 11th of July 2025. The matter was then reported to Social Welfare and the matter was reported to the Lautoka Police Station.*
- 4. The complainant was then taken to the Lautoka Hospital where she was medically examined and a medical report was compiled.*
- 5. The accused was then interviewed under caution and the admitted to the offence. The accused was then charged accordingly.*

CAUTION INTERVIEW

- 6. The accused made full admissions in his caution interview (Transcripts of video recorded interview is attached and annexed as 'A').*

[8] Iowane Salato, you have admitted to the above Summary of Facts and taken full responsibility for your actions.

[9] The complainant's date of birth is 5 July 2015 [As per her Birth Certificate]. Therefore, at the time you committed this offence on her, the complainant was between 8 to 10 years of age and, as such, a juvenile. You are said to be the grand uncle of the complainant. Your brother is the complainant's grandfather. Therefore, this is an offence which is in the nature of a domestic violence.

[10] Section 4(1) of the Sentencing and Penalties Act No. 42 of 2009 (“Sentencing and Penalties Act”) stipulates the relevant factors that a Court should take into account during the sentencing process. The factors are as follows:

4. — (1) The only purposes for which sentencing may be imposed by a court are —

(a) to punish offenders to an extent and in a manner which is just in all the circumstances;

(b) to protect the community from offenders;

(c) to deter offenders or other persons from committing offences of the same or similar nature;

(d) to establish conditions so that rehabilitation of offenders may be promoted or facilitated;

(e) to signify that the court and the community denounce the commission of such offences; or

(f) any combination of these purposes.

[11] I have duly considered the above factors in determining the sentence to be imposed on you, which is primarily to punish and deter offenders or other persons from committing such offences and also to signify that the Court and the community denounce the commission of such offences.

[12] Section 4(2) of the Sentencing and Penalties Act provides that a Court must also consider the following factors when sentencing an offender:

(2) In sentencing offenders a court must have regard to —

(a) the maximum penalty prescribed for the offence;

(b) current sentencing practice and the terms of any applicable guideline judgment;

(c) the nature and gravity of the particular offence;

(d) the offender’s culpability and degree of responsibility for the offence;

(e) the impact of the offence on any victim of the offence and the injury, loss or damage resulting from the offence;

(f) whether the offender pleaded guilty to the offence, and if so, the stage in the proceedings at which the offender did so or indicated an intention to do so;

(g) the conduct of the offender during the trial as an indication of remorse or the lack of remorse;

(h) any action taken by the offender to make restitution for the injury, loss or damage arising from the offence, including his or her willingness to comply with any order for restitution that a court may consider under this Decree;

(i) the offender's previous character;

(j) the presence of any aggravating or mitigating factor concerning the offender or any other circumstance relevant to the commission of the offence; and

(k) any matter stated in this Decree as being grounds for applying a particular sentencing option.

[13] Furthermore, Section 4 (3) of the Sentencing and Penalties Act stipulates the factors that a Court must have regard to in sentencing offenders for a domestic violence offence.

“(3) In sentencing offenders for an offence involving domestic violence, a court must also have regard to —

(a) any special considerations relating to the physical, psychological or other characteristics of a victim of the offence, including —

(i) the age of the victim;

(ii) whether the victim was pregnant; and

(iii) whether the victim suffered any disability;

(b) whether a child or children were present when the offence was committed, or were otherwise affected by it;

(c) the effect of the violence on the emotional, psychological and physical well-being of a victim;

(d) the effect of the offence in terms of hardship, dislocation or other difficulties experienced by a victim;

(e) the conduct of the offender towards the victim since the offence, and any matter which indicates whether the offender —

(i) accepts responsibility for the offence and its consequences;

(ii) has taken steps to make amends to a victim, including action to minimise or address the negative impacts of the offence on a victim;

(iii) may pose any further threat to a victim;

(f) evidence revealing the offender's —

(i) attitude to the offence;

(ii) intention to address the offending behaviour; and

(iii) likelihood of continuing to pose a threat to a victim; and

(g) whether the offender has sought and received counselling or other assistance to address the offending behaviour, or is willing to undertake such counselling or seek such assistance.”

[14] Iowane Salato, I have duly considered the above factors as well in determining the sentence to be imposed on you.

[15] The offence of Rape in terms of Section 207(1) of the Crimes Act carries a maximum penalty of imprisonment for life.

[16] The severity of the offence of Rape was highlighted by the Fiji Court of Appeal in the case of **Mohammed Kasim v. The State** [1994] FJCA 25; AAU 21 of 93 (27 May 1994); where it was stated:

“...It must be recognized by the Courts that the crime of rape has become altogether too frequent and that the sentences imposed by the Courts for that crime must more nearly reflect the understandable public outrage.”

[17] In the case of **The State v Lasaro Turagabeci and Others** (unreported) Suva High Court Crim. Case No. HAC0008.1996S; Pain J said:

“The Courts have made it clear that rapists will be dealt with severely. Rape is generally regarded as one of the gravest sexual offences. It violates and degrades a fellow human being. The physical and emotional consequences to the victim are likely to be severe. The Courts must protect women from such degradation and trauma. The increasing prevalence of such offending in the community calls for deterrent sentences.”

[18] In **State v. Marawa** [2004] FJHC 338; HAC 16T of 2003S (23 April 2004); His Lordship Justice Anthony Gates stated:

“Parliament has prescribed the sentence of life imprisonment for rape. Rape is the most serious sexual offence. The Courts have reflected increasing public intolerance for this crime by hardening their hearts to offenders and meting out harsher sentences”.

*“A long custodial sentence is inevitable. This is to mark the gravity of the offence as felt, and correctly so, by the community. Imprisonment emphasizes the public’s disapproval and serves as a warning to others who may hitherto regard such acts lightly. One must not ignore the validity of the imposition of condign punishment for serious crime. Lastly the sentence is set in order to protect women from such crimes: **Roberts and Roberts** (1982) 4 Cr. App R(S) 8; **The State***

v Lasaro Turagabeci and Others (unreported) Suva High Court Crim. Case No. HAC0008.1996S."

[19] His Lordship Justice Daniel Goundar, in the case of **State v. AV** [2009] FJHC 24; HAC 192 of 2008 (2 February 2009); observed:

"...Rape is the most serious form of sexual assault. In this case a child was raped. Society cannot condone any form of sexual assaults on children. Children are our future. The Courts have a positive obligation under the Constitution to protect the vulnerable from any form of violence or sexual abuse. Sexual offenders must be deterred from committing this kind of offences".

[20] In the case of **State v. Tauvoli** [2011] FJHC 216; HAC 27 of 2011 (18 April 2011); His Lordship Justice Paul Madigan stated:

"Rape of children is a very serious offence indeed and it seems to be very prevalent in Fiji at the time. The legislation has dictated harsh penalties and the Courts are imposing those penalties in order to reflect society's abhorrence for such crimes. Our nation's children must be protected and they must be allowed to develop to sexual maturity unmolested. Psychologists tell us that the effect of sexual abuse on children in their later development is profound."

[21] In the case of **Felix Ram v. The State** [2015] FJSC 26; CAV 12 of 2015 (23 October 2015); His Lordship Chief Justice Anthony Gates laid down the following factors that a Court should take into account when sentencing an offender who has been convicted of Rape:

"(a) whether the crime had been planned, or whether it was incidental or opportunistic;

(b) whether there had been a breach of trust;

(c) whether committed alone;

(d) whether alcohol or drugs had been used to condition the victim;

(e) whether the victim was disabled, mentally or physically, or was specially vulnerable as a child;

(f) whether the impact on the victim had been severe, traumatic, or continuing;

(g) whether actual violence had been inflicted;

(h) whether injuries or pain had been caused and if so how serious, and were they potentially capable of giving rise to STD infections;

(i) whether the method of penetration was dangerous or especially abhorrent;

(j) whether there had been a forced entry to a residence where the victim was present;

(k) whether the incident was sustained over a long period such as several hours;

(l) whether the incident had been especially degrading or humiliating;

(m) If a plea of guilty was tendered, how early had it been given. No discount for plea after victim had to go into the witness box and be cross-examined. Little discount, if at start of trial;

(n) Time spent in custody on remand;

(o) Extent of remorse and an evaluation of its genuineness;

(p) If other counts or if serving another sentence, totality of appropriate sentence.”

[22] His Lordship Justice Goundar in **State v Apisai Takalaibau** – Sentence [2018] FJHC 505; HAC 154 of 2018 (15 June 2018); making reference to statistics of Aggravated Burglary cases filed in the High Court in 2017 and 2018, stated that “A factor that influences sentencing is the prevalence of the offence in the community.....The more prevalent is an offence, the greater the need is for deterrence and protection of the community.”

[23] This has also been affirmed by the Supreme Court in **Alfaaz v. State** [2018] FJSC 17; CAV0009.2018 (30 August 2018); where it was recognized that the prevalence of cases of child rape calls for harsher punishments to be imposed by Courts. Their Lordships held:

“According to the statistics released by the Director of Public Prosecutions Office it appears that a number of rape victims as well as victims under the age of 18 years and victims in domestic relationships or relatives were also victims of other serious sexual offences. The rape of children is a very serious offence and it is very frequent and prevalent in Fiji. The courts must impose harsh penalties dictated by the legislation. The courts should not leniently look at this kind of serious cases of rape of children of tender years when punishing the offenders.”

[24] In the case of **Anand Abhay Raj v. The State** [2014] FJSC 12; CAV 0003 of 2014 (20 August 2014); Chief Justice Gates (with Justice Sathya Hettige and Madam Justice Chandra Ekanayake agreeing) endorsed the view that Rapes of juveniles (under the age of 18 years) must attract a sentence of at least 10 years and the acceptable range of sentences or sentencing tariff is between 10 and 16 years imprisonment.

[25] However, in the case of **Aitcheson v State** [2018] FJSC 29; CAV0012 of 2018 (2 November 2018); His Lordship Chief Justice Gates (with Justice Saleem Marsoof and Madam Justice Chandra Ekanayake agreeing) stated that the sentencing tariff for the Rape of a juvenile should now be increased to between 11 and 20 years imprisonment. His Lordship held:

*“The tariff previously set in **Raj v The State** [2014] FJSC 12 CAV0003.2014 (20th August 2014) should now be between 11-20 years imprisonment. Much will depend upon the aggravating and mitigating circumstances, considerations of remorse, early pleas, and finally time spent on remand awaiting trial for the final sentence outcome. The increased tariff represents the denunciation of the courts in the strongest terms.”*

[26] In *Aitcheson v State* (*Supra*), it was said:

[72] Undoubtedly it has been accepted by the society that rape is the most serious sexual offence that could be committed on a woman. Further it is said that; "A murderer destroys the physical body of his victim; a rapist degrades the very soul of a helpless female."

[27] In determining the starting point within the said tariff, the Court of Appeal, in *Laisiasa Koroivuki v. State* [2013] FJCA 15; AAU 0018 of 2010 (5 March 2013); has formulated the following guiding principles:

"In selecting a starting point, the court must have regard to an objective seriousness of the offence. No reference should be made to the mitigating and aggravating factors at this time. As a matter of good practice, the starting point should be picked from the lower or middle range of the tariff. After adjusting for the mitigating and aggravating factors, the final term should fall within the tariff. If the final term falls either below or higher than the tariff, then the sentencing court should provide reasons why the sentence is outside the range."

[28] Iwane Salato, in the light of the above guiding principles, and taking into consideration the objective seriousness of the offence, I commence your sentence at 11 years imprisonment for the count of Rape (which is a representative count).

[29] The aggravating factors are as follows:

- (i) Breach of trust. You are related to the complainant. You are her grand uncle. Your brother is the complainant's grandfather. Being so, you should have protected the complainant. Instead you have breached the trust expected from you and the breach was gross.
- (ii) There was a large disparity in age between you and the complainant. At the time of the incident the complainant was between 8 to 10 years of age. At the time you were 60 years of age. Therefore, you were 50 years older than the complainant at the time of the offending or more than five times older than her.
- (iii) You took advantage of the complainant's vulnerability, helplessness and naivety and thereby paid no regard to her personal security, dignity or privacy.
- (iv) You have exposed the innocent mind of a child to sexual activity at such a tender age, and thereby robbed the complainant of her innocence.
- (v) As per the Victim Impact Statement filed by the State it is revealed that the complainant has been emotionally and psychologically traumatized by your actions and the trauma is continuing.
- (vi) The frequent prevalence of the offence of Rape in our society today, especially cases of child Rape.

(vii) You are now convicted of multiple offending.

[30] In mitigation you have submitted as follows:

- (i) That you are a first offender.
- (ii) You have submitted that you are truly remorseful of your actions.
- (iii) You have fully co-operated with the Police when you were taken in for questioning and subsequently charged for this matter instead of trying to circumvent the course of justice.
- (iv) That you entered a guilty plea at the first given opportunity during these proceedings.

[31] Iwane Salato, you are now 61 years of age (Your date of birth being 23 March 1964). You are married with three children, who are all above the age of 18 years. You are now said to be separated from your wife. You are currently unemployed. However, the above are all personal circumstances and cannot be considered as mitigating circumstances.

[32] Considering the aforementioned aggravating factors, I increase your sentence by a further 5 years. Now your sentence for the count of Rape would be 16 years imprisonment.

[33] Iwane Salato, you are a first offender. Even the State confirms this position. Furthermore, I accept your remorse as genuine and also the fact that you fully co-operated with the Police in this matter. Accordingly, considering the above mitigating factors, I deduct two years from your sentence. Now your sentence for the count of Rape would be 14 years imprisonment.

[34] You entered a guilty plea at the first given opportunity during these proceedings. In doing so you saved precious time and resources of this Court, instead of proceeding with the matter for trial. More importantly, you saved the complainant from having to give evidence and thereby re-live the incident all over again. For your early guilty plea I grant you a further discount of 4 years. Now your sentence for the count of Rape would be 10 years imprisonment.

[35] Iwane Salato, you have been found guilty on your own plea and convicted of one count of Sexual Assault in terms of Section 210 (1) (a) of the Crimes Act (Count 2).

[36] The offence of Sexual Assault in terms of Section 210(1) of the Crimes Act carries a maximum penalty of 10 years imprisonment.

[37] In the cases of *State v. Abdul Khaiyum* [2012] FJHC 1274; Criminal Case (HAC) 160 of 2010 (10 August 2012); and *State v. Epeli Ratabacaca Laca* [2012] FJHC 1414; HAC 252 of 2011 (14 November 2012); Justice Madigan proposed a tariff between 2 years to 8 years imprisonment for offences of Sexual Assault in terms of Section 210 (1) of the Crimes Act.

[38] It was held in *State v. Laca* (supra) “The top of the range is reserved for blatant manipulation of the naked genitalia or anus. The bottom of the range is for less serious assaults such as brushing of covered breasts or buttocks.”

“A very helpful guide to sentencing for sexual assault can be found in the United Kingdom's Legal Guidelines for Sentencing. Those guidelines divide sexual assault offending into three categories:

Category 1 (the most serious)

Contact between the naked genitalia of the offender and naked genitalia, face or mouth of the victim.

Category 2

- (i) Contact between the naked genitalia of the offender and another part of the victim's body;
- (ii) Contact with the genitalia of the victim by the offender using part of his or her body other than the genitalia, or an object;
- (iii) Contact between either the clothed genitalia of the offender and the naked genitalia of the victim; or the naked genitalia of the offender and the clothed genitalia of the victim.

Category 3

Contact between part of the offender's body (other than the genitalia) with part of the victim's body (other than the genitalia).”

[39] In this case, as per Count 2, it has been proved that you unlawfully and indecently assaulted the complainant, by forcing her to touch your naked penis with her hands. Therefore, in my opinion, the offence in Count 1 should be categorized under Category 2 (i) above.

[40] Accordingly, considering the objective seriousness of the offence and taking into consideration the nature and the gravity of the offence and your culpability and degree of responsibility for the offence, and also taking into consideration the aggravating and mitigating factors, I impose on you a sentence of 5 years' imprisonment for the second count of Sexual Assault.

[41] In the circumstances, your sentences are as follows:

Count 1 – Rape contrary to Section 207 (1) and (2) (b) and (3) of the Crimes Act – 10 years' imprisonment.

Count 2- Sexual Assault contrary to Section 210 (1) (a) of the Crimes Act – 5 years' imprisonment.

I order that both sentences of imprisonment to run concurrently. Therefore, your total term of imprisonment will be 10 years.

[42] Accordingly, I sentence you to a term of 10 years imprisonment. Pursuant to the provisions of Section 18 of the Sentencing and Penalties Act, I fix your non-parole period as 8 years imprisonment.

[43] Section 24 of the Sentencing and Penalties Act reads thus:

"If an offender is sentenced to a term of imprisonment, any period of time during which the offender was held in custody prior to the trial of the matter or matters shall, unless a court otherwise orders, be regarded by the court as a period of imprisonment already served by the offender."

[44] You were arrested for this case on 14 July 2025 and produced in the Magistrate's Court of Lautoka on 17 July 2025 and remanded into custody. You have remained in custody since that day. Accordingly, you have been in custody for a total period of about 8 months. The period you have been in custody shall be regarded as period of imprisonment already served by you. I hold that a period of 8 months should be considered as served in terms of the provisions of Section 24 of the Sentencing and Penalties Act.

[45] In the result, your final sentence is as follows:

Head Sentence - 10 years imprisonment.
Non-parole period - 8 years imprisonment.

Considering the time you have spent in remand, the time remaining to be served by you is as follows:

Head Sentence - 9 years and 4 months imprisonment.
Non-parole period - 7 years and 4 months imprisonment.

[46] You have 30 days to appeal to the Court of Appeal if you so wish.




Riyaz Hamza
JUDGE
HIGH COURT OF FIJI

AT LAUTOKA

Dated this 6th Day of March 2026

Solicitors for the State : **Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, Lautoka.**
Solicitors for the Accused : **Office of the Legal Aid Commission, Lautoka.**