



FIJI TRADES UNION CONGRESS

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ILO DIRECT CONTACTS MISSION TO FIJI TOLD TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY BY THE FIJI GOVERNMENT

The ILO Contact Mission which arrived in the Country on Sunday 16th September, 2012 and had scheduled meetings until Friday 21st September, 2012 with the Prime Minister and other Ministers including the Chairperson of the Constitution Commission together with FTUC and Employers have been handed a letter this morning by the Prime Minister's Office to leave the country as soon as possible.

The members of the Mission were:

- The Honorable Judge Koroma from Sierra Leone, Leader of the Mission. (A judge on the International Court of Justice and a distinguished member of the ILO Committee of Experts on Application of Conventions and Recommendations.)
- Ms Karen Curtis – Deputy Director of the International Labour Standards Department;
and
- Ms Christine Bader – Officer of the International Standards Department.

The background to the ILO Direct Contacts Mission to Fiji originated from the request by the Committee on Freedom of Association (CFA) to the Governing Body in 2011 and the tripartite resolution adopted at the 15th Asia and Pacific ILO Regional Meeting held in Kyoto, Japan in December, 2011.

The Direct Contacts Mission has the mandate to report back on the development in Fiji to the 316th Governing Body Session of ILO in November, 2012 in Geneva.

The scope of the mission was to cover all matters relating to Freedom of Association, including legislative and practical application of the fundamental principles of ILO Core Conventions, including other relevant compliance matters. The matter of utmost importance was that the Mission could meet freely with the various parties to the pending complaints, as well as with high level government officials and non-governmental actors of relevance.

In June this year the Minister for Labour during the 101st session of International Labour Conference re-confirmed the acceptance of the Contact Mission and a letter to this effect was sent to the Minister as ILO's confirmation. This was preceded by the Prime Minister's letter to the Director-General of ILO His Excellency Juan Somavia on 23rd May, 2012 accepting the Mission. The acceptance by the PM was based on para 18 of his letter and I quote :

"I consider that an objective, fair, transparent and all-inclusive ILO direct contacts mission will be most welcome. In this regard, my Government will shortly provide ILO with the terms of reference for the direct contacts mission. Given the commencement of the constitutional consultations and electronic voter registration, both of which will commence independently of each other in July, it is best that the direct contacts mission visit Fiji in the third or last quarter of 2012."

The Prime Minister's letter also alluded that his government has undertaken the task of overhauling the social security relating to Workers Compensation and setting a National Minimum Wage after consultations with tripartite social partners and would ensure it is compliant with ILO Conventions that Fiji has ratified.

Once again the regime has demonstrated that it cannot be trusted on the commitments it gives to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and other international institutions. The regime having drafted the terms of reference of the mission cannot now claim that they disagree with the terms of reference. Clearly the regime is not prepared for the ILO or any international organisation to see the reality on the ground in relation to workers rights. The truth is that the regime has trampled on trade union and workers rights established in ILO Conventions.

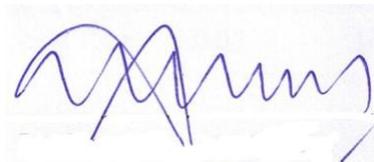
Unceremoniously giving an ultimatum to the ILO Direct Contacts Mission to leave Fiji will have a further devastating effect to Fiji's already dented reputation and standing internationally.

Once again the regime appears to be morphing into a panic mode as it resorts to heavy handed action similar to the ACTU/NZCTU Fact Finding Mission which was refused entry into Fiji on December, 13, 2011 after an open invitation to come to Fiji by the Attorney General.

This morning, the FTUC was informed of the latest handiwork of the regime that the Mission has been handed a letter to leave Fiji as soon as possible. This will not help the cause of the regime which has been keen on telling the world about the Constitutional Process, fair and equal treatment to all and its promise of an open, transparent and an accountable government. A “non-negotiable” matter for the Constitution Review.

We again question what gives this unelected government the power to impose themselves on the workers and the people of Fiji ? All the draconian decrees are there for everyone to see and there is no running away from the fact that it blatantly violates workers’ rights and human rights. This is a recognized fact by the International Community, the United Nations Agencies including the ILO which has been roundly condemned. The Kyoto Resolution of the ILO Asia Pacific Conference some 10 months ago comprising of Government in the region, employers and workers organization also unanimously condemned the blatant violation of workers’ rights in Fiji by the regime. The regime cannot suggest that the whole world is blind, biased and ill-informed except themselves. The assault on the cherished heritage of the workers of this country which has been trashed and trampled by this regime will not be forgotten by the workers who continue to give their sweat and blood for fair and honest existence.

The FTUC as workers representatives condemns the decision to expel the ILO Mission and calls on the regime to behave responsibly and honour its commitment given to the Director General of ILO.



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