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Fiji Under Scrutiny In US Trade Hearings

On 26th June 2012 the US Trade Representative in Washington DC announced that Fiji together with Iraq would be listed for General System of Preferences (GSP) hearings to examine whether the GSP for exports from Fiji should be withdrawn. The GSP Trade program allows duty free excess into the US imports from developing countries. However there are certain conditions which these countries need to observe to continue to qualify.

In Fiji's case, the hearings would examine whether Fiji is taking steps to afford internationally recognized standards for worker rights. This comes on the heels of the regime expelling the ILO Contact mission to Fiji to examine Fiji's compliance with the ILO Core Labour Standards. These standards are central to the determination by US Trade. Clearly the Prime Minister has been wrongly advised.

Trade Union and workers' rights which form part of human rights have been subject of scrutiny and condemnation by International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), International Labour Organisation (ILO), Global Unions Federation (GUFS), European Union (EU), ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly and numerous Governments and Trade Union National Centers around the world. This has been a result of the regime imposing various decrees that deny workers the right to collective bargaining and freedom of association. These decrees have denied workers the right to challenge unfair treatment at workplace and benefits. These

decrees take away any form of job security and nullified decades old won benefits in Collective Agreements. Workers and Union leaders have been intimidated and beaten at work places. The list goes on.

It is therefore ironic that the regime should showcase a Permanent Secretary on TV reading a written statement blaming Union Leaders for the predicament that the regime finds itself having to go to Washington DC to justify its denial of workers and trade union rights in Fiji. The PS reading the statement mischievously alleges that Union leaders have a political agenda in this regard. The regime needs to admit that it is solely responsible for the situation it has got itself into and it can easily get out of this situation by doing the responsible thing and revoke all decrees that violate international labour standards and start respecting workers' rights. The FTUC and the International Trade Union Movement will not sit back and accept such blatant violations.

Therefore the regime must stop shedding crocodile tears and pretend to be concerned about workers losing their jobs. It is time the regime takes responsibility for its actions. The regime's decision to expel the ILO Mission will have its implications in this hearing as well. Again it can blame no one else but itself.

The FTUC will be represented by its sister National Center in the US, the AFL-CIO in the hearings.



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