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Regime's Fear Strategy

Recently a number of statements have been made by the Prime Minister, The Ministry of Information, Fiji Sun and the Attorney General regarding the US GSP Trade Hearings.

All these statements appear to deliberately attempt to instill fear in people and also to again play the blame game, blaming FTUC for the predicament that the Regime finds itself in. The facts are clear and the people of Fiji will not be bamboozled with the overnight "love" the regime and its supporters appear to have developed for workers in Fiji.

The Prime Minister must understand that trade unions are defenders of human and workers' rights and play an essential role in ensuring good governance. Over the last 3 years, the Regime has systematically repressed trade union and workers' rights through the many decrees it has imposed on the workers. These include the Administration of Justice Decrees and its amendments, the Essential Services Decree, the Public Service Decree, the Public Order (amendment) Decree to name a few. These decrees in many instances take away the very fundamental rights of workers and their unions. These rights are universal and are clearly stated in the Core ILO Conventions, which the Regime has promised on numerous occasions to respect, the last being at the United Nations General Assembly. The ILO reports of the Freedom of Association Committee and the Committee on the Applications of Standards have clearly stated the violations and requested that the Regime act upon the recommendations of the Committees. The regime has to date not acted upon the reports. When the ILO mission on invitation of the Regime arrived in Fiji to assist the Regime to comply with the Conventions, the Regime was quick to expel the mission.

The Prime Minister's attack on Trade Unionist is unfortunate and another excuse for the bad advice that he has had from his Attorney General on the draconian Decrees. Let me remind the Prime Minister that Union Leaders are elected and have not usurped power like he has.

Workers determine who their leaders are and these leaders are mandated to act on behalf of the workers. It would have been more appropriate for the Prime Minister to talk about returning the Government of Fiji to the people. Can we have that as soon as possible, Mr. Prime Minister?

The FTUC is no longer convinced that the regime's promises to respect labour rights in Fiji can be taken seriously. It is time that the Regime stop making empty promises and attempting to defend its actions by blaming others who are not responsible for the violations. Calling the FTUC's actions as "un-Fijian" is a bad joke. We ask, is it Fijian to overthrow an elected Government, Is it Fijian to violate citizens' human rights, is it Fijian to violate workers' rights, is it Fijian to intimidate the people of Fiji, is it Fijian to mislead people, Is it Fijian to disrespect indigenous institutions and traditions?

It's time that the regime takes responsibility for its own actions and do not expect the Trade Union Movement worldwide to accept its "cock and bull" story on its respect for workers' rights. The FTUC is not seeking the withdrawal of GSP on Fiji goods but rather a clear time frame, without undue delay, in which the labour rights will be restored and respected in Fiji. If that is not done then the regime will have no one to blame but itself. Employers who benefit from this GSP with the US also have a responsibility to urge the regime to act responsibly rather than blame FTUC. The FTUC is not responsible for the labour rights violations which will be examined in the hearings in Washington.

The FTUC urges the Prime Minister to immediately repeal all the draconian decrees that he has imposed that violate labour rights, allow the ILO Contacts Mission back to Fiji on the original terms of reference that was agreed and ensure that human rights is protected for all citizens.



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