



FIJI TRADES UNION CONGRESS

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DATE: 21/03/14

PRESS RELEASE No. 62-03-14

Labour Ministry's Inefficiency with Workers' Issues

The Labour Minister is trumpeting his Ministry's settlement of disputes which are referred to the Ministry. The FTUC challenges this claim. The fact is that the Mr Jone Usamate is as usual reporting only half the story. Today majority of stakeholders prefer to settle disputes for one simple reason and that is to find quicker resolutions and return to the work at hand. This is due to the fact that the alternative route for settlements is so inefficient that it takes anywhere from one to five years for the cases just to be heard by the Arbitration Tribunal. And even then Awards remain pending for years in many of these cases. This is known to the Minister but no action has been taken. The FTUC acknowledges that there are two Ad hoc arbitrators who are attempting to do their best but these are exceptions.

We demand the Minister be more honest and give the full picture so the public understands the reason why workers today settle for half their entitlements rather than pursue the matter further which they are rightly entitled to. Employers have taken advantage of such inefficiencies. This is the same Ministry responsible for promoting greater productivity in all workplaces in Fiji.

Another area of inefficiency in the Ministry is the acceptance of reports of disputes. The FTUC is aware that many of its affiliates who report disputes do not get a response or if they do are advised that their disputes are being evaluated. Some of these evaluations have been ongoing for more than two years. Workers get the impression that the necessary action has not taken place and sadly those affected are left to fend for themselves. The Minister is fully aware of this matter. In another case, the Ministry has not acted upon an application for two Unions to amalgamate for nine months now despite the Unions following the laws to the letter.

These are serious inefficiencies and we request the Minister takes immediate action to ensure that workers' issues are taken care of. Furthermore, claims by Mr Usamate on his Ministry's much publicized productivity ring hollow when his Ministry is now just another department of the Attorney-General's Office. The FTUC has lost confidence in the Ministry's ability to act efficiently and impartially and to fully respect workers' rights in the process.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Felix Anthony', is centered on the page.

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NATIONAL SECRETARY

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