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**Fiji Sugar and General Workers Union**

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## **Press Release**

### **Sugar Workers Mourn Colleague**

A member of the FSGWU was fatally injured on Thursday morning last week after suffering from burns to his body at the Lautoka mill. Samuela Sigatokacake was admitted to Lautoka Hospital ICU Unit after acquiring 60% burns from work and sadly passed away on Sunday night.

Initial investigations indicated the release valve on a pressure vessel where Mr. Sigatokacake worked had not functioned since 2010 and the Management was made aware by workers much earlier. The structure of the vessel was also said to be unstable and the vessel itself in very poor condition with corrosions found on the inside. On Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> July, the same week, the same pressure vessel burst through the cracks in the welding. Instead of doing the right thing, the engineers simply welded the crack and continued with operations. Information is that the matter was not reported to the Ministry of Labour inspectors, nor was the vessel certified for operations. This raises a number of serious questions. How was the vessel certified in the first place prior to the crushing season commencing just weeks ago? Furthermore, it is also unknown why the release valve was not fixed for such a long time and while operations continued. The entire bottom cone of the pressure vessel collapsed and the employee was splashed with very hot juice. First aid at the workplace was not available nor was an ambulance ready to properly transfer the seriously injured worker to hospital.

This is not the first occasion that workers have suffered serious burns at the mill. The Union has, over many years raised concerns on OHS issues in the mills but it appears the FSC enjoys a privileged position where OHS laws can be overlooked and has in the past years behaved in a very arrogant manner when dealing with worker issues. There needs to be a wholesale change of attitude by Management to stop falling over each other trying to please their masters and in the process neglecting the safety and plight of workers.

The Union calls for a thorough investigation into this tragic accident by the factory inspectorate and OHS officers. The report needs to be made available to the Union and workers so that remedial work can be conducted and that workers are confident that their lives are not in danger. The Union also calls for a police investigation into criminal negligence on the part of FSC Management which resulted in the member's death. It is time a proper OHS audit of all mills is conducted by OHS professionals and that the OHS laws are enforced to avoid any future accidents.

The Union extends to the family of Samuela Sigatokacake its deep condolences and assures the family that we will do whatever is necessary to obtain justice for the family in these difficult times. This tragic event was in fact avoidable had management acted responsibly in the first place.

Felix Anthony

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Felix Anthony', is centered on the page. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial 'F'.

FSGWU General Secretary