



FIJI TRADES UNION CONGRESS

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DATE: 4/06/14

PRESS RELEASE No. 67-06/14

FTUC Refutes Usamate's Claims

The FTUC is appalled at the mis-information propagated by the Labour Minister, Jone Usamate through a media statement during a recent workshop in Labasa. The Labour Minister had the gall to state that workers in Fiji still enjoy their rights as if the opportunity to do so automatically grants them rights afforded to union members elsewhere in general. In case he has forgotten or just plainly ignored, the FTUC would like to remind him of the draconian ENI Decree that decimates the rights of workers.

His revised Gazette notice supplement dated 17th December, 2013 extended the force of ENI Decree to cover timber workers, municipal workers and the National Fire Authority. ENI Decree totally undermines trade union rights but it offers major tolls to the Employers to utilize against unions. This latest amendment regulation last December adds to the fear, intimidation and the very survival of the unions. The Decree No. 35/11 and its regulations outlaws professional trade unionists, eliminates existing collective agreements, promotes an employer-friendly system of non-professional bargaining agents to represent workers, restricts industrial action, and strengthens sanctions against legally striking workers and bans overtime and allowances for workers in a 24 hour shift operations.

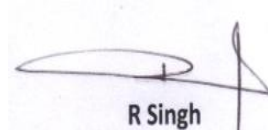
Despite this, the Minister sees it fit to mention that 78 percent of workers report their grievances to the Ministry. Yet he fails to disclose that his National Minimum Wage (Amendment) regulation early this year gives a pittance to the workers as a National Minimum Wage of \$2 per hour. He should take a leaf out of some of our neighbouring pacific islands countries like PNG and Vanuatu who have a robust minimum wage regulations which is established through a tripartite system.

Mr Usamate actively encourages workers to lodge their grievances directly at the Labour offices. The FTUC believes this alternative is highly inefficient as it has taken almost five years for some cases to be heard by the Arbitration Tribunal. All cases at the Tribunal now have been stood down from hearing until the backlog is cleared from several pending decisions which has piled up over the years.

The Minister and his government has paraded on the international scene promoting its plans to build a stronger democracy in Fiji and hold elections in September this year. Contrary to their promises the ILO Direct Contact Mission (DCM), with regime's concurrence, which was to look at the breaches of

Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining that visited Fiji in September 2012 was expelled from the country. Again in June 2013 Mr Usamate with his delegation gave countless excuses to ILO in order to avoid the process of a Commission of Enquiry under Article 26 of the Constitution of the ILO.

The Minister should do an introspection and accept the deteriorating and on-going violation of trade union rights in Fiji which calls for an urgent respite for the unions.



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