

312th Session of the GB

WORKERS GROUP STATEMENT ON FIJI

The WG would like to make the following statement on the worsening trade union rights situation in Fiji.

The Fijian government, led by a military junta since a 2006 *coup d'etat*, has launched an aggressive and illegal campaign to dismantle the trade union movement by use of brute force, by jailing trade union leaders and by issuing executive decrees that together have deprived most Fijian workers their fundamental international labour rights guaranteed by instruments of the International Labour Organization.

The regime has jailed trade union leaders on dubious charges in retaliation for their trade union activities.

On numerous occasions the military has severely battered, assaulted and harassed senior trade union officials in Fiji, leading in some cases to permanent physical damage.

The Public Emergency Regulations of 2009 makes it illegal to hold union meetings unless authorized by the regime and permission for meetings is simply not granted. Moreover the regulation permits the police to break up trade union meetings, which it has done several times this year – including on the day of an ILO Geneva visit.

The regime has attempted to bar trade union leaders from addressing the International Labour Conference and it has now placed a travel ban on the General Secretary of the Fiji Trades Union Congress.

Since 2009, the regime has issued several decrees that sharply curtail trade union and labour rights in both the public and private sectors. It eliminates the access to judicial review and redress for past, present and future violations. It disallows the right to question the legality of the decrees themselves.

These sweeping reforms were made without any consultation with the trade unions.

The government issued the “Essential National Industries & Designated Corporations Regulations”, which gave effect to the Essential National Industries (Employment) Decree 2011. Unfortunately the Government ignored a specific request from the ILO not to allow the Decree to enter into force. The regulation designated the finance, telecoms, civil aviation and public utilities sectors as essential and it allows the regime to include any other industries as and when it wishes.

We take note of recommendations made by the Committee on Freedom of Association which has denounced these and other labour rights violations.

There is ongoing unwillingness by the regime to engage with the social partners and the international community, including the ILO.

In view of these serious concerns the Workers Group strongly condemns the actions of Fiji government and calls upon the Director General to:

1. Closely monitor the situation in Fiji and to intervene to safeguard the human and labour rights of Fijian workers.

2. Ensure that the recommendations of the ILO Committee on Freedom of Association are fully implemented, in particular; *“(j) Given the seriousness of the complainants’ allegations and the absence of a complete picture of the situation on the ground, the Committee urges the Government to accept a direct contacts mission to the country in order to clarify the facts and assist the Government in findings, together with the social partners, appropriate solutions in conformity with freedom of association principle.”*

3. Urgently inform the UN Secretary General and all heads of UN agencies regarding the grave and worsening trade union and human rights situation in Fiji and call on them to take these matters into consideration in their engagement with Fiji; including the suspension of cooperation if the situation in Fiji remains same.

Thank you

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