

Thursday, 17 May 2012

The Pacific and Fiji

The Australian trade union movement acknowledges its long history of solidarity with trade unions of the Pacific.

Congress notes with concern that the Oceania region is not on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goal on Decent Work by the goal date of 2015.

Congress recommits to working with unions in the region to meet the challenge of achieving decent work and sustainable development for all. Australian trade unions will continue to work for:

- Strong trade unions in Pacific countries to effectively represent the interests of workers;
- Economic models and trade arrangements that do not adversely impact countries in the region economically or socially;
- The integration of decent work into Australian development assistance in the region, including employment generation, workers' rights, social protection, and capacity building of trade unions;
- The inclusion of decent work into all significant infrastructure and resource development projects and the allocation of revenue to public goods so that the benefits to local workers are maximised; and
- Comprehensive action on climate change, including mitigation and adaptation, to reduce the risk of adverse impacts on communities.

Congress recognises the crucial role of the South Pacific and Oceania Council of Trade Unions (SPOCTU) as the voice of working people in the Pacific.

Fiji

Congress expresses its serious concerns with the deterioration of human and trade union rights in Fiji, including:

- Amendments to the Public Order Act (enacted in late 2011) that effectively continue the draconian measures introduced under the Public Emergency Regulations (PER) of 2006 to 2011. The amendments enable the regime to operate as an authoritarian government without democratic scrutiny, accountability, transparency and in a manner inconsistent with good governance;

- The series of Decrees amending the Employment Relations Promulgation (ERP) that remove thousands of public employees from the protection of the ERP. Collectively these Decrees take away fundamental labour rights including the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining. Furthermore the role of trade union to challenge any decision of Government or Government owned entities to make any employee redundant or change any terms and conditions of employment, despite a collective agreement remaining in force, has been removed.
- The promulgation of the Essential National Industries (Employment) Decree which removes fundamental labour rights and effectively abolishes trade unions in eleven key corporations.
- The repeated assault, harassment, intimidation and arrest of trade union leaders including Mr Felix Anthony, National Secretary of the Fiji Trade Union Congress (FTUC), and Mr Daniel Urai, President of the FTUC.

The decrees and the regime's treatment of trade unionists is in violation of International Labour Organisation core labour standards which Fiji has ratified and is obligated to respect; the Cotonou Agreement which obligates Fiji to respect the core labour standards; and Fiji's own labour laws.

Congress calls on the Government of Fiji to:

- Respect human and trade union rights, and the promotion and protection of such rights in a manner that complies with Fiji's obligations under international human rights instruments;
- Immediately revoke amendments to the Public Order Act and all other decrees that violate ILO Core Conventions;
- A return to the rule of law, including reinstatement of and respect for an independent judiciary;
- Withdraw all military personnel from all civilian workplaces and cease intimidation of workers and citizens;
- Restoration of the 1997 Constitution; and
- A return to democracy as soon as possible, including the holding of genuinely free and fair elections.

Congress acknowledges the efforts of the Australian Government to see a return to democracy and respect for human rights in Fiji. Congress calls on the Australian Government to continue its efforts by:

- Refraining from easing pressure on Fiji until there is a clear return to democracy and respect for human rights;
- Holding the regime accountable to its human and trade union rights violations, particularly through the International Labour Organisation;
- Providing support, where possible, to persecuted trade unionists.

Without a return to democracy, Fiji is not on the path of restoring respect for human and trade union rights, international development assistance and investor confidence. In the meantime, the economy will continue to deteriorate and the workers of Fiji and their families will continue to struggle to meet basic needs.

The Australian trade union movement will work with the Fijian and international trade union movement in the struggle to maintain trade union rights, including bargaining and organising rights, end the military dictatorship and restore democracy.