

Sunday, 30 October 2011

Worker rights in Fiji sink to a new low; Australian unions condemn arrest of Fijian union president

Australian unions have serious concerns about the welfare of the head of the Fiji Trades Union Congress after he was reportedly arrested and detained on his return from a visit to Australia yesterday.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said Australian unions had been informed by sources in Fiji that Daniel Urai had been arrested as soon as he stepped off his plane in Nadi yesterday when he returned from the Commonwealth Trade Union Group meeting in Perth.

Mr Urai was believed to have then been taken to Suva for further questioning. His current whereabouts are unknown.

Ms Kearney said Australian unions were unaware of the reasons for his arrest, but suspect they are linked to his visit to Australia, where he took part in meetings to discuss the increasing abuse of trade union and worker rights by the military dictatorship in Fiji.

"If these reports of Mr Urai's arrest are correct, then the repression of human and trade union rights has sunk to a new low when a union leader is arrested simply for telling the world about what is happening in his own country," Ms Kearney said.

Last week during the Commonwealth People's Forum in Perth, the CTUG, which represents more than 30 million workers in 30 countries, condemned the Fijian Government for its violations of international workplace rights, including the recent Essential National Industries (Employment) Decree, which bans all industrial action, bans unions from representing workers, voids all collective agreements, and scraps minimum wages, conditions and overtime pay.

Ms Kearney noted that Mr Urai still faced charges after he was also arrested in August this year for organising a meeting of hotel workers in Nadi who were seeking a collective agreement.

She said the Fijian Government was becoming increasingly arrogant in its persecution of the union and opposition leaders, despite growing international condemnation.

"It appears the intimidation of workers and their representatives in Fiji has entered a dangerous new phase," Ms Kearney said.

"Worker and trade union rights are a fundamental element of a democratic society. Independent trade unions are needed in Fiji to deliver decent work to its people, 40% of whom live below the poverty line. The world cannot allow this abuse and disregard of human and workers' rights to continue."

Ms Kearney said a number of large Australian companies, including airlines and banks, were effectively condoning the actions of the regime of military dictator Frank Bainimarama by continuing to operate in Fiji.

"We urge those businesses to distance themselves publicly from the Australia-Fiji Business Council, which is one of the most enthusiastic mouthpieces for the military regime," she said.



australian council of trade unions

media release

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