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Second Fijian union leader arrested in a week points to a new wave of anti-worker action

Australian unions are increasingly concerned at what appears to be a systematic campaign of persecution by the Fijian Government of workers and their representatives following the arrest of another senior Fijian labour movement official.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said that it was troubling that the Fijian Government was resorting to such strong arm tactics, yesterday arresting the Secretary of the Fijian Trades Union Congress, so soon after the arrest of FTUC President Daniel Urai last week.

Ms Kearney said Australian unions were still investigating the reasons for both arrests, but given the military dictatorship's track record on abuse of workplace and human rights, had grave concerns for the immediate welfare of both union leaders.

Recently, The Fiji Trades Union Congress had taken part in the Commonwealth People's Forum in Perth, where the Commonwealth Trade Union Group condemned the Fijian Government for its violations of international workplace rights.

"The fact that not just one but two union leaders have been arrested and detained in Fiji within a week is an alarming and aggressive tactic by the Fijian Government," Ms Kearney said.

"The intimidation of workers and their representatives in Fiji is continuing unabated despite international condemnation.

"Worker and trade union rights are a vital aspect of a democratic society.

"Arresting union leaders for doing their job is unacceptable and alarming behaviour by a regime that has persecuted the union for some time.

"Independent trade unions in Fiji are representing workers in an increasingly dangerous environment, and with 40% of Fijians living below the poverty line, their human and workers' rights must be protected.

"To arrest union officials for nothing more than doing their job, is tantamount to Frank Bainimarama making his Government's anti-union position crystal clear.

"A society in which democratic protest and protection of workers' rights is met with government retaliation and intimidation is one that Australian unions condemn as a blatant disregard of both human and workers' rights."

Ms Kearney also noted that from the beginning of next week, all existing collective agreements in Fiji will be declared null and void under an undemocratic and unilateral government decree that also effectively outlaws unions.

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