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New decree bans Fiji workers' basic rights to collective bargaining and representation

The rights of Fijian workers have deteriorated further following the start of a draconian decree that effectively bans collective bargaining.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said the Essential Industries Employment Decree, which came into full effect today, denied workers of many fundamental rights, including to freely organise or collectively bargain.

"This is yet another example of the continued attack on workers' rights by the Fiji military Government," Ms Kearney said.

"Australian unions are increasingly concerned at what appears to be a systematic campaign of persecution by the Fijian Government of workers and their representatives."

The decree's implementation comes immediately after Fijian Trades Union Congress President Daniel Urai was charged with sedition and accused of political violence, and follows the arrest of FTUC Secretary Felix Anthony.

"Unions are among the few Fijian institutions still able to campaign for democracy and human rights, which appears to be why they are being targeted by Fiji military leaders.

"The detention of union officials in recent weeks is evidence of the Government's repression and Australian unions are concerned that other Fijian union activists have been forced to go into hiding with their families."

The restrictions on worker rights under the Essential National Industries Employment Decree include:

- Banning unions from representing workers in negotiating collective bargaining outcomes;
- Making void all current collective agreements;
- Banning overtime payments, including for weekend work, work on days off, and work on public holidays;
- Removing minimum wages, terms and conditions of work in designated industries;
- Banning all strikes, slowdowns, or any action that may negatively impact the employer;
- Requiring that all members, office bearers, officers and executives of the union shall be employees of the designated company.

Ms Kearney called on Australian companies operating in Fiji, including ANZ and Westpac banks, to publicly denounce the Government's decree and commit to workplace rights consistent with International Labour Organisation obligations.

"Australian companies cannot wash their hands of the repression, while continuing to profit from the labour of Fijians," Ms Kearney said.

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