

Thursday, 17 November 2011

ACTU & ACCI call for freedom of association in Fiji

Joint Statement by Ged Kearney, President, Australian Council of Trade Unions and Peter Anderson, Chief Executive, Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry

The Australian Council of Trade Unions and the Australian Chamber of Commerce have combined to call on the government of Fiji to take immediate steps to restore workplace rights in the country, to respect international labour standards governing union and employer rights, and to comply with recommendations of the Governing Body of the International Labour Organisation and its tripartite Committee on Freedom of Association, which were adopted overnight in Geneva.

Both the ACTU and ACCI have been increasingly concerned at the arbitrary detention, arrest and harassment of senior trade union figures in Fiji for exercising civil and labour rights which are norms of behaviour in Australia, and recognised internationally.

Our alarm has been deepened in recent weeks with the arrest of Fiji's national trade union President and General-Secretary, the latter even while the ILO's Committee on Freedom of Association was deliberating on the case.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said the unions and ACCI shared the ILO's concern with the reports of assault, harassment and intimidation of trade union leaders and their families.

"This is in direct violation of Fiji's international obligations. The ILO has now called on a number of occasions for the interim regime to bring its law into line with Fiji's international obligations," Ms Kearney said. "We have repeatedly expressed our serious concerns with the latest decree that the freedom of association and the right to bargain collectively.

"We will continue to call for a change in Fiji that brings about respect for worker's and trade union rights. The finding of the ILO is a strong reminder to the interim regime that the world is watching and will not tolerate such actions."

In reporting on case number 2723 (Fiji) ACCI's Peter Anderson, who is also global employer spokesperson on the CFA, told the ILO Governing Body overnight:

"This case brings to full attention alarming and regrettable developments in this Pacific Island country. The Committee not only draws to the attention of the Governing Body this extremely serious state of affairs, but also recommends that the Fiji government accept a direct contacts mission to inquire into and press the case for application of basic international law embodied in Conventions 87 and 98. Our appeal, as representatives of the world's employers, is to join with the international community and condemn these flagrant breaches, which taint the good name and reputation of this beautiful country in the region and within the global community."

"History tells us that the worst abuses of fundamental rights occur when authorities close in on themselves and their people. The Committee urges the government to engage with the international community on these issues and provide immediate recompense to the trade union leaders subject to arbitrary arrest, detention, harassment and intimidation."

A copy of the ILO CFA's report can be found at: www.ilo.org

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