

Sunday, 11 December 2011

What is the Fijian Govt trying to hide? Aust and NZ unions to go ahead with visit despite reported ban

Unions from Australia and New Zealand intend to proceed with plans to send a delegation to Fiji this week and have called on the regime to clarify media reports it will ban them from the country.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said she was concerned at unconfirmed reports in today's Fijian media that the union delegation would not be permitted to enter the country for a three-day mission to investigate allegations of human and labour rights abuses by the military regime.

She said the ACTU and its New Zealand counterpart were seeking clarification from the Fijian Attorney-General, but intended to go ahead with the fact-finding mission, which is the result of requests from Fijian unions and civil society groups.

"Australian and New Zealand unions have been open about the intentions of this visit, but this reported ban on travel into Fiji can only add to perceptions that the regime is attempting to prevent scrutiny from the rest of the world," Ms Kearney said.

"We are responding to an open invitation from the Fijian Government to visit their country, and are concerned at these unconfirmed media reports that we will be denied the opportunity to have meaningful discussions about human rights concerns.

"The purpose of this delegation is to talk to Fijian workers, unions, church and civil society groups, employers and business representatives about serious allegations of repeated breaches of human and labour rights by the Bainimarama Government.

"There has been global reporting and condemnation of the unelected Fijian Government's increasingly hostile attitude to human rights, particularly labour rights.

"We have also sought meetings with Prime Minister Bainimarama which we hope would be the beginning of a fresh dialogue about human and labour rights in Fiji.

Ms Kearney said unions in Australia and New Zealand held a teleconference this morning where it was determined to go ahead with the visit.

"We have been invited by Fijians to investigate the true situation in Fiji, and we don't want to let them down," Ms Kearney said.

"We have held concerns for working people on Fiji since the enactment of a series of decrees which have abolished the minimum wage, and effectively banned collective bargaining and union representation. Senior union leaders in Fiji have been arrested and detained in recent months, in what appears to be a campaign to intimidate anyone who challenges the regime.

"This is on top of other breaches of human rights, particularly freedom of expression, including a bans of church meetings, harassment and violence towards opposition politicians, religious persecution, and a clampdown on media."

The delegation is due to leave for Fiji on Tuesday.

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