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Unions call for strong action against latest Fijian Military Dictatorship decree

The Australian Government must take strong action against the Fijian military regime's latest attempts to suppress participation and a genuine return to democracy, the ACTU said today.

The regime's announcement that union leaders and others are to be banned from participating in political parties in the lead up to next year's election is the latest attempt to undermine a return to democracy in Fiji.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said that, in light of this latest appalling decree, the Australian Government should withdraw its plan to re-establish an Australian High Commission in Fiji.

"We should not legitimise a regime that is clearly only interested in maintaining its grip on power and has no interest in a genuine transition to democracy in Fiji," Ms Kearney said.

"To ban any one group of people from participating in political parties is a blatant attack on freedom of association and democracy, but to ban trade unionists, who have been the strongest supporters of the reinstatement of human rights and democracy in Fiji will make a mockery of any election," Ms Kearney said.

"This is the latest step in a campaign that has targeted, harassed and intimidated Fijian union members, including assault and detention without charge.

Earlier this week the Fijian military regime dumped the draft constitution, prepared by an independent Commission, that recommended enshrining basic human rights such as the freedom of association, freedom to bargain collectively and a minimum wage.

"Australia is a major power in the Pacific and we have an opportunity and a responsibility to advocate for positive change in Fiji," Ms Kearney said.

"Australia should stand with other countries in their criticism of the regime's most recent actions.

"The Australian Government currently has sanctions against Fiji military regime including barring regime leaders from entering Australia, but we should not in any way provide legitimacy to a regime that has repeatedly failed to respect the rights and promote the interests of the Fijian people."

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