



FIJI TRADES UNION CONGRESS

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Fiji Sinks Deeper Into Dictatorship

The latest imposition by the Regime through Decree No. 11 of 2013 (Political Parties (Registration, Conduct, Funding and Disclosures) (Amendment) Decree 2013) is another attempt by the regime to move the goal post once again, denying the people of Fiji their choice of a political party to represent them in Parliament and Government. This move is clearly the lowest point in the dictatorial maneuvers the regime has made in the name and quest for so-called democracy.

The Decree now totally shuts out the media from reporting on any political party or any views that these parties may have. The Decree basically tells the media that they can only report on political matters that the regime approves of. Again, total control over the media by the regime, while it preaches to the world that we have a free media. The latest amendment to the Decree has further subjugated and disenfranchised the rights of our people. Clearly the regime is increasingly getting uncomfortable with political parties airing their views and trying to make the regime accountable and transparent for their actions.

The Decree also further empowers the Registrar of Political Parties and Permanent Secretary for Elections, to unilaterally make a determination on the registration of any political party, giving the Elections Office wider powers to reject applications. This office is neither neutral nor independent as would be a normal requirement in any country willing to observe a fair and equitable process. The regime's Attorney General has the final say in all such matters, as the Minister responsible. We ask, why is this the case if we are committed to ensuring that the people's will must be respected as pronounced in Decrees 57 and 58, or were these Decrees for international consumption only? If so, these Decrees must clearly state that the regime does not mean what it states in its own Decrees. It is now time to stop fooling the people of Fiji.

The Decree further strengthens provisions disqualifying and denying Trade Unions or their representatives and employees to participate in any political activity. Despite giving several assurances of an open and transparent "roadmap" to Democracy, this regime unashamedly totally disregards these

commitments. How can we, the people of Fiji take seriously any commitment this regime makes in light of its track record so far?

The FTUC condemns all these impositions and the hefty fines and imprisonment terms stipulated in the Decree. These are nothing short of intimidation and threatening the people of Fiji into submission. No self respecting authority is going to consider such bullying tactics to shut its people up. The regime must come out of its bluff that it knows best for the people of Fiji. It clearly does not, when it denies people their human rights to speak and be heard, demonstrating its own weaknesses and doubts about the acceptability of its actions by the people.

Trade Union officials are not public officers and are not paid from the public purse. This is a membership based movement and is funded by members only. Government has no business in the internal affairs of Trade Unions and this is clearly defined in the ILO Convention on Freedom of Association which this regime has an obligation to respect. Political freedom of workers is a right which is recognized the world over and indeed many assurances have been given to the international community that these rights would be respected. The world has been assured by the Regime of an open and transparent process for our quest for "true democracy". Yet what we see in reality is more denial of open and free debate on critical issues that affect all the people of Fiji. Fiji is sinking deeper into being a totalitarian state with an iron fisted dictatorship. This is no way to achieve true democracy, which cannot and will not be sustainable if the people do not have the freedom to speak and be heard.

The Regime's motives are clear and must be condemned. The means to achieve Democracy is equally important as democracy itself. The FTUC calls on the United Nations and the International Community for an international observer mission to Fiji now to ensure that the preparations for elections are conducted in a free and fair manner in line with international standards and principles, where every citizen is free to exercise his or her right, including the right to speak and be heard through the media, and that every citizen is given a fair opportunity to participate fully in the political life of Fiji. We recognize that Fiji cannot have a free and fair election without the preparations and process being fair in the first place.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Felix Anthony', with a stylized, cursive script.

Felix Anthony
National Secretary

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