



FIJI TEACHERS CONFEDERATION



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Press Release- World Teachers Day 5th October 2021

Theme: **"Teachers at the heart of Education Recovery"**

Since 1994, World Teachers Day has been celebrated annually on October 5th. This celebration draws attention to the contributions of teachers in educating their communities in a bid to develop a more inclusive and sustainable society. The important role of teachers at the heart of the education system was highlighted last year, and again this year as the COVID-19 pandemic struck Fiji. While the first wave had a detrimental impact on the provision of face-to-face classes for approximately three months, the second wave, unfortunately, has prevented physical interactions between teachers and students for about half the year. However, our teachers ensured the continuity of learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, via online classes in the form of zoom, moodle and classroom drive. School administrators and teachers also made an effort to reach out to students who had issues with accessibility to internet and data. Worksheets were prepared and delivered to these students. Such stories made headlines on the print and social media. The story of Emele Tabucala, who teaches at Ratu Sukuna Memorial School, and Rajneel Rohitesh of Saint Theresa College inspired all at the height of the pandemic. Mrs. Tabucala delivered worksheets for students who lived beyond the border and to Kadavu Island, while Rajneel Rohitesh, who trekked through the highlands of Navosa, distributed work sheets to his students living in different villages throughout the mountainous community. Teachers were involved in the verification process of child vaccination, entering data and assisting parents during the vaccination process. Other teachers were involved in humanitarian and charity work, assisting those families who were affected by COVID-19. The theme for this year's WTD was coined in collaboration with UNESCO, ILO and Education International, three organisations which give education utmost priority. The theme, 'Teachers at the heart of Education recovery', is apt considering the fact that every Fijian is recovering from the economic, social and psychosocial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, one and a half years into the COVID-19 crisis, this year's WTD will focus on the support teachers need to fully contribute to the recovery process. While WTD marks an important time to show appreciation and thank teachers for all that they do each and every day, it is imperative that the stakeholders join hands to support teachers, who are at the core of the education system, so that the lost teaching hours do not affect the performance of our students. Like all other years, this year's World Teachers Day provides the perfect opportunity to celebrate the teaching profession, highlight teachers' accomplishments and draw attention to teachers' needs and voices. Teachers are arguably the most important members of our society as they give our children a purpose, set them up for success as citizens of our world, and inspire in them a drive to do well and succeed in life. The children of today are the leaders of tomorrow, and teachers are that critical point that makes a child ready for their future. Children carry what they are taught at a young age throughout the rest of their lives. They will use what they have learned to influence society. Everyone knows that today's youth will become tomorrow's leaders, and teachers have access to educate the youth in their most impressionable years - whether pre-school teaching, teaching extra-curricular, sports or traditional classes. Teachers have the ability to shape leaders of the future in the best way for a society to build positive and inspired future generations and therefore design society, both on a local and global scale. In reality, teachers have the most important job in the world. Those who have an impact on the children of society have the power to change lives. Not just for those children themselves, but for the lives of all. Great teachers have the ability to change lives for the better. Teachers have not only shaped lives inside the four walls of the classroom, but have also nurtured our students to be good sports ambassadors. According to Education International and UNESCO, WTD commemorates the adoption of the 1966 ILO/UNESCO Recommendation

concerning the Status of Teachers and the 1997 Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel. Since the adoption in 2015 of fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), which is 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all', WTD has also provided an occasion to take stock of progress towards SDG 4 on increasing the supply of qualified teachers and address the challenges faced by the teaching profession.⁴ These challenges have multiplied exponentially, as the unprecedented situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic severely tested education systems that were already constrained. Teachers individually and collectively demonstrated leadership, innovation and creativity in the classroom, school and community levels while responding to the many challenges imposed on their work and working conditions. The COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted the importance of systemic and ministerial support for teacher leadership at times of crisis, which was critical in terms of the contributions teachers made to provide remote learning in order to support the vulnerable population to ensure that learning gaps were mitigated. Therefore, discussions surrounding this year's WTD must address the role of teachers in building resilience and shaping the future of education and the teaching profession. It's important to reflect on the importance of teachers on the lives of our children despite the environment that they work in. There can be no dispute that the behaviour of children will remain a huge challenge for many teachers, who not only provide education, but also act as counselors and mentors, when children return to school after a lapse of more than half the year. Thus, counseling strategies and support must be on hand for both teachers and students. In Fiji's context, the employees of the state, who are teachers, have suffered immensely in the manner that their terms and conditions of work have been watered down unilaterally. Teachers have been the worst victims considering the forced one-sided contracts and the draconian disciplinary procedures. Teachers have been threatened with constant fear of job losses. Derogatory comments made by some of our senior officials of the Education Ministry, excessive workloads and the denial of salary increments have affected the morale of teachers. The Education Budget has been reduced drastically in the past two years, including the non-provision of the My APA increment for teachers for 2017-18, while the My APA increments for 2018-19 and 2019-20 remain anyone's guess. The denial of a hard-earned increment to the teachers is an act of bad faith on the part of the Education Ministry and the State. The morale in the teaching profession remains low. The Confederation urges MEHA to engage with the legitimate representatives of teachers in dialogue in good faith to address the challenges of providing our children with the quality education they deserve. How does one expect teachers to provide quality education when their morale and self-esteem is low? Teachers are not magicians. They are educators and they must be provided the necessary support required to achieve quality education and Sustainable Development Goal 4. On this day, Fiji Teachers Confederation wishes all our teachers a happy, vibrant and meaningful WTD.

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