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FTUC PRESS RELEASE: Call for Family Care leave Removal by FIA

The Fiji Trades Union Congress is surprised and disappointed at some of the submissions made to Government by the Fiji Institute of Accountants (FIA). Clearly, those that represent the institute are not in touch with the reality on the ground. We have the news media, social media, NGO's, Individuals and Unions calling for assistance for families who have nothing to eat due to unemployment, lockdowns and poverty in the country. The Institute appears to be deaf to these cries for help. We oppose any suggestion by the FIA to increase VAT, particularly at a time like this. This is clearly a sad sign of insensitivity by FIA Officials.

We also object to the FIA's suggestion that civil servants should have a salary cut. This will bring great hardship to thousands of families and reduce the purchasing power of these workers which would result in a decline in VAT collections and taxes. Workers have mortgages, bills and other financial commitments to pay. Many support extended families who are unemployed or dependents. Civil servants have not received their merit increments according to Governments own remuneration guidelines implemented in 2017. Teachers have not received their rural allowances and acting allowances for the past 2 years. Government Ministers on the other hand have received salary increases of between 100% to 300% not long ago and are able to withstand the increase in cost of living.

The FTUC also objects to FIA proposal to take away the family care leave stating it is too disruptive to work. We remind FIA that family care is more important than work and that there needs to be a fair balance between work and family commitments. Countries around the world are attempting to lessen working hours to achieve a work life balance and here we have FIA suggesting family care is too disruptive. We wonder where these people live or whether they have families to care about. We remind FIA that over the past few years our public holidays have been reduced unilaterally by 3 days per annum by this Government. In addition to this, civil servants who were entitled to compassionate leave for decades of 3 days per annum had that converted into family care leave. The FTUC over decades have campaigned for more holidays for workers. So, it is not as if this family care leave is all about generosity of the Government. It is time to put families first. Work life balance as enshrined in international labour standards and occupational health and safety is critical for employee productivity within and beyond the workplace.

The FTUC reminds FIA that the national budget is not only about numbers and balancing the books. It must be more about people, more so, at the current time when most people are barely surviving. We must preserve the good that we currently have and build on them for a fairer Fiji.

Felix Anthony

National Secretary

All correspondence to be addressed to the National Secretary

Phone : (679) 3315377, 3315402.
Email : ftucns@ftuc.org.fj
Suva, Fiji

32 Des Vouex Road,
P.O. Box 1418,

An Affiliate of: International Trade Union Confederation / International Trade Union Confederation Asia Pacific