

# Unions decry decision

BY LITIA CAVA

THE automatic renewal of teachers' contracts for one year after its expiration in January is annoying teachers unions.

The two teachers unions — Fijian Teachers Association (FTA) and Fiji Teachers Union (FTU) — claim that teachers were advised earlier that they would be given five-year contracts except for those who were not fully qualified.

FTA general secretary Paula Manumanunitoga has questioned Government about this change and said in the past teachers' positions were secured.

He claimed that the contract system was an unfair system because it limited employees from improving their standard of living, especially if they were to seek financial assistance from the banks.

“If they keep insisting that the contract system is good, then why are all these problems arising,” Mr Manumanunitoga said.

“Why haven't they prepared the contracts for teachers? It's just a one-way thing, everything seems to be wrong and teachers feel insecure.”

Mr Manumanunitoga has questioned the excuse by the ministry that it had been trying to verify the qualification of teachers.

Fiji Teachers Union (FTU) general secretary Agni Deo Singh said teachers were victims of one-year contracts.

“What were they doing all this while? How did they employ them in the beginning when the contracts were done?” Mr Singh questioned.

“It is very sad that teachers are getting this kind of contracts.”

He also said it would be hard for teachers to seek financial assistance from banks as this system was creating a lot of difficulties.

According to the circular dated December 24, 2018, the Education Ministry stated it had insufficient time to complete the verification of individual qualifications in order for it to be in line with the Teacher Remuneration Setting Policy.

“To allow the ministry time to complete the checks required, all secondary school teachers' contracts due to expire in January 2019 will be automatically renewed for one year at the employees' current salary band,” the circular stated.

“This includes all employees on oneyear contracts who were advised to reapply for their position in the letter dated September 21, 2018.”

The ministry stated that a new contract would be issued once all checks were completed.