



# Fiji Teachers Union

(THE CHILD OUR HOPE)

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## Newsletter

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### GREETINGS

"Our hopes for a more just, safe, and peaceful world can only be achieved when there is universal respect for the inherent dignity and equal rights of all members of the human family." (UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka)

Brothers and Sisters in Union, Bula Vinaka and warm greetings to the members of FTU! The Union, at the outset, wholeheartedly welcomes the new members to the FTU family.

Brothers and Sisters in Union, FTU sincerely extends its appreciation to the members for their tremendous support during the 92nd FTU AGM and Annual Conference held at Rishikul Sanatan College.

Your unwavering support of the leadership has reaffirmed your resolve to persevere as a strong team to achieve our common goal.

Unity is strength and powerful. Being in solidarity for a common cause of greater good is what will make us strong as a person, community and team.

Solidarity means unity or agreement of a group/ community or class of people based on common interests, objectives, and standards. Well we all have heard the phrase, unity is the best policy. And yes it is. The power of solidarity is always more than the power of an individual.

Be it your relationship, family, country, or humanity in general, we can fight against all odds when we join our hands together. The power of unity is unbreakable.

Now, that the AGM has concluded, attention will shift towards membership drive, capacity building and industrial relations issues.

Brothers and Sisters in Union, FTU will need your continuous support for the success of our activities. Hence, we look forward to your participation in all branch activities.

### THE 92ND AGM AND ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Members of FTU gathered in huge numbers for the Unions 92nd AGM and Annual Conference at Rishikul Sanatan College. The turnout was pleasing, and so were the powerful and vibrant addresses by the FTU National President Muniappa Goundar, General Secretary Agni Deo Singh and the Chief Guest Govind Singh. The General Secretary briefed the house about matters concerning industrial relations and the activities that were undertaken by FTU post COVID-19. The General Treasurer Sashi Mahendra Shandil took the house through the audited financial report, while the Vice President Nakul Deo Barman took the house through the resolutions. In the evening, the FTU history book was launched by Honourable Professor Biman Prasad- the leader of NFP. The writer of the book Mr. Krishna Datt also shared his experiences and expectations. On Tuesday, the FTU Cooperative Thrift and Credit Limited met. The meeting allowed the shareholders to see the financial position of FTU-CTCL. The five board members, whose term had expired, were replaced. The new board members are Bros. Brij Singh, Narain Goundar, Rohit Deo, Rajnesh Lingam, and Sis. Latchmi Devi. The National Women's Wing had their meeting on Tuesday after the FTU-CTCL AGM. Sis. Urmila Singh was elected as the Chairlady. In the evening, shareholders attended the FTU-CTCL social. On Wednesday, we concluded the 92nd FTU AGM and Annual Conference on a high note with sports and presentation of prizes. The Union looks forward to the 93rd AGM and Annual Conference in the Friendly North.



### LAUNCHING OF THE FTU HISTORY BOOK

On Monday 4th April, the FTU history book, which was written by Krishna Datt, was launched much to the delight of the members. The leader of the National Federation Party - Hon. Professor Biman Prasad was the chief guest. Hon. Professor Biman deliberated at length on the book and its content. The writer Krishna Datt then addressed the delegation present and he alluded to the various chapters and FTU's significance in the trade union movement. The FTU history book collected detailed memories and events from 1930 to 2022. The detailed descriptions added a priceless memoir to FTU's dignity. The photos captured vivid descriptions of what actually transpired from 1930-2022. The writer Krishna Datt, who was FTU's president and a Member of Parliament, is commended for documenting FTU's history in a way that is interesting and informative. Brothers and Sisters in Union, the book reveals the role FTU has played as a trade union.



### PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

While addressing the membership at the FTU AGM, NP Bro. Muniappa Goundar shared that FTU had been members' mouthpiece in the media drawing the public's attention to the challenges faced by teachers in achieving quality education. He said that he was proud to be the President of an organization that had not deviated from its course, but had always been the voice of its members. He alluded to the various press statements released by the Union during the year on all issues affecting teachers and the education system in the country. He shed light on the COVID-19 pandemic which was much more than a health crisis, as it was also an unprecedented socioeconomic crisis. NP stated that the COVID-19 crisis had not caused cracks, but had revealed them. He gave credit to the teachers, who 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

as they rose to the occasion of getting worksheets printed and delivered to their children. In some cases, teachers crossed rivers and climbed undulating terrains to reach their students. They left their families to shelter for themselves and spent a few nights in villages just to ensure the children received their worksheets. NP then addressed the house on the following industrial relations issues: review of the Job Evaluation Exercise; inception of the Teacher Protection Policy; Executive Teacher Positions; downgrading/ upgrading of schools; congestion of urban schools; sporting leave; corporal punishment; contractual appointments; and school zoning. NP stressed that FTU continued to strengthen and readjust various services to the members in terms on increase in premium for the Selffunding Insurance Scheme and its age bar. He urged members to read through the union literature which was posted up on the union's website and face book page and send the links to membership at grass root level so that members were abreast with union information and developments.

### ADDRESS BY THE CHIEF GUEST- BRO. GOVIND SINGH

Bro. Govind Singh, who is the Secretary General of Council of Pacific Education and the Senior Coordinator of Education International, thanked Nasinu Branch for the cordial, colorful and moving welcome ceremony. He thanked the President for his dynamic Presidential address and for already raising some prominent issues. He paid tribute to the FTU and FTC General Secretary Bro. Agni Deo Singh for his indefatigable defense of human and trade union rights and status of teachers and a champion of resilience in education for the last 22 years since 1999 as General Secretary and since 1980 when he entered union as Secretary of Rewa Branch. Reflecting on the 92nd AGM and Annual Conference theme, Bro. Singh shared that the pandemic profoundly exacerbated existing educational and social inequalities in Fiji and the world. Bro. Singh read Susan Hopgood's message. Susan Hopgood is the President of Education International. Bro. Singh also shared the findings of the global survey by United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF), which highlighted that schools were not only place for academic learning, but also for social and emotional learning, and that lack of social interaction and support for school classes had disrupted children's education, wider learning opportunities, access to social and emotional security, health and wellbeing and safe learning environment. He highlighted the fact that the pandemic forced changes to the mindset from face-to-face class to distant, ad hoc and emergency remote teaching in a very unpredictable manner. He stressed that teachers under the new norm talked about trauma, stress, fear, anxiety and mental health issues of

students and of themselves as well. He said that the pandemic highlighted the need for independent skills from teachers, students and parents. The bureaucratic hierarchical and standardised educational practice in our primary and secondary schools had difficulty in meeting the needs of virtual classroom modalities. Schools with poor ICT structures made matters worse. At the end, disadvantaged children were deprived of quality learning. Bro. Singh acknowledged teachers who served in front lines with medical authorities and those who distributed food and basic necessities relentlessly to those families who were starving during lockdown. He thanked FTU for a long and sustained campaign to feed thousands of children during the pandemic. He deliberated at length on the impact of the OMRS, contractualisation of the teaching profession, MyAPA increment, the technical colleges saga, and reforms introduced by MEHA.

**UPSETS DURING THE SPORTS MEET**

Sporting events have traditionally added hype and excitement to the AGM and Annual Conference. This year's games attracted a huge crowd and some upsets were on the card. The soccer competition was tough, and Nadroga created one of the biggest upsets when they defeated Labasa in the quarter-final. Lautoka also upset hosts Nasinu in the semifinal. Rewa, which was one of the most consistent teams, had the last laugh as the Delta Tigers won the soccer competition, defeating Lautoka. Nasinu scooped the netball title, outpacing rivals Suva. Taveuni sent shockwaves in the men's volleyball competition as the men from the Garden Island upset defending champions Suva, ending Suva's two-decade dominance in the competition. Nasinu created history as they won the men's volleyball title. In women's volleyball, the women from the Old Capital beat Suva in the semi-final, and then shocked Nasinu with a dynamic performance to return to Ovalau with the spoils. The standard of competition was quite tough and the presence of district reps in sports added thrust and thrills. At the outset, Nasinu, being the host branch, dominated the sports meet, while Rewa's togetherness and 'red' spirit on and off the field stood out. The best players for the various sports include: soccer- Rajneel Prasad (Rewa); netball- Josifini Talei (Nasinu); women's volleyball- Sainiana Vukicibua (Levuka); and men's volleyball- Alipate Tui (Nasinu).

Sport	Winner	Runner-Up
Soccer	Rewa	Lautoka
Netball	Nasinu	Suva
Men's Volleyball	Nasinu	Taveuni
Women's Volleyball	Levuka	Nasinu

**93rd FTU AGM AND ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

Labasa bid to host the 2023 FTU AGM and Annual Conference next year. The 'Friendly North' last hosted the AGM and Annual Conference in 2015 and excitement is high amongst members as they plan their travel to Labasa which is known for its hospitality and oneness. The 2023 AGM and Annual Conference will take the 'Friendly North' by storm and large numbers are expected to converge for the AGM.



**THANKS AND APPRECIATION**

The host branch- Nasinu deserves credit for hosting the 92nd AGM and Annual Conference. In a short span, the Executives, led by the Chairperson Ashween Raj, pulled the loose ends, got a 'spirited' team and organized the three-day Conference and the Pre-conference meeting. It was pleasing to note the support from FTU stalwarts, including those who have retired from FTU. The commitment of the FTU leadership to stand and defend the collective and individual rights of the membership remains steadfast, and has been praised by many. The membership at large is complimented for the wonderful support that was rendered in Nasinu.



**FTU NATIONAL WOMEN'S WING**

The National Women's Wing has worked hard to ensure that all branches have a fully functional women's wing. The Executives of the National Women's Wing attended the branch AGMs. They successfully conducted their AGM on Tuesday 5th April at Rishikul Sanatan College.

The list for the Executives is as follows:

Position	Name	Branch
Chairlady	Sis.Urmila Singh	Rewa
Vice Chairlady	Sis. Ajeshni Nand	Suva
Vice Chairlady	Sis. Niazul Naushad	Ba
Secretary	Sis. Sima Kumar	Lautoka
Assistant Secretary	Sis. Arti Karan	Navua
Treasurer	Sis. Latchmi Devi	Nasinu
Executive Committee Members (4)	1. Sis. Nandita Kumar	Nasinu
	2. Sis. Salome Vakabuto	Rewa
	3. Sis. Sandhya Goundar	Levuka
	4. Sis. Sunita Lal	Labasa

**INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS  
GRADUATE SALARY**

The 2017 Job Evaluation Exercise put graduate salary at \$26,283.00. MEHA and the Ministry for Civil Service endorsed the 2018 Remuneration Guideline, which was in breach of the 2017 JEE agreement. Three different salary scales are used: \$26,283.00, \$24,000.00 and \$22,500.00. This is cheating! The Union will pursue relentlessly until a positive outcome is achieved. The Honourable Education Minister recently announced in Parliament those graduates would be paid their correct salaries, but graduates continue to be paid \$22,500 which is less than what the JEE had set.

**MERIT INCREASE**

Lest we forget for the assessment period 2017-2018, only 137 teachers only received an increment. The union is deeply concerned that for the periods from 2018-2019, 2019-2020, and 2020-2021 there is no word on any increment being paid out to teachers. As per the JEE, all teachers should have been on step 4 + paid a bonus as promised by the then Education Minister Honourable Aiyaz-Sayed Khaiyum during the road shows that he conducted nationwide. Teachers were actually misled and given false hope of getting annual increments as per the JEE. You rightfully deserve to be compensated fairly. We will not settle for anything less

**FTU FILES LEGAL ACTION ON HoS POSTS**

It was indeed very sad that MEHA changed the MQR suddenly to eliminate senior leaders including principals, VPs, APs and HODs who have a degree plus STTC and degree plus DTT. According to MEHA, only those who have postgraduate qualifications would be promoted as school heads. The union filed proceedings in the Employment Court to stop MEHA from implementing a

new system in promoting heads of secondary schools. The union believes this decision is unfair, discriminatory and unjustified and shows total disregard of their own policies. The union's argument is that those who possess equivalent qualifications, that is, degree in the relevant subject plus teacher training component (STTC and DTT included) must not be eliminated. Primary trained teachers, who upgraded their qualification and joined secondary schools, must also be included. The court has ruled in our favour that none of the acting heads be removed till the Courts determination of the substantive matter.

**ACTING ALLOWANCE**

Numerous complaints regarding non-payment of acting allowances were received. Acting allowance has been paid for primary schools in December 2021, but several secondary schools acting allowances are yet to be paid. This rather is now before the Arbitration Court.

**DIS-ESTABLISHMENT OF POSTS**

The re-classification of schools has seen a large number of schools downgraded, resulting in loss of substantive posts. These include: primary school Head Teacher and Assistant Head Teacher positions, HoD positions as well as HoS Positions in secondary schools. The union had been reliably informed that all HoD positions with less than three teachers are being abolished. The criteria should be 50 by 40 minute period. All these cost cutting measures mean that teachers, who are doing the job that they deserve to be paid for, are actually being denied.

**CONTRACTURAL APPOINTMENTS**

As expected, the Union has experienced MEHA instilling fear in the teachers due to the one-sided draconian contracts of employment. We have also noted lately that teachers have been issued contracts with short durations. Some have been given four month's contract and advised they will not be renewed. Secondary trained teachers, who had taught in primary schools for several years, were laid off at the beginning of 2021. Those, who are still employed, have been given 12 months contracts. One such member has taught for 12 years. The one month notice of termination of contract actually sends shivers down the spine, considering the current attitude of the top people in MEHA. Purchases on credit terms, bank loans, etc. are also affected.

**"FTU STAND- CONTRACTS MUST GO!"**

**LOG OF CLAIMS- MEHA**

A Log of Claims has been submitted to pay acting allowances, payment of correct graduate salary of

\$26,283.00, as per the 2017 JEE, review of employment contracts, payment of pending annual merit increase from 2019 to 2021, and a 10% across the board adjustment to address the CPI, plus other remuneration related matters. The case is before the Arbitration Court.

**LOG OF CLAIMS- FNU**

A Log of Claims had been submitted to FNU on the following:

- (i) A 10% across the board increase based on the current CPI;
- (ii) Review of the employment contracts to read, 'renewal/non-renewal by mutual agreement';
- (iii) Renewal subject to performance based on open, objective and transparent assessment process at least six months prior to expire; and
- (iv) The Union to be engaged in negotiations at least one month before any redundancy is contemplated. The matter has been referred to the Arbitration Court to seek redress.

**BRANCH AGMs**

All Branch Annual General Meetings, except for Tailevu branch, was conducted and completed within the month of March from March 3 to March 19, 2022. The 15 branches are full functional. Executives of the National Women's Wing accompanied members of the elected National Executive and rejuvenated women's wing at branch level. The matter is now referred to the Arbitration Court.

**INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**

This year's International Women's Day was celebrated on Tuesday 8th March with the theme 'Gender equality today for a sustainable tomorrow'. Branches also celebrated this important day with women members to appreciate their contributions to the economy and society in general. The Southern Branches met at FTU HQ on Tuesday March 8th for a celebration. The Chief Guest was Sis. Elizabeth Fong, who is the President of AUSP. She addressed the house and deliberated at length on ways how Unions could empower women members.



**MEDICAL INSURANCE BOOKLETS**

The self-funding insurance booklets, with all the amendments, have been uploaded on the FTU website. Please, read through the booklets.

**UNION ASSISTS NEEDY CHILDREN**

The Fiji Teachers Union continues to reach out to needy families and students. The Union's motto is 'The Child Our Hope'. FTU has in the past assisted victims of natural disasters with relief and stationery packs. Victims of STC Winston and Yasa were greatly assisted by FTU. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, FTU also assisted students whose families were in dire need. That assistance has since continued. The General Secretary visited the Valelevu, Nasole, Narere and Navua and Ba HARTS and schools in the north and west with stationery supplies for students. Times are hard, and it is pleasing to see that NGOs and other individuals are also assisting students with school stationery.



**BRANCH VISITS/ CLUSTER MEETINGS**

The General Secretary continues to visit schools and districts, and will address cluster meetings to enlighten members on current issues, as well as, maintain connectivity. School Reps and Branch Executives need to work hand-in-hand to ensure that these cluster meetings are a success in terms of attendance of members.

**MEMBERSHIP- ECE TEACHERS/ MEHA SUPPORT STAFF**

ECE teachers have joined the Union and others are welcome to join as well, as per the rules and Constitution of FTU. The 92nd AGM also passed the motion that support staff at MEHA and FNU could also join FTU as per the rules.

**POLICY ON TEACHER'S RIGHT**

A submission has been made to MEHA to formulate a policy on teacher's rights. This should include protection from unnecessary harassment and threats from external and internal parties.

### MEMBERS HEALTH

The Union advises all members to look after their health, the type of food consumed and members must ensure that they have some time in the day to do some physical activities. NCD's are on the rise and members must take precautionary measures.

### FTU WEBSITE/ FACEBOOK PAGE

We encourage members to take advantage of the FTU Website and FTU Facebook page to retrieve more information on the latest developments, press releases and information pertaining to industrial relations issues.

***Please note, the Union does not abandon any case, regardless of how long it takes.***

***Information is repeated in FTU Newsletters for continuous awareness.***

### UP-COMING UNION ACTIVITIES

The Union is looking forward to members' participation in the Union activities this term. These activities include zonal sports meet and capacity building. After the success of the 92nd AGM, branches are also organizing thanksgiving functions.

### CONCLUSION

*"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."*  
(Helen Keller)

The commitment of FTU leadership to stand up and defend the collective and individual rights of the membership remains steadfast, and has been praised by many. FTU has stood firm to defend its members when dirt was thrown at them. The various press releases and media statements are indicating that FTU is very much alive and well. Members will note that in the last few years, MEHA has taken numerous cost cutting measures at the expense of the teachers. **This includes long-service leave allowance, drastic reduction in post of responsibility positions, executive teacher positions, counselor positions, graduate salary, location allowance, non-payment of increments, boarding allowance and the like.**

While the Ministry has saved millions, teachers have lost out substantially. The Union will continue to pursue persistently for the restoration of these losses.

MEHA has endured five ministers and four permanent secretaries in the last few years. Each one has changed policies at whim, escalating the level on uncertainty and inconsistency, leaving all stakeholders immensely, in a dilemma. It is indeed a very sad state of affairs.

We are nowhere near the targets we set for ourselves in 2015 to progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4. Our repeated calls for an Education Commission have been ignored for over a decade now. However, FTU will continue to fight persistently to ensure that members' rights and dignity are re-stored.

The frequent unilateral and adhoc decisions and the implementation of ill-conceived policies without due diligence and consultation with the relevant stakeholders have gradually compounded the mess MEHA is currently in. The closure of the vocational centres attached to the various secondary schools, the opening of the numerous technical colleges and subsequent closure of the same have resulted in the loss of millions of dollars as well as depriving interested students from accessing vocational classes, beginning at secondary school level. These technical colleges have become 'white elephants' and the lecturers and instructors have been terminated.

The sudden change to MQR and nonadherence to the revised OMRS in the case of HoS secondary schools is another typical example of poor decision making.

The recent announcement by the Minister at the Nausori Principals Association meeting that she was going to DISMANTLE THE COMPUTERS in the schools and replace them with tablets is another example of "I AM GOING TO...". We could end up in a predicament similar to the technical colleges; millions of dollars worth of computer labs destroyed and no tablets in sight.

Members would remember Hon. Reddy announcing sometime in 2014 the "one laptop per child" plan that never saw the light of day. We need not labour the point further. FTU's calls for an Education Commission have been ignored for over a decade now. However, FTU will continue to fight persistently to ensure that members' rights and dignity are re-stored.

Our campaign for quality public education will also continue.



