



Joint statement concerning workers' rights in Fiji

Fairtrade International is an international association of Fairtrade certified producer representative organisations and Fairtrade labelling initiatives that work to promote a better deal for small farmers and workers through Fairtrade. Fairtrade has been working with sugar cane farmer groups in Fiji and brought economic benefits to 4,000 farmers and their families. Fijian cane farmers have had to deal with many challenges to their livelihoods, including expiring land leases, floods and the impact of European market sugar reform. Fairtrade has been supporting them to establish their own democratic producer organisations. According to a recent economic assessment by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Fairtrade certification of sugar in Vanua Levu has successfully enabled farmers to improve their livelihoods, enhance productivity, and invest in their local community with Fairtrade Premiums.

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) is a global organization promoting and defending the rights of 175 million workers in 153 countries and territories. It has 308 national affiliates, including the Fiji Trades Union Congress (FTUC). The International Union of Food Workers (IUF) is an international federation of trade unions representing over 12 million workers worldwide employed in, among others sectors, sugar. The IUF represents workers in Fiji's sugar mills. The TUC is the British Trades Union Congress (TUC), which is the voice of Britain at work. Its 53 affiliated trade unions have 6 million members, including the workers who refine Fiji's sugar. It has a long association both with Fiji's trade unions and with the Fair Trade movement and the Ethical Trading Initiative. The following is a joint statement of Fairtrade International, the ITUC, the TUC and the IUF regarding the workers' rights situation in Fiji, particularly with respect to freedom of association.

This week, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) reported that it “was stopped by the Fijian government from carrying out a mission to verify complaints over the lack of freedom of association” and told to leave the country. Over the last few years we have followed the situation in Fiji with concern and this week’s events are a further cause for concern. We support the position of international bodies such as the ILO, which has previously expressed “deep concern at the serious violations”. Between 2009 and 2012 the military government applied the Public Emergency Regulations, which, among other things, led to banning of public meetings, including trade union meetings, without prior authorization from the police. In sugar mills, essential parts of the negotiated collective agreement have been set aside and the representative function of the trade union impaired. In 2011, the ILO adopted a resolution, endorsed by governments, employers and workers’ representatives, calling on the government to restore fundamental rights.



We are also concerned by the decision of the Fiji Sugar Corporation to end the dues check-off system for union membership of the National Farmers Union (NFU), which is affecting the financial stability of the NFU. We believe this should be reinstated for those farmers that are members of the Union. Fairtrade intends to renew dialogue with the farmers unions as part of its multi-stakeholder engagement with the Fijian sugar industry.

We welcome the decision of the government to organize elections by 2014, and the steps taken to prepare for that event and further democratization. However so far, these developments have not led to restoration of workers' rights. Recently the European Union – African, Caribbean, and Pacific (EU-ACP) Joint Assembly stated in its report following their recent mission to Fiji, the importance of “a democratic and just society firmly established on the rule of law and respect for human rights.

Fairtrade International, the ITUC, the TUC and the IUF reiterate the call previously made by the international community for full restoration of workers' and farmers' rights to exercise the right of freedom of association and collective bargaining, to be recognised by all parties as a key part of the process of democratic reform in Fiji. We believe that an essential step towards that goal will be to resume a dialogue on workers' rights with local and international stakeholders, including the ILO. We are committed to working with all the relevant stakeholders in order to improve industrial relations in the Fijian sugar industry. Our concern is to ensure the continued viability of the Fijian sugar industry based on sustainable farming, ethical sourcing, fair trading practices and respect for human rights.

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