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MEDIA RELEASE

Seasonal Workers ad hoc blacklist ban inhumane

The President of the National Federation Party, Lieutenant-Colonel Pio Tikoduadua has called on the Employment Minister, Jone Usamate to make public all details of the seasonal workers scheme including the plight of those workers in New Zealand that warrants such an inhumane approach to blanket blacklisting.

Mr Tikoduadua said Mr Usamate's statement where whole villages and settlements are being imposed with penalties of a 4-year ban from the seasonal workers scheme is discriminatory, inhumane and goes against the principles of international labour practices.

"Why in the interest of balance and fair play, is this Government penalizing a whole village for four years, for the supposed action of a fellow villagers on an overseas scheme? This reeks of provincialism and political sanctioning on areas that the Fiji First government may have discovered as not friendly to them."

"Now we have some 25 whole villages being penalized by this Government for four years. How many more villages will be put on this blacklist?"

Tikoduadua said that Minister Usamate's handling of the recent New Zealand seasonal workers case is symptomatic of the sheer arrogance that is the usual mode for of Fiji First where there is no empathy nor a balanced regard for redress for the worker."

"The way that the seasonal workers scheme is being implemented needs to be investigated, as we know that this also being used as a vote-buying scheme for our rural communities."

"What we are now witnessing is the disempowering and demeaning treatment of our citizens, many of them who have been taken straight from their villages to a foreign country for work without much a thought for their care and their support in that country."

"The fact that that the minister states that this ban is not sudden or a new decision but was "explained" during ministry consultations and recruitment, is exactly what makes the scheme's implementation untenable."

"This outcome is simply a knee-jerk reaction from the bad publicity that the current government has received from media reports abroad that highlighted the gross inhumane conditions that our people are subjected to."

All correspondence should be addressed to the general secretary

“A responsive, responsible and ‘equality driven’ Government does not take their decision and “explain” this to the community. It is indicative of an ill thought out policy, devoid of consultation with almost no thought to the wider impact of this on the community, such as travel expense debts that these workers may be worrying about.”

“An ‘equality driven’ government would also ensure that initiatives like this take care of all our communities. At present the current selection criteria of passing physical fitness tests, passing RULA (Rapid Upper Limb Assessment) & an acceptable BMI (Body Mass Index: <29) automatically rules out the vast majority of indo-Fijians and the numbers who have gone on this initiative validate this gross discrimination based on stereotyping. Granted that this particular line of work is labour intensive, there should be a similar initiative that allows for less rigid demands that are not neocolonial in approach.”

“The NFP has stated many times before that employment creation in the country is critical and abdicating our national employment obligations to New Zealand, Australia and the Pacific Island countries under seasonal worker schemes and similar initiatives like for teachers is commendable but it is a short-term band-aid solution to the national unemployment and low wage issue.”

“This is now further aggravated if the current scheme results in negative consequential results not just for the worker but for whole communities back in Fiji.”



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