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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### Top-Up Cane Payment a sham **Bleak Diwali**

The National Federation Party says more than 70 percent or over 9,000 cane growers and their families will have a bleak Diwali after deductions by Fiji Sugar Corporation for commodities and loans have left them with no income in the 4<sup>th</sup> and final cane payment for 2016.

This shows that Government's decision to top-up the 4<sup>th</sup> cane payment of 44 cents per tonne by \$9.15 per tonne was a sham, says NFP Leader Professor Biman Prasad.

"We have cited several statements issued by FSC to growers. The statement itself is misleading. The deduction by FSC is listed as reversal of 50% of FSC debt. In reality, this means that a grower has paid 50 percent of debt owed to FSC for fertilizer, rice, sugar etc. Other deductions include rent to i-Taukei Land Trust Board, Sugar Cane Growers Fund and Fiji Development Bank".

"In one case a grower who harvested 236 tonnes of sugarcane in 2016 is left with only 82 cents from a payment of about \$1500 after deductions by FSC. This is preposterous. How can FSC and the Government expect this grower like thousands of others to celebrate Diwali?"

Professor Prasad said the fact that the FSC announced the payment even before the Sugar Industry Tribunal certified it raises serious questions about the payment like: -

1. Was the Sugar Cane Growers Council Chief Executive Officer aware of the actual amount of the payment and the top-up?
2. If the SCGC CEO was aware, did he request FSC and Government not to make any deductions from this payment because of Diwali?

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All correspondence should be addressed to the general secretary

3. Why did the FSC announce the payment before the Tribunal certified the payment because any cane payment is first announced by the Tribunal?
4. Why are \$3.05 cents per tonne from the top-up to be paid in January 2018 when the payment is for the 2016 season?
5. Does this mean that FSC and Government will use the deferred payment of \$3.05 as a Special Payment that is advanced to growers from the previous season, in this case the 2017 season, for educational needs of their children?

Failure by those at the helm of the sugar industry institutions to answer these pertinent questions, namely the Sugar Industry Tribunal, Sugar Cane Growers Council, Fiji Sugar Corporation and the Ministry of Sugar will confirm the deviousness of these institutions.

This façade re-enforces our consistent call for the democratisation of the industry institutions, especially the SCGC that is the umbrella body of growers who are the largest and most important stakeholders in the industry.

It also confirms that FSC and Government are colluding similar to the CSR and colonial rule to subjugate growers. They have lost the plot and seriously undermined the livelihood of growers because the industry has been declining under their control since the military coup of 2006.

The NFP has already announced the implementation of a minimum guaranteed price of \$100 per tonne of cane if it forms government. This will be part of sound and sensible measures to be implemented by an NFP Government to ensure the industry once again produces 4 million tonnes of sugarcane and at least 400,000 tonnes of sugar.



**Professor Biman Prasad**  
**NFP Leader**