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MEDIA RELEASE

Suppression of media freedom

The detention of three *Islands Business* magazine journalists for alleged Public Order Act offences is deeply concerning. It is a clear warning of how the Fiji First Government will behave if it is re-elected to office this year.

Islands Business magazine posted a story last week suggesting that the employment contract of Magistrate Andrew See had ended. Mr See had ruled in favour of ATS workers last month in the Employment Relations Tribunal. The Police reacted by questioning *Islands Business* journalists and searching their offices and homes.

The journalists were told that they were suspected of “maliciously fabricating” information or spreading “false news reports to create public alarm” under s.15 of the Public Order Act.

We do not yet know if the story is wrong. But that is not the point. How could a news story about a magistrate’s appointment cause public alarm?

If a news media report is wrong, then there are legal remedies available against the publisher. You do not detain the publisher and investigate him for a crime.

This Government now wants to suppress any news reporting by anyone of anything that it does not like, using any excuse.

A week ago, the Attorney-General said he wanted to regulate social media. This was because, he said, people should not post pictures of a man and a woman sitting together after they have married other people.

All correspondence should be addressed to the general secretary

This government wants to control everything we say and all the information we receive. I believe they will try to do this through repressive new laws for both mainstream and social media.

I also believe they will stay very quiet about this until after the election. But imagine what will happen if they are given four more years to do anything they want.

Detaining journalists for doing their jobs is about spreading fear, and reminding the Government's critics about what can be done to them for speaking out.

If you value your own freedom of expression; if you value the freedom of others to be able to give you information and opinions; you cannot vote for this government.



Pio Tikoduadua

President