



FIJI TRADES UNION CONGRESS

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FTUC Calls on University Council to Act

The Fiji Trades Union Congress has followed the University of the South Pacific saga with great interest. At the heart of the dispute is the question of transparency, accountability and good governance. Parts of the BDO report that has been made public is simply shocking to say the least. Millions of dollars have been squandered and there needs to be people held responsible.

The attempt by the Pro Chancellor and his Executive Committee to divert attention from the report and suspend the Vice Chancellor is an attempt to sweep the report under the carpet. The USP is a regional education institute and good governance must start from the very top. The culture of abuse of funds and excessive payments to senior officers does not set a good example for students who hope to become responsible citizens. To the contrary, this must be condemned.

The FTUC commends the USP Students Association for taking a stand on this matter and supports its actions to ensure full accountability from the authorities. The students are paying the University huge sums of money either personally or through their various governments and have every right to demand transparency and accountability. It is no wonder why the University fees are so high when the administrators pay themselves huge salaries and allowances. Student debts are of great concern as a result and many are unable to afford higher education. The FTUC will continue to support the USP Students Association in their quest for answers. It is shocking that so many investigations have been conducted on the current Vice Chancellor since his appointment with no outcomes. This is a clear indication of victimization and an attempt to oust the Vice Chancellor simply because he chose to highlight some of the abuses that were taking place and resulted in the BDO Report.

We condemn this attempt to oust the Vice Chancellor and commend his efforts to address the serious abuses. While the Fiji government may be the biggest contributor to the University financially, it must also ensure full accountability and act responsibly, and try not to protect those responsible for this fiasco.

The FTUC questions the role of the police in this matter. We have seen police within the precincts of the University and have even attempted to question members and officers of the Students Association. We say that the police have absolutely no role in this matter. There has been peaceful protest within the university which is not a public place and the government must not use the police to intimidate students or staff. We call on the Police to refrain from any intimidation tactics, which is becoming the hallmark of the Fiji Police where people attempt to exercise their rights.

The FTUC calls upon the University Council to expeditiously address the concerns of the Students Association and act upon the BDO report. The current crises at the University is going to adversely impact the education of our students and the very reputation of the University itself.

We call on the University Council to ensure that the students are protected and not intimidated by the police. The Students Association has every right to raise concerns and protest peacefully. The Public Order Act or the COVID19 restrictions must not be used to deny fundamental rights.

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