

23rd September, 2020

Press Release: “A Great Loss to The Social Justice Movement in Fiji”

“ How can you expect a worker to be productive if they have to live in substandard housing, cannot feed themselves nutritious food, cannot afford medical care, and the added costs of education for their children “ – Kevin James Barr, “ Wonderful and Challenging – May, 2018. These were the words of a fighter who believed in the fair and equitable welfare of workers in Fiji. Throughout his life, he advocated for a just minimum wage, a living wage that must enable a decent meal for family.

Father Barr, as commonly known, passed away at 1pm on Thursday, 17th September, 2020. A close friend of the Congress and workers in Fiji, Father Barr pursued passionately the enforcement of a decent national minimum wage and a fair wage for sectors enlisted under the Wages Councils. Unfortunately, as the Chairperson of these Wages Councils, he faced various challenges in enforcing the decisions of the Wages Council as some unscrupulous employers had influence in government and his hard work was met with refusal of legislating any increase or upgrade in the terms and conditions of workers as per the Wages Council Orders. He eventually resigned as Chairperson of the Wages Council in August, 2012, but he did not let go of his agenda to improve the lives of the working poor.

Speaking at numerous FTUC Biennial Conferences and meetings, Father Kevin Barr launched the FTUC National Minimum Wage Campaign in 2012 at our 44th Biennial Delegates Conference in Nadi. He also spoke alongside our international guest Sister Sharan Burrow, General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) headquartered in Brussels at our Special Delegates Conference in 2012.

Being a true man of the common people, he would walk unheeded into the FTUC headquarters, beaming with new ideas and drafts of his papers and research. His continued words of encouragement and guidance for furthering our campaign on fair wages resulted into us adopting the National Minimum Wage as one of our six campaign issues to-date. The national minimum wage stagnant at \$2.68 utterly disappointed him. A lion at heart and fearing no one, he overcame the many challenges imposed by the government.

Father Barr has left behind a legacy that generations will remember. The FTUC continues to promote the issues he passionately believed in. He rightly said *“The economy must be people-centered. everyone should have the basic necessities for a decent human life in terms of food, housing, health care and education, and be able to exercise the social, cultural, and political rights”*.

The FTUC family of unions in Fiji, the National Executive Board and workers join other institutions and persons to extend their prayers of strength to the families of Father Kevin Barr.

May he rest in peace.

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