



## PRESS RELEASE

### Economic context imperative for living wage

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The Fiji Commerce & Employers Federation (FCEF) supports decent work including fair wages that contributes to progressive improvements in workers' living standards, enterprise sustainability and economic prosperity.

*“However, demanding for a new wages system in an economic climate where businesses and even the Government is trying to survive and continue to employ workers, is not good faith on the part of FTUC”,* said Mr Edward Bernard, the Chief Executive Officer of FCEF.

FTUC's call for \$8 per hour living wage must be evidenced and balanced against Fiji's unique challenges such as low productivity, widening skills gaps, high youth unemployment and rising cost of freight and production inputs. The World Bank has warned that Fiji's economic growth could slow below 3% unless the country urgently strengthens reforms, improves productivity and rebuilds fiscal discipline.

Fiji's minimum wage has risen by 115% since 2015—from \$2.32 to \$5.00 per hour—and by 86.6% in just the past three years, making it perhaps the highest wage increases in the world. Fiji's minimum wage is over 60% higher than Papua New Guinea's, even though PNG's Gross Domestic Product is four times larger than Fiji's.

At the same time, we have had increase in sectoral wages – where most sectors are paying above \$5.00 per hour. Recently FCEF pushed for the standardization of meal allowance for workers across all sectors and supported an increase in the meal allowance of workers, based on evidence it presented to the Wages Council. There has also been an increase in income at the household level through the \$1.4b in remittance.

In establishing a living wage, the ILO and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, explicitly requires taking into account the country circumstances and ensuring enterprise sustainability.

In many jurisdictions such as New Zealand, living wage is not compulsory. Setting living wages is not easy and requires taking into account the number of dependents in a family but also the number of working adults in the same family.

FCEF supports the Prime Minister, Hon. Sitiveni Rabuka's response to FTUC - *that wage reviews must be structured, transparent, informed by economic realities and cost of living*

*considerations and necessary discussions that require balanced, evidenced and genuine consultation.*

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