

SDL on Registration of Political Parties

It is very clear from the announcements of the Regime's Attorney General that the level of vindictiveness with the Regime is willing to go in dealing with political parties and trade unions as we can see from the requirements for registration that that will be imposed by the Regime at this very difficult economic times.

Political parties are essential cornerstones of democracy and as such the least we would expect from an unelected Government is to facilitate and not stand in the way of the return to democracy. But true to form, the Regime has imposed a very unrealistic registration fee of \$5005 per party, which is unprecedented. This is out of line with the depressed economic conditions of the country and not – withstanding the high level of poverty for which the Regime must also take full responsibility. This is to come out of the voluntary contributions of ordinary people of this country within a short period of 28 days.

In addition, the Regime is imposing a very tough requirement for parties to come up with a list of signed up membership of 5000 people and these names are to be distributed in all administrative districts. Up to now parties have not been allowed to meet freely let alone having these meetings throughout the country.

Even travel and especially travel costs in all districts in Fiji as we have heard from the Constitution Commission recent travels is hard and difficult, even when funded by international agencies and governments. The Regime has raised the requirement from 180 to 5000 signed up members for all parties for the purpose of registration.

The requirement for trade union officials to form new parties in particular is restrictive particularly at this time. The regime could be more facilitative and recognise the right of workers to set up political parties to promote and safeguard their interests.

Another very curious condition for the re-registration of existing parties is for them to have 'their names in English' besides their symbols. We take this to mean

that a Fijian name like 'Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua' (SDL) will not meet the Regime's requirement.

Fijian by the way is one of the three official languages of Fiji and is spoken by the overwhelming majority of the people of Fiji. It is spoken nowhere else in the world as different from Hindustani and English. It is recognized as such by all the previous Constitutions of Fiji namely the 1970, 1990, and the 1997 Constitution including Ghai's Draft as a language acceptable for conducting business with any branch of the Government. I hope this requirement is not an error on the part of the Regime's AG, as it really traverses beyond the bounds of common sense. We would have no objections if parties in Fiji have their names in Fiji Hindi/Hindustani or English and we presume this is the same for us in the SDL.

The people expect the Military Regime to be reasonable in setting the requirements for political parties which form an essential cornerstones of democratic societies. We find some of their registration requirements vindictive and unreasonable at a time when they should be more facilitative and helpful.

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For and on behalf of the SDL Executive Board