MINISTRY FOR EMPLOYMENT TAKES STEPS TO PROTECT FIJIAN WORKERS DURING COVID-19 CRISIS

From the outset of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry for Employment, Productivity, and Industrial Relations has proactively sought to lessen the pain felt by both employers and their employees during a time of tremendous economic uncertainty.

The Ministry is ensuring that job losses are minimized and that all guarantees made to workers — including paid leave — are fulfilled. The Ministry is also encouraging measures such as revised working schedules, working-from-home where possible, and conditional reemployment guarantees.

The Labour Officers within the Ministry are well positioned to assist employers and employees in navigating the complexities imposed by the COVID-19 crisis, and both parties are encouraged to contact the Ministry with concerns relating to employment.

The Minister of Employment, Parveen Bala, stressed the need for collaboration between employers, their employees, and the Ministry.

“COVID-19 presents the biggest economic challenge in living history for Fijians. We’ve consulted with businesspeople and employees throughout Fiji, and we’re acutely aware that these are difficult times for all parties involved, particularly in travel-related industries,” said the Minister. “Meanwhile, we must work together to find solutions that are as fair as possible — while also positioning our economy to be able to rev back up as quickly as possible once the threat of coronavirus has subsided.”

Since the start of the year, the Ministry has also conducted a total of 711 labour inspections, resulting in the successful recovery of $179,110.39 — a total that has been directly paid out to affected workers. The Ministry is also actively investigating 305 labour complaints lodged related to COVID-19, such as non-payment of statutory leave entitlements and other entitlements under the Employment Relations Act 2007.

Through its toll-free number 1535, the Ministry’s customer care centre has also received a total of 435 employment-related queries from workers and employers since it was launched on 29 January 2020. This new service has proven to be of great assistance to workers and employers navigating the COVID-19 lockdown period.

As part of the government’s overall COVID-19 containment efforts, the Ministry has also been conducting health and hygiene awareness trainings, with 1,311 sessions completed at high risk workplaces such as airports, sea ports, hotels, markets, supermarkets, and banks. Faced with the historic challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, adherence to the requirements of the ERA 2007 remains vital.