



# FIJI TEACHERS UNION

(THE CHILD OUR HOPE)

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Affiliated to EDUCATION INTERNATIONAL, FTUC, Fiji Teachers Confederation & COPE

President : Muniappa Goundar

Our Ref:

General Secretary: Agni Deo Singh

Your Ref:

## Reply to the Education Minister's Media Release of 25<sup>th</sup> January 2022.

The Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts, Honourable Premila Kumar, has once again attempted to vilify FTU by making wild allegations regarding the statement of 20th January 2022 on the sudden change that the Ministry has made in the minimum qualification requirement (MQR) for secondary school heads of schools positions which are currently being processed.

The union has registered a dispute with the Employment Court against the abrupt change made to the MQR to unfairly eliminate senior teachers, some of who are currently acting as heads of schools, vice principals and assistant principals. Ironically, some of these leaders were promoted principals of small schools in 2018, but are now being told that they do not qualify to be promoted as principal of a medium or large schools.

FTU is on record for encouraging teachers to upgrade their qualification. This is clearly stated in the statement. In fact, FTU has a special loan scheme in place through the FTU Credit Union whereby members can borrow to pursue further studies and upgrade their qualification. While FTU has this policy intact, it is saddening to take note that the Ministry has abandoned the in-service training program which teachers made use of to upgrade their qualification. Teachers, who graduated with a diploma, upgraded their qualifications to degree due to the Ministry's in-service training provision back then.

The union challenges Honourable Premila Kumar to reveal the following:

1. Written communication to individual officers or an official circular to advise teachers and heads of schools of the change in the MQR and the timeframe given to acquire the new qualification;
2. The reasons for appointing them to act in leadership positions, that is, Principal, Vice Principal, Assistant Principal and Head of Department if they were unqualified;
3. The full transcripts of the following qualifications which MEHA now deems unsuitable for promotion- Secondary Teacher Training Certificate (STTC), Diploma in Tertiary Teaching (DTT) and Bachelor of Education (Bed). We urge MEHA to provide the basis and a sound explanation why these qualifications were deemed appropriate all this while. We ask,

All correspondence to the General Secretary Fiji Teachers Union, Please.

Branches: Suva, Nasinu, Rewa, Tailevu, Ra, Tavua, Ba, Lautoka, Nadi, Sigatoka, Navua, Labasa, Bua, Taveuni, Savusavu, Levuka.

who was the competent authority that decided these qualifications are no longer relevant?

4. We challenge the Ministry to submit the performance record of these officers for the past three years plus.

Honourable Kumar claims that the MQR has not been changed and has been in place for some time now.

**FACT: The job evaluation exercise was carried out in 2017. In 2018, teachers with STTC, DTT and Bachelor of Education as well as primary school teachers who were upgraded to secondary schools were selected to go through the job test up to the interview. Some were promoted. FTU has reliable data to substantiate this argument.**

Honourable Kumar has commended teachers for being a shining example.

**FACT: The current heads of schools, who are shining examples in leadership, have unfortunately been eliminated by the Honourable Minister.**

Honourable Kumar alludes to the reasons for having the MQR.

**FACT: There is no denial that there has been the MQR. FTU believes that the MQR cannot and should not be changed overnight. FTU believes that additional qualification has always been deemed an added advantage. The starting line is the MQR.**

Honourable Kumar talks about teachers keeping up with the changes taking place in the globalized world by constantly updating their qualification.

**FACT: Heads of schools have attended numerous workshops and capacity building trainings conducted by MEHA over the years before the current Minister and her PS came. The Future Leaders workshops and the BEMTUP are such glaring examples. The annual 20 hours of professional development requirement also serves the purpose.**

Honourable Kumar states that role description for senior school leaders requires certain years of teaching experience and leadership.

**FACT: A third year teacher was selected ahead of a Principal with 10 years plus outstanding service and performance in leadership role!**

Honourable Kumar goes on to say that the Ministry did not need to consult the teacher unions in decision making.

**FACT: The Minister must read Sustainable Development Goal 4 which was signed by her predecessor, Dr Mahendra Reddy. SDG 4 clearly states that all policies from formulation,**

**implementation, monitoring to review must be done with full involvement of teacher's representatives which are the teacher unions.**

Honourable Kumar states that FTU is against teachers up skilling themselves and acquiring the necessary qualifications to compete for leadership roles.

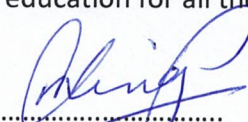
**FACT: Honourable Kumar and her PS Anjeela Jokhan are the ones who are confused. FTU has always encouraged members to upskill and upgrade their qualifications. What they fail to understand is that the MQR included qualifications like STTC and DTT which were designed and approved by the Education Ministry, and conducted by Fiji College of Advanced Education and FNU to assist teachers who had a plain degree to become fully qualified. They were promoted on the same basis in 2018 as well. Appropriate qualification includes qualification (degree plus teacher training) and relevant experience in leadership positions with proven performance. FTU's argument is that those who met the above and are currently leading top schools in the country are being eliminated by the new requirement implemented late last year.**

Honourable Kumar accuses FTU of working against its own members and fighting for mediocrity in the system, rather than promoting excellence in the teaching profession.

**FACT: The Ministry must determine merit through a combination of factors and not only Postgraduate qualification. Mediocrity is actually putting paper qualification with zero experience in relevant leadership positions ahead of proven performance for several years. If the senior heads currently acting (for over five years in most cases) are unqualified, why were they appointed to act in the first place. FTU is of the firm belief that Honourable Premila and Anjeela Jokhan are on a destructive path towards speeding up the already downward spiraling quality of education.**

#### **Concluding remarks**

Honourable Kumar has the audacity to state that the General Secretary's voice is the view of a minority group of teachers. She should know that FTU has over 5000 members who know whom to trust and who know that FTU is their only voice and represents them in matters concerning industrial relations and their interest and welfare. Our members definitely do not trust Minister Premila and her team. Premila's desperate attempt to divide the union is futile as our membership is a united front. Thus, it is advisable for Premila Kumar and her team to build a healthy working relationship with the teacher unions. We are on record for making constructive contributions to improve the quality of education for all the children in the nation.

  
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**AGNI DEO SINGH**  
**GENERAL SECRETARY**  
**01<sup>st</sup> February 2022.**