

## **Fiji: Nurses, teachers strike against pay cut**

Monday 6 August 2007, by [WILLIAMS Kerry](#) (Date first published: 4 August 2007).

About 1400 nurses in Fiji, who began a strike on July 25, were joined on August 2 by thousands of teachers and other public servants, resulting in at least half of Fiji's 20,000 public sector workers being on strike.

Hospitals were paralysed and school classrooms were empty around the country. The strike action was in response to a 5% pay cut and lowering of the retirement age by five years to 55.

Since the military coup last December, which was led by army chief Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama — now the caretaker prime minister — Fiji has faced a growing economic crisis and the government claims it can't afford to maintain public sector workers' pay rates.

According to the August 2 New Zealand Herald, Bainimarama refused to meet the strikers' demands, announcing that his government "will not allow groups such as FICTU [the Fiji Islands Council of Trade Unions] and FNA [the Fiji Nursing Association] to promote their self interest and political motives at the expense of the country's welfare and well-being". He claimed that contingency plans to maintain services affected by the strike were effective, and that as long as this was the case he would refuse arbitration of the dispute.

Radio New Zealand International reported on August 3 that the Fijian Teachers Association called off its strike after school holidays were brought forward two weeks by the government. However, FTA president Tevita Koroi said: "Our issues are still very much alive. While the school holidays are going to occur much earlier we are going to still pursue the issues that we have with government."

Meanwhile, nurses pledged to continue their strike until their demands are met. FNA Ba province branch president Ivona Tavuki was quoted on Radio Fiji on August 2 as saying that nurses just wanted a "fair deal" so they can "go back to our individual work place and serve the community".

Taniela Tabu, the general secretary of the Viti National Union of Taukei Workers, told the media that he had received death threats from the military.

The August 2 Fiji Times reported that Tabu said he had been detained by the military the previous day and was assaulted and forced to run around in the rain wearing only his underwear. He said the police told him they were charging him over a statement he made allegedly "discrediting the interim government when I said that Bainimarama is not the PM but [Mahendra] Chaudhry". Tabu called on the members of his union not to be intimidated and to join the strike the following day.

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