



Dismissing democracy

Fijian teachers union head Tevita Koroi has been sacked as a school principal for speaking out about his country's lack of democracy. **Alex Eveston** reports.

A global campaign by the AEU and its sister organisations is pushing for the reinstatement

of Fijian teachers union leader Tevita Koroi, who was removed from his job as a school principal after criticising the government.

Koroi, president of the Fijian Teachers Association, in December called on the interim government, installed in a military coup two years earlier, to return to democracy and hold elections as soon as possible. He was suspended on half pay from his job as principal of Nasinu Secondary School, then notified of his sacking at the FTA's annual conference in May.

Koroi says his sacking sharply demonstrates the decline of democracy in Fiji. Fijian prime minister and military leader Frank Bainimarama has turned a deaf ear

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Tevita Koroi
President of the Fijian Teachers Association

to his complaints and he has been left without an avenue of appeal, he says.

“The appeals board of the Public Service Commission has been abolished following the abrogation of the constitution,” Koroi told *Australian Educator*. “In addition, the High Court is not fully functioning—nor the Supreme Court or Court of Appeal.”

Koroi is the current president of the Council of Pacific Education (COPE), which has alerted regional teacher groups to the Fijian government's actions and enlisted the support of Education International (EI).

EI and the AEU have written to Bainimarama and Fijian

president Josefa Iloilo, without response, says Koroi. “Generally the interim regime here in Suva is very arrogant. It's not listening. It shows that attitude of no consultation, no dialogue... It is a clear move to silence dissent. [The government is] just taking actions, right or wrong, and there's no consultation.”

The sacking was not reported in Fiji's media because of government control, he says.

It is proving difficult to mount a media campaign in support of Koroi because of censorship, says COPE secretary-general Govind Singh.

“It has left us with little option but to pin our hope on a global campaign, put in by EI and supported by COPE, to investigate International Labour Organisation jurisprudence,” says Singh. “Tevita's sacking is a gross violation of trade union rights in Fiji. It is an attempt to gag trade union leaders from exercising their rights.”

Pacific teacher unions owe much to Australian teachers through the AEU and the Independent Education Union of Australia, he says. “The voices of teacher unions are stronger than ever before through major support from our colleagues in Australia.

Their support in the region will be critical for the next decade as the Pacific is going through testing times in a huge array of issues confronting teachers.” ●

Alex Eveston is a freelance writer.