



Geneva & Brussels, February 27, 2013

The Editor  
Guardian Newspaper  
UK

Dear Editor

**Concerns the article in the Sustainable Business section by \*Barbara Crowther "*Sugar production in Fiji: a bittersweet story*", Feb 25, 2012.**

The article by the \*Fairtrade Foundation's Director of Policy & Public Affairs, while promoting the benefits of fairtrade sugar to cane farmers, conveniently forgets to mention that fairtrade sugar is processed in government-run mills in Fiji where their employer refuses to recognize the workers' union, ignores their collective bargaining agreement and has subjected union leaders to beatings and harassment by military and police forces.

Unions representing cane growers also face repression. They have been prohibited from holding meetings with members, leaders were harassed and jailed. The government continues to sideline them.

It is not a case, as Ms Crowther claims, of "accusations of repeated violations" but of well-documented, proven violations of human rights. The European Union has imposed sanctions against Fiji for violation of the Cotonou agreement in relation to violation of human rights, fundamental freedoms, democratic principles and the rule of law. Fiji has been suspended from both the Pacific Island Forum and the Commonwealth of Nations. The United States is currently considering whether to impose trade sanctions against Fiji over labour rights violations. Last November, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the UN body dealing with labour rights, described the situation in Fiji as "serious and urgent".

All of these facts are well known to the Fairtrade Foundation and to its umbrella body, Fairtrade International.

Ms Crowther might have been taken in by the Commodore Bainimarama's promise of a return to democracy in September 2014 but we are not. His government recently issued decrees that will have the effect of dissolving most opposition political parties and prevent the formation of new ones – especially ones linked to trade unions. This on the heels of the government throwing out a new draft constitution, which was the product of a popular, consultative process, to replace it with their own version.

Cane farmers, sugar workers, the Fijian population as a whole desperately need a return to democracy and the protection of their fundamental human rights – fairtrade can only be a plaster on a gaping wound. Certifying dictatorship? Bittersweet indeed.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Burrow', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Sharan Burrow  
General Secretary, ITUC

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Oswald', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Ron Oswald  
General Secretary, IUF