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“DECENT WORK & EMPLOYMENT GROWTH”

4 March 2019

Ref: ME CS5/MIN/3-1

Secretary-General to Parliament
Parliament of the Republic of Fiji
Parliament Complex
Constitution Avenue
SUVA

Madam Secretary-General,

Re: **Written Question 10/2019**

Reference is made to your letter of 26 February 2019.

Below is my response to the Question raised by the Honourable Mikaele Leawere on the ***Status of the Seasonal Workers Programme and how many have benefitted from it?***

Honourable Speaker, I wish to thank the Honourable Leawere for the question raised.

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The history of both the New Zealand Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) and the Australian Seasonal Workers Programme (SWP) began when both Governments signed the Memorandum of Understandings with the Fijian Government in December 2014 and April 2015, respectively.
- 1.2 This began the journey of labour mobility for low-skilled workers' that is recognised by the Fijian Government; to work in the horticulture and viticulture farms.
- 1.3 The first batch of Fijians was deployed to New Zealand in February 2015 and to Australia in April 2015.

2.0 RECOGNISED SEASONAL EMPLOYER (RSE) NEW ZEALAND

- 2.1 For New Zealand, the programs have seen an increase in the number of Fijians deployed for seasonal work and likewise an increase in the number of employers.
- 2.2 To date, 946 Fijians have worked under the NZ RSE program.
- 2.3 The breakdown of the RSE workers is shown in table 1 below.

Table 1

New Zealand Recognized Seasonal Employer (RSE) Deployment 2015 – 31 Jan 2019			
Year	Male	Female	Total
2015	44	2	46
2016	207	21	228
2017	265	19	284
2018	358	28	386
31 Jan 2019	2	0	2
Total	876	70	946

- 2.4 In terms of the number of employers recruiting from Fiji, there are twenty-six (26) employers from New Zealand.

3.0 SEASONAL WORKER PROGRAM (SWP) AUSTRALIA

- 3.1 For Australia, the programs have seen an increase in the number of Fijians deployed for seasonal work and likewise an increase in the number of employers.
- 3.2 To date 748 Fijians have worked under the Australian SWP as highlighted in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Australia Seasonal Worker Program (SWP) Deployment 2015 – 31 Jan 2019		
Male	Female	Total
108	29	137
71	14	85
188	26	214
280	17	297
15	0	15
662	86	748

3.3 In terms of the number of employers recruiting from Fiji, we currently have twelve (12) employers in Australia

4.0 SOME OF THE BENEFITS AND SUCCESS STORIES

4.1 Thirteen (13) Seasonal Workers from Naqaravutu Village, Cakaudrove, participated in the programmed from 2015-2017 and were deployed under the New Zealand Recognized Seasonal Employer (RSE) Worker Scheme and Australia Seasonal Worker Programmed (SWP).

4.2 Remarkable stories shared was that their savings was invested in their yaqona farming, home extension, setting up of a canteen business, assistance for siblings' education and contributions to customary obligations.

4.3 Returning worker, Petero Mainukubati highlighted that the group also gained a lot of experience during their deployment in terms of time management, farming techniques, use of farming machineries and general hygiene.

4.4 Miriama Levu, a member of the Vaturova Women's Team from Korotasere Village, managed to extend their dwelling house, build a veranda for the family house, changed all the house windows to aluminium and also started her canteen business.

4.5 Her fortnightly remittances of \$1000 FJD per fortnight assisted the family expenses and Yaqona farming which amounted to 2500 plants. She even assisted in the refurbishment of the village hall. Her good-Samaritan does not only end here as she also donated \$500 NZD towards the refurbishment of the church.

- 4.6 Other stories shared by Ovalau team leader, Mr. Sitiveni Waqawai, thanked the Fijian Government for the opportunity given to them and look forward to Government's continuous support. The team was assigned on a special mission to motivate Team Fiji in New Zealand.

According to the Team Leader, the group carried out with what was required and fostered good relationship with the employer. Their tremendous achievements resulted in them being the first Fiji Team to break the record set by other Pacific countries in New Zealand.

They were grateful to be employed with Bostok and Vinepower and confirmed that they were treated so well by the employers during their 7 months stay in New Zealand.

- 4.7 Under the Australian SWP, it is not only limited to working in farms but also in the Accommodation and Hospitality Sector where the Ministry has deployed fifty-one (51) Fijians to work as porters, food & beverage attendants, housekeeping attendants and front office attendants.
- 4.8 The Fijian seasonal workers have benefitted immensely from the program in terms of improving and sustaining their livelihoods, education for their children, financially assist their relatives and the community large and have an impact on the Fijian economy through remittances and savings.
- 4.9 With the commitment from the Bainimarama Government, a budget allocation has been set for the recruitment of Liaison Officer for Australia.
- 4.10 The Liaison Officer will liaise with Employers and workers in the workplace through facilitating communications between SWP workers and the relevant stakeholders. The Liaison Officer will attend meetings which are relevant to the well-being and support of the SWP workers and assist in the orientation and induction so that workers understand the terms and conditions of their employment and in management workers expectations. The LO will also ensure that the welfare of Fijian workers is considered.
- 4.11 To conclude, the Fijian Government is anticipating an increase in the number of Australian Employers recruiting from Fiji and with the official announcement of the new Pacific Labour Mobility Scheme earmarked for Fiji; it will be a good opening for Fijian workers to maximise on this employment opportunity.

5.0 SUMMARY OF SEASONAL WORKERS BY PROVINCE

- 5.1 The Provisional representation of our seasonal workers to both Australia and New Zealand is tabulated below;

New Zealand Recognized Seasonal Employer (RSE) Deployment 2015 – 31 Jan 2019				Australia Seasonal Worker Program (SWP) Deployment 2015 – 31 Jan 2019		
SUMMARY BY PROVINCE				SUMMARY BY PROVINCE		
Province	Gender		Total	Gender		Total
	Male	Females		Male	Females	
Ba	146	0	146	61	12	73
Bua	39	2	41	24	1	25
Cakaudrove	63	41	104	106	11	117
Kadavu	58	2	60	9	0	9
Lau	23	6	29	13	0	13
Lomaiviti	69	1	70	86	0	86
Macuata	58	11	69	87	12	99
Nadroga/Navosa	54	0	54	30	2	32
Naitasiri	60	5	65	19	5	24
Namosi	64	0	64	3	0	3
Ra	91	0	91	37	3	40
Rewa	18	0	18	68	12	80
Serua	42	1	43	8	0	8
Tailevu	91	1	92	47	9	56
Rotuma				6	0	6
Blank				60	18	78
Total	876	70	946	662	86	748

Thank you Honourable Speaker.

Yours sincerely



Honourable Parveen Kumar Bala
Minister for Employment, Productivity & Industrial Relations and Youth & Sports