

Pacific Network on Globalisation (PANG)

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PANG Press Release:

NZ Work Scheme a “Mutton-flap Gesture”

PANG is calling NZ’s seasonal work scheme a “mutton-flap gesture.”

“This scheme is little more than being offered the ‘mutton-flaps’ of the NZ job market” said a PANG representative in Fiji today. “What we need is substantive development in Pacific economies. We need to up-skill our work force and be able to set up value-added production in our own countries; not merely export raw materials or unskilled labour.”

On the last day of the 37th Pacific Islands Forum, Helen Clark announced a seasonal work scheme to allow up to 5000 Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu nationals to work for up to seven months in the New Zealand horticulture sector. However, work opportunities will depend on NZ labour shortages and NZ horticulture industry needs; not the needs of the Pacific.

“New Zealand’s seasonal work scheme is fools gold, because it does not address any of the underlying causes of the economic problems that Pacific economies are currently facing, furthermore it must not be seen as a potential benefit under PACER. There is a huge imbalance in free-market globalisation because labour cannot move with the same freedom that capital can. This work scheme from NZ is by no means the labour mobility plan that Pacific policy makers want, nor should we assume that labour mobility will provide the economic solutions Pacific Island people need” said a PANG representative.

“We should see this scheme for what it is: We’ve been thrown a politically strategic bone to ease Pacific policy-maker angst over unemployment due to the surplus of semi- and unskilled labour. In reality 5000 jobs across six countries for only seven months will ease nothing! It’s a joke, yet Fiji’s Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase and Minister of Foreign Affairs and External Trade Kaliopate Tavola have said they are ‘pleased’”.

Exporting a miniscule fraction of our semi- and unskilled labour is a bandaid, not an economic policy that will lead to substantive growth. It accentuates the dependency that we have on first world nations through the remittances cycle, as it does not create jobs, rather it disguises the lack of economic opportunities in our own countries. At the end of the day a job created in a Pacific Island country is better than a temporary, minimum wage, low-skill job in New Zealand.