



# Fair Pay

# in **Cleaning**

**Guess what?** That office you work in, that library your kids have just sat in for two hours doing homework? They are cleaned by people like Tuaine. Tuaine spent years cleaning a large central city library, doing all five floors of it, for fifty hours a week, cleaning the toilets.

There are 44,000 more people like Tuaine with the same stories up and down the country. Tuaine is one of the lucky ones, she managed to get a job as a cleaner in a DHB, leading to a substantial pay rise and a drop in hours. But, if for any reason she leaves, she will be back down to the minimum wage.

Those cleaners work for hundreds of different companies, often franchises run by people who have mortgaged themselves to the hilt in pursuit of the Kiwi dream, and as a result work for far less than the minimum wage, just so they can pay the rent on their business.

**The** union for cleaners and companies like Spotless, and those affiliated to the Building Services Contractors Association of New Zealand negotiate every year to attempt to lift wages above the minimum for a few months at least. However the

industry has the same problem as security – they are trapped into a race to the bottom, as other, less scrupulous companies come and offer themselves for lower prices which, all too often, is the main focus of clients.

Malia, a cleaner of many years says, “We need all the cleaning companies to be forced to bargain with us, so that we can get a good deal that lets us feed our families, and get to spend a little more time with them.”



**Lousiena (Rose)  
Kavapalu**

**Cleaner**  
*Auckland*

**“Going to work at night and in the morning not knowing how you will get through the day, and not seeing your kids. It’s not good.”**

For more info contact Sam Gribben  
E tū union | 027 204 6329

**“Are** we paid fairly? No, no we’re not – we have been underpaid and under valued for so long and it is not fair. I’ve been a cleaner at two of the police stations for 14 years now, but over that time companies changed all the time. Hours get cut but the workload still remain the same. Recently I have lost a total of 25 hours, and now I am looking for another part-time job at night. And that is why a Fair Pay Agreement is very important to the 44,000 cleaners all over New Zealand. It is about, decent jobs, decent wages like the Living Wage and job security.

“I work fifty hours a week on the minimum wage. Most of it goes to my rent then you add food and electricity and sometimes my pay can’t meet the whole lot. Twice now, my power has been disconnected because we didn’t have enough money left for that. Especially when everything goes up and up but our wages are still too low.

“I’ve had a lifetime of struggling like this. I’ve brought up four kids. I was the only one working as I have left my husband. All this time I’m working long long hours, and it makes it hard for me mentally, physically, living week to week - just trying to spread all the little money you’ve got for basic needs – food, clothing and a roof over your head. I’m the only one that works in my family - it’s my responsibility to look after my family. And most of the time I feel that I have failed as a mother to provide for my children. It really breaks my heart not to meet those needs.

**“It’s** getting worse - between the contractors and the clients. The client gives the contract to the cheapest contractor it is a race to the bottom. As a result we end up with less hours and with the same workload. Making us stress all the time.

“Going to work at night and in the morning not knowing how you will get through the day, and not seeing your kids. It’s not good. One of my family members is sick with a heart problem and they tell us it’s not getting better. There’s been times I can’t afford a pair of shoes for my children and my heart breaks as like all parents we want the best for our kids. But that is the reality for us who are getting paid the minimum wage.

“I want to tell the Government that they are funding the money to the contractor to pay us. So they are the real employer who encourages poverty wages. We are talking about real families here. Real people. And it’s not going to go away. Telling you this is hard, exposing myself like this. But I need to. Others can’t. The Government has to listen. To help people like me. They have the power to fix this, to do it right to give us a Fair Pay Agreements and a living wage. For me, for the 44,000 cleaners and their whanau who are stuck in the same place, poverty. Fix it now, not in 10 year’s time.”

**Mareta** Sinoti works as a contract cleaner for Spotless at the National Library opposite Parliament. She earns the minimum wage. Around the corner, cleaners directly employed by the Government and working at Archives NZ earn the Living Wage of \$20.50.

“How is this fair?”, asks Mareta. “We do the same job, exactly the same job. How come we’re not entitled to the Living Wage?”

The answer is, that there are no standards for companies contracted to provide government services, and contracts typically go to the lowest bidder.

“If this company I work for loses (a tender) and the other contractor comes in, they cut the hours for us. It’s not fair. If another contractor comes in and cuts the hours, what’s the protection?”

“The organisation hiring the cleaning contractor decide on the cheapest, but they don’t think about us. They forget about the people doing the work.

“Then, the other thing is they lose contracts because they’re told “you don’t do the job properly.”

**What** standards should government agencies set when they tender for contracts? Mareta thinks they should be paying a living wage; providing enough hours for a decent weekly income, and have protections against super short shifts.

“I think the pay should be the Living Wage. We’re all cleaners but the only people who get the Living Wage are the parliament people but we all do the same job, so that should be included.

“And we need more hours because if you get only one job and you’ve got a family, it’s difficult. Because some people only get 6 hours – that’s not a full-time job, that’s a part-time job.”

Mareta works 44 hours over a 6-day week; she works an additional 4-hours on Saturday. She knows of people who are required to do 2-hour shifts which she says are barely worth turning up for.

She doesn’t think contractors should be allowed to cut hours when contracts change, just because they bid so low, they can’t employ workers to do the job.

“I went to a union event last month. I heard a story from someone whose job was cut from 40 to 15 hours a week. And someone who only worked 2 hours a day.”



**Mareta  
Sinoti**

**Cleaner  
Wellington**

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**Malia  
Langi**

**Cleaner  
Auckland**

**“I’m working  
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“**We** work hard for our money for our life – especially when we have family. I have six children in my family and it is so expensive, half of our money goes on the rent, and then after that food, clothing, the power, water, telephone, the basics you know? It’s just one bill after another for us. Never ending...”

“We work such long hours, we never rest. I’m working 45 hours a week in the Mayor’s office from 5.30pm to 3am. Monday to Friday. I hardly ever see my family, when they are awake I am asleep, when they are asleep I am awake and working. It’s too hard to look after them under your roof. We work hard for them to let them study to get a better life. My husband takes different shifts he works the day and I work the night. So we never see each other, except at the weekend.

“It means we miss out on being a family, having dinner together, helping out with their homework, and their school activities and being part of our community, especially church activities. It’s a big thing for us.

“**If** I had better pay like the Living Wage, I would reduce my hours to 40 hours a week and spend more time with my kids. So they know that I’m their mum. I miss them. They miss the cooking of their mum. That is why the Living Wage and a Fair Pay Agreement will make a whole difference to my life, my family and the rest of the 44,000 cleaners, their families and their communities all over New Zealand.

“People say get another job but the other jobs pay just as bad, and someone has to do this work. It’s got to get better. For the whole community. Mayor Phil Goff and Auckland Council Councillors, we know you can afford it. Respect your contracted cleaners and pay them the Living Wage.”