

FRIDAY, 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2016

The Parliament resumed at 9.30 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Honourable Members were present, except the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications; the Honourable Minister for Forests and the Honourable A.T. Vadei.

MINUTES

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Madam Speaker, I move:

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Thursday, 29th September, 2016, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

HON. SPEAKER.- I welcome all Honourable Members to today's sitting.

I also welcome students from Corpus Christi Teachers College who are observing today's proceedings. A special welcome to our friends from the West who are there in blue shirts, thank you for being here.

Finally, I welcome members of the public who are joining us in the gallery and those who are watching proceedings on television and the internet and listening to the radio. Thank you for your interest in your Parliament.

Daily Hansard – Thursday, 29/09/16

Honourable Members, I also advise that yesterday's *Daily Hansard* will be slightly delayed and will be delivered as soon as practicable.

Senior Citizens Day – Saturday, 01/10/16

Honourable Members may be interested to know that tomorrow is Senior Citizens Day and I invite us all to think of our senior citizens and indeed encourage us all to continue to show them the love and respect they all rightly deserve.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, although not in our Order Paper, we received notification yesterday from the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment, Infrastructure and Transport that he would be tabling his Ministry's Reports today. I now call upon the Minister to table his Reports.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 38(1), I present to Parliament the following Reports:

1. Ministry of Local Government, Urban Development, Housing and Environment 2009 Annual Report;
2. Ministry of Local Government, Urban Development, Housing and Environment 2010 Annual Report; and
3. Ministry of Local Government, Urban Development, Housing and Environment 2011 Annual Report.

HON. SPEAKER.- Please hand the Reports to the Secretary-General.

(Reports handed to the Secretary-General)

Pursuant to Standing Order 38(2), I refer the following Reports to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs:

1. Ministry of Local Government, Urban Development, Housing and Environment 2009 Annual Report;
2. Ministry of Local Government, Urban Development, Housing and Environment 2010 Annual Report; and
3. Ministry of Local Government, Urban Development, Housing and Environment 2011 Annual Report.

Parliamentarians' Visitation to Supporters

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, can I seek a point of clarification. As we complete Parliament today and we will not be returning until February 2017, can I ask Government to clarify whether we, the Parliamentarians, during this period can visit the villages and talk to our supporters without obtaining permits? It is very critical that we understand this because on many occasions, the *turaga ni koros* are afraid to talk to us.

Please can we be given a definitive direction that we can take or alert them not to be fearful of us because sometimes they treat us like lepers, they are afraid of the regulations in place. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- The Secretariat will be in contact with the relevant Minister concerned and we will contact you after that.

Would the Minister concerned, the Honourable Minister for Immigration, National Security and Defence like to make a comment on that?

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- Madam Speaker, I am sorry, I will have to check with our Ministry and then I will come back to the Honourable Member.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

HON. SPEAKER.- I have been informed that there will not be any Committee Reports tabled today.

MAIDEN SPEECH – NEW MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

HON. SPEAKER.- We will now resume debate on His Excellency's Speech and I now give the floor to the Honourable Howard Politini to make his maiden speech.

HON. H.R.T. POLITINI.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, members of the public in the gallery, students from Corpus Christi Teachers College and those watching this live telecast; good morning to you all.

It is indeed a great honour and privilege to take my place in this august House as a Member of Parliament.

First and foremost, I thank our Sovereign God for this favour.

Madam Speaker, today is the culmination of a great deal of hard work, both before and after the National Elections that has enabled me today to achieve an ambition that I have held tightly for a number of years. That ambition was for me to be in a position where I could serve my fellow Fijians and to be able to assist them by my actions, to lead more fruitful and satisfying lives.

Madam Speaker, I wish at the outset to thank both the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama and the Minister for Economy, the Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum for inviting me to contest the 2014 General Elections and for having faith in me until today.

Madam Speaker, I would also like to thank my campaign team who worked tirelessly in the electorate, who supported me at all times. I specifically would like to thank Mr. Abdul Khan of Wailoaloa Boxing Promotion in Nadi; Waisea Lutu; Mr. Naushad Ali of Namulomulo in Nadi; Napolioni of Namatakula Village in Nadroga; the *vanua* of Makolei, Solevu in Bua; the *vanua* of Tavua; the Villages of Nakorokula; Nadelei; and Drauniivi; the greater Nadi area, Uciwai, Nawajikuma in Nawaka, Namulomulo, Tovatova and the Nausori Highlights. I am also grateful to all those who voted for me.

Madam Speaker, I would also like to thank Pranit and Lani; Aja and the food hall supermarket family in Sigatoka; Kabisi; Sonaisali; and Namotomoto in Nadi.

Madam Speaker, I would also like to thank Xavier Riyaz Khan, and the Board of Bio- Security Authority of Fiji and the former Tourism Fiji Board Chairman, Mr. Truman Bradly; the current Chairman, Andre Villion and the Deputy Chair, Mr. Jeff Shan. My time in these two strategic

Government Boards was a moulding process to what good governance, transparency, efficiency in service delivery throughout the organisation.

Madam Speaker, when I was approached to contest the Elections for the FijiFirst Party, I did not hesitate, even though I acknowledged to myself that I was very inexperienced in the political arena, because I knew and respected a number of other people who had decided to stand and was confident that they would be there for me when I needed their support and advice.

Madam Speaker, I also have the highest respect for the man who is the Head of the FijiFirst Party and those he had chosen to stand with him to bring his vision for a more united, more cohesive, more open and more successful country to fruition in the post-Elections period. I had no doubt that the FijiFirst Party would be rewarded with the support of the majority of the Fijian population and to this day, I carry the firm conviction of that, with such strong support and the clear strategy of the Party, we will lead Fiji into a greater place in the world.

And so it is, and I am excited to now be a part of the FijiFirst Party and to have the opportunity to serve my electorate and my country, an opportunity that I gratefully accept and commit myself to ensuring that at all times, I will live up to my personal standards and those of the Party.

Madam Speaker, each day I look around me and see dramatic evidences of the impact, FijiFirst is having on the lives of every Fijian. There is a great feeling of inclusiveness, of shared success and a renewed pride in what our beloved islands stand for in a world that is struggling to find its meaning.

I see thousands of children, all headed for a better life because of our policies. I see our sportsmen and women lifting their heads high into a world arena because of our policies which encourages and rewards excellence. I see thousands of women who now understand their rights and who are making life choices that were not available less than five years ago.

Madam Speaker, I look around and I am proud that I am now part of this great Parliament and have the opportunity to serve the people of Fiji as one. A Fiji where everyone can be called a 'Fijian' and a Fiji where fairness and equal opportunities are given out to all citizens, regardless of their ethnicity or religion.

For the past year after the Elections, I have seen the rapid change in developments. New highways, roads - the new bypass now that connects Denarau which has minimised the transport times between Nadi airport and Denarau island, hospitals, medical clinics, have all been developed for the benefit of all Fijians.

Madam Speaker, I come from the tourism background. Tourism now is the major revenue earner for this country. The development of the tourism industry in Fiji today is surpassing our expectation.

Developments of new 5 star resorts such as the FNPF Momi Bay Redevelopment by Marriot Hotels, Denarau Moorings, Denarau South, Wyndham Silkroad Ark Hotel Project on the Coral Coast, the Vunabaka development on Malolo island, Nawi Island Resort in Savusavu, to name a few, will generate more employment, for our local people and bring in more revenue for our country. This, Madam Speaker, shows investor confidence in our beloved nation.

Madam Speaker, our national airline, Fiji Airways should also be commended for its contribution in supporting tourism industry and the trade sector. It has grown from a small domestic airline to an international player, connecting people and freight to every corner of the globe.

Madam Speaker, with the Modernisation Project of Nadi International Airport and improved road networks, together, these developments are not just because of its magnitude but because of the fact that their very existence contributes to our economy. This means, be direct or indirect, these developments enable breadwinners to put food on the table for their families. It means, it sends our children to school, opens up small and micro enterprises and in all stimulates the local economy.

Madam Speaker, Fiji has a lot to offer; its friendly people are its greatest assets and we must continue to radiate to the world that genuine smile that Fijians are known for. Tourism Fiji has adopted a brand where it goes - 'Where happiness finds you'

Madam Speaker, I am also a small business player in the tourism industry, providing tours to the Nausori Highlands of Viti Levu and giving tourists the sights of our highlands. I on behalf of small business operators can say that tourism really does have a ripple effect. Not only does the hotels reap the rewards, but little fruit farmers, basket weavers, handicraft stalls and little eateries do also get a share of the tourist dollar. This has greatly helped our people participate in the economic growth of our country and ensuring that no one is left behind.

Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Honourable Prime Minister for having a vision. A vision that is to make Fiji a better place than before. A place where everyone is treated equally, regardless of background or social standing. A place where everyone is called a Fijian and a place where people are given equal citizenry.

This, Madam Speaker, has never happened ever in this country. Most people I know who were brought up here, who are abroad, never thought that this would happen during their lifetime, where every person and creed are all one and equal. This is indeed a revolution, and I am glad that I have a role to play in it.

Madam Speaker, this Government has stated that Fiji is open for business, which I totally agree with. The interests coming into our country in the field of hotel developments, property development and agriculture, is growing, but there are criteria this Government has laid out so that opportunities are not left to waste, where opportunities are taken on board wherever appropriate and wherever the Government gets the best return for the Fijian people. This Government is all for the best interest of the Fijian people.

Again, I thank you all for this opportunity to serve my country in this role and may the rest of our term continue to move our country forward, towards prosperity and harmony.

May our sovereign God bless our beloved nation Fiji.

Vinaka

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Prof. Biman Prasad.

MADAM SPEAKER.-Point of order!

HON. J. USAMATE.- Point of Order, Madam Speaker. I was looking at the rules of the game last night and my attention was drawn to Standing Order 60, where it says that "when speaking, members must confine their observation to the subject under consideration."

The point of contention here, the Honourable Biman Prasad was not here when His Excellency The President was making His Address.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. USAMATE.- So on that issue, how can then he have the audacity to come and comment on something when he was not here? We need to be able to respect our Head of State when he makes an Address. Members of Parliament must be here to show their respect for him and now he is going to address us on something that he was not here to address. That is all, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Your comments are noted and recorded.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON HE'S ADDRESS

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you Madam Speaker.

I wish to begin by acknowledging the sad news item to the nation last night about the passing of the former Vice President of Fiji, Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi.

I understand that the news item would have breached protocols and I may be doing so too by saying these few words but Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi transcended very many barriers and confines and I seek the forgiveness of his family and *vanua* for taking this liberty.

Ratu Joni will always be remembered as an embodiment of chiefly authority and wisdom whose humility, care and concern for all our ordinary people and adherence to the rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedoms was paramount. The people of Fiji are indeed poorer for Ratu Joni's loss.

Madam Speaker, as protocol dictates, I also join other Honourable Members of this august House in thanking His Excellency for his most gracious Address.

While this has been an inaugural speech for His Excellency in terms of his Presidency, there is no doubt he was in familiar surroundings and well versed with parliamentary process, having served as a Cabinet Minister before his elevation to Government House.

Madam Speaker, apart from outlining Government's legislative programme for the ensuing year - a few of the Bills stated in his Address are already before us in Parliament, his Address reflected on our democracy achieved through Elections a little over 2 years ago, as well as reflecting on the devastating effects of severe *Tropical Cyclone Winston*.

His Excellency also spoke at length about the outpouring of unity generated by the Fiji Sevens Team's historic gold medal win at the Rio Olympics. We do unite during both in times of triumph and tragedy as witnessed twice this year. We united after the triumph of our National Sevens Team, whose performance in Rio was poetry in motion. We united as a nation in an outpouring of grief and immediate assistance to victims of severe *TC Winston*.

Unity, Madam Speaker, during triumphant and tragic days is laudable but sadly it does not transcend nationally, and tragically this Parliament remains fragmented as we struggle to find our feet to give true meaning to democracy because of "My Way or the "High Way" attitude. For the last two years, democracy has been used to ride roughshod over the people's mandate.

We saw example of this on Monday, Madam Speaker, when moving the motion to thank His Excellency for his gracious Address, the Honourable Prime Minister ungraciously launched a vitriolic attack against the oldest and most principled political party in the country, the National Federation Party.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The National Federation Party, Madam Speaker, has survived for the last 53 years. and will continue to do so for the next 53 years.

Madam Speaker, Leaders and Prime Ministers have come and gone, and will also come and go in future, but the NFP is an impregnable fortress of principles that it has never shirked for the last 53 years, is and will not shirk them come hell or high water.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- On Tuesday, the new Honourable Minister for Fisheries likened the Opposition to singing the same tune and being bereft of ideas. This is from a Member who as Honourable Minister for Employment told Parliament on 31st May 2016 during a motion on Occupational Health and Safety compliance issues on the Fiji Sugar Corporation's (FSC) mills, following fatalities of workers that accidents were a fact of life and loss of life was not a new thing.

Let me mention, Madam Speaker, after *TC Winston*, the Opposition put out three ideas:

1. The FNPF,
2. The reduction in duty for hardware materials and;
3. grants for those whose homes were affected.

They took all three ideas but they messed it up. They never acknowledged it. They never acknowledged that these were our ideas.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, to borrow the slogan of our taxpayer funded Fiji Broadcasting Commission or FBC TV, "the difference is clear." They have got a very good slogan. It is the FijiFirst Government, which is bereft of ideas, sound and sensible solutions for the social, economic and political advancement of our nation.

Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, His Excellency's gracious Address showed Government was bereft of ideas, geared towards national unity, nation building and true nationhood. Because the statement by His Excellency is what Government wants to do in the ensuing Parliamentary year. Essentially, it is the Government's statement of intent. Therefore, His Excellency could only outline Government's programme. My colleague, Honourable Singh and many other Honourable Members on this side have alluded to many of those things and have raised some very very important issues and I am not going to repeat many of them.

But, Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister's senseless attack against the National Federation Party President, Honourable Roko Tupou Draunidalo, who is not even in Parliament to defend herself and me as Leader of NFP, cannot go unchallenged. For the sake of posterity, we need to rebut his statement of describing the NFP and its leadership a sham.

Firstly, the Honourable Prime Minister said that NFP's boycott of the opening of Parliament on 12th September by His Excellency was an insult to the President and Parliament.

Madam Speaker, let me make it very clear, my arrest and incarceration in a police station cell for a total of 30 hours that ended on the night of Sunday 11th September, along with others, especially a trade unionist who also twice served as Leader of NFP was an insult to the many thousands of our supporters. This was done under the Public Order (Amendment) Decree 2012, not Public Order (Amendment) Act, one of the many Decrees that violate fundamental human rights and freedoms. This has also been pointed out by the US Human Rights Report for 2015.

The NFP Management Board, Madam Speaker, decided and rightly so that we do not attend the opening of Parliament the next morning because violation of fundamental rights and freedoms under parliamentary democracy must be condemned in the strongest manner.

Even if it were "orders from the top" as we were told by Police, true, we could have been treated differently, instead of being arrested from our homes in front of our families, causing them mental anguish and psychological trauma. To them, this was intimidation and political persecution.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Secondly, Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister said I boycotted the Constitution Day celebrations and described the document as a sham despite participating in the Elections under the same Constitution.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Madam Speaker, my Point of Order is, this is the problem when the Members are not present when the President was giving his Speech. It is the right of reply to the President's Speech, not the Honourable Prime Minister's speech. Honourable Member should realise that he is supposed to give his right of reply to His Excellency's speech.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- I am sure the Honourable Member has taken note of your concern.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, I am amazed at the frivolous point of orders.

(Hon. Member interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Secondly, Madam Speaker, as I said, let me repeat, the Honourable Prime Minister said that I boycotted the Constitution Day celebrations and described the document as a sham despite participating in the Elections under the same Constitution and because we won only three seats, we oppose the Constitution.

Nothing can be further from the truth. Madam Speaker, both in 1992 and 1994, the NFP participated in the General Elections under the racist, unjust and feudalistic 1990 Constitution that it described as a façade of democracy, with the sole objective of changing the Constitution within the 7-year timeframe stipulated in that Constitution.

The then NFP Leader, Honourable Justice Jai Ram Reddy and the then Prime Minister, Major-General Sitiveni Rabuka are rightly credited for giving us the much acclaimed 1997 Constitution through genuine dialogue, consensus building, painstaking negotiations and perseverance.

And the NFP and I participated in the Elections under the 2013 Constitution with this objective as well, as clearly stated in our 2014 Elections Manifesto, where we stipulated what legislation and draconian decrees need to be changed or repealed. This can only be done by reviewing and repealing draconian decrees preserved under Section 173 of the Constitution. So, Madam Speaker, we made our position very very clear.

Madam Speaker, the relevance of President Barack Obama's last speech to the United Nations General Assembly last week to what I am saying is highly important and I quote:

“I believe in a liberal political order - an order built not just through elections and representative government, but also through respect for human rights and civil society, independent judiciaries and the rule of law.”

On correcting economic imbalance so that economic growth benefits all instead of governments legislating control of the economy, President Obama further stated and I quote:

“I do believe there's another path - one that fuels growth and innovation, and offers the clearest route to individual opportunity and national success. It does not require succumbing to soulless capitalism that benefits only the few, but rather recognizes that economies are more successful when we close the gap between rich and poor, and growth is broadly based. And that means respecting the rights of workers so that they can organize into independent unions and earn a living wage. It means investing in our people - their skills, their education, their capacity to take an idea and turn it into a business. It means strengthening the safety net that protects our people from hardship and allows them to take more risks - to look for a new job, or start a new venture”.

Madam Speaker, I subscribe to these principles. I was not bitter. I was not bitter contrary to the Honourable Prime Minister's view about not leading my party to victory in the Elections because we were campaigning against a party that was in power as an unelected government for seven and a half years and most importantly in control of the Treasury and making unilateral decisions on how to spend taxpayers' funds.

But we must be doing something right, Madam Speaker, and adhering to our principles and objectives that I stated in my maiden address in Parliament on 15th October 2014, to have the FijiFirst juggernaut in a worried state of mind and for them to launch vitriolic attacks on the NFP.

I thought, Madam Speaker, it was quite hilarious the intervention on Wednesday of Honourable Praveen Kumar, the once NFP flag bearer in Ba for 12 years when he was an NFP Member, the NFP mayor for 12 years until the Council with others nationwide was dissolved by military regime, but the same Government that he is now serving was symptomatic of a person I think who is confused about his political identity.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Oh!

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, Honourable Kumar called the protest actions of NFP under my leadership a joke, but he forgets (and let me remind him) that he repeatedly lobbied with his mentor and father like figure, Mr. Vinod Patel for me to become leader of the NFP as early as the beginning of 2014.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Point of Order!

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of order!

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Point of Order, Madam Speaker, I will take this statement as an offence. I never went and begged Mr. Vinod Patel in asking Honourable Professor Biman Prasad to be the Leader of NFP. I lost the respect for this man when we appointed him the leader in the morning and in the afternoon he resigned.

(Laughter)

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, let me also say that he can go and check his number. He even called me and congratulated me after my unanimous election as Leader of the NFP on May 29th, 2014. So definitely, Madam Speaker, it is not the NFP, it is not me who are playing flip-flop politics but the likes of the Honourable Minister who jumped ship for reasons known to many of us.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Point of order! He has called "lies". I want him to take that word back – "lies"

HON. SPEAKER.- Would you like to withdraw that word?

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- He has to take it back.

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- I withdraw, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, I repeat what I stated on 14th October 2014, in my maiden speech and it nullifies the claim by the Honourable Prime Minister that I am still bitter about not leading the NFP to victory in Elections, and I quote excerpts of that address because this is very important for the Honourable Prime Minister to know what I said in 2014.

I said this Madam Speaker:

"Madam Speaker, our people have spoken. They have elected their Government for the next 4 years. We wish the Prime Minister, Honourable Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama and his government well for the next four years".

This is what I said in 2014.

"To those who have the privilege to be elected to this Parliament; let me say; we have two obligations at the core of our role as MPs. First, we have to make our democracy work; and second, we have to make our democracy work for the people."

"What do I mean by that?"

Let me quote further:

"To make our democracy work; we need to ensure that our citizens and the organisations are able to freely comment, support and when needed criticise policies

and programmes being debated by this House. They need to know that our media will amplify their voices and ensure that their voices are directly heard by us. This way, we will know how citizens feel about an experience Government policies and programmes. Our democracy will grow from this new openness”.

I also said this Madam Speaker, and I quote:

“Second, we need to make our democracy work for our people. The Honourable Prime Minister called for our support for his programme for Government. We will extend that support. In extending that support we will hold the Honourable Prime Minister to his own words.

“When necessary we will criticise Government policies. When we shall do so, it will not be for the sake of doing so, but because we are in a considered view able to provide credible alternatives” .

Madam Speaker, if adhering to these principles and objectives is a sham, then I make no apologies At halftime of our Parliamentary democracy, my optimism for consensus building, dialogue and bi-partitiship is fast evaporating.

I wish I was wrong but the painful reality is that this Parliament is perhaps the most fragmented and compartmentalised into two with the mace bearing witness to what is more and more becoming a place where majority rule prevailing at all times and sound and sensible solutions being swatted aside like flies.

The question that arises Madam Speaker, is, are we beholden to a personality or personalities? Or should we be loyal to the people who place their faith and trust in us?

For the last four days, I have had nothing but praises of the 2013 Constitution, especially of its provision of a common name of “Fijian” for all and common and equal citizenry.

Talk can be cheap sometimes, Madam Speaker. Does being a Fijian and common name and equal citizenry guarantee everyone's employment on merit and equal opportunities? This is the question.

Does it guarantee a descent voluntary retirement for employment instead of enforced job loss at the age of 55 years? Does it guarantee employment on merit, again in proportionate to the make up the multi ethnic population? Does it guarantee decent pay for decent work for everyone doing the same job?

(Chorus of noes)

It does guarantee something, Madam Speaker. By July next year our citizens will bear the average burden of \$6,000 debt, following the increase of our debt level to \$5 billion. I could talk about the economy and how it is doing, I could keep talking about the cost of living. In fact, Madam Speaker, the cost of living, the people are really under a cost of living which is probably the worst ever in the history of this country.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- And I am going to talk about it.

It does guarantee majority of our cyclone ravages schools remaining unrepaired or un-built while Government's "build it back better" scheme, which is in its infancy, struggles to find its feet. It does guarantee that children in the cyclone ravaged district of Ra are dropping out of school because they do not have food.

And, Madam Speaker, calling everyone a Fijian, guaranteeing common and equal citizenry and appointments based on meritocracy we have had a lot of the Honourable Members on the other side talk about meritocracy, guarantee recruitment in the Civil Service and other job market on merit.

For example, a lot of people have come to me and expressed their concerns about the full list of police recruits that was published in the *Fiji Sun* on 28th of May this year.

Here, I want to request the Honourable Minister for Defence to provide us the criteria of the recruitments so that we can be satisfied that the recruitment of all 131 personnel was meritorious and in conformity to the principles of the Constitution. After all, the FijiFirst Government has repeatedly emphasized meritocracy as the benchmark for all appointments and this is exactly how it should be and nothing else.

Madam Speaker, they could not possibly go to the Minister for Education.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, yesterday, Parliament voted to increase the allowances of MPs. Yet FijiFirst voted against my motion during the budget to provide \$50 million a year for the next three years towards sugar rehabilitation, to guarantee a minimum price of \$90 per tonne of cane for growers that will instil confidence in growers and increase crop production, subsidize land rentals and encourage landowners into cane farming.

Madam Speaker that was a very sensible rescue package and I hope the Government will take that on, they have not come out and said why it is not possible.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- It is not a logging thing.

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- Maybe, Madam Speaker this Government thinks that my motion was a sham. But what really is a sham is a decline of sugar industry in the last ten years, primarily under the leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister.

HON. OPP MEMBERS.- On!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- (Inaudible)

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- There is no question, Madam Speaker, the facts speak for themselves, I mean in the last 10 years, we can say whatever we want, but the facts laid there on the table suggest that the sugar industry has declined.

HON. GOVT MEMBER.- What is the cost?

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- Let me just give you some statistics. We produced 220,000 tonnes of sugar from last year's crop, down from 310,000 in 2006 - 30 percent less. We grew 1.8 million tonnes of cane in 2016, down from 3.2 million in 2006 - 44 percent less. The number of active growers has fallen by 5,674 from 18,636 to only 12,872.

HON. MEMBERS.- Oh!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The only reason for the Prime Minister's anger it seems Madam Speaker, with the NFP is that we are questioning the value of this Government's so-called reforms.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Yeah, yeah.

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- We are doing so not to bring down the Government.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- You do not know anything about the sugar.

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- We are doing so not to discredit Government, we are doing so because long experience has told us what will work in the industry and what will not.

HON. MEMBER- Tell them! Tell them!

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, we have asked the Government to join hands with us and work together to save the industry. I have called for a joint Parliamentary Committee for the Prime Minister. They keep talking about working with them and we suggest the joint Parliamentary Committee to look at the Sugar Industry which is in dire straits, they reject it. But the Government, as usual, wants to do things its way. It believes that it will get it right and claim all the political credit. Madam Speaker, we do not mind what they are saying and I want to tell this to the Government.

There is a saying that goes like this:

“There is no limit to what a man or woman can do if they do not mind who takes the credit.”

We do not mind if they claim the credit. They take the rescue package, they save the farmers in this country, they save the sugar industry, we will give them credit.

Madam Speaker, I will stand in this Parliament and give credit to the Government.

(Chorus of interjections)

Madam Speaker, let me conclude by saying once again to the Honourable Prime Minister that we are ready to engage in dialogue, we are ready to extend our hands to the Government and we believe that we have two more years left, and I think it is a long enough time for us to do a lot of things. I do implore on the Honourable Prime Minister and his Government to work with us.

Madam Speaker, I know many people have quoted the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon for his address on 20th September, and I quote, because it is important that this be repeated:

“In too many places we see leaders rewriting Constitutions, manipulating elections and taking other desperate steps to cling to power.”

He said:

“My message to all is clear; serve your people. Do not subvert democracy; do not pilfer your country's resources; and do not imprison and torture your critics.”

(Hon. Members interject)

Madam Speaker our next session is in February, so I want to take this opportunity to wish all Members of Parliament a Happy *Diwali* and a Merry Christmas.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and God Bless Fiji.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Ashneel Sudhakar.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, Leader of Opposition, Members of Parliament, to that effect the Leader of NFP as well and my fellow Fijians: I rise this morning, Madam Speaker, to join my colleagues in thanking His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji, Major-General Jioji Konrote, for his most gracious Speech, delivered on Monday, 12th September, 2016 at the Opening of Parliament for the 2016-2017 session.

Madam Speaker, when such a high calibre person, of high military rank, social status and a great leader speaks to us, it becomes incumbent upon us to pay proper heed to his words. His Excellency reminded us that two years ago we launched our new democracy.

When the Fijian people cast their votes in the General Elections of 17th September, 2014, the first to be based on genuine democratic principles of equal votes of equal value.

Fiji, for the first time since Independence, felt just and experienced genuine democracy, and the foundation of that democracy is our 2013 Constitution.

The Constitution, which has been much maligned by the Members of the Opposition and there have been some suggestions by my friends from the other side to amend, change or even totally do away with that Constitution. I ask them why? What is so wrong with the Constitution? Fiji has had a very chequered history, Madam Speaker.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Listen!

The turbulent times of 14th May, 1987; September, 1987; 1990; and May of 2000 are some of those times we remember with pain.

I am old enough to have lived through various phases of that era and young enough to vividly remember what this country has gone through. I have seen the injustices and atrocities of those times and if His Excellency has challenged us to move away from politics of the past, then he is absolutely right.

One of the primary reasons why Fiji was never a genuine democracy was because the foundation of Fiji in those days were laid on Constitutional documents, which were riddled with the racist policies, where some votes were worth more than the others, while others were not even worth the paper it was printed on.

(Hon. Members interject)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR Madam Speaker, today is 30th of September, 2016. Exactly 12 years ago I was sworn in as a Barrister and Solicitor of the High Court of Fiji and admitted to the Fijian Bar of Legal Practitioners.

In the very first year of my Law Degree Programme, I had written a paper comparing the various Constitutions of Fiji that Fiji had seen at that time. Those were the 1970, 1990 and 1997 Constitutions, I will make the paper available for the benefit of the Members of the Opposition.

In the 1970 Constitution, THE Honourable Biman Prasad has raised about submission of the 2013 Constitution. Let me highlight the matters of those Constitutions. In the 1970 Constitution, Elections were based on racial lines: 10 seats in the then Parliament were reserved for *iTaukei*; 10 seats were reserved for Indo-Fijians; while a further 26 were based on cross voting.

(Hon. Member interjects)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- The Constitution was replaced in 1990 with the Constitution which entrenched the racial demarcation further. This is for your benefit, Honourable Prasad, listen to it.

Under the 1990 Constitution, 37 seats were reserved for *iTaukei*, 27 seats were reserved for Indo-Fijians and 3 for General voters.

The 1997 Constitutions which the Opposition had been praising so much was also a racial Constitution. The 1997 Constitution was no better, which furthered racial division by allocating 23 seats to *iTaukei* and 19 seats to Indo-Fijians. Those Constitutions were riddled with other race based policies and structures and classed as religious biased.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Like what?

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Affirmative Action – you know about it.

My aim in only highlighting the allocation of Parliamentary seats on racial lines in those Constitution was to demonstrate that Fiji was never a genuine democracy. Previously, people were segregated on racial, ethnic, religious and class lines. There was never a case of equal votes of equal value.

People of the two major races would eat from the same plate on all the other days, but come Elections time, there will be hate speech, racial vilification, abuse and so on.

His Excellency reminded us how things are so different with the modern Fiji because of the 2013 Constitution.

Madam Speaker, sound legal basis for any country is the platform on which development can occur. The FijiFirst Government has achieved seven years of consecutive economic growth, which is not only confirmed by the Reserve Bank of Fiji, but also the ADB and the World Bank.

One just has to see the number of cars on our roads. One just has to travel on the coast of Viti Levu and see the construction that is going around in Fiji, to see how economic growth is passed on to the common Fijians. This stability in economic growth points towards able and sound leadership in the form of our Prime Minister, Honourable Bainimarama, which we Fijians are mighty fortunate to have among us.

Our Prime Minister, Honourable Voreqe Bainimarama has done a great favour to this nation by ushering in the 2013 Constitution, which is the engine for stability, economic growth and foundation for our new democracy.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, please, allow me to highlight certain aspects of the 2013 Constitution, particularly the Bill of Rights which will demonstrate that our Prime Minister and the *FijiFirst* Party do not only preach the document but put it into practice in real terms.

Just like Honourable Prasad has pointed that his talk is cheap. We do not engage in cheap talk, Honourable Prasad, because I will show it to you now with evidence, how we achieved the Constitution.

Section 15 - Access to Courts and Tribunals: Our Government has opened the Legal Aid Offices across Fiji, even in remote places like Nabouwalu, Tailevu and Taveuni, which will have Legal Aid Officers and we have appointed more judges and magistrates to make access to justice easier for people.

Section 22 - Freedom of Religion, Conscience and Belief: For the first time in Fiji, we are free to practice our religion and faith in public or in private and that was ably demonstrated by our Prime Minister when he attended My Suva Park two weeks ago and participated in the Ganesh Utsav celebration. He was the chief guest there and it was organised by the Hindu organisation and you must have seen the pictures of Prime Minister with the *tilak* and the garland. He was there, that is the demonstration of the religious tolerance in this country which has never been seen before in this country.

(Hon. Members interject)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Section 31 - Right to Education: In Section 31, the Constitution provides right for education. Our Government has brought in the Toppers Scholarship, where the cream of the students get their scholarships and we have the best possible people for the best possible jobs, TELS loan scheme, increased grants for schools and technical college.

We have established technical colleges around the country. People who would be jobless and roaming around the villages are now in technical colleges, studying. We will give them a life. Our talk is not cheap, we have got enough.

Section 32 – Right of Economic Participation: Small and Micro Enterprise grants has given hope to many of those young entrepreneurs, who did not have any other choice but now we have given small grants and they are able to start their businesses.

Sugar Industry Reform - Our Prime Minister has gone around the country, listening to the people's plight and has changed the aspects of the Sugar Industry Act that has been holding the sugar industry back.

Section 34 – Right to Reasonable Access of Transportation: We are building new roads, bridges. It is all for the benefit of the people to provide them with transport, that is provided for in Section 34 of the Constitution.

And people have questioned about the MWH and their termination. Well, when people do not perform, we do not hang around with them. We sack them and that has brought in development. Full stop! That is the full stop.

Section 35 - Right to housing and sanitation. The FijiFirst Government has embarked upon building homes for the poor through Social Welfare Schemes. People whose houses have been burnt down are eligible to receive \$1000 from the Ministry of Social Welfare - never before and \$5000 from Ministry for Housing, people who have had their houses burnt down. Even when after *Cyclone Winston* hit, when super *Cyclone Winston* hit us, our Government allocated \$83 million to rebuild homes, without any legal obligation. We did not have any legal obligations to rebuild those homes, but we did it out of compassion. We gave up \$7,000 to rebuild. We have allocated another \$20 million in the "Help for Homes" programme to help those people. This is enforcing the rights of the Constitution to adequate food and water.

(Honourable Members interject)

During *Cyclone Winston*, our Prime Minister, our Minister, our Ministers and our MPs went on foot, travelling around the disaster stricken areas.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! Honourable Members interjections are getting disrespectful, please have some respect for the Honourable Member, that has the floor and be more responsible.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Yes, Madam Speaker, I have two minutes to round up.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Why are you looking at me?

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- He is distracting, me, Madam Speaker, that is why I am looking at him.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- You keep quiet, I will not look at you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- I was highlighting, Madam Speaker, that under Section 36 of the Constitution, people of Fiji have a right to adequate food and water and we did. We demonstrated that during the cyclone time.

Right to social security scheme: We have introduced old age pension. Section 37 of the Constitution, under Bill of Rights, provides for social security scheme. We have provided for the first time old age pension. We have provided security for the poor and old. We have paid the land rent of people who cannot afford it, who are very poor. We have waived the Housing Authority loans for people who could not afford it. That is the Social Security Scheme under Section 37 of the Constitution.

Freedom of arbitrary eviction: Section 39 of the Constitution provides freedom from arbitrary eviction. Before our Prime Minister came to power, he used to see farmers being evicted from their farms on a daily basis. In the middle of the night, they will be chased by the landowners, but now, since he has come into power, it has all stopped. People are following proper legal channels.

In Ellington too ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- He is doing it again Madam Speaker.

... in Rakiraki itself, the sector was producing 79,000 tonnes of cane of every year. That has dropped to 7,000 tonnes only - 72,000 wiped off the graph of FSC because the land leases expired and no one ventured to remove that. It is our Government and our Prime Minister who has introduced CIBUL, where we go and negotiate for renewal of leases and if Honourable Prasad is saying that we have not done well in the industry, we are trying to do well. Sugar Industry declined well before we came to power, but at least we are taking steps to revive the industry.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- If the Members of the Opposition, Madam Speaker, cannot see the benefits of the Constitution clearly, then I advise them to pay a visit to Dawasamu, Tailevu and make use of the miracle water there.

(Laughter)

Please, if you cannot see the benefit of the Constitution, please go to Dawasamu, Tailevu, and make use of the miracle water, even fill in small bottles like this and bring the water here and drink it every day. Maybe after that, you have a clearer vision, you will be able to see properly. Even I am going there this afternoon, if you want you can accompany me. Let us go and have a look, let us go and have a dip in the miracle water, you will be able to see clearly.

Even the new SODELPA Leader, Mr. Rabuka has acknowledged our party. He said that our party has a vision and SODELPA needs a vision like FijiFirst, if they have to have any chance. If they have any chance in the next Elections, they must have a vision like FijiFirst, Madam Speaker. A key factor in driving economic growth, ...

HON. MEMBER.- Bigger parties need to work together.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Smaller parties need to work harder actually.

(Laughter)

... Madam Speaker, is Civil Service Reform. No matter how good the policies we make, they will never transcend to benefit the common Fijian, if the Civil Service structure is not proper.

Our Government has brought in the Merit-based recruitment and Merit-based promotion in the Civil Service; no other government tried that. People were appointed on whom you know basis before, but now we have setup the criteria where people will be appointed and promoted on merit and the results will be seen in a year or two. When we go there, we will no longer be complaining about civil servants. Today people go to the hospitals, complain about doctors, nurses, even the gardener, people go to any ministry, complaining about civil servants, they say no one is working. But when the merit-based people are appointed, then people realise that if they work hard they will be promoted, then people will improve their services, and that is what we are going to deliver to the people of Fiji.

I urge the Opposition to learn from us instead of criticising our every move, Madam Speaker, and appreciate that document which we rely upon in delivering the goods, and that is the 2013 Constitution.

Why do we only unite when our Sevens Team wins gold in *Rio*? Or when we criticise how badly our soccer teams play internationally? Those are the only two times that we unite, other times we are fighting. There are other times we can unite like celebrating the Constitution Day. However, sadly most of the Opposition Members chose to boycott the Constitution Day celebrations at Albert Park. Maybe because the SODELPA Team is sitting very close to the National Federation Party and the boycott virus have rubbed on them.

(Laughter)

It is too close, we are sitting too close and the boycott virus has jumped from this side to that side, everyone is now boycotting stuff.

Some Members of the Opposition, Madam Speaker, have prophesied that the end of FijiFirst is near. Prophecies are not our forte, Madam Speaker, for that we have to go to Nadroga, and maybe closer to home like Honourable Viliame Gavoka, who knows a lot about false prophecies, something that happened about 2 years ago.

(Laughter)

Some Members of NFP, including the leader has been roaming around Ba, Tavua and Rakiraki and distributing small booklets, misleading the people, telling them stuff that FijiFirst Government is doing and misleading them.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Where is the booklet?

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- We will get it. They are getting it. Please wait, we are getting it - Batiyaka, Koronobu, Korovuto, Esaru, people have been misled, people have been maligning the good work that FijiFirst Government is doing. Madam Speaker.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- They are worried.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Ba people have never worried, Honourable Prasad, we are good there.

Madam Speaker, I have demonstrated how the FijiFirst Government has not only applied the Constitution in theory, but in practice and this is why FijiFirst needs and will return to power in 2018 and beyond, because we can deliver like no other.

Echoing the sentiments of His Excellency the President, I appeal to the people of Fiji not to believe in false prophets and false prophecies, some of who are sitting on the other side of the House today. FijiFirst is here for you and it will be here for you.

Long live FijiFirst and long live Fiji. Thank you Madam Speaker.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now invite the Honourable Laisenia Tuitubou to have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of Opposition, fellow Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Members of Parliament, youths listening around the nation and ladies and gentlemen; at the outset, I wish to add my congratulations to His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji on his outstanding Address at the Opening of the new Session of Parliament.

I wish also to express my appreciation again to the current Government, led by the Honourable Prime Minister and Members of Cabinet, for their continued faith in me as the Minister for Youth and Sports.

Madam Speaker, in His Excellency the President's Opening Address, he reminded us that we are at the halfway mark of the FijiFirst Government first four year term and it is an opportune time to reflect on the progress that we have made. There is no doubt that the voice of youths was heard during the 2014 General Elections and continues to be heard, as I and my Assistant Minister visited the outlying areas of Fiji to hear what our people are saying. The genuine democracy principle of equal votes of equal value is having a major impact and I am happy to report that my Ministry has been making significant progress, empowering Fiji's young leaders by supporting them to become capable and sound decision-makers.

Reviewing our performance over the past few years, Madam Speaker, I stand here for our achievements as a Ministry. After being sworn in as Minister for Youth and Sports and having taken up this important portfolio, I have pushed hard to strengthen the Ministry's approach by refocusing our efforts on effectively delivering our service and programmes to youths and sporting organisations. We have made it our priority to ask our people about their training needs and wishes before introducing our service and empowering training for their ongoing development.

This, Madam Speaker, has ensured that our young people are receiving the most effective, suitable and relevant training so that our youths can start their own income-generating projects to contribute to our economy development and help their families, community, and of course help Fiji.

Madam Speaker, the outstanding success of our Sevens Rugby Team is a testament, not only to what Fiji can do, but also to the enormous benefit of discipline, focus and the significant investment made by this Government, the same factors from the foundation of our approach to youth development.

All of us were affected in some way by *Tropical Cyclone Winston* but what we witnessed as a nation was the true spirit of Fiji, our resilience in the face of adversity. My Ministry contributed to the re-building effort after *TC Winston*, specifically with the cash work programme on the most affected islands, in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme.

This funding enabled the residents of the affected islands to come to Suva to register for the 'Help for Homes' Programme and to order materials to re-build their homes and their lives. While it was a small contribution, it was certainly significant to those involved in the programme, nothing that we have to be prepared to future disasters.

My Ministry has also ensured that 27 young people from the most affected island and were trained in disaster waste management so that they can form the core future leaders in this area when another disaster strikes.

Madam Speaker, these past two years has been one of the best learning experience to me, particularly visiting youths around Fiji and hearing about their daily encounters. My Assistant Minister and I have collectively visited approximately 500 youth clubs in the country, the latest of which was my recent visit to Rotuma with the Honourable Minister for Forests and to the furthest island in Yasawa, meeting with youths from the three villages at Naibalebale, Yakani and Najia on Viwa Island, as well as having an opportunity to officiate the opening of a youth canteen at Waya Island.

Madam Speaker, although only accessible by sea and lacking basic infrastructure like electricity and at times water, these young people of Yasawa are actively engaged in agriculture and are full of enthusiasm for future development in their village.

As Ralph Waldo Emerson rightly said and I quote:

“Enthusiasm is one of the most powerful engines of success.”

It is an asset that I know our young people possess in abundance. And enthusiasm combined with skills, discipline and focus, together with a little investment from Government, is a recipe of success.

The Vaturareba Youth of Waya Island wrote their motto on their canteen, and I quote:

“Old man declare war, but its youth must fight and die”

We have listened to our leaders and we are working in concert with the other Ministry to provide relevant skills training in the villages to those who need it most.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry has listened to those in the hospitality and the garment industry and we are developing new strategies to meet scarce skills identified and focus increasingly on the urban areas, where a large number of our unemployed youths live.

We have initiated new training in basic computer skills for those in urban areas as this has to be a fundamental ability for them and for our future economic growth.

My Ministry is developing a close working relations with Technical Colleges, so that we not only complement their work, but also jointly extend the training opportunities into the interior, the maritime and the rural areas.

My Ministry has just begun to cooperate with the IHRDP and we welcome this opportunity to provide increased support using the expertise in the Ministry for Industry, Trade and Tourism to our young people, to take their income-generating projects to the next level.

To-date, Madam Speaker, in relation to our youth development agenda, the Ministry is pursuing the accreditation of our core training programme through the National Qualification Framework with support from the Fiji Higher Education Commission. This will enable our training programmes to feed into more specialised training and to create a pathway for further education for our young people. This allows us to coordinate more effectively with others and also provide additional training opportunities.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President also mentioned Government's responsibility to empower more of our young Fijians through an educational revolution. The development and approval of the Non-Formal Education Policy was an achievement for the Ministry as it strengthened and gave credibility to the training and programmes we deliver. We were given the mandate to educate our young men and women who had dropped out of the formal education system and who required skills in order to re-engage so that their future are full of promises.

Madam Speaker, programmes such as the seed of success, the multi-skills, the mobile skills and youth empowerment training has sown the right positively mentality for young leaders as they make their way a long life's long and bumpy road. Indeed, Tuvalu has recognised our seeds of success programme and have requested for us to train their trainers in the programme later this year.

Madam Speaker, as of August 2016, a number of youths over the span of three years have undergone a form of training with the Ministry stands at approximately 9,770, while the number of registered active youth clubs with the Ministry sits at 1,157 as of March this year. These figures represent the number of achievements by the Ministry as we seek to reach as a wide number of young people as we possibly can.

Madam Speaker, with the engagement of 15 youth administrators, working with provincial administrators, I am delighted to report that we have a network of energetic and focused people, working in the field as our eyes and ears.

The amount of information we received now is substantial and allows us to plan our service more effectively. Part of the mandate of these young administrators is to revive the balance of 1,772 in active youth clubs, as well as to help establish youth clubs, where they have never existed before. I am confident that you will make further significant progress in a short period of time and provide the targeted services to our people across the country.

Madam Speaker, I wish to highlight also the strengthening of our training institutions, namely our five youth training centres: Yavitu in Kadavu; Naleba in Macuata; Naqere in Cakaudrove; Nasau in Sigatoka and Valelevu in Naitasiri.

These Youth Training Centres, Madam Speaker, have received major extensions and renovations to provide a conducive learning environment that meets OHS standard, training and the demand from the youths.

However, in meeting our commitment to empower more young people, the Ministry takes our multi-skills and empower training to the youth. And in doing so, we have not only met our targets for rural and maritime areas but supported rural development.

We continue to strengthen our commitment to the Integrated Rural Development Framework to maximise youth development, fully utilising available Government resources through cooperative partnership with other Government agencies and stakeholders.

Madam Speaker, as indicated, my Ministry has also been actively engaged in programmes to empower youths to create better livelihoods for themselves. This we do through our youth grants programme providing assistance to youths operating income-generating projects.

I wish to highlight a shining example of a vibrant youth club that has greatly utilised our assistance:

- The Youth Club in Legalega Housing in Nadi: They started off with a collection of \$80 from the members in 2006 and have a combined assets of \$100,00 and cash over approximately at \$40,000 from the \$3,000 investment rendered to them by the Ministry in the Western Division;
- The Youth Club of Makolei village in Solevu Bua, they have been able to generate combined revenue of more than \$60,000 from the \$3,000 investment, rendered to them in 2013 by our Youth Office in Northern Division;
- Another example; while smaller in impact is the Bilolevu Youth Club in Lomati, Cicia, Lau, which received an investment of \$3,000 from the Government for roofing irons, empty drums, fencing for its cattle farm and copra drier in 2011, purchasing green copra from the villagers, drying it and selling it to local buyers. After a year, they diversified into a small canteen, selling groceries, snacks and kava, as well as opening a small retail fuel business selling petrol and diesel. They have a total of about 800 shares with the Unit Trust of Fiji, worth an estimated \$1,300 and currently having a total of \$5,952 savings in their accounts. This is from the \$3,000 investment from the little the Government gave them.

The Youth Clubs have taken on board the lessons learnt about financial literacy and the importance of savings. These are just three examples of countless success stories from the urban youths and youths from the 14 provinces, facilitated by the committed officials in the Ministry.

Madam Speaker, I wish to mention the National Youth Policy. The Policy covered the interests of all stakeholders and sectors, including Government's strategic direction for 2015 to 2018, as well as relevant regional and international youths declaration and commitments.

Our National Youth Policy is mentioned in the Green Growth Framework as it recognises that Fijian youths are vital components of national development and amidst the many challenges they constantly encounter.

Madam Speaker, Government recognises sports as an industry as we move into the era of sports professionalism, with the need to invest in developing our elite athletes, increasing our levels of participation in sports and physical activity, supported by coaches, technical officials and other specialists.

With Government's inclusive approach, the current National Sports Policy will be reviewed in 2016-2017, to promote the participation of women and disabled persons in physical activities and encourage the participation of all Fijians, irrespective of ethnicity, gender or physical and mental abilities.

My Ministry is working closely with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services to contribute to the fight against non-communicable disease. We cannot continue with the situation where one person in every eight hours in Fiji has a limb amputated, according to recent data from the Ministry of Health and Medical Services. With increased physical activity, we can assist in improving mental well-being, help reduce suicide rates and ultimately improve the health of the nation.

Madam Speaker, Cabinet has approved the 2017 National Sports Day Holiday, where we hope to get all stakeholders mobilised and to use sport as a tool to increase the level of physical activity across all segments of Fiji's population.

This will support Government's undertaking to combat our NCD problem, where Fiji is ranked second in the world, with the most deaths caused by diabetes as revealed by the World Diabetes Association at the recent NCD Summit in Tonga.

Madam Speaker, the proposed Anti-Doping Act will protect the athletes to participate in doping-free sport and thus promote health, fairness and equality to athletes worldwide. It will also ensure harmonised, coordinate an effective anti-doping programmes at the national and international levels to detect and prevent doping.

Madam Speaker, this Act will, if approved by this House, also establish the Fiji Anti-Doping Agency as an independent body, charged with the implementation of the World Anti-Doping Code and its international standards in Fiji.

We have all seen the integrity of sports being questioned by recent events taking place in one of the world's sports powerhouse. This has potentially corrupted the foundation of sport in the minds of spectators and athletes alike and we cannot afford to let that happen too in Fiji. We continue to tackle corruption with our zero tolerance approach and this is now being extended to the sports field.

Madam Speaker, as mentioned by the Honourable Assistant Minister, Fiji has had a very successful year attracting major sporting events to our shores – the Oceania volleyball, swimming and weightlifting championships, the Super Rugby match between the *Chiefs* and the *Crusaders*, and the upcoming third annual Fiji International Golf Tournament in Natadola and Under-18 Oceania Basketball Championships, and more to come.

At the back of our gold medal victory at the Rio Olympics, Fiji's international reputation as a sporting power has never been stronger, and I echo our Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade and Tourism's commitment to ensuring that we have the necessary facilities in the country to help us lure even more international events to our shores so we can better tap into the sports tourism market.

We need to aim high, to continue to punch above our weight and look for other opportunities, including bidding to host the Pacific Games again as our contribution to the region and host other events such as the Commonwealth Youth Games. My Ministry will work with the Fiji National Sports Commission, Fiji Sports Council and our colleagues from the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism, to develop this aspirational strategy in this financial year.

Madam Speaker, however, in light of the above, there is still room for improvement and I continue to challenge my Ministry to problem-solve, namely, we will be putting greater effort into

making our programmes as inclusive as possible, so that all of our young people can learn leadership skills and enjoy the immense benefits of physical activity.

I have set out before you our achievements and our current and future directions as we continue to improve our quality of services. I have taken note of His Excellency's call to us all to read and understand the Constitution and as a result, my Ministry has begun to cooperate with the Fijian Elections Office and the Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission, to ensure our youths understand the context of an equal vote for all as we deepen our constitutional democracy.

Madam Speaker, this will of our Fijian youths can move mountains and I am confident of their capabilities as His Excellency said in his opening Address, and I quote:

“Fijians can do almost anything.”

Young people, wherever they are, are in one way or another effectively changing our society for the better, contributing to the development agenda of their respective communities and surroundings and making a difference. I say this with confidence as the Assistant Minister and I have seen, first hand, so many examples of this.

Madam Speaker, to conclude, I wish to once again thank His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji for his challenging opening Address. Before I take my seat, I also wish to congratulate my Assistant Minister for yet another milestone achievement in being the first Fijian Minister to award medals to the great achievers at the Rio Paralympics.

(Applause)

He continues to be an example and role model to aspiring youths across the nation.

Madam Speaker, I again reaffirm my unwavering commitment in supporting all of our young people in realising their full potential for the benefit of our country and its future, both on and off the sports field.

Before I resume my seat, Madam Speaker, I congratulate all the sappers and ex-sappers around Fiji and abroad and wish them all the best as they celebrate 'Sappers Day' today.

I would also like to remind the Opposition that the Creator creates us with one mouth and two ears, so listen more and speak less, Madam Speaker.

Vinaka vakalevu and thank you very much.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Jone Usamate.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, who unfortunately is not here, Honourable Members of the House, ladies and gentlemen, those sitting in the public gallery and those watching from the comfort of their homes.

Madam Speaker, I wish to thank and acknowledge His Excellency the President for his thought-provoking and gracious Address. His Excellency has reminded us to bring back the honour into this

House. He has emphasised the need for unity and the need to take stock of how far we have come to re-look at our game plan and map out our future direction.

I would first like to convey my gratitude to the Honourable Prime Minister for the trust and confidence shown in my appointment as the Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations. I now have the opportunity to continue the good work done so far by my predecessor, the Honourable Minister for Fisheries, Semi Koroilavesau and His Excellency the President before him. Like them, I intend to continue the focus on employment creation, social justice, good faith employment relations and safe and productive workplaces.

Turning now, Madam Speaker, to the issue of employment. The basis for employment is economic growth. When you have economic growth, you provide the basis for growth in employment. We all know that this year, we will have had seven years of positive growth in this country and that is a reflection of the success of FijiFirst policies and is also a reflection of confidence in the economy. This is our number one approach; developing employment - develop the economy, that is what this Government is focused on.

World Bank statistics published this month have shown that from 2013 to 2014, unemployment figures have decreased from 8.3 percent to 7.9 percent, with projections for 2016 and 2017 that this will further decrease to 7.8 percent and 7.5 percent respectively. Those are World Bank projections.

Job advertisements that are tracked by the Reserve Bank of Fiji show consistent growth in the number of jobs we advertised from 2011 to 2015. The same number of job advertisements that were recorded in 2011 is the number of jobs that were advertised for the first 6 months of this year. We will continue to focus on substantially reducing unemployment rates by our focus on further growing the economy, in particular with a focus on job-rich growth, more focus on employment creation programmes on employment placement and foreign employment.

We are now registering and processing Fijians for seasonal work to New Zealand under the Recognised Seasonal Employer of New Zealand (RSE) and to Australia under the Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP). In 2015, under our first year of participation in these labour mobility schemes, we sent 179 workers to New Zealand and Australia. Over the last 8 months, we have sent 126 workers, with this number expected to grow to around 500 workers over the coming 6 to 9 months.

During the course of this debate, Madam Speaker, there have been some questions raised as to why we have only sent that number of people so far. We need to realise this is seasonal work. It is demand-driven, it is when the employer requires the labour then we can then send our labour. We must also remember that we are in competition with countries that have been doing this for some time, for a long time. They have built a reputation, we are building up our products in only two years, we are raising the number.

This whole week, I have been meeting employers who have been coming from Australia and New Zealand. I have met one employer this morning who told me, "I took 15 last year, I want to take 50 this year." So, this is what we do, we build it up slowly. We build the reputation of the Fiji product, we make sure that it is a class product, a quality product, then only and then, we will be able to increase the numbers.

There has also been a question asked in this House, "why is it only for 6 months?" Because it is seasonal, it is only seasonal. It is when the season demands then we can send. That for me is common sense, it is seasonal.

For seasonal work, we are now targeting the most isolated rural communities. I once again commend my predecessor, Honourable Koroilavesau who for the last 3 months has set the platform by travelling and recruiting from the isolated rural areas in Fiji, including the Lau Group, Lomaiviti, Rotuma, Kadavu, the interior of Viti Levu namely Navosa, Nadarivatu, Navatusila, Naitasiri, Namosi, Serua, Nakorotubu, Tailevu North, and in rural areas in Vanua Levu such as Udu, Wainikoro, Saqani, Korotasere, Kubulau, Dama, and Wainunu. The furthest extremities of Fiji have not been forgotten by this Government.

I will continue this recruitment drive. Last week we visited and recruited from Vatulele and we are scheduled to also visit Beqa, Yasawa, the remaining islands in Vanua Levu, including Rabi and Kioa as well as the rest of the Lau Group and Taveuni which are yet to be covered. We aim to complete this recruitment drive by December this year.

We have also started, Madam Speaker, to send skilled workers to New Zealand this year. We have sent 6 carpenters with another 7, who are scheduled to leave at the end of this month, to assist in the Christchurch rebuilding programme. The feedback on our workers has been good, 2 of our pilot employees engaged in the Christchurch rebuild have been positive and 2 workers were interviewed for foreman positions. This speaks highly of the potential of our Fiji product that we are sending on these job opportunities.

The scope of the Seasonal Worker Programme with Australia is broad, given the scope of the Australian economy. This programme has opened up work opportunities in the agriculture sector, including dairy, aquaculture, and sugarcane and has also provided opportunities in the accommodation sector or the hospitality sector.

The first employer in the accommodation sector from Western Australia was in Fiji 2 weeks ago to interview 50 workers for positions in their hotel at a Cable Beach Club and these workers are expected to depart around October. Since the inception of the Seasonal Work Programme with Australia, we have been able to send 163 workers.

Through the Fiji Volunteer Service, we continue to send retirees to the region for volunteer services on a cost sharing basis with regional countries. This programme is gaining popularity with some of our workers now offered permanent positions in their country of employment. We will continue to grow these labour mobility schemes as they provide opportunities for our people. We are now holding consultations on the development of a first ever National Employment Policy which will provide an overarching framework and allow us to identify sectors in which we can grow domestic employment so that we can work with other ministries to make those employment opportunities come to fruition.

Madam Speaker, the introduction in March 2014 of Fiji's first ever National Minimum Wage under the FijiFirst Government resulted in assisting approximately 100,000 Fijian workers nationwide. The upward revision of the National Minimum Wage from 1st July, 2015 to \$2.32 per hour is also an extra boost to our workers in particular, following the recovery undertaken after the devastation of *Tropical Cyclone Winston*.

We continue to focus on training of workers on their rights and responsibilities under the law; we have consistently provided this training over the last 3 years. For example, on OHS Modules 1 and 2, we have trained approximately 1,200 workers each year over the past 3 years. In terms of labour compliance, we assist workers in the recovery of unpaid wages and dues with our case disposal sitting at approximately 44 percent.

Unresolved cases at our Labour Compliance Unit are mainly submitted to mediation where the current settlement rate of mediation cases averages around 80 percent over the last 4 years, which is comparable to the best that is achieved anywhere in the world. Where cases are still unsettled at mediation, they are referred to the Employment Relations Tribunal. From July this year, the functions of the Employment Relations Tribunal have been moved to the Judicial Department and we understand that they will have an appointment of two more legal tribunals who will be based in the West and the North. This should assist in the faster determination and disposal of employment cases.

Madam Speaker, we have a specialist court known as the Arbitration Court which deals only with disputes from essential services and industries. It is now fully functional with the appointment of the Chair as well as the 24-employer and worker members in July this year. The Arbitration Court will ensure the quick disposal of matters that relate to essential services and industries.

In pursuit of social justice, the Ministry undertook a review of the Workmen's Compensation Act to increase the amount payable for all deaths and injuries sustained at the workplace. Since July 2015, the compensation for a deceased worker that is paid to the dependents has increased from \$24,000 to \$50,000. Workplace injuries average around 1,020 cases per year and over the last 3 years whilst workplace death cases averages 150 cases over the same period.

The consistency in these numbers is mainly due to the increasing awareness of workers and employers on their rights and also their responsibilities in actually reporting of these cases. The Ministry's settlement rate of the worker's compensation cases averages around 60 percent per annum with 2015 seeing an increase of 29 percent in the settlement of these cases compared to the preceding year. We will focus on continuing to improve the settlement of all cases.

For Occupational Health and Safety, we have managed to strengthen the enforcement capabilities of our officers by formally gazetting their appointments and getting them to attain prosecutorial qualifications. We will continue to do this, to assist speedy resolution of OHS issues. We intend to build on the enforcement of Occupational Health and Safety in the workplace as the focus of occupational health in the workplace, as the focus in the past has always been primarily on occupational safety. I, therefore, look forward to developing and implementing policies and programmes that will enhance Occupational Health in the Workplace.

In terms of improving our service delivery and customer service, the Ministry is using the ISO 9001 Quality Management System with 5 of the 11 Ministry Units certified to ISO 9001 Quality Management System by June 2016.

In terms of National Productivity, the World Bank has published this month as National Gross Domestic Product per capita in Fiji has grown from around USD\$2,870.79 back in the 1960s to over USD\$4,000 in 2015. We know that the growth rate of productivity has always been our challenge. This is something that we will continue to focus on. We also know that our past *coup* culture has had a lot to do with how our stagnant growth has been. That is why our constitution is important because it tries to build that climate of stability that will allow us to focus on continual growth and continually improving our productivity.

The Asian Productivity Organisation Data book from 2011 to 2015 has shown that total factor productivity has fluctuated but remained positive in 2013, 2014 and 2015 compared to the negative values in 2011 and 2012 and that is a positive trend because total factor productivity is determined by how efficiently and intently the inputs that grow into the production are being used. So it is actually showing that we are working smarter and we are working better and perhaps that is some of the focus that we had on education and so forth are working out much better for us.

The Ministry is working on programmes to enhance productivity in workplaces. The Ministry conducts workplace awareness and training through the Labour-Management Consultation and Cooperation Committee, which we refer to as the LMCC.

Since 2012, the number of trainings have increased by over 100 percent over the last three years and these trainings are now conducted in all manner of sectors; wholesale and retail, hotel, garment, logging, road building, engineering, manufacturing, mining and et cetera. To-date, the Ministry has managed to register 411 employers under the LMCC covering 17 percent of the total formal sector workforce.

Madam Speaker, on the international front, upon the successful closure of the Article 26 Complaint Against Fiji at the ILO, Government is now vigorously pursuing engagement on pertinent projects that have relevance to Fiji. These include projects in areas such as decent work for all the workers of this country, for those who are disabled in the workplace, gender parity and increasing employment opportunities for our youths.

After the ILO Tripartite Mission visited Fiji, the social partners signed a Joint Implementation Report that contained important achievements and concessions reached between the social partners including the:

- restoration of check off facilities;
- reduction of strike notice;
- reinstatement of terminated individual grievances;
- removal of references to bargaining units;
- removal of limitations regarding representation in negotiations and at the Arbitration Court,
- compensation for workers whose employment was terminated during the operation of the Essential National Industries Decree, and
- registration of trade unions de-registered as a result of the Essential National Industries Decree.

After the signing of the single Joint Implementation Report, the Employment Relations (Amendment) Act 2016 was passed by Parliament.

Under this law, Government employees now access and utilize the Employment Relations Promulgation machinery and its judicial institutions.

I think the Honourable Sela Nanovo has asked about what is done about Government workers. Under this new Employment Relations (Amendment) Act, those who are employed in Government can now use all the mechanisms that are in the Ministry of Labor. This includes non-unionised workers, they may raise their employment grievances with my Ministry's Mediation Unit. For those that are unionized, their union can raise those issues also with the Arbitration Tribunal, so there are clear mechanisms available for all workers in this country to be able to raise the issues that they want to raise.

This law now provides for enterprise unions and we now have 29 registered enterprise unions in our country. Law has reduced the period of strike notice from 28 days to 14 days and ensured that individual grievances that were terminated under the E&I Decree were reinstated, 186 of these cases have been sent to the Arbitration Court for adjudication in June this year.

Workers whose employment was terminated during the operation of the Essential National Industries Decree were able to apply for compensation to the Arbitration Court within 28 days of the

commencement of the law, and a further 3 weeks was given. The law provides the trade unions that were de-registered as a result of the Essential National Industries Decree could apply for re-registration, but there was no need for this as no trade union was de-registered.

Check off facilities for payment of union dues have been fully restored as at March this year.

The expanded Employment Relations Advisory Board (ERAB) which is inclusive and more representative has committed to meet monthly to continue its vital work of reviewing laws and providing advice to the Minister. The expanded ERAB has been meeting regularly with its latest meeting happening yesterday. That, Madam Speaker, is just an outline of some of the developments in my Ministry.

I might like to turn to some of the things that have been said in this House over the past few days. There have been a lot of misstatements that were put into the House. Sometimes the Opposition speak, they say certain things, they do not give any facts and figures.

The Honourable Leader of the Opposition had said that I had stated somewhere, I do not know where he got this, that the ratio of doctors to the population in this country is 1:3000. I never said anything like that because I know off the top of my head that the population of this country is around 870,000. There are 550 doctors in Government employment, there are another 120 doctors in the private practise. So, if you take that together it is roughly a ratio of 1 doctor to 1400 employees. I will not be saying anything off the top of my head unless it is correct. There have been people that have cast comments, the Honourable Singh has talked about the failure of the health sector to be able to deliver its service.

We must remember that when you talk about the failure of a sector, you need to look at the overall performance, not just one complaint. Complaints are important but when you are talking about health, you need to look at all the health indicators; neo natal mortality, maternal mortality, et cetera. That gives you a picture of the performance of that particular sector, not just one incident.

Incidence are important that they will be addressed, but we need to look at things sensibly, have a lot of sense when you look at things; that is very important. I have heard some statements in this House saying that this Government is focused on freebies.

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. J. USAMATE.- Listen.

They say that the Government is focussed on giving freebies. What are you saying? Are you saying that we should remove free education? Are you saying that we should remove the food vouchers from pregnant mothers? Are you saying that we should remove 'Help for Homes'? Are you saying that we should not give milk and weet-bix?

All of these things are targeted at the most marginalized in society. This side of the House does not look at things on ethnic grounds. We make sure that all the programmes that we have are focused on the most marginalised in society.

People have talked about the National Minimum Wage as being too low, but when you think about the income of people, you do not just look at the wage, you look also at the social wage component of what this Government provides. Everything that we provide in terms of free health, free education, all of these are part of the income of people. Our assistance is targeted. We do not distinguish people by the colour of their skin or their religion or their ethnicity.

We look at those who are the most marginalised, we make sure that we have targeted assistance that helps them immaterial of who they are or where they live, this Government will focus its attention on them because we want to make sure that we are building a better Fiji, not just for us who live today but for the children that are here and their children, for everyone and the people that will follow us. This Government is for everyone in this country. We will not segregate. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members we will now adjourn this sitting so that we can have refreshments and we will begin again at 11.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.08 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.34 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members we will resume from where we left off and I now invite the Honourable Samuela Vunivalu to have the floor.

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Madam Speaker, The Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Leader of the Opposition and the Members of Parliament.

I rise this morning in support of the President of Fiji, His Excellency, Major-General (Rear Admiral) Jioji Konrote's opening Address for the 2016 Parliament Session.

Madam Speaker, I take this moment to congratulate His Excellency the President for his most gracious Speech and also to commend him for his term as the President of Fiji, after serving the Parliament as the Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations one and half years ago.

Madam Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the support of all Fijians who are either listening to the live broadcast or watching television in Fiji or abroad.

Madam Speaker, in his opening of the 2016 Parliament session, His Excellency the President said and I quote: "Let us all be worthy in public life of the ordinary men and women who have put us here, have given us their trust into whom we owe our ultimate duty and our ultimate loyalty." These are the words of blessing and manna. We must not forget our duty to our people. We do not walk out on our people.

Madam Speaker, I will always remember during our term in the UNIFIL in Naqura HQ, South Lebanon when His Excellency the President was Chief of Staff of the UNIFIL. He was the first Fijian soldier to be promoted to Deputy Force Commander, UNIFIL and he was later promoted to Force Commander. Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President was an Officer Commander in the First Tour of Duty in 1978 under the then Commanding Officer, Colonel Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, our respected former President. He demonstrated excellent leadership many times, he even restructured commanding officers in all battalions, including Poland, Netherlands, India Nepal, Ireland, Fiji, et cetera and it worked according to his plan.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency has proven himself without a doubt, not only in Fiji, but also to the world. No wonder God has chosen him to be Ratu Epeli Nailatikau's successor.

Madam Speaker, the Opposition are praising the Fiji team after winning gold from Rio de Janeiro. The reason for this is that our beloved God has chosen a great man to lead our country. He even announced their names and made sure that the same players be presented with gold medals from Rio de Janeiro. That man is the Honourable Prime Minister.

Madam Speaker, I take this opportunity to congratulate Ben Ryan and our Fiji team that won the gold from Rio. With all due respect, whoever is responsible please I urge that person to return the gold medal to Masivesi Dakuwaqa. The medal was stolen from his residence in Nadi.

Madam Speaker, the Almighty God has made us fully united because the FijiFirst leader has chosen him to be our leader. Our achievement has made us united, our spirit as a country, our gold win has made us all united.

Madam Speaker, if the FijiFirst Government was following the wrong path, the same God which Honourable Karavaki was mentioning could not have given us so much as a nation-for a small nation to punch above our weight and to make history in the Olympics.

If Honourable Karavaki who is not here, thinks otherwise, just wait for the next General Elections because we do not work based on just dreams, we never believe in dreams but we work hard and put our words into action. The fruits of our work are our achievements.

Madam Speaker, there are areas where everyone of this nation must respect. That is the law of the land which is based on our Constitution. There is no use boycotting because the nation is supporting the President and the Government of the day but Honourable Prof. Biman Prasad, who is not here too thinks otherwise. By boycotting it will not help but if you can carry on with that attitude, it will end up nowhere. Most adults sit and listen with respect, and then say what they need to. We do not walk out on our people. I would like to emphasise in this honourable House that if it was not for the 2013 Constitution, the NFP could not have been in Parliament.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- This is true because under the 1997 Constitution, they never made it to Parliament, so why boycott?

Madam Speaker, one of the FijiFirst's objective is to honour men and women who have sacrificed their lives in the services of our nation. There are 168 personnel serving in Iraq, 201 in Sinai, 288 in Golan Heights, 147 in Lebanon, a total of 804 who are risking their lives on peacekeeping missions for Fiji to be a part of the affairs of the world. I must commend and respect them for their hard work. Thank you and also thank you Commander of the Fiji Military Forces.

(Applause)

Madam Speaker, there is an increase in the number of police personnel in the Police Force now to work in the 35 police stations around the country; 24 police stations in Viti Levu, 5 in Vanua Levu, 1 in Kadavu, 1 in Rotuma, 1 in Lakeba, 1 in Vanua Balavu, 1 in Levuka and 1 in Taveuni. Now we have 67 Police Posts in Viti Levu, 9 Police Posts in Vanua Levu, 1 in Koro, Gau, Rabi, Matei respectively and there are 40 personnel serving in mission areas: 21 in UNMISS, 2 in RAMSI, 12 in UNAMI, 3 in MFO and 2 in UNDOF - thank you for the Police effort.

Madam Speaker, there are new laws that will be introduced and existing laws will be reviewed and it will boost the work of the Police Force and the Military Force to achieve their task in Fiji or abroad.

Madam Speaker, it has been proven in the past years that the most common offence which has been committed is rape. There are cases of childhood, students and even the elderly. The court has powers to give penalties to provide punishment but it does not prevent rape.

We have proven that even some fathers, grandfathers, step-fathers, and some church leaders are committing this crime. In order to minimise or stop such crime we need to create awareness in the villages and settlements because from the facts of rape offenders in 2015: step parents, 2; parents, 15; preachers, 11; guardian 3; others, 221 and a total of 252 rape cases.

Madam Speaker, I urge the people around the country, especially the *Turaga ni Koro* and Advisory Councillors to create awareness, women and children are being victimised.

Another problem in our country is drugs and that makes the people of this nation to live in fear.

Madam Speaker, I must congratulate the Police on their operation in the interior of Fiji and outer islands in uprooting of these drugs. I also want to commend the Military in assisting the Police in the uprooting of marijuana from various places around the country.

Madam Speaker, part of the FijiFirst's values is to remain clean, incorruptible, above board, transparent and lead with integrity. It has been 2 years now since we have been running the Government of the day and we will make sure that we lead by example and show the world what integrity is all about.

I only hope that some members of this House learn from this Government and support our mission to build a just and fair society, where the benefit of progress includes everyone including Honourable Prof. Biman Prasad. As I said before, we do not walk out on people.

Madam Speaker, in regards to the millions of dollar that the Government has funded the World Golf in Natadola, World Golf is not just Fiji, it is the world.

(Hon. Members interject)

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- I wish to remind this august House that for the second time and I mentioned this last year, "please look beyond the horizon, not just past the end of your nose."

(Laughter)

In the long run, this will bring multi-million dollars. We already know what rugby is all about, we have already won in Rio. We took part in the Rugby World Cup and now it is the first time for World Golf, why are you not supporting the World Golf?

(Laughter)

I am not pointing at you, I am pointing at everyone. It will bring multi-millions dollars and visitors to our shores. How many people watched major golf tournaments in the previous years? This will not only benefit Natadola, or the Nadroga Province, the whole country will benefit. Perhaps the Opposition has no imagination How can you dream and still not imagine this?

Madam Speaker, Honourable Gavoka who is not here too kept on saying that they will reinstate the Great Councils of Chiefs. One thing he has never realised is who will look after the *vanua* if the Great Council of Chiefs involves itself with politics? Even without the Great Council of Chiefs, the Sevens Team won gold in Rio. Even without the Great Councils of Chiefs, we have made unprecedented progress.

Madam Speaker, the chiefs are always powerful once they occupy their chiefly place in the *vanua*, not here. The chiefs around the country who are here to serve the people, when they know their land, *tokatoka*, *mataqali*, *yavusa* or *tikina* and *vanua* - their God-given resources, this will drive partnership for investment and development; this is where progress starts.

If a team has no leader with them, how can the team function? Could we have won gold without a leader and captain? When the chiefs hold their power in the *vanua*, when they return to their land to urge people to do good to invest, many of our problems, there will be less crime in Fiji. The chiefs should advise people to devote their land which has been lying idle for generations, people

die but the mahogany plants and all the land are still be there. That is why the chiefs should sit down with all the villagers and people under their jurisdiction and inform them to make use of their land.

The Land Bank has decided to help landowners to seek financial benefit from land that is current lying idle for years and years. What is good with land bank is complete voluntary. You are not being forced, that is your land, but the land owning unit cannot be forced to deposit their land. In fact, it is not like iTLTB, they have to sign 60 percent in regards to landowning unit. Put simply, the land bank give landowners the option on how to lease their land, many landowning units have been attracted to the land bank because it offers significant advantage over iTLTB.

By leasing through the land bank, landowners receive 100 percent of the total lease payment and leases are issued at market rates after proper evaluation for the period of 99 years.

Why do you not give your land? Chiefs can sit down and talk to their landowners because you have plenty of land and nothing in their pockets. This is where the money will come from. The person who will lease the land will get the money and the Government of the day will receive money from offshore and the *iTaukei* landowners will get plenty money too. Unlike iTLTB, no poundage fees are charged for land deposits with the land bank and all these payments go to the landowners; that is the difference.

The land remains the ownership of the landowning unit. All leases issued, renewed under this Decree must take into consideration the best interest of landowners.

It appears to the Government that the distribution of a particular land is not the best interest of landowners, the lease can be cancelled. While the Opposition and other political parties spread misinformation about land rights, they fail to know that in June 2006, the SDL Government approved the converted *iTaukei* land in Momi into freehold title and then transferred the land to a private company as part of the land swap deal. I met some people from Momi two weeks ago for a *solu* and they told me why they cannot do it in their own land.

So when the SDL Government was in power not only it did nothing to fix this serious breach in the security of *iTaukei* land, but it actually knowingly approved this transaction of this unalienated *iTaukei* land from its owner for ever. This was done by the SDL Minister for Lands, Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu who presented this proposal to Cabinet.

The proposal was approved by the Cabinet which was chaired by the Prime Minister, Laisenia Qarase. And the Cabinet, Madam Speaker, at that time also included the current Leader of the Opposition, Ro Teimumu Kepa who is not here, they were able to do this with those so called entrenched provision was intact .

Similar land swap deals were also done by the SVT Government in the 1990s in Denarau, Nadi, which led the conversion of the *iTaukei* land into freehold lands lost forever, Madam Speaker. They are crying for that land. The Minister for Lands at that time was Ratu Timoci Vesikula and the Chair of the Cabinet was the Prime Minister, Sitiveni Rabuka, now the leader of SODELPA.

Now the FijiFirst Government will ensure that this type of theft of *iTaukei* land will never happen again.

(Hon. Members interject)

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- That is how important the land is all about, this was during the Bainimarama-led Government and now the FijiFirst Government will do the same thing and it will never happen again.

Madam Speaker, in 1875, the British created a body called Native Council so that they could rule over *iTaukei* and Fiji through handpicked elites and chiefs. After World War I, British renamed Native Councils to 'Council of Chiefs' and later to GCC.

This is an establishment created by an old western system of conquering but now we do not need it. Now the world believes in democracy and FijiFirst, in the true spirit of democracy, has made every single person vote equal and fair. To become better, we must push away what does not work and accept what does work. Look at the fruits of our work - unprecedented progress.

Madam Speaker, we must believe that the Constitution will protect the right and the practices of *iTaukei* and its fundamental aspect of our culture. I want to remind Honourable Gavoka that the chiefs will only demonstrate and hold very much power in the *vanua* because God has chosen them to look after the *vanua*. This comes first to God, politics come after.

Madam Speaker, I wish to congratulate my friend, Honourable Alexander O'Connor and wish him all the best in his new Assistant Ministerial post. I also congratulate our new Member, Honourable Howard Politini, my friend from Nadi (*O Nadi Ko*) and I wish the nation all the best.

Madam Speaker, I would like to conclude by quoting from the *Holy Bible*: "Matthew 5:15 - Not do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel but on a lampstand, and give light to all in the house."

Let us pray. God bless the President, the Speaker, the Prime Minister and the Members of the House, in Your name, Amen. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- I will now give the floor to the Honourable Mereseini Vuniwaqa.

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers and Members of Parliament: I rise to firstly thank and congratulate His Excellency the President for his most gracious Speech.

In his first Address to this august House, he very eloquently captured Fiji's journey to where we are now and our hope for the future.

Madam Speaker, our beloved nation is moving on, unified after Rio and after the devastating effects of *Tropical Cyclone Winston*, His Excellency has expressed the perfect accolades of a strong leader to put our country first and foremost in all our colleagues and to serve our people with honesty and integrity.

Madam Speaker, I stand here with humility and honour to voice my response as a Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation. It will be a quite a challenge to fill the shoes of my predecessor, Honourable Rosy Akbar, but I am confident that with the very committed and versatile Permanent Secretary I have and hardworking staff at the Ministry, I will be able to take on that challenge whole heartedly with the will to serve to the best of my ability.

Madam Speaker, it is indeed a great privilege to serve in a Ministry which holds at the core of its service delivery the interests of children, women, disabled, elderly and the poor. Therein, Madam Speaker, we have five of the most vulnerable groups of Fijians in our society. It is critical that we, as a people, pay particular attention to the needs of these groups and that we collectively work towards the empowerment. For that empowerment, we have a major part to play in this august House.

In all matters that come to this House, it is important that issues pertinent to these vulnerable groups are considered and used to help shape the legislative landscape of this country such that all

laws that we pass are cognisant of the vulnerable position of women, children, the poor, elderly and the disabled in our society.

The Fijian society is one that is rich in culture and traditions. Whilst the cultures and traditions may be different from one ethnic group to another, they all agree on the need to protect and nurture those who are more vulnerable, to lend a hand where it is needed, to empower those who are weaker, irrespective of ethnicity, gender, social status, religion and of race.

Therein, Madam Speaker, lies the ethos of service delivery in the FijiFirst Government, an ethos which my Ministry will continue to passionately uphold and promote in all that it does.

The noble call by His Excellency and I quote:

“Let us all be worthy in public life of the ordinary men and women who have put us here, have given us their trust and to whom we owe our ultimate duty, our ultimate loyalty.”

This is indeed a challenge to each and every one of us to rid ourselves of petty politics and personal agendas and concentrate on the national interest.

Madam Speaker, in my Ministry, I will harness this call to resonate across all service delivery levels so that our clientele will leave our offices empowered. One of the greatest challenges I see in my transition to my new Ministry is the perception we have of the issues which have been entrusted to the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation.

The perception that somehow these issues can be best addressed in their own private space, with a specific budget year in and year out. This perception fails to acknowledge that these issues, particularly gender issues are multi sectoral and cross-cutting. By its very nature, gender issues need to be addressed in every policy and law and every public space we have in this country.

It is interesting to note that the Ministry of Women, as it was historically known, only came into being in 1988. With its very young history, I am sure that we can all agree that we have come a long way. From its humble beginnings in the 1920s, what was then known as the Destitute Allowance for elderly indentured labourers who could not support themselves has evolved to make it more relevant to current socio economic conditions.

Madam Speaker, three state of the art mobile buses that are Fijian Made, disability friendly and women friendly are now under construction in Fiji under a REACH Project. There will be serviced on wheels for our legal services, social protection, women's empowerment, child services, people living with disabilities, services for older persons, family services and other partners in the social sector to reach out to rural communities. This initiative will improve the position of Fijians, who are disadvantaged or require special assistance.

The REACH Project which stands for Rights, Empowerment and Cohesion for Rural and Urban Fijians will bring about relief and empowerment to the disadvantaged and rural communities. Its philosophy mirrors that of the Fijian Constitution. One of social inclusion, justice, transparency and accountable governance. It is about boosting access by disadvantaged Fijians to legal and social services, no matter who they are or where they live, and it complements and reinforces the Fijian Government's existing programmes to ensure that every Fijian gets the same opportunities.

Madam Speaker, in Rio, the world came to know that we Fijians can achieve anything when we put our minds, energy and effort to it. We came together in celebration at a time we never experienced before. That energy and spirit is needed to address gender inequality, the social illnesses of our nation and the rights of people living with disabilities.

Madam Speaker, there is a road map progress now in the form of our National Gender Policy to address gender issues comprehensively. My Ministry is the lead agency for introducing gender

mainstreaming into the Civil Service Reform. There is good progress to obtain gender data sets, whereby we can specify the ground level reality, in relation to gender equality. After all, we need data to inform us of the existence of gender inequality in our society.

Gender equality is a cross-cutting issue, which can only be effectively addressed through a multi sectorial approach. It is therefore encouraging that Government ministries, agencies and departments, UN bodies, regional institutions, foreign governments, non-government organisations, faith based organisations, private sector organisations and the media have jumped on bandwagon to support and highlight gender equality as an aim in itself.

Madam Speaker, our Fijian women condemn men that use violence as a tool to control, treating women as slaves, or keeping them as possessions or chattels. It is no secret that we hear of violence against women and often at the hands of those who are entrusted to care for them.

The Ministry has signed an agreement with the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre to establish the first ever Domestic Violence Helpline. This facility will break the silence on violence and will ensure that women victims of violence will get the proper counselling, referrals and timely emergency response when it is needed most. The facility will enable Fijian women to have access to these services as long as they are near a phone.

His Excellency the President made mention of the relief and rebuilding initiatives that were quickly implemented by our Government to the affected communities in the wake of *TC Winston*. The show of support to Government by our corporate industry, donors, partners, foreign governments and international organisations allowed the flow of assistance to our people at a time they needed it most. The "Help for Home" initiative has covered 23,388 households in the 12 priority affected areas. This was an investment of approximately \$86 million to build back stronger and better dwellings.

Yesterday, we heard from the Honourable Minister for Agriculture about being partners in development. The Help for Home Initiative is a partnership in development with the Fijian people, whose homes were damaged during the cyclone. Government provided the funds or part of the funds and home owners built their own homes. That was the understanding and that is what is happening on the ground.

Madam Speaker, yesterday we heard some injudicious statements being made about the Help for Home Initiative. Statements like, the homes for help has done nothing much, the electronic cards are useless. These statements are clear examples of what we have been preaching about on this side of the House. Statements that we, as responsible Members of this House, should not make. They are perfect examples of statements made to score cheap political points and are not constructive at all. They do nothing for nation building and definitely do not have the national interest at heart.

Madam Speaker, I have here some stories from ordinary Fijians who have managed to rebuild their homes, better and stronger, post *Winston*. In May this year, Waisake Talakuli (this is from the dailies), Madam Speaker, was assisted through the Help for Home assistance and he said:

"I have been able to rebuild the 3- bedroom house which was partially damaged during *Tropical Cyclone Winston*. After I got the *M-PAiSA* card from the Social Welfare Team, I was able to purchase hardware materials worth \$3,000. With the assistance of the village carpenters, I was able to rebuild my home. I would like to thank the Government, particularly the Honourable Prime Minister for assisting the Fijian families through this housing programme."

Similarly Gyan Chand, a 62-year-old farmer in Nasolo, Ba has benefited from the Help for Home assistance and he says:

“I have been able to purchase the hardware materials amounting to \$3,000 from R.C. Manubhai and I am looking forward to rebuilding my house. If it was not for the Government's assistance, it would have been difficult for me to rebuild my home.”

Madam Speaker, 45-year-old Tevita Manono of Namosau in Ba:

“I have been living here with my family in our old house which was destroyed by *Cyclone Winston*. It was of a wooden structure and much smaller in size, as compared to the new home that I have just built, which is much more spacious and secure. Building this house in such a short period of time has only been made possible through the help of the Fijian Government. My family is looking forward for the new home and this has given us a new beginning.”

Stories of ordinary Fijians who have been empowered by Government programmes in rebuilding, better and stronger after *Tropical Cyclone Winston*.

Yesterday, Honourable Salote Radrodro very carelessly hinted at an untruth that is, that Government has cash flow problems in relation to the Help for Home Project. If Honourable Radrodro understood how the payment system for Help for Home works, I am sure that she would not be repeating that kind of assertion.

For the information of the Honourable Members, all cards issued by Government to home owners are loaded with cash the minute it is received by the home owner. This project was initially allocated \$70 million by Government. That budget was increased by another \$18 million, to cater for those Fijians who were not initially catered for in the planning stages. There is an additional \$20 million in phase 2 of the programme, which will commence once we clear the backlog of pending hardware supplies for phase 1.

Phase 2 will cover those red zone areas, which were missed in phase 1, including Tailevu North, Wainibuka, rolling out to Rakiraki, Tavua and Ba. The bottom line is this, Madam Speaker, Government will not leave behind a home owner in a red zone area, whose home was damaged in the cyclone. It is therefore very important for home owners, advisory councillors and *Turaga ni Koro* to vouch for damage assessments that they tell the truth and nothing but the truth about the damages and the extent of it.

The last thing that the Government wants to do is push for the prosecution of people but Government will not hesitate to do that if it is found that people have lied about their loss. Preliminary meetings have happened with the Commissioner Central, relevant *turaga ni koro* and advisory councillors in preparation for Phase 2. Similar meetings will be held in the next two weeks with other relevant Commissioners, *turaga ni koro* and advisory councillors.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President made reference to the quality of our exports, the Fijian Made brand and the urgent need to confront the challenges of climate change. The third National Women's Expo which is being planned for next year will again advocate the importance of connecting women artisans to markets and give them and impetus to expand their own businesses. Our key focus will be on the quality of products by our women and entrepreneurs.

For the National Women's Expo, we will work with the Fiji Arts Council and the Ministry of Industry and Trade to graduate our women artisans to bear the Fiji made logo and be recognised as such. This venture will not only create a better livelihood by providing a more sustainable income source for rural based women and girls, it will also elevate the relevant products to international recognition as something that fulfils relevant Fiji and national standards.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President made reference to the Fijian Government's vast and significant investment to infrastructure which are building blocks of economic resilience and growth. The current economic growth and investment in infrastructure has created newer opportunities for women empowerment. Any infrastructure development also addresses the rights of women in that community. The building of roads, wharves and jetties do open up market opportunities, which will bring about economic and social resilience.

As a poverty alleviation strategy, it makes good economic sense to invest in women progress into formal employment. We can see the benefits money from these ventures means more money for women and more money for their families. This leads to a higher standard of living and helps many escape the grips of poverty.

In his speech, His Excellency stated and I quote:

“Most important of all for anyone who values an inclusive society, my Government is using our increasing prosperity to benefit the disadvantaged and take every Fijian on our journey forward. It has introduced the first social security pensions in our nation's history and lowered the age at which the elderly become eligible – from 70 to 66 in the past two years.”

The Fijian Government introduced Fiji's National Ageing Policy in 2011. We now have seven aged care facilities that have benefitted from the programme and that newer opportunities have been set with Arcare in Australia to uplift our facilities for senior citizens.

To-date 22,073 senior citizens, including some of those in Aging Care Homes are currently benefiting from the Fijian Government's Social Pension Scheme. They receive a monthly allowance of \$50 and the age has been reduced to 66 years from July this year.

Madam Speaker, a total of 53,650 individuals that includes senior citizens age 60 years and over, along with persons living with disabilities are benefiting from the Government's bus fare scheme. The Ministry will continue to propel our efforts to raise awareness amongst families to look after their elderly, to show respect, care and compassion to senior citizens as they are the ones who have contributed to the development of our nation.

The Women's Plan of Action has key pillars for women's economic empowerment, independence, improved access to services and the law and commitment to the elimination of violence against women. Work and activities are centred on this plan in support of the implementation of our gender policy which becomes the duty of all ministries and departments to embrace. I believe the Fijian Government must continue to adopt a one nation approach that looks long and hard at the deepest causes of entrenched poverty in our communities and take bold action to deal with these realities.

There are currently 32 Poverty Alleviation Programmes worth \$172 million and 33 Rural Outer Island Development Programmes worth \$82.1 million budgeted for in 2016–2017 across Government Ministries. My Ministry is the leading agency for the monitoring of these poverty related programmes so that we can show the impact of these investments against fact base indicators.

My Ministry continues to pursue its term strategic priorities, focusing on strengthening welfare services, expanding social security systems, facilitating community development as well as empowering women and the disadvantaged. These priorities constitute the ministry's contribution towards building a caring society. Government believes that the building of a caring society begins with strong families and vibrant communities. To this end, our policies and programmes are geared to responding to the lifestyle of needs of all Fijians as part of families and communities from their childhood to all age.

The Department of Social Welfare remains committed to the full realisation of the rights and wellbeing of children by tackling some of their most pressing needs. Government provides a range of services to children which includes social grants, early childhood development services, nutritional support, health care services and targeted free basic education.

In our Care and Protection Programme, there are 3,568 beneficiaries and these include children of single mothers, widows, prisoners, those in residential care and those under guardians of foster care.

In December 2014, the Ministry established the National Child Helpline Service which was launched in April 2015. This is Fiji's effort to tackling child abuse and other related cases.

Madam Speaker, I close with His Excellency's call and I quote:

“Let us set an example in this Parliament for young Fijians who look to us to build a future worthy of their dreams and aspirations because it is by setting standards of excellence here that we can inspire them to excellence themselves.”

As Members of this House, we have yet again to address the lacuna in the standards yesterday when we disciplined a Member. It is a solemn reminder to all of us on both sides of this House about the huge responsibility we carry individually and that is an institution to be great role models in society for all Fijians. I thank you, Madam Speaker.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. At this stage, I would like to specially welcome all the students from Naivacula Primary School who have joined us this morning.

Honourable Members, I now give the floor to the Honourable Prime Minister to give his right of reply.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, let me begin by again thanking His Excellency the President for his Speech opening this session of Parliament. All throughout the week, we have seen how the principles and values set out in his vision for Fiji have served as a guiding force in our deliberations and at least on this side of the House have set our high standards of conduct that we have strived to meet.

Those standards, Madam Speaker, we as elected representatives be “worthy in public life of the ordinary men and women who have put us here” should always be at the forefront of our minds and at the centre of every decision that we make, most especially in this Parliament. Because our being here can never be seen as an opportunity to serve ourselves, I hope people are listening, but rather it is an honour bestowed upon us to serve our people.

The Honourable Prof. Biman Prasad mentioned the passing away of *Turaga Roko Tui Bau* – Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi and I on behalf of the Government and the FijiFirst Party also offer our condolences in the passing of this great, a learned man, Madam Speaker.

A lot of people do not know that he was the Vice- President after the events of 2000 and he tried very hard to work a way out between me (as a Commander of the Military) and the Honourable Prime Minister then Laisenia Qarase in the impasse that was in place then, but unfortunate for us, the former Prime Minister could not commit himself to the two issues which I and Ratu Joni believed would bring about racial division and the loss of economy.

The rest of course, Madam Speaker, is history. As I say farewell to this great man, I want to, Madam Speaker, quote from some of the write-ups about Ratu Joni and it will be good for everyone to listen, especially the other side of the House.

Madam Speaker, at an Education Workshop in Suva, Ratu Joni said it was a mistake to view indigenous rights as superior to human rights in general and this is what we have been talking about, and I wish the Honourable Niko Nawaikula and the Honourable Gavoka (I cannot see the name tag) to be present today to listen to this, but it is very fortunate that we have the Honourable Leader of the Opposition here with us, thank you, Madam.

Ratu Joni said:

“It was a mistake to view indigenous rights as superior to human rights in general.”

He said that the ILO Convention 169 that everyone has been quoting, the Convention concerning indigenous and tribal peoples in independent countries clearly stated that indigenous rights were not separate from human rights and could not be asserted at their expense - exactly what we have been trying to tell everyone. Articles referring to a self-contained system of government for indigenous people were, he said:

“For traditional and cultural matters and did not legitimise or authorise indigenous supremacy.”

Ratu Joni rejected arguments by some politicians that when the United Kingdom granted Independence to Fiji in 1970, they should have handed back power to the chiefs, calling this position legally untenable.

Ratu Joni opposed calls for the establishment of a Christian State in Fiji, saying that it would hinder a correct relationship between the overwhelmingly Christian *iTaukei* and mainly Hindu and Muslim Indo-Fijian community.

He expressed concern that the growth of newer fundamentalist denominations at the expense of the long dominant Methodist Church evoked a less-tolerant dimension to the work of some Christian churches - exactly our stand on this side of the House, Madam Speaker.

Ratu Joni once called on his fellow chiefs to maximise the effectiveness of income generated through tourist facilities, built on native-owned land - no spoon-feeding here, Madam Speaker.

But he goes on to talk about the National Federation Party, then he said in 2014 before the General Elections, where I understand he was invited to speak at the National Federation Party Congress, Ratu Joni told the National Federation Party:

“The message must be, the NFP’s willingness to embrace a more inclusive and non-racial type of politics that is more substantial than merely having a renowned *iTaukei* as President of the party.”

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- That is from a great man, Madam Speaker, and I would just like to pass on some of his messages across to the Honourable Members of this House.

Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, it was as if Members of the Opposition in the last couple of days chose to ignore entirely the noble aspirations outlined by His Excellency the President in his speech. Unfortunately, they chose not to heed his words to promote unity, but rather fear and division. They could not keep their comments focussed on the issues that matter to the Fijian people

on the delivery of essential services and on the development of our infrastructure. And they most unfortunately, could not place the interests of the Fijian people ahead of their own political ambition.

While I had hoped that this session might be an opportunity to improve the relationship between the Government and the Opposition and while I wish that we could depend on the Opposition to take a serious and appropriate approach to Government, we saw clearly during this first sitting in dealing with a racist and derogatory outburst from the Opposition ranks - that this is simply not the case.

The Opposition's outbursts have been offensive on the basis of gender, and then ethnicity, and now religion. And as we endured the latest, I could only think of the words of Abdul Kalam, the former President of India. He said, Madam Speaker, and I quote:

“For great men, religion is a way of making friends; small people make religion a fighting tool.”

Let me say that again, Madam Speaker, I want people to hear and try to understand: “For great men, religion is a way of making friends; for small people make religion a fighting tool.”

As I said yesterday, as a legislative body, we had to take firm action to sanction the kinds of statements that we have been hearing in this House, or we risk becoming accustomed to them, and then we risk losing our civility together.

But what was most concerning, Madam Speaker, was that we sought to confront this blatant demonstration of prejudice, the NFP once again choose the path of least resistance. It was truly sad witnessing the mental acrobatics on display as they attempted to justify their confounding allegiance with SODELPA's leadership. I could not believe that Honourable Prof. Biman Prasad could completely ignore what happened to our country in 2000, what happened to our country in 1987 and even earlier, that was the result of the exact same attitude articulated by the Honourable Tikoca. Instead, he attempted to paint a rosy picture with his fellow bed mates, he chose to pretend our history of racial vilification and violence never existed. Let me assure him the traditional support base of the NFP is watching. Those who recall the noble legacy of the NFP are watching, and they must know that the NFP have again let them down. Yesterday, Madam Speaker, he was claiming that we are always on a high moral ground.

Madam Speaker, this side of the House and that side of the House, we have a vision, which I think that side of the House lack; a vision to take Fiji forward, to get rid of all the racist comments that have been the cause of the events of 2000 and 1987. That is a vision that we have but if he wants to talk about a lack of vision, maybe he should have a look at the people around him.

It was really interesting to see his fellow friend, Honourable Prem Singh talk about ethics. Thank you, Honourable Prem Singh.

Madam Speaker, another deeply and troubling aspect on the part of the Opposition has been the disregard for the loyalty and patriotism that His Excellency so eloquently called for in his Opening Address.

We may all come from different political parties, we may have come from vastly different political perspectives but there are certain things - certain principles that we must share - certain actions and statements must remain taboo in our political discourse. For example, you do not run down your country for personal gains; you do not take sides with unscrupulous companies or other groups seeking to undermine Fiji's progress or other groups seeking to undermine Fiji's purposes and then use them as tools to do the same. You do not seek to further your own ego and engage in

short term political point-scoring at the expense of undermining the confidence in the country and of the Fijian people. These are lines that elected officials simply should never cross.

We are all Fijians in this House and I think we will try very hard to convince Honourable Professor Biman Prasad; we are all Fijians in this House, we need to be patriotic. I loved it at one stage that they had the flags like us, Madam Speaker, but they seem to disappear one by one.

We all need to remember that it is for the betterment of our nation that we are privileged to even sit here. That is the level of commitment that is expected. That is the duty we all owe our people.

So, Madam Speaker, imagine my disappointment when the old SODELPA reared its old ugly head in the form of the intemperate and truly ignorant ramblings of Honourable Salote Radrodro, who is not here. I thought it was another walkout by the Opposition, but talking about patriotism, Madam Speaker, this is patriotism. Look at the number of them and when I look across the room, I thought it was another walkout. There is really no respect for the House and the little children watching us from the gallery. I imagine many Fijians must have scratched their heads, Madam Speaker, and asked themselves if she had perhaps been possessed by demons or had fallen on her head. For surely, no Honourable Member of this House would cite a supermarket conversation as evidence that the Judiciary is not independent. A serious legislator would surely gather facts before spouting such nonsense. Madam Speaker, I need not defend the independence of the Judiciary because it does so on its own, every day, by its actions. The officers of our courts guard their independence jealously; the Judges, the Magistrates, everyone.

Yesterday, Madam Speaker, she even has a gall to talk about the Ministerial reshuffle on this side of the House. I think she should talk more of that side of the House and there is a lot of separation in powers across the room. If she had spent more time thinking about what she is going to say in public here, than dressing up for the camera, I think she would make a good parliamentarian.

Madam Speaker, I need not defend our Constitution or our democracy against the ridiculous charges, because it is clear that the Opposition have a different vision of democracy, one, where some people are treated more favourably than others and everyone else sets for the crumbs that fall from the table. This attitude, Madam Speaker, is the same one of past governments that crippled Fiji and our development for far too long. And it is an attitude that must never again come to pass.

Madam Speaker, American President Ronald Reagan once famously said in refuting an opponent's charges: "Facts are stubborn things." Indeed they are so stubborn that they have completely eluded Honourable Radrodro's incomprehensible imagination. She went on to reveal her ignorance of contractual disputes and the rule of law, defending people who have violated the terms of their agreements with Government entities and who, we have on strong authority, threatened this country. It is, indeed, the facts that seem to routinely be the undoing of this Opposition.

How many times have we witnessed the spectacle of Opposition Members yelling and screaming across the aisle whenever this side of the House brings actual facts to the table? Do you know why they make such a scene? Because to them, the facts are too much to digest. They prefer their own fantasies. In fact, yesterday, Honourable Bulitavu had quoted from the *Facebook* and the blog pages. This is no place for *Facebook* and blog pages. This is the Parliament. Here, you talk on facts and talk on visions, not on *Facebook* and blog sites, and we are all too happy to splash the cold water of reality in their faces from time to time.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Point of order, Madam Speaker. I was just reflecting on the Prime Minister's statement about Honourable Salote Radrodro with reference that she was seating to

the camera, I think is a sexist comment and the Honourable Prime Minister should withdraw it. Thank you

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- I cannot take that point of order because Honourable Salote Radrodro is not here to support that.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- If she is not here, go and look for her and bring her here.

Madam Speaker, this Parliament must represent the people, and the fact is, despite the fantasies peddled by the Opposition, Fiji has never been more united than it is today. We are united because of our Constitution. On that note, Madam Speaker, I would suggest that Honourable Ashneel Sudhakar give a lesson on the Constitution to our Opposition Members especially Honourable Prof. Biman Prasad so that he can tell them the difference between the 1997 Constitution that they have been harping about and the 2013 Constitution.

We are united because of my FijiFirst Party, Madam Speaker.

(Hon. Members interject)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- We are united because we came together as a people in the face of a tragedy, *Tropical Cyclone Winston*. We are united because we came together in the pride and sheer exhilaration of our gold medal Olympic win in Sevens rugby and we are united because we are more equal than ever before. Honourable Prof. Biman Prasad, listen to that and in this sense, the people are leading us and showing us the way.

Equality requires us to look at our own personal lives, Honourable Prem Singh, to look at our family life and the communities we live in, to look at our political parties and take proper action, not just recite the words. Equality is not an incantation, Madam Speaker, to be intoned at convenient times, it is a way of being, a civic vocation that must be taught, shared, believed and lived and we must be patriotic within nation.

The Opposition once came with the black ribbon, Madam Speaker, and the Honourable Leader of the Opposition gave an explanation in the papers but when I asked the Honourable *Tui Namosi* as to why was he wearing a black ribbon, he said that his dog died.

(Laughter)

There must be a lot of dogs dying.

The Opposition, Madam Speaker, continuously raises issues of division and raises issues that are irrelevant in an attempt to create division. We do not need to create division where it does not exist. Instead, we should be seeking to find the commonality between us and lead by example in promoting equality where differences do exist. This requires strong, decisive and principled leadership ...

(Hon Members interject)

... because I think its lacking on that side of the House, Madam Speaker. The leadership that I and my Government are delivering.

Sowing fear and distrust has no place in a society based on equality, simply because equality requires respect and a will to understand and care for each other. (A bit too late to come in and listen to my speech)

We need tangible equality and true non-discrimination. In the same way, Madam Speaker, we cannot just tick the boxes of justice and proclaim our society just; we need substantive justice, justice for the poor, for the marginalised, for those in rural and maritime areas, for women, children sitting out there in the galley, the elderly and the disabled. That is the mission we must keep before us.

I thank the Honourable Salote Radrodro for coming in now but she is sitting behind Honourable Vadei's nametag. Can you just move that? Yesterday, Honourable Radrodro had asked as to what did the little girl gain from singing? Was there just a lot of claps? If she was there, she would have seen that the little girl read from the Braille of our Constitution. The first time ever in Fiji that we have a Braille version of the Constitution but she does not understand that.

(Applause)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Madam Speaker, she does not understand why we did that, she has little understanding of anything. The Braille version of the Constitution is what this Government is trying to tell the disabled that we are with you and you are with us. We will take you along.

(Applause)

That is the thanks we give to that little girl.

The Opposition takes any small thing that happens which they do not like, things like adhering to rules and processes they do not like, newspaper articles, positive events in our country, or actual facts, they claim that there is no democracy, they claim there is no rule of law. Madam Speaker, this is not leadership. This is not patriotism. Such attitude shows their ignorance and their incompetence to be the alternative government.

Of course, not everyone in this country has clean drinking water yet, not every place has good roads yet, but under my Government, as His Excellency said, which they did not hear properly, we have never had such a focus on building up our infrastructure and increasing access to essential services. And under my Government, we do have the highest rate of connectivity and the highest rate of infrastructure development ever achieved in such a short period of time. And if past governments had done their job, we would not have to play so much catch-up. Every Fijian knows that the level of infrastructure, the number of people connecting to electricity and other essential services has never been higher under any other government. And that is because we have never had such a drive for justice, equality and service delivery.

Madam Speaker, there is so much to be done in Fiji. We are a developing country that faces many challenges, and this Government is confronting those challenges on a broad front. The path ahead is clear: we are moving steadily towards better health care, better education and better infrastructure. We cannot recreate or even correct the shortcomings in all sectors overnight, and we can always point to gaps or to areas that can improve. But choices must be made, and limited resources must be applied. The decisions are not always easy but if we keep before us the ideals of justice and equality that we have talked about last week, and if we discuss our needs and debate our priorities with respect, civility and relevant and rational arguments, the decisions will build on each other year after year, until we have the essential services and infrastructure that all Fijians deserve.

Madam Speaker, as the Government makes decisions and establishes priorities, we keep before us always the need to bring the marginalised closer to the centre of national life. That has been at the heart of the education reforms and the health reforms His Excellency referred to, but of course some people were not here to listen to that, providing equal access to education and relieving hard-working parents of the costs of schooling, and making medicines more accessible to the people who can least afford them which the other side calls freebies.

It is at the heart of our unrelenting commitment to support small and medium-sized businesses and particularly micro businesses. These programmes are a way for my Government to reassure the people that we believe in them and that we will help them find the means to improve their standard of living, create new wealth for themselves and their families, and live fulfilling lives.

Madam Speaker, all Fijians must have the chance to participate in the economy in a meaningful way, and if the economy rewards them for their hard work, if it encourages them to take charge of their lives, if it shows them that they can get a better life for their children, and if it encourages them to have big dreams, then their participation will be meaningful. Whether people start their own businesses, work the land, or choose to work for salary or wages, they must believe that the economy works for them, that the playing field is level, that laws protect them and that they can sustain their livelihoods for the long term.

On that note, Madam Speaker, Honourable Professor Biman Prasad has talked about his knowledge of the sugar industry, he talked about trying to get \$90 a tonne for sugar. You know why, Madam Speaker, because \$90 a tonne will work out for the number of votes that he is going to get. The biggest amount of money ever earned by a cane farmer in Fiji's history, Madam Speaker, is about \$87 per tonne. He is talking about \$90 a tonne; \$87 a tonne, that is the highest amount of money a cane farmer has ever received from sugar. That was two years ago under my leadership.

(Applause)

He is talking as if he knows the sugar industry, what little knowledge he has of the sugar industry, Madam Speaker, is in my little pocket here. He has forgotten that \$80 million was brought over from India by past governments, \$80 million worth of milling equipment, 75 percent of which did not work. We had to throw them over the sea.

He has not told everyone that a lot of people have taken advantage of the scholarship that is now available to them and they have left farming. But he has not told anyone that people like Honourable Niko Nawaikula went around in 1999 telling the chiefs to take back their land because of the politics in those days, the same politics that removed Mahendra Chaudhry from office – an indo-Fijian.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- And you were the Commander.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Yes, and I know, that is why I am telling you, that is the little knowledge you do not know about, you should ask him because he was responsible for going out into the rural areas in the villages and telling the chiefs to take back their land. That was part of the sugar demise. He has not told people that. As I said, Madam Speaker, what little knowledge he has of the sugar industry is in my little pocket.

Government is not only committed to ensuring good working terms and conditions, but also to making sure that new jobs are created and that the jobs that people have today can be sustained over the long term and if we do that, we will create new jobs in the modern economy that will keep our

young, talented, ambitious people in Fiji. Our young people like those sitting out there need opportunities, and it is Government's job to create an environment through laws, sound economic policies and the creation of investor confidence that will give them these opportunities. Stability, Madam Speaker, whether they want to get a job or become entrepreneurs who create jobs.

I was truly moved when His Excellency mentioned what a privilege it was to hear Naomi Lewakita from the Fiji School for the Blind read out the Rights of the Disabled from the Braille version of the Constitution on Constitution Day. His Excellency was proud of Naomi, but also proud of his country, because he knew that her participation was not just a gesture, it was a milestone on Fiji's road to equality, justice and inclusion. That is for you, Honourable Radrodro.

Madam Speaker, it is that same commitment to inclusion that was again so clearly lacking from the Opposition throughout this sitting, very embarrassing. Members on that side of the House made it very clear that they do not believe they owe their duty to all of the Fijian people, but rather to their own select provincial interests. In true SODELPA fashion, they have catered to a favoured few, rather than address the interest and welfare of all Fijians that we do on this side of the House and that side of the House.

From Honourable Nawaikula, you would have heard in the last couple of days, heard only of Cakaudrove, from Honourable Kiliraki we only heard of Naitasiri, Honourable Gavoka we only heard of Nadroga and from Honourable Leawere, we heard only of Serua, he forgot about Tailevu.

(Laughter)

From that side of the House, we again heard only narrow-minded, selective leadership, and Madam Speaker, I hesitate to call it leadership at all.

I want to make something very clear as Prime Minister. I stand for the interest of every Fijian and so as members of my party...

(Applause)

... no matter where they are in Fiji, who they are, what religion they follow or what province they come from - we are for every Fijian. I have said this many times, that who you are or where you reside makes you no less a part of this country, or no less deserving the services and infrastructure that drive economic advancement. My Government understands that our success hinges on involving as many of us in our economy as possible. We understand that our responsibility extends beyond anyone area, and that is the responsibility that we embrace and we will continue to meet.

Madam Speaker, in serving all of our people, we will take a serious and sober approach to the legislative agenda that His Excellency outlined for us. It is an ambitious agenda because we have so many laws and regulations that need updating to meet the country's current and future needs. But we also know that it is not always possible to satisfy everyone. We want to be sure that these laws are discussed in a constructive spirit, not in an atmosphere of a bazaar or a boxing ring. Elections naturally are about differences, but governing is about reason and compromise and most importantly it is about keeping the common good of all Fijians uppermost in our minds.

We experience in Fiji a great national low and a great national high within the six months, Madam Speaker. The low, of course, was *TC Winston*; the high, of course, was our great Olympic 7s rugby victory. That victory would have been a cause for celebration in any year, but this year - this terrible year of *TC Winston*, it lifted us all and gave us greater hope and confidence; that is where we are now. There is the spirit of confidence and hope in the country, even in the face of significant work

that still needs to be done to recover and return the country to normal to get people back on their feet and give back their lives.

His Excellency reminded us that we are facing a challenge of an unprecedented scale and a shortage of materials needed to rebuild, which a lot of people on that side of the House do not seem to understand. This is the highest priority and will remain our highest priority, even while we continue to do the things that Government must do to keep the country moving. Our friends are still with us, and of course, our Olympic spirit is still driving us.

I urge my colleagues in this Parliament to join with me as we confront all the challenges. His Excellency pointed out, as we enact new legislations, set our priorities, oversee the delivery of critical services and recover from *TC Winston*. I ask that we keep before us the principles of equality, justice and patriotism, and I ask especially that we do so by promoting the interest of all Fijians.

Madam Speaker, I thank His Excellency the President for his most gracious Speech and we look forward to his continuing leadership as the Head of our State. *Vinaka vakalevu* and God bless you all.

(Applause).

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Prime Minister for his right of reply.

Parliament will now vote on the motion. The question is that this Parliament thanks His Excellency the President for his most gracious Speech.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of noes)

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Leader of the Government in Parliament.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I move that:

Parliaments adjourns until Monday, 6th February, 2017 at 9.30 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Is there a seconder?

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote on the motion. The question is, Parliament adjourns until Monday, 6th February, 2017 at 9.30 a.m.

Does any Member oppose?

(Chorus of noes)

HON. SPEAKER.- Since no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

I thank you all Honourable Members. Parliament is now adjourned until Monday, 6th February, 2017 at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.50 p.m.