

MONDAY, 12TH SEPTEMBER, 2016

The Parliament met at 9.57 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

Hon. Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, Prime Minister and Minister for *iTaukei* Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs
Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, Attorney-General and Minister of Economy, Public Enterprises, Public Service and Communications
Hon. Faiyaz Siddiq Koya, Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism and Lands and Mineral Resources
Hon. Lt. Col. Inia Batikoto Seruiratu, Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management
Hon. Parveen Kumar, Minister for Local Government, Housing, Environment, Infrastructure and Transport
Hon. Mereseini Vuniwaqa, Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation
Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy, Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts
Hon. Jone Usamate, Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations
Hon. Lt. Col. Laisenia Bale Tuitubou, Minister for Youth and Sports
Hon. Rosy Sofia Akbar, Minister for Health and Medical Services
Hon. Osea Naiqamu, Minister for Forest
Hon. Cdr. Semi Tuleca Koroilavesau, Minister for Fisheries
Hon. Lorna Eden, Assistant Minister Local Government, Housing and Environment
Hon. Cdr. Joeli Ratulevu Cawaki, Assistant Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management
Hon. Vijay Nath, Assistant Minister for Infrastructure and Transport
Hon. Veena Kumar Bhatnagar, Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation
Hon. Ro Teimumu Vuikaba Kepa
Hon. Mosese Drecala Bulitavu
Hon. Mohammed M.A. Dean
Hon. Jiosefa Dulakiverata
Hon. Viliame Rogoibulu Gavoka
Hon. Semesa Druavesi Karavaki
Hon. Ratu Kiniviliame Kiliraki
Hon. Jilila Nalibu Kumar
Hon. Dr. Brij Lal
Hon. Mikaele Rokosova Leawere
Hon. Alvick Avhikrit Maharaj
Hon. Mataiasi Akauola Niumataiwalu
Hon. Ratu Suliano Matanitobua
Hon. Alivereti Nabulivou
Hon. Ruveni Nadabe Nadalo
Hon. Ratu Sela Vuinakasa Nanovo
Hon. Niko Nawaikula
Hon. Viam Pillay
Hon. Aseri Masivou Radrodro
Hon. Salote Vuibureta Radrodro
Hon. Lt. Col. Netani Rika

Hon. Balmindar Singh
Hon. Ashneel Sudhakar
Hon. Lt. Col. Isoa Delamisi Tikoca
Hon. Anare Tuidraki Vadei
Hon. Samuela Bainikalou Vunivalu

Absent

Hon. Ratu Inoke Kubuabola, Minister for Defence, National Security and Immigration
Hon. Alexander David O'Connor, Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services
Hon. Iliesa Delana, Assistant Minister for Youth and Sports
Hon. Prof. Biman Chand Prasad
Hon. Prem Singh

ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI

HIS EXCELLENCY MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) JIOJI KONOUSI KONROTE.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Chief Justice and Honourable Members of the Judiciary, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, Your Excellencies, High Commissioners, Ambassadors and Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Distinguished Guests and Ladies and Gentlemen, *ni sa bula vinaka, namaste, asalaam alaykum, ni hao, noaia 'e mauri*, and a very good morning to you all.

Two years ago next Saturday, 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 the genuine democratic principle of equal votes of equal value.

As we come together today to officially open the 2016 Session of Parliament, we have reached the midpoint of the current four-year term and the Fijian Elections Office is already well advanced in its preparations for the next election in 2018.

At this halfway mark – the equivalent of half time in a rugby or football match – it is appropriate for me as your Head of State to not only outline the Government's legislative programme for the coming year but for all of us to take stock of our performance so far; to review the progress we have made as a Parliament and as a nation over the past two years; and to reflect on ways in which we can improve our quality of service to the Fijian people, because it is to them that we owe our allegiance as Members of Parliament, and in my case, as President and whose interests we have solemnly sworn to uphold.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Chief Justice, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen; it has been a very difficult and traumatic time for a great many Fijians in the six months since *Tropical Cyclone Winston* slammed into our islands and claimed the lives of 44 of our loved ones. As you all know, *Tropical Cyclone Winston* also left many thousands of people homeless and destroyed schools and other public infrastructure.

My Government's huge relief effort and the provision of urgently needed food supplies and shelter was quickly implemented, and as you all know, it embarked on two principal initiatives – based on need

and through a transparent process - to rebuild our country – The Help for Homes and Adopt a School programmes.

The challenge before us as a nation is the sheer scale of the disaster and the consequent shortages of basic materials needed for the rebuilding effort. These items are being obtained from overseas in cases where local suppliers are unable to meet the enormous demand and to make it easier to import these supplies, the Government has zero-rated duty on these basic building materials.

As you all know, we could not have coped with the scale of this disaster without the assistance of our many friends in the international community - governments, organisations and individuals. And I again ask the members of the Diplomatic Corps who are present here today to convey our heartfelt thanks for that assistance to your governments and your people.

We are privileged to have a group of French Senators with us here today who are specifically tasked with building friendships in the Pacific. So, I especially ask you - Honourable Senators - to convey our thanks to the French people for their response to the needs of our people in the form of a surveillance aircraft, a naval patrol vessel and relief supplies. We are all grateful to France for its generosity and kindness. I also thank you for your generous offer to host – in Paris - the winners of our national essay competition on the Constitution, which will be announced on Fiji Day. Your fundamental national values of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity are values that we also cherish and we can learn a lot from your 230 years of democracy.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Chief Justice, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen; however much of a blow *Tropical Cyclone Winston* was to Fiji, we were extremely fortunate that it spared our main tourism areas and the principal source of our national income. Our international visitors kept coming and in some instances in even greater numbers. So our overall economy has proved to be remarkably resilient and we are still expecting it to grow by close to 3 percent this financial year. It has been truly a bitter-sweet year, the bitter impact and legacy of *Tropical Cyclone Winston*, coupled with one of the sweetest moments in Fijian history that none of us who witnessed it will ever forget.

The Olympic Gold that our Rugby Sevens team brought back from Rio de Janeiro has had a profound effect on the national psyche. They have brought Fijians together in a way we could never have imagined and they have triggered a surge of national pride and patriotism that has been shared by every Fijian. It is cause for great celebration that we can begin this parliamentary session knowing that as a nation, we have never been as united as we have been in the past month.

To outsiders, it may seem strange that winning a rugby match can have such a profound effect on an entire nation. That the joy of rugby fans can be so infectious that it spreads into every corner of national life, but it is no surprise to any Fijian, because not only is rugby a national obsession, we play Sevens Rugby better than anyone else on the planet - Back to back world champions, as well as taking Olympic Gold; the global superpower in sevens rugby.

As much as the astonishing achievement itself, it is the symbolism of our Olympic win that has gripped the imaginations of our citizens and especially our young people. It is the growing realisation that coming from a small nation with limited resources is no impediment to success. That if we put our minds to it and work hard and work with the best, Fijians can do almost anything.

It has shown us that we can journey forth from our island homes fired with the Fijian spirit and be world beaters. Not just on the rugby field, but in everything else we do as a nation, whether it is the quality of our exports and the Fijian Made brand; the proud reputation of our national airline; our respected men and women in uniform keeping the peace in troubled parts of the world; or the disproportionate lead we are taking in drawing global attention to the urgent need to confront the challenges of climate change. All these efforts have been given a huge boost – supercharged by the spectacle of excellence – because of what happened on that glorious Friday in Rio. And so as your Head of State – a figure above politics – I have come to you all today – the elected representatives of the Fijian people – with a simple message:

The nation calls on you to do all you can to harness the spirit of our Olympic win. To tap the wonderful sense of unity that has descended on our beloved Fiji. To leave aside petty squabbles, rivalries, division and grandstanding for personal and political gain. To use this Parliament as a force to propel us forward to the greatness we glimpsed in Rio and with Almighty God's help will be our nation's future.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Chief Justice, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen; even without our Olympic win, we would have entered this new session of Parliament with a sense of optimism that *Tropical Cyclone Winston* could not crush. We have had seven straight years of economic expansion – the longest running period of growth in Fiji's history. My Government's prudent economic management is acknowledged by Fiji's development partners and global financial institutions and they are eager to help us take our nation to the next level, on the steady path that the Government has set to become a modern nation state.

My Government is responsibly using the increasing financial resources available to it and the revenue it is generating from economic growth to transform our nation's prospects. It is investing hundreds of millions of dollars a year in new infrastructure projects because these are the building blocks of economic resilience and growth.

First and foremost in my Government's mind is to empower more of our young people through its education revolution. This includes free schooling and more scholarships and tertiary loans, plus access to affordable transport to attend these institutions. The Government has created a national network of technical colleges to complement our universities and to teach our young people the trades every nation needs to maintain a proper skills base. We are determined to provide young Fijians with every opportunity to have prosperous and satisfying futures.

My Government is improving access to such necessities as health care and legal services, and connecting more people to, electricity, water and telecommunications. It is attracting ever increasing levels of investment – foreign and local – and creating jobs with a range of incentives and some of the lowest corporate and personal taxes in the region, and it is igniting an enterprise culture in Fiji by assisting our people with its Small and Micro Business Grants to start their own businesses or expand existing ones. The Government has given an undertaking to create a national body to coordinate this effort and make it more streamlined.

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 Government is providing free medicine and water, plus subsidised electricity for low-income earners, along with a range of specific programmes to assist the most vulnerable members of society - women, children, the elderly, the sick and the disabled.

It was a wonderful privilege for me as President at our first Constitution Day celebration last Wednesday 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. It was easily the most inspiring moment of a very inspiring day, so much so that I have asked Naomi to be with us in the Chamber today and to receive the acclaim she so richly deserves for making us all so very proud. Naomi, would you please stand to be acknowledged by our elected representatives and distinguished guests.

(Applause)

Thank you.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Chief Justice, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen; it is also my duty today as Head of State to outline my Government's legislative programme for the coming session. Once again, it continues its programme of modernisation and reform and opens up new avenues of investment and opportunity, all to support the Government's overall vision of Fiji taking a pre-eminent role in our region and strengthening our voice and presence in the world.

In the 2016 Parliamentary session, new laws will be introduced and existing laws reviewed in the following areas:

- Quarantine;
- patents;
- industrial designs;
- trademarks;
- traditional knowledge and cultural expression;
- public health protection;
- secured transactions;
- pensions saving;
- the subdivision of land;
- town planning;
- elections;
- credit unions;
- electronic transactions;
- the transplantation of human organs;
- anti-doping laws;
- the registration of practicing engineers; and
- residential tenancy.

The review of legislation includes, the:

- Public Order Act;
- Police Act;
- Arbitration Act;
- Housing Act;
- Public Enterprises Act;
- Stamp Duties Act;
- Land Transport Act;

- Consumer Credit Act;
- Sale of Goods Act;
- Bankruptcy Act; and
- Customs Tariff Act.

The Parliament will also be asked to review the United Nations Electronic Communications Convention for ratification.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Chief Justice, the Honourable Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen; this is my first official opening of the Parliament since I assumed the role of President, and I am aware that I have some very big shoes to fill. As you all know, my distinguished predecessor, His Excellency Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, had many qualities as President and one was the ability to speak plainly. So, I want to close today by recalling what he said to you all a year ago and to me as a Member of Parliament myself back then, when he addressed us from where I am now sitting.

His Excellency Ratu Epeli asked us to promote unity rather than division; to think beyond parochial interests of ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status or where we come from in Fiji; not to peddle false information to create fear among ordinary Fijians; not to attempt to bring our highest offices of State into disrepute with crude smears or undermine the economy for political gain but one thing he said that has stuck in my own mind is this, and I quote:

“I ask you all to put the honour back into honourable, in carrying out your duties as members of parliament, to raise the tone of the forthcoming session and to lead the nation by example.”

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Chief Justice, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen; these are words for the ages and apply to the conduct of any elected representative. And as I draw your attention to them again with my full endorsement as President, I want to add some of my own.

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. We are now a nation that is unified, more so than at any time in our entire history, and we are a nation on the move.

All around us are the signs of revival, of rejuvenation whether it is the historic building in which we sit, the park outside with its new pavilion and grounds or the stately hotel that faces our beautiful harbour. All these are within a short stroll of here and are all signs of a transformation that we must extend to other parts of Fiji and to every facet of our national life.

Let us rededicate ourselves today to the task of continuing to rejuvenate our nation and giving it the sense of direction and purpose it deserves. 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 a standard of excellence here that we can inspire them to excellence themselves, and be powerful role models in the quest to make Fiji great.

It is now my honour to declare the 2016 Parliament session officially open. May the Almighty God Bless you all. May God Bless Fiji.

Vinaka saka vakalevu, sukria, bahoot dhanyavaad, xie xie, fai'aksea and thank you.

(Applause)

ADJOURNMENT

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, you may be seated.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank invited guests who are present in the gallery and in the Committee Rooms for your attendance at the opening session of Parliament for 2016 to 2017.

I wish to especially acknowledge the delegation from the French Senate, who observed today's proceedings from the upper gallery. Welcome, Honourable Senators.

(Applause)

I trust that your visit to our shores has been fruitful, and that you take warm memories of Fiji when you return to France.

I also acknowledge the public watching the proceedings on television and the internet, as well as listening on the radio. Thank you for taking interest in your Parliament.

I wish to remind Honourable Members that when Parliament next meets, we will proceed with a motion to thank His Excellency for his most gracious speech.

I also take this opportunity to invite Honourable Members and invited guests for refreshment at the marquee below.

The Parliament now stands adjourned until Monday 26th September, 2016.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.51 a.m.