

MONDAY, 14TH SEPTEMBER, 2015

The Parliament met at 10.05 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MADAM SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

Hon. Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, Prime Minister and Minister for *iTaukei* Affairs and Sugar
Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, Attorney-General and Minister of Finance, Public Enterprises, Public Service and Communications
Hon. Faiyaz Siddiq Koya, Minister for Industry, Trade and Tourism
Hon. Parveen Kumar, Minister for Local Government, Housing, Environment, Infrastructure & Transport
Hon. Mereseini Vuniwaqa, Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources
Hon. Lt. Col. Inia Batikoto Seruiratu, Minister for Agriculture, Rural & Maritime Development and National Disaster Management
Hon. Ratu Inoke Kubuabola, Minister for Foreign Affairs
Hon. Capt. Timoci Lesi Natuva, Minister for Immigration, National Security and Defence
Hon. Jone Usamate, Minister for Health and Medical Services
Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy, Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts
Hon. Major-General (Ret'd) Jioji Konusi Konrote, Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations
Hon. Lt. Col. Laisenia Bale Tuitubou, Minister for Youth and Sports
Hon. Rosy Sofia Akbar, Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation
Hon. Lorna Eden, Assistant Minister Local Government, Housing & Environment
Hon. Cdr. Joeli Ratulevu Cawaki, Assistant Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management
Hon. Veena Kumar Bhatnagar, Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services
Hon. Iliesa Delana, Assistant Minister for Youth and Sports
Hon. Mosese Drecala Bulitavu
Hon. Roko Tupou Takeiwai Senirewa Draunidalo
Hon. Jiosefa Dulakiverata
Hon. Viliame Rogoibulu Gavoka
Hon. Semesa Druavesi Karavaki
Hon. Ro Teimumu Vuikaba Kepa
Hon. Ratu Kiniviliame Kiliraki
Hon. Cdr. Semi Tuleca Koroilavesau
Hon. Jijila Nalibu Kumar
Hon. Brij Lal
Hon. Mikaele Rokosova Leawere
Hon. Alvick Avhikrit Maharaj
Hon. Ratu Suliano Matanitobua
Hon. Alivereti Nabulivou
Hon. Vijay Nath
Hon. Ruveni Nadabe Nadalo

Hon. Ratu Sela Vuinakasa Nanovo
Hon. Niko Nawaikula
Hon. Alexander David O'Connor
Hon. Sanjit Patel
Hon. Viam Pillay
Hon. Dr. Biman Chand Prasad
Hon. Aseri Masivou Radrodro
Hon. Salote Vuibureta Radrodro
Hon. Lt. Col. Netani Rika
Hon. Balmindar Singh
Hon. Prem Singh
Hon. Ashneel Sudhakar
Hon. Lt. Col. Isoa Delamisi Tikoca
Hon. Anare Tuidraki Vadei
Hon. Samuela Bainikalou Vunivalu

Apology

Hon. Osea Naiqamu, Minister for Fisheries and Forests
Hon. Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu

ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE FIJI ISLANDS

HIS EXCELLENCY RATU E. NAILATIKAU.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Chief Justice and Members of the Judiciary, the Honourable Prime Minister and Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Distinguished Guests and Ladies and Gentlemen. Good morning, *Ni Sa Bula Vinaka, Salaam Alaykum, Namaste.*

A year ago, we gathered together as a nation to mark a momentous occasion - the launch of our new democracy. Forty four years after Independence, Fiji finally held a General Election based on the genuine democratic principle of equal votes of equal value. And the Fijian people chose the 50 Members of our new Parliament – to represent them and serve them until the next Elections in 2018.

That Election was declared credible and free by a multi-national observer group of 20 countries, led by three of the world's most vibrant democracies; India, the largest democracy in the world, Indonesia and Australia. So the result cannot be questioned. It represented the genuine will of the Fijian people, freely expressed in a process run so well by the Fijian Elections Office and the Supervisor of Elections that Fiji is now monitoring the elections of other nations and being used as a benchmark.

As your President and Commander-in-Chief of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces, I have a very important message for the whole nation today. The Fijian people spoke at the General Elections on 17th September, 2014. They demonstrated their passionate desire to exercise their democratic right with a remarkable election turnout of 84.6 percent and invalid votes of only 0.75 percent. If you compare these figures to the previous Elections in 2006, it

is more remarkable since voting was compulsory in 2006 but the voter turnout was 64 percent and invalid votes of 6.4 percent.

When Fijians voted in 2014, they chose the current FijiFirst Government by a margin of almost 60 percent. Today, Government occupies 32 seats, SODELPA – 15 and National Federation Party – three, in this august Parliament.

That decision by the Fijian voters was decisive, unambiguous and must be respected. The Government will serve its term and then subject itself to the will of the people, as our Constitution provides, sometime in 2018. That is what will happen under our supreme law and no other course of action is lawful or acceptable, neither will it, nor should it be tolerated.

The current attempts by a small minority to set up an alternative state, a so called Christian State or to overthrow the current Government are unlawful and contrary to the national interest. They are an assault on democracy, attempts to overturn the will of the people freely expressed almost a year ago and are disruptive to economic stability. They cannot be condoned under any circumstances. Such actions must be publicly condemned, in particular given our political history, in no uncertain terms. Such actions and any such proposed actions must be emphatically condemned by all those who truly adhere to and believe in the democratic principles upon which our Government, this Parliament and our new Fijian State is built upon.

If we fail to condemn these actions and such actions, in particular if Members of this august Parliament fail to do so, it will cast doubts upon you – it will cast doubts about whether you believe in and truly subscribe to the fundamental democratic principles upon which our modern nation state is founded upon.

I repeat, there is no justification whatsoever to defy the will of the Fijian people, especially on the spurious grounds that have been advanced by the supporters of these insurrections, who attempt to justify their illegal behaviour on religious or ethnic grounds. Those who subvert the national interest – who try to thwart the will of the Fijian people must be and will be subjected to the full force of the law.

As your Head of State, a figure above politics, I call on every Fijian to rally to the defence of the democratic process and the right of every Fijian to practice their rights. And as Commander-in-Chief of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces, I believe the RFMF must wherever and whenever required, support the police in bringing to justice those who want to destroy democracy and impose their will on others. It is your constitutional duty to do so as the ultimate guarantors of the security of the Fijian nation.

I also call on all honourable Members of this House to support democracy and not give comfort to those who wish to subvert the democratic process. You have sworn the most solemn of oaths or affirmed your allegiance to protect and defend democracy and have a sacred and unbreakable trust with god and the Fijian people to uphold that oath or affirmation.

To those Fijians outside this Parliament, who are being swayed by the enemies of democracy who are using communal divisions, in other words, ethnicity, race and religion to gain political power, let me say this to them: there is no threat to your religion, identity or culture or your rights. Your rights are protected in our Constitution for all time. Have you lost your culture, your identity, your religion, your land since the promulgation of our Constitution? Or since the FijiFirst Government was elected? The answer is an emphatic no. The Constitution

is your safeguard. Indeed the Constitution governs and will govern all governments. It defines the perimeters within which all governments can act.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Chief Justice, the Honourable Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, Your Excellencies and Ladies and Gentlemen. Our new democracy was built on the most solid of foundations, a Constitution that for the first time, guarantees equality for every Fijian. It also provides for a range of social and economic rights that are unprecedented in our history.

I was extremely proud and privileged, as your President, to have been instrumental in bringing this Constitution into being, to give it my assent as Head of State and formally establish it as our supreme law. Because by any international standard, it meets the test of providing a framework for genuine democracy and genuine opportunity for all. Indeed our Constitution has been internationally lauded and critically acclaimed.

Translating the Constitution into the *iTaukei* and Fiji Hindi languages and producing a version in braille has made our supreme law accessible to everyone. When you read it, you can easily discover for yourself the truth. So, I urge everyone who has not already done so to do so.

I took a particular interest, as President in the wide-spread public consultations and the formulation of our Constitution prior to its promulgation. It is regarded as one of the best in the world. Its principles are unassailable, the foundation of all the world's great democracies. Equality of opportunity for every citizen. The rights of every citizen is protected and I therefore, fully endorse my Government's decision to celebrate Constitution Day as a national holiday every year, to enable us all to reflect on the benefits it offers every Fijian.

The Constitution provides for a range of social and economic rights that are unprecedented in our history. It contains a Bill of Rights which guarantees a range of rights including the right to education, economic participation, transport, housing, food and water, health and social security for all Fijians. It recognizes and protects the unique culture, customs, traditions and language of the indigenous *iTaukei* and Rotuman people. It recognizes common and equally citizenry, and that regardless of our ancestry, ethnicity or religious beliefs, we are all Fijians.

The day on which the Constitution came into force should be remembered and celebrated. Our celebrations must include educating our citizens of the intricacies of the Constitution, so we and the future generations will understand how to benefit from it and learn to uphold it as patriotic citizens. We must all be committed to celebrating Constitution Day.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Chief Justice, the Honourable Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen. Last year, I urged you all to think beyond your parochial interests of ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status or wherever you come from in Fiji. And to join hands to work together to move our beloved nation forward. I also cautioned that if you did not, it would be to our ultimate peril as a nation-state. And I am deeply saddened that 12 months on, some appear more intent on promoting division than promoting national unity. It would appear they cannot relinquish the politics of the past, the politics of viewing everything from a communal and parochial perspective rather than as a

Fijian leader who puts the country and people first. A leader who thinks about the future, a leader who assesses issues holistically not for now, not just to simply make a political point that will look good for one day or get the newspaper headline the next morning.

It is also inexcusable to peddle false information to create fear among ordinary people. It is inexcusable to attempt to bring our highest offices of State into disrepute, especially with crude smears. It is inexcusable to undermine the Fijian economy just for political gain. So, 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. To talk about our country and our economy in a responsible manner.

You must talk about your country first and not yourself. To debate, by all means, and wage a battle of ideas because that is the function of Parliament. But to do so with civility, humility and with national unity, national interest and the common good always at the forefront of your minds. And to do so also with intellectual honesty. To know that an idea is better than yours, to know that an action or policy is going to be for the benefit of the country in the long term and to still debunk them, is also intellectual dishonesty. Without honesty and humility on all fronts we will never progress as a nation, as leaders and as individuals.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Chief Justice, the Honourable Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, Your Excellencies and Ladies and Gentlemen. Growing the economy and embedding investor confidence in the economy must be every single leader's objective. We must take a national approach. Our economy has recorded a 5.3 per cent increase in growth for 2014. We have had sustained and unprecedented economic growth rates in excess of four per cent for over three years. We must as a nation capitalise on this trajectory.

There is no doubt my Government's policies and initiatives and economic reforms are paying dividends but we cannot rest on this. We must take it to the next step. It requires focus and hard work from all. It requires a commitment to this national goal from both sides of this Parliament. We no longer can afford to debunk or run down the economy for political expediency or to score political points. Building a strong economy requires confidence building measures by the nation as a whole.

Economic growth means improved lives for all. It means prosperity for all and it means a brighter future for all Fijians. All great countries that today we look up to have invested large amounts of monies into their infrastructure. Proper infrastructure capacity leads to economic opportunities and economic success. This is what my Government is doing, building infrastructure to invest in our future.

Many of the great countries that have built their capacity in infrastructure have done so, and some today are doing so, by borrowing to build for the future. Therefore, in talking about the economy and debating about the economy in a responsible manner, we need to remember that borrowing or acquiring debt is not necessarily a negative thing. Debt if properly managed is good if you borrow to build for and invest in the future.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Chief Justice, the Honourable Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, Your Excellencies and Ladies and Gentlemen. I have made it my number one priority as President, to engage with our young people. I have made a point of visiting almost

every school in Fiji. I can tell you that the younger generation has no interest in listening to the voices of division and fear mongering. They want stability and the opportunity to carve out worthwhile lives for themselves and each other. They want to build one Fiji. They do not want politicians of the old, they want politicians and leaders who talk about the issues and act upon them. They think and want the future. They want better services, amenities, access to technology and career paths and we must work together as leaders, as a nation to give them the future they deserve.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Chief Justice, the Honourable Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, Your Excellencies and Ladies and Gentlemen. It is also my duty today, as Head of State, to outline the Government's legislative programme for the coming session. It opens up new areas of investment and opportunity as the Government continues to pursue the vision I outlined last year - the development of Fiji as a modern nation state, taking a pre-eminent role in our own region and strengthening our voice and presence in the global community at large.

The legislative programme for this parliamentary session will be even more extensive than the previous year, with the introduction of new laws. Some of these new laws will be in the following areas:

- Code of Conduct for Public Office Holders;
- Freedom Of Information;
- National Switch;
- Public Health Protection;
- Consumer Protection;
- Security Credit Transactions;
- Disabled Persons;
- Child Care and Protection;
- Community Based Corrections;
- Child Justice;
- Adoption;
- Volatile Substance Abuse;
- Trade-marks and Industrial Designs;
- Aquaculture;
- Sugar Industry; and
- Kava.

As part of its legislative programme for the coming session, Parliament will also substantially review a number of existing laws. These will include the:

- Parliamentary Powers and Privileges Act;
- Public Enterprises Act;
- Public Service Act;
- Land Transport Act;
- Police Act;
- Mining Act;
- Consumer Credit Act; and
- Financial Management Act.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Chief Justice, the Honourable Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, Your Excellencies and Ladies and Gentlemen. This is my last opportunity as President to address you in the Parliament before my term in office comes to an end in November. I have had the great privilege and honour to serve the nation and the Fijian people in a variety of roles over the years, as Commander of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces, as an Ambassador, as a Permanent Secretary, as a Speaker of the House of Representatives and as a Minister. As your President, I have had the privilege of presiding over the greatest period of Fiji's substantial economic growth, focused investment in infrastructure for the future and of course the promulgation of our Constitution. So permit me, in the people's Parliament, to make some personal reflections on what it means to serve the people.

The requirements for public life are very simple: patriotism which means love for your country. Empathy and consideration for others which means love for your fellow human-being. A sense of spirituality and acknowledgement of a higher authority which means a personal relationship with and love for God without imposing it on others. The pursuit of excellence which means a desire to do the best possible job. These values combined with the universal qualities of integrity, honesty, humility and honour have always been the required hallmarks and have stood the test of time.

Those of us in public life must lead by example and especially when you are elected to Parliament. The people have put their trust in you to represent their interests. And while you have a responsibility to your political goal, you have a greater responsibility to the nation as a whole. We need to take a united approach to the development of our nation and to ensure that the best interests of the nation are at the forefront of public actions and decisions.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Chief Justice, the Honourable Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, Your Excellencies and Ladies and Gentlemen. It has been a great privilege for me to serve the nation and I acknowledge and thank the honourable Prime Minister and his then Cabinet for showing

confidence in me and recommending my appointment as the President of Republic of Fiji six years ago.

I will leave office in November confident that great days lie ahead for every Fijian if we continue on the current path of governance, national philosophy and economic growth. It is now my honour to declare the 2015 Parliament session officially open.

Before I conclude, I would just like to add the wishes of the Fijian people and those of this Parliament to the Fiji Team that will be playing their first game this coming Saturday and to wish them all the best for that game and the six games that will come after that and to bring the World Cup back to Fiji.

(Applause)

May God bless you all and May God bless Fiji. Thank you, *Vinaka Vakalevu, Sukria, Bahoot* and *Dhanyavaad*.

(Acclamation)

(His Excellency the President leaves the Chambers accompanied by Madam Speaker)

COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIR

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I wish to take this time to thank all invited guests that are present in the Gallery and those in the Committee Room, for your presence to witness the opening session of Parliament. I also thank members of the public who are watching the proceedings on televisions and on 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 meet, we will proceed with the motion of thanks for His Excellency's Address.

I also take this opportunity to invite honourable Members and invited guests for refreshment at the Government Buildings Car Park.

The Parliament is now adjourned to 9.30 a.m. on Monday, 21st September, 2015.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.05 a.m.