

MONDAY, 21ST SEPTEMBER, 2015

The Parliament resumed at 9.35 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MADAM SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All honourable Members were present, except the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for *iTaukei* Affairs and Sugar; the Honourable S. Patel; and the Honourable Ratu N.T. Lalabalavu.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sittings of Parliament held on Friday, 28th August and Monday, 14th September, 2015 as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

New Session of Parliament

MADAM SPEAKER.- I warmly welcome all honourable Members to the first day of the September sitting, which is also the first sitting after the State Opening of Parliament by His Excellency the President, and I look forward to another year of valuable contributions and robust debate.

Acknowledgment of Viewers

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

Visiting Delegation - Australian Federal Parliament

I take this opportunity to extend a special welcome to a delegation from the Australian Federal Parliament, who are also observing today's sitting from the gallery. A warm *bula vinaka* to Dr. Andrew Southcott, Member of Parliament; Senator Christopher Ketter; and Ms Susan Cardell.

I welcome you all to Parliament and indeed to Fiji. I trust you will take warm memories of your short stay on our shores as you travel onwards tomorrow. *Vinaka*.

Ruling – Friday 28th August, 2015

Before we move on to the next item on the Agenda, on Friday, 28th August, 2015, the last day of the August sitting, the Honourable Deputy Speaker had allowed a personal explanation from the Honourable Dr. Biman Prasad. A point of order was raised by the Honourable and learned Attorney-General and Minister of Finance, Public Enterprises, Public Service and Communications. The Honourable Deputy

Speaker requested the Honourable Dr. Prasad to resume his seat and refer the matter to me for a ruling at a later sitting, which I now deliver.

Personal Explanations: Standing Order 80. The matter to be explained must be personal to the Member seeking permission to make a personal explanation. The procedure cannot be used to make a personal explanation on behalf of another Member. This process is used to explain to Parliament, matters of a personal nature, but reflect on the honour or integrity of a Member. It can be used to correct an earlier answer, for example, by a Minister or by a Member to correct an earlier statement or explain something that has occurred outside the Parliament, but it is not another channel for taking issue with or debating a statement made in debate or outside the Parliament on the grounds that it is mistaken or wrong.

In my view, the matters raised by Honourable Dr. Prasad in his capacity as leader of the NFP, about statements made in response by Honourable Roko Tupou Draunidalo about a report in the *Fiji Sun*, and I quote: "because the report tried to denigrate the NFP", cannot be raised by way of personal explanation. It is not a matter that is personal to the Member raising the issue and it is not a matter of a personal nature, reflecting on the honour or integrity of that Member.

Misrepresentation: Standing Order 81. This procedure applies where a Member who has spoken may speak again in the same debate, to offer some explanation of the material part of his or her speech that has been misrepresented, misquoted or understood by a previous speaker. The Honourable Member must raise the matter immediately at the end of the speech of the Member against whom the allegation is made.

Misrepresentation arises solely out of a debate in Parliament and has no application to any statements made outside of the Parliament. It is, in a sense, an exception to the rule that no one can speak twice in the same debate. Its application is confined to the debate in Parliament.

In my view, the matter as raised by the Honourable Dr. Prasad about statements made in response by Honourable Roko Tupou Draunidalo in the *Fiji Sun*, cannot be raised in the Parliament by way of misrepresentation.

DEBATE ON THE ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT

HON. ACTING PRIME MINISTER.- Madam Speaker, I move:

That this Parliament thanks His Excellency the President for His most gracious Speech.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Before I give the floor to the Honourable Acting Prime Minister, I wish to remind Honourable Members that you have up to 20 minutes to speak. The warning bell will sound at 15 minutes, and again at 20 minutes for the end of your speech.

I will now call on the Honourable Acting Prime Minister to have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Members of this honourable House, before I specifically speak on His Excellency's Address, I wish to in Parliament, and I am sure I speak on behalf of all the Honourable Members, thank the Fijian Rugby Team for their sterling performance at Twickenham on the weekend. Well done.

Madam Speaker, while they may not have won the game, they most certainly won the hearts and minds, of not just all Fijians, but also of many rugby fans outside of Fiji. The UK Telegraph, referring to the Fijian Team said, and I quote: "We must be wary of underestimating how genuine a force they are."

The sports and retail social media has gone euphoric about our performance, and of course, theories abound. Some liken Referee Peyper as a reincarnation of Paddy O'Brien, notwithstanding referee decisions and video referees. We are in a position only to get better from.

We wish our Team the best of the game against Australia this Wednesday, and I am sure there is no conflict of interests here ...

... and I am sure when the Honourable Prime Minister addresses us tomorrow morning, he will give us a deeper insight. But, Madam Speaker, as the Excellency our President said in His Address, Fiji can win the World Cup.

Madam Speaker, I rise today to thank His Excellency the President, not only for his forceful and eloquent Address of 14th September, but for a career of service to the nation. His Excellency has always answered his country's call, and his leadership, an example as a man of principle, has guided us through those years of transition and hope.

Madam Speaker, many nations face turning points in their histories. Critical moments in which they must choose between two paths: often one of progress, modernity, enlightenment and another of fear, being insular and regression. At that moment, some nations have been fortunate enough to have leaders who have been a pillar to successful progression.

Fiji is also at a crossroads at the time His Excellency assumed the Presidency. Would it continue to exist as a nation driven apart by separation, discrimination and privilege, only for some, or would it come together as one nation, one people, with full equality and opportunity for all? At that time, His Excellency came forward to show us that a man of principle can be above politics, even in an intensely political time. He has been a lodestar of our progress, keeping us mindful and accountable to the principles we all profess – always above politics.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency condemned the attempts by a small minority, to set up an alternative State. He was not being partisan, he was being principled when he said that those who use religious and ethnic arguments to justify attempts to rob the people of their God-given right to choose their government, must be and will be subjected to the full force of the law. He was not being partisan. He was being principled, and when he called on all Honourable Members of this House to support democracy and not give comfort to those who wish to subvert the democratic process, he was not being partisan, he was being principled again. He reminded all of us of the solemn oaths we have sworn to protect and defend democracy, and of the sacred and unbreakable trust we have with our Creator and the Fijian people to keep our word.

Madam Speaker, this appeal to principle comes naturally to a man who has lived a life of service and compassion,. A man who has served his country as a Senior Military Officer, and a Diplomat. A man who has visited nearly every secondary school in the country, 175 in all, to educate youth about HIV/AIDS; a man who has courageously embraced people who have been traditionally shunned or ignored - AIDS sufferers, gays, lesbians and transgender individuals, the disabled and the poor; he has validated and confirmed them all in their worth and in their humanity and he has welcomed them to the core of the Fijian society. This is a man who possesses both nobility and the common touch, and who is equally comfortable in the presence of royalty or the most humbled individual.

Finally, Madam Speaker, His Excellency has transformed the role of the President of the Republic: where once the Presidency seemed reserved and distant, it is now fully engaged with the people and very demanding. His Excellency had 360 public engagements all over Fiji in 2014, bringing government to

nearly every town and village, and making it the statement that the president is indeed the servant of the people.

In his Address to this body, Madam Speaker, His Excellency reported Fiji's unprecedented economic growth. He reminded us that building investor confidence in the economy must be every single leader's objective. He charged us to capitalise on our sustained growth over the last three years. This is how we create opportunity for our citizens and he called for commitment from both sides of the aisle.

As we all know, Madam Speaker, the Fijian economy grew by 5.3 per cent in 2014, the first time since 2004 that the growth has exceeded five per cent and only the seventh time in the last 30 years. All experts expect the Fijian economy to show growth for the sixth consecutive year in 2015. Only since Independence have we recorded such an unprecedented growth. In addition this will be the third consecutive year that the Fijian economy will grow above four per cent. This had only happened once before in our history from 1971 to 1973.

Madam Speaker, given the revised figures of the economic growth for 2014, Fiji's debt to GDP ratio declined to 47.7 per cent in 2014. This is roughly average for all nations of the world, and well below the ratio of countries like Germany, Sri Lanka, United States, Japan and number of other Small Island Developing States. If we exclude the US\$81 million that is in the Sinking Fund, our debt to GDP ratio would be below 46 per cent for 2014.

Our medium term target was to achieve a ratio of 45 per cent and we are strongly poised to achieve this target before the 2017 fiscal period. More importantly from a debt management perspective, Government intends to maintain an external to domestic debt mix of 30 to 70 plus or minus 5; a safeguard against foreign exchange risks exposure.

But Madam Speaker, we cannot understand debt in one dimension. Debt is a dynamic factor in the economy meaning that it can have far reaching effects, depending on how it is used and managed. Some nations have abused debt, borrowing money to finance profligate spending, ill-thought projects or populist schemes without any tangible and sustained benefits. But many of the great countries that have created great economic capacity by developing the infrastructure have done 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, as His Excellency our President reminded us, 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. Conversely, maintaining a prudent level of debt will provide the fiscal buffer to borrow in times of crisis, such as unforeseen natural calamities.

Our philosophy, Madam Speaker, has been to use debt to create growth, to finance the physical and social infrastructure improvements that create opportunities, expand the economy and raise personal incomes. Debt for a nation is like debt for a small business or even a household. If it is taken on intelligently and with a careful plan, it can create wealth and it can create opportunities. So, we need not fear debt, as long as we control it. We need only fear that paralysis that comes from irrational or uninformed fear of credit or the politicisation of debt.

Madam Speaker, having said that, a discussion of debt cannot be one dimensional. I would like to turn to another aspect of our economy, that is working with the intelligent use of credit and the enactment of intelligent reforms to drive growth in our economy, to fuel the economy. We are proud to say that for the first time in our history, Fiji will record three consecutive years of investment levels above 25 per cent of GDP.

This fact, Madam Speaker, shows that reforms are having the desired results. Business confidence is strong because business leaders and lenders see that Government policies have brought stability and continuity to Fiji. Private sector investments are now approximately 19 per cent of GDP, and bank lending for investment purposes has grown by 76 per cent so far this year, following on the heels of the double-digit growth for the past three years.

Madam Speaker, construction is another important indicator of business confidence and investment, and a harbinger of continued growth. In Fiji, domestic cement sales grew by 46 per cent from January to July this year after strong growth in the past few years. In addition, I am advised that the Reserve Bank of Fiji's (RBF) Business Expectation Survey reveals that business confidence is at an all-time high with almost 75 per cent of large businesses, planning to invest in plant and equipment in the next 12 months.

Madam Speaker, all of these means two things to the Fijian people, jobs and opportunities. Growth and investment not only create wage and salary jobs, they create opportunities for new businesses, they invite new ideas and they inspire entrepreneurship, even at the micro finance level. As the economy grows and becomes more dynamic, wage rise in the number of high-skilled jobs, increases also.

Madam Speaker, RBF's Employment Survey, which is based on job advertisements only in the *Fiji Times*, indicated that employment offers rose by 19.6 per cent in the first eight months of this year after growing by 18.4 per cent last year. This is a record since RBF has been collecting data, an unmistakable indicator that the economy is growing well and creating jobs and opportunities. This is further supported by revenue from the PAYE tax, which has grown by 14.6 per cent as of July 2015.

All of that growth, Madam Speaker, might inspire fear of inflation but the inflation rate at the end of 2014 was a very modest one-tenth of one per cent. I am told that this was the lowest end year inflation rate ever. The inflation rate as of the end of August was 1.3 per cent. Obviously, low global commodity prices, particularly petroleum, are helping to keep inflation down but the low rate also reflects proactive government policy such as the reduction of import duties, the establishment of free education, free medicine, free water, subsidy for electricity and the rationalisation of the tax rates.

Madam Speaker, Fiji's foreign reserves are at an all-time high. We broke the \$2 billion barrier a few weeks ago and we currently hold around \$2.04 billion -sufficient to cover more than five months of imports. This is an increase of more than \$200 million from the end of 2014 and approximately 300 per cent more than the \$515 million in foreign reserves in 2006.

If we include the foreign reserves held by FNPF, Government and other entities, foreign reserves are approximately F\$2.7 billion. With low inflation and available cash, commercial bank interest lending rates have also been declining. This is good for business and a strong factor in encouraging investment.

The RBF has supported this lending with commercial bank liquidity currently above \$600 million. This has helped businesses and individuals to borrow at much lower rates than ever in our history. Currently, the weighted average lending rate is 5.8 per cent, down from eight per cent at the end of 2006.

Madam Speaker, we Fijians laud our Pacific Island homes and we love showing it off to our visitors. Visitors, of course, are responding to our invitation by visiting in record numbers. Last year, Fiji recorded 692,630 visitor arrivals, the most ever, and we have every reason to expect that growth trend to continue.

HON. OPP. MEMER.- Not one million?

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order! Order! I would appreciate no interjections at this point. You will have your turn for debate later on.

You may continue, honourable Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Visitor arrivals are up by 8.4 per cent from January to August of this year, and will definitely set a new record in tourist numbers in 2015. Earning from tourism will surpass \$1.5 billion this year.

Our citizens living overseas provide Fiji's second-largest source of foreign exchange. Personal remittances reached a record F\$383 million in 2014 and stand at F\$284 million so far this year, 35 per cent higher than for the same period in 2014. At this rate, Madam Speaker, we expect to set a new record in 2015 of around F\$450 million.

Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to recite these important facts and figures for this august Parliament because they mean good news for the people of Fiji. Yes, as a Member of this House, we are proud of what our reforms and our management of the economy have produced.

But I believe I speak for all the Members of this Government and all Members of this House, regardless of party affiliation, in taking pride and pleasure in what lies ahead for the people of Fiji. That future will continue to unfold in a positive way, if we keep our focus on three things that all truly great economies have:

- 1) a commitment to equality of opportunity and equality before the law;
- 2) a government that is chosen by the people and work for the good of all its citizens and;
- 3) an economy that rewards hard work and encourages prudent risk.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President has shown us how principle can guide a nation. Let us hold fast to those principles and continue on the enlightened path, the path that produces freedom, wealth and happiness for all Fijians.

This, of course, Madam Speaker, requires hard work, as His Excellency noted. This is why Government is committed to the Civil Service Reform and procuring the services of those appointed on merit. This is why Government is committed to expediting the reforms because we cannot lose the current momentum, and His Excellency noted our youth, our young people, who are the future of our country. They want stability, they want prosperity, they want progress, and they want access to amenities and services like young people all over the world.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, it becomes incumbent upon us, as His Excellency stated, to think beyond our parochial interest and work together, to join together in this Parliament and outside to move our country forward. It becomes incumbent upon us to talk about our country and our economy in a responsible manner, not to malign it for short-term political gain or the newspaper headline.

Of course, as His Excellency stated, and I quote Madam Speaker :

“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 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, with those words of wisdom from a distinguished Fijian, a man who has served his country beyond the call of duty, I appeal to all Members of this Parliament and in particular the Honourable

Members from the Opposition, to work together with Government for the betterment of our country, and to serve all Fijians since that is what we are here to do, Madam Speaker.

I once again, Madam Speaker, thank His Excellency for his most gracious Address.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Ratu Inoke Kubuabola.

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- Honourable Madam Speaker, the Honourable Acting Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliaments, ladies and gentlemen; good morning, *ni sa bula vinaka, namaste, As-Salam.u-Alaikum*.

Madam Speaker, I would like thank His Excellency the President for his words of wisdom, when opening Parliament last week. In a time when the voices of sedition threaten our young democracy, His Excellency's word are a clear reminder that the way for all Fijians is forward, not backward. That attitude and spirit was in vivid demonstration over the weekend by none other than our national rugby team when they played England at the opening match of the 2015 Rugby World Cup in Twickenham.

I wish to congratulate the Flying Fijians for making us proud at that opening game. Although the final score of that match did not really reflect the close on field battle and intensity of the game, the valiant efforts of the Fijian Team and display of world class rugby showcase to the world our die hard spirits. Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, our team was playing against 16 on the field. It is the same spirit of team unity and hard work that also lifted the Japanese side in a historical upset win over the favoured South African Springboks side.

Madam Speaker, if there is a lesson in this august Parliament, we can learn from those two Rugby World Cup games over the weekend, it is that our past record should not determine our future or destination. When we keep our eyes on the future and look ahead to brighter better days, we in this Parliament, can no doubt, give our people much cause course for hope and celebration.

Madam Speaker, as a true leader, His Excellency rallied all Fijians to a common course, and I thank His Excellency for reiterating the vision for our Fiji; the new Fiji, a safe and prosperous Fiji, where all Fijians are equal.

Allow me, Madam Speaker, to also join His Excellency in congratulating the Supervisor of Elections and his hard-working team at the Fijian Elections Office, who last week celebrated the first anniversary of the 2014 General Elections. All Fijians should be proud of this accomplishment. As His Excellency pointed out that the 2014 Fijian General Elections are now being used as a benchmark in other countries and the Supervisor of Elections, is lending his expertise by monitoring elections throughout the region.

Madam Speaker, as we approach the conclusion of His Excellency's term in office as President of the Republic of Fiji, it is only proper that we acknowledge a life that has given so much service to the Fijian people. Today, we express our deepest gratitude to His Excellency, the First Lady, and members of this family, for sharing this exemplary leadership with us in the public service for Fiji and his people.

His Excellency's term in office were some of the most difficult, enthusiastic six years, but through it all and in the conduct of his onerous duty, he displayed leadership, courage, fortitude, conviction and compassion. He will be remembered for his common touch and humility, despite his high chiefly status in Fiji.

I know I speak on behalf of all Fijians, as I thank His Excellency for his years of service to Fiji. He is indeed, Madam Speaker, a true son of Fiji, a patriot, an example of selfless service to our young and old alike.

As a soldier, Military Commander, Diplomat and Senior Civil Servant, Cabinet Minister and Speaker to Parliament, His Excellency has always put the needs of Fiji before his own. He never lost a common touch with the Fijian people he so dutifully served in high office.

His Excellency's advocacy work for HIV/AIDS Awareness is well known throughout Fiji, the Region and indeed, throughout the world.

Madam Speaker, last week, His Excellency spoke of the solid foundation of our democracy, the 2013 Constitution. Our Bill of Rights provides an addition to political and civil liberties unprecedented code of social and economic rights and true leaders for all Fijians.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Madam Speaker, has identified the relevant international instruments that support Government's efforts towards the continued realisation of rights enumerated in the Constitution. Madam Speaker, the assent of Parliament for the ratification of the UN Convention against Torture is one such example.

Madam Speaker, tonight I will be heading to New York to participate in this year's UN General Assembly for the Seminar 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is adopted. There I will highlight the leadership role that Fiji has enjoyed under the FijiFirst Government, to ensure that the Sustainable Development Goal 14 to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources is being implemented properly, especially given the importance of the ocean and its resources for future generation of Fijians.

Fiji is a founding member of the Ambassadorial Group of Friends of Ocean and Seas and we are a leading advocate of creating their Tri-annual Summit on Oceans and Seas that would oversee the implementation of Goal 14.

Madam Speaker, we are working towards hosting the first such summit in Fiji in 2017. In Geneva, our Fijian Mission is taking the lead that the World Trade Organisation to negotiate new disciplines to regulate fisheries subsidies. In London, we are doubling down on resource and a mission concerns in the international maritime organisation.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency rightfully pointed out that the Constitution has been formally established as our supreme law, which all Members of this Honourable House have sworn to uphold. Madam Speaker, one wonders at times whether certain Members of the Opposition share His Excellency's sentiments. He also reiterated the need for a Constitution day that all Fijians deserve to understand and celebrate the stability the Constitution provides in shaping a beloved Fiji.

Our Constitution is the legal framework for genuine democracy and genuine opportunity for all, crafted to meet all relevant international legal steps standards. Madam Speaker, the Fiji-First Government has refined the "Look North Policy" to a focussed, proactive, transparent and innovative foreign policy framework. Fiji has extended its diplomatic footprint globally to engage new partners in our development and we are witnessing the benefits of these relationships today.

Madam Speaker, we have earned the highest respect of the global community because of the principles which governs the conduct of our foreign policy engagement "friends to all, enemy to none." We believe in the sovereign equality of all States, no matter how small they may be. We respect the rights of sovereign States to decide for themselves their own development growths.

In the last five years, Madam Speaker, Fiji's international image has grown significantly. Fiji became the Chair of the Group of 77, plus China at the United Nations and it recognises as one with the nation

leading the fight against climate change in the international arena. We are also continuing our engagement efforts by seeking membership of the UN Human Rights Council in 2017. In doing so, Fiji will contribute to the global agenda and governance of human rights promoting a higher standards we have set for ourselves in the global arena.

Madam Speaker, after wide consultations with all Government departments and relevance stakeholders, a revised Foreign Policy Statement for the next five years was developed and adopted. This statement will form the strategic plans of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to transition Fiji's international relations in all areas of engagement.

In the next phrase of our policy, Government will focus its attention towards increasing trade and investment for Fiji through a continued engagement. Fiji will continue to observe the principle of bilateralism as its core policy. We will respect the sovereign rights and independence of states and Fiji will continue to help those in need all over the world as we have done over the years, through our UN peacekeeping efforts.

Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government will continue to highlight the importance of climate change action in international forums - from settings as diverse as our recently concluded Pacific Island Development Forum - to the UN Human Rights Council and the World Trade Organisation and the International Organisation for Migration.

Indeed, we believe it is the role of Fiji and other frontline States, to advocate for international action on environmentally induced migration for climate refugees. But the advocacy goes beyond the mandates of negotiations of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in which Fiji is an active participant. This is an urgent issue and in line with the principle of the human dignity outlined in our Constitution. As a small island developing State, Fiji sits at the leading edge of the destructive impact of climate change.

Madam Speaker, the Suva Declaration on Climate Change is a very powerful statement of our intentions. We refused to be silenced and we are pressing the industrialised nations to reduce their pollution to negligible levels. With this Declaration, Fiji will lead the charge of Pacific nations and a coalition of like-minded nations and international partners at the United Nations Conference on Climate Change in Paris, the COP 21 in December.

We have the knowledge, ability and capacity to build with the issue of climate change by showing the commitment and resolve and in providing high-profile political leadership to champion this cause. Our Government is seeking to preserve a safe and prosperous future for our young people.

Madam Speaker, as we continue to invest in our future, it is incumbent upon us in this Honourable House to act responsibly to preserve the quality of life and to leave a legacy for our children tomorrow. We must be determined to leave them the best we can. Thank you, Madam Speaker, and God bless Fiji.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, I now give the floor to the Honourable Rosy Akbar.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, the Acting Prime Minister and Attorney-General, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable leader of NFP, Honourable Members of Parliament and distinguished guests in the gallery; *ni sa bula vinaka* and a very good morning to you all.

I also rise to join the Honourable Acting Prime Minister and my colleague, the Honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs to thank and congratulate His Excellency the President for His most eloquent and passionate acclaimed Address.

His Excellency has expressed the perfect attribute of a strong leader, to put our country first and foremost in all our callings to serve our nation. His call to the Members of this House to support democracy, to think beyond our parochial interests, whatever they may be based on, to join hands together, to grow our economy and to think seriously about the society we intend to build for our children and those to follow, was exactly what we needed to hear.

Madam Speaker, as a Fijian and, I believe, for all of us Fijians, His Excellency's Address has made us all proud of our heritage. As a leader, I also pledge my continued whole-hearted service to the people of our Fijian homeland in the pursuit of peace, progress and prosperity. Serving my country is foremost in a life and I pledge that I will do it with the integrity of my heart.

On behalf of the women and children of Fiji, I also thank His Excellency for the great and ambassadorial role he has played for the cause of multiracialism and non-discrimination in our society. His global leadership on the issue of HIV and AIDS has put Fiji on the map.

Madam Speaker, today, the 21st of September, is the United Nations International Day of Peace. The UN General Assembly has declared this as a day devoted to strengthening the ideals of peace, both within and among all nations and people. This year's theme is "Partnership for Peace, Dignity for All" and the constant theme of His Excellency's Address is one of peaceable living, multiracialism and unity towards the common goal of economic and social prosperity. The aim of this commemoration is to highlight the importance of all segments of society, working cohesively together to strive for peace, and peace, Madam Speaker, in a nation begins with our families and our communities.

Madam Speaker, I arrived back in the country after attending the World Alliance Religious Summit in South Korea, in the presence of religious leaders, women leaders and youth leaders. One message that was constantly brought up, was the need for individuals to find peace within our own selves and achieving world peace, or nation peace, is very much dependent on how an individual finds peace within himself. We were also told that once we attain peace within ourselves, we will be able to cross all barriers of racial intolerance and, Madam Speaker, I think that is the way forward for us to take this country forward.

His Excellency the President also mentioned in His Address that the Fijian Constitution protects the rights of every member of this nation. He mentioned that "the Constitution is your safeguard." In having said that, Madam Speaker, protecting the rights of women and children is one of the supreme priorities of the Ministry that I am privileged to have.

Madam Speaker, I also hold great optimism and excitement for a better Fiji and I offer our challenge for all of us today here, to work together to improve the lives of our families, women, children, and the disadvantaged.

Madam Speaker, after one year of leading this Ministry, I am beginning to understand the differences in how men and women experience life, privileges and entitlements and what impact these can have on our well-being, safety, health and the enjoyment of our very basic human rights. We will continue to work collaboratively to identify these factors and to address the inequalities that they may cause. There is a road map progress now to address gender in a more comprehensive approach and the very first in our country under this Fijian Government.

Madam Speaker, foremost is changing mindsets for gender and there has been excellent collaboration of stakeholders to move this forward. Madam Speaker, I pledge that we also seek to understand and address as to why marginalised and disempowered women are vulnerable.

Let me also resonate the key message that His Excellency rightfully stated that we need to be honest on all fronts and to work unitedly as individuals and leaders to address the scourge of violence and abuse that claim innocent lives of our women and children.

In response to His Excellency's call to unitedly grow our economy, my Ministry, Madam Speaker, believes that women's economic empowerment is also a key factor in addressing household poverty. It is also well-documented in UNDP and World Bank Reports that "investing in women is smart economics."

Madam Speaker, I fully support the call by His Excellency to uphold our democracy and condemn the work of minorities who attempt to assault our journey towards the peaceful and prosperous nation. Such disrespectful acts will be a threat towards empowerment of our women, girls and children alike.

Madam Speaker, our women's plan of action has key pillars for economic empowerment, independence, improved access to services and the law and commitment to eliminate violence against women.

Work and activities are centred on this plan, in support of the implementation of our Government's national gender policy. This policy is for the entire government and thus it becomes the duties of all ministries and departments to embrace this policy.

Madam Speaker, as a Poverty Alleviation strategy, it makes good economic sense to invest in women, progressing to formal employment. We can see benefits, we are seeing benefits. Money from these ventures means more money for families. This leads to a higher standard of living and helps many escape the grips of poverty. The current economic growth and investment in infrastructure has created newer opportunities for women empowerment.

Madam Speaker, income generation is good for the Fijian economy but also for individuals. It can allow freedom to travel, engage in further education, receive medical treatment, improve housing, sanitation and the list can go on.

In rural areas, it might mean investing into some new equipment for farming, better transport to market or means to employ another person to work in business ventures. The benefits are multiple. They are means to address the range of social, economic, health, housing, water and sanitation, and range of rights in our Constitution.

Madam Speaker, the second National Women's Expo on 14th to 16th October will champion "Connecting Women to Markets, Make it Happen" **and** is a breaking platform for women entrepreneurs to connect to markets and start their own businesses.

Madam Speaker, encouraging and sponsoring women into formal employment ticks many boxes of our holistic violence prevention strategy. Lifting the status of women gives them confidence to take leadership role and make informed decisions for their well-being. It eliminates the notion that women are unimportant and not to be valued, a notion that contributes to violence against women. Similarly for victims, having financial independence and work skills can mean the difference between staying in a life of violence or premature death, and a life where justice and freedom can be accessed.

This has been the moment that our Government is leading the way for a region by laying good foundations to remove the barriers that stop women taking their rightful place and having the freedom to equally contribute to the development and prosperity of our nation. It is the moment women of our country have been looking forward to, to lead their lives free of violence. It is the moment women can enjoy their human rights that they have been previously denied.

Madam Speaker, in response to His Excellency's comment that Fiji for the first time has a Constitution that guarantees equality for every Fijian by providing them with the range of social and economic rights, please allow me to outline the programmes and the policies of the Government that make this right a reality for every Fijian and their families.

The 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. The Government believes that building a caring society begins with strong families and vibrant communities. To this end, our Ministry's policies and programmes are geared to responding to the life cycle needs of all Fijians, as part of families and communities from their childhood to old age.

His Excellency, Madam Speaker, mentioned in His Address that the Constitution also ensures equality for all. It contains the Bill of Rights which guarantees a range of rights, including right to education, economic participation, transport, housing, food, water, health and social security for all Fijians.

Madam Speaker, the Fijian Government will promote positive parenting and work to equip parents with capacities to nurture and develop the lives of their children. In addition, we also need to provide appropriate services to families who are experiencing social and personal challenges.

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

Madam Speaker, please permit me to highlight the progress in the two key areas that, as stated by His Excellency in His Address, would see introduction of new laws in areas of disabled persons, child care and protection, and child justice.

Madam Speaker, this would indeed be a positive move and would enhance some of the child protection programmes currently undertaken by my Ministry. Notwithstanding the comprehensive services we provide to children, there are still far too many orphaned and vulnerable children who live under conditions of hardship. We will expand the current services provided to them, by ensuring that our children are well-protected through our laws.

Each year in November, Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation intensifies the national celebration to commemorate the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (PCAN) campaign. During the PCAN campaign in 2014, various awareness programmes were organised by the Ministry, in partnership with Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) to create community awareness and positive parenting.

Madam Speaker, in December, 2014, the Ministry partnered with Medical Services Pacific and communication companies such as Vodafone, Digicel and TFL (Telecommunications Fiji Limited) in Fiji to provide efficient communication network to children who seek and need our advice and assistance and that was the National Child Helpline Service, launched in April, 2015. This is Fiji's efforts in tackling child abuse and other related cases made possible with the launch of the country's first ever child help line available on a toll free number 1325, which provides a platform for children and young people who are in need of support, care and protection, with the slogan "you are never alone when you are near a phone."

Madam Speaker, there are plans for it to be a toll-free 24-hour service. To-date, the National Child Helpline has processed more than 400 genuine calls, coming as far as Taveuni and Vunidawa. Analysis

shows that women and parents are also using the helpline. At this note, if I may inform the House, the Ministry also plans to establish a toll-free Domestic Violence Helpline in Fiji from next year.

The Department works closely with the Residential Care Homes to ensure that children under care are not exploited; this is safeguarded through the Minimum Standards and Standing Operations Procedures. Visitations to our children's Residential Homes are monitored and have to be approved by the office of the Director of Social Welfare. We do not allow photographing of children in the homes. These are some of the measures when covering the Convention on the Rights of Children and the rights of our children under our Constitution too.

Madam Speaker, I am proud to serve a Government and a nation where everyone is treated equally and where there are no grounds for discrimination. The Constitution, as reiterated by His Excellency in His Address, is a strong voice for the marginalised, particularly persons living with disabilities, senior citizens who are at the centre of all key developments of the Fijian Government. The increased level of recognition and freedom to be heard, has never been this highly provided to us before.

Madam Speaker, the work of the Fijian Government speaks volumes of our perseverance to reach out and going out of our way to assist the needy. We will continue to vigorously reach out and create an inclusive, supportive and enabling society for all senior citizens in the country.

Madam Speaker, it is very well said by His Excellency in His Address that, "Government's Policies and economic reforms are paying dividends - reaching out to communities across Fiji is a key agenda of the Fijian Government and confirms our support for all our communities. The Fijian Government's commitment to deliver promises by turning it into deeds has earned the respect and trust of people."

Madam Speaker, as a matter of principle, all our social and economic policy interventions must be inclusive. This is the rationale behind our core belief that no Fijian should be left behind in our social and economic development efforts, especially those who have suffered the indignity of segregation and exclusion over the decades.

Madam Speaker, it is incumbent upon us to ensure that women, children, youth, veterans of the liberation struggle, people with disabilities, as well as residents of rural areas and informal settlements are given opportunities to fulfil their potentials and enjoy access to basic services.

Madam Speaker, our approach to poverty alleviation, must, as a matter of necessity, continue to be multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary. In this light, we will achieve sustainable results and broader impact on poverty alleviation.

Cross-departmental initiatives can be challenging to manage, but for many families, the benefits derived from a range of interventions from different sources can add enormous life-changing values. I believe that the Government continues to adopt a one nation approach that looks long and hard at the deepest causes of entrenched poverty in our communities and take bold actions to deal with these realities.

Madam Speaker, before I conclude, I would like to thank all our stakeholders and our international development partners for partnering with the Government and our Ministry, to ensure that the vision of our Government is fulfilled.

Madam Speaker, finally I believe we need to recognise and protect the rights of everyone in our society and accept the fact that our Constitution gives us that; that means putting every Fijian on equal

footing, including women, children, the disadvantaged and the vulnerable. When we ensure that their rights are protected, we ensure a brighter future for Fiji.

Madam Speaker, I once again thank His Excellency for His praiseworthy Address, thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, I now give the floor to the Honourable Veena Bhatnagar.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Acting Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen: a warm good morning, *Ni sa Bula Vinaka, Namaste, Kem Cho, Sat Sri Akaal* and *Assalamu Alaykum*.

Madam Speaker, I rise in response to the Address delivered by His Excellency the President in this Honourable House last week. At the outset, I wish to take this opportunity to express my sincere and profound appreciation to His Excellency for the very stimulating, well-constructed and thought-provoking Address, in outlining the future initiatives and policies on the reform programmes of this Government. His Excellency so ably articulated this message not only to this Honourable House, but also to all Fijians who saw and listened to the Address on television and read it in the media.

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members, ladies and gentlemen, this Government has been in office for only a year now and has already undertaken and completed numerous development projects. This is testament to the commitment that Government has to the welfare and benefit of the people. In the Address by His Excellency, he discussed several other new laws and reforms currently under review, that will help build a socio-economic environment and that will provide better living standards for all of our people. His Excellency also stated that he had made it his number one priority to engage with young people through his endless endeavour to visit as many schools as possible - an endeavour we have all followed in the media.

I have been highly inspired by His Excellency's vision for a future Fiji. He emphasised the values of unity and stability, and praised our youth's optimism towards the new Fiji. His Excellency's actions must be applauded, Madam Speaker, as such engagement with the highest office in the land will surely instil confidence and a sense of pride and re-assurance in the minds of our young people. As a result, many will want to mould their future development in the exemplary manner in which His Excellency has and continues to conduct himself.

I sincerely thank His Excellency, the President of our beloved republic for such outstanding leadership and service to the country. I also wish to sincerely thank our Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable and Learned Attorney-General for their guidance, support and direction that has assisted many of us during our transition into the political arena. I am indebted to those who have been there as 'beacons of hope and strength' in this journey.

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members, ladies and gentlemen, the year has also brought with it great demands in shaping the new Fiji. The resulting demand in this august House has been enormous and challenging. This has been met with a zeal of commitment to hearing our people and meeting their needs appropriately and in a timely manner.

Being Assistant Minister in the Ministry of Health and Medical Services has given me one of the most satisfying and fulfilling experiences one can have, to be in the leadership of Fiji's health service delivery system which aims to re-enforce and build a healthy population is a special calling and responsibility.

During the past year, our Health Ministry has pursued changes that are aimed at creating better health outcomes for Fiji's population and improving the service delivery mechanisms to maximise accessibility. Various strategies have been developed and executed by the Ministry of Health & Medical Services to bring sustainable health reforms that will yield healthy harvests in wellness, disease surveillance, prevention and control, health protection, treatment and referrals.

Accessibility to primary care has also greatly improved due to the decentralisation of these services to health centres. This include the extension in service hours in many facilities, allowing the public new and improved choices in accessing health services. The role of these centres will continue to grow throughout the medical divisions in the West and North.

During the past year, human resources have grown by way of the creation of new positions to respond to our health service needs, particularly in the clinical settings. The addition of 75 doctors and 200 nurses per year over the next 3 years will continue to address our human resource needs.

The paradigm shift toward nursing specialisation is gaining greater momentum and our team is already in the process of designing a blueprint that paves the way forward for the provision of specialized clinical service. Having such services provided in-country is sure to yield positive health results within a more manageable budget.

The building of new health facilities for rural and remote populations to ensure easy access to health services has brought great relief for those communities. The new Waimaro, Nalotawa, Vatukarasa and Nagatagata Nursing Stations (to name a few), are testament to this initiative.

The upcoming new Ba and Nausori Hospitals, the Makoi Health Centre Birthing Unit and proposed extensions to some of our strategically placed health facilities, will add great value to the timely provision of health care as well.

Madam Speaker, through the very able leadership of the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services, has expanded into new frontiers in our effort to provide better health services for our people.

The support for women's and children's health is high on the Ministry's agenda. We are ensuring that our awareness programmes on women's health, particularly the fight against cervical and breast cancer are given priority. Encouraging women to take greater advantage of our cervical cancer screening programmes and other related services is an ongoing project.

Our Expanded Program for Immunization (EPI) for children is available in all our primary and secondary health care facilities. We have already achieved a national EPI coverage of over 90 per cent and we intend to increase this to 95 per cent next year.

We have given strong emphasis to our Adolescent Health Development (AHD) Programme designed for our youths and are actively collaborating with relevant stakeholders. The Ministry of Health is conscious of the most recent adolescent health issues, particularly in the rates of suicide, teenage pregnancy, drug use, alcohol consumption and glue sniffing.

We have targeted our schools with our peer educators, who are taking the lead role to educate, encourage and convince their peers to reduce the incidences of youth health issues in the country. The "in-school" and "out of school" programmes under the Adolescent Health Development Programme are tools that are being used to address youth-related issues. The Ministry is adamant about investing more in this specific area.

Madam Speaker, everyone has the right to health care. Talking about the needs of women and children is not intended to de-emphasise the importance of men's health or assign it a lesser priority. As growing numbers of men are dying young from the complications of non-communicable diseases, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services has not ceased to keep them on its radar.

Increasing men's interest in their own health is an important goal. While it has been an uphill battle to convince our men to have more frequent consultations with doctors, our men are now beginning to respond at a gradual pace.

The Government's initiative, "The Free Medicine Scheme" for Fijians who need that help is also progressing well, with thousands of Fijians benefiting through that programme.

Madam Speaker, honourable Members of this august House, ladies and gentlemen. His Excellency the President had alluded to in his opening Address, our Constitution guarantees a range of rights including the right to education, economic participation, transport, housing, food and water, health and social security for all Fijians.

We are answering the call to foster sound strategic approaches to delivering quality health services to every citizen of our beloved Fiji and no compromises will be made. All Fijians have the right to health, and the Constitution provides the mandate to our Ministry to focus on the core business with commitment and passion.

Madam Speaker, we have all heard His Excellency encouraging Honourable Members of this august House to pursue excellence and do the best possible job. To exercise empathy and consideration for others should manifest in our love for our fellow human beings, and the need to combine values of universal qualities of integrity, honesty, humility and honour in the delivery of our services.

What a rich challenge this is and I know that the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services and I will ensure that there is a new culture of service delivery in our Ministry.

Madam Speaker, I would like to acknowledge with gratitude the support of all Honourable Members of the House, those who have supported or assisted me one way or the other, the general public, staff at the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, the Honourable Minister and, last but not the least, I wish to sincerely acknowledge my family, my husband and my children and not forgetting my dad and my brothers, all of whom have been a driving force and inspiration to me in this last one year in this new role and this new journey.

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members of this august House, ladies and gentlemen, we often read in the media and hear reports about the simplicity, humility, considerate and down to earth manner in which His Excellency conducts himself and all of which have earned His Excellency much respect, high esteem, love and admiration.

His Excellency will be relinquishing the highest office of this land in two months, but will be doing so after serving Fiji in an honourable and worthy way. He has served with dignity and I thank His Excellency for all that he has done and wish him and his family well for the future.

My dear Fijians, I very humbly pledge to continue to serve my Fiji, my Government, my Prime Minister, and my Fellow Fijians with diligence, honesty, empathy, love and compassion.

Thank you and *vinaka vakalevu*.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Madam Speaker, the world is ruled by dead men because all the ideologies that serve as the foundation of all governments, religion and social civic institution are built by people who no longer live today. The foundations of all the world's great democracies are products of ideas that societies have embraced as acceptable.

Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Fiji's Address at the opening of the new session of Parliament on Monday, 14th September, 2015.

Madam Speaker, I believe in the western, developed world, people have, what you call, you might call "an affair with authority". They use it when it is convenient, but in developing world, authority has become a hated enemy, one that represents colonisation. That is why Fiji wants to advocate its independent standing in the world, removing the Queen's portrait from our currency, changing the flag and coat of arms while it wants to retain the Westminster model and the Common Law.

Madam Speaker, I believe we suffer from an inner contradiction that can be solved if Fiji recognises its political authority and priesthood authority were created to serve God. The British system recognises that God defends Her Gracious Queen.

Madam Speaker, has the 2013 Constitution stated that although religion and state are separate, Fijians acknowledge that worship and reverence of God are the source of good government and leadership?

Madam Speaker, Government must be vigilant of the social behaviours that have manifested amongst us such as rape, suicide, political, religious and public corruption, child abuse, prostitution, Fiji now has been gateway for drugs coming as far as Mexico to enter the Australian and Asian markets, human trafficking, exploitation of resources, environmental destruction, climate change, reducing humanity to commodities, cybercrimes, family disintegration, AIDS, NCDs, poverty, community violence, culture clashes and the culture of fear all show that our structures and parameters are spiralling out of control preventing us from enjoying the rich and fulfilling lives that were meant to live. Government does not have any proper measures to prevent or cure these problems.

Madam Speaker, on the world stage, we see war, genocide, ethnic cleansing and terrorism all speak to the violent clashes of culture at an unprecedented scale. At the heart of this cultural conflict lies fundamental, deeply entrenched and thoroughly differing ideologies that are religiously based.

Madam Speaker, on the allegation of a Christian State, we must understand national legislators that every offence has an *actus reus* and *mens rea*. The *actus reus* could be the hoisting of a Christian flag, taking oath as a Minister in a Christian State and a military style training.

These are questions of fact which normally come out through the police caution interview. The *mens rea* will determine whether they had seditious intention to show disaffection to the Government, urging others to overthrow by force or violence the President, Constitution of Fiji or the Government. These are questions of law which the State is yet to establish, therefore all accused persons are innocent until proven guilty and bail cannot be denied because the accused persons are a threat to national security.

Madam Speaker, bail is always based on the undertaking that the accused person will re-appear on the next court day. Madam Speaker, Government must focus on how to defeat the ideologies of Christian State without threat and intimidation. The RFMF and the Police's joint operation to crush the insurrection will only install unnecessary fear. This type of operation happened after the 2000 *coup* in Labasa and the rebels were tortured and even a deaf person was shot at Dreketi. The acts were inhumane, it amounted to a systematic attack on the civilian population despite the signing of the *Muanikau Accord*. Acts done were not disciplined force, it was the work of excessive force and the RFMF has not taken any effort to apologise

to the people for its role in the chain of events. Madam Speaker, people can change when our approach is peaceful and humble.

Madam Speaker, the ideologies of the Christian State may have its merits. However, the methods the people have gone about to establish it is wrong. I am of the view that there are a lot of indigenous people who are still fearful and resentful of the power of the elites over economic and commercial influences and resources.

There is a popular thought that *iTaukei* land is not safe, native group rights have been removed, the State administers proprietary rights on land and *qoliqoli* and *itaukei* people only enjoy usage rights. Which means that *iTaukei* people are not *qoliqoli* owners, they only exercise fishing rights given by the State while the Government is saying that the 2013 Constitution provide the best protection for the *iTaukei* people.

Madam Speaker, I will illustrate an example using Section 30 of the Constitution which states that all minerals in or under any land or water is owned by the State. The State has derived income through royalty, tax and landowners benefit through leases and a fair share of royalty. Our Nawailevu landowners managed to buy only two twin cabs, set up a village canteen, improve their homes, invest at Fijian Holdings Limited and also a \$600,000 fair share of royalty for the future generation. Compare our economic status of the Nawailevu people with the Western Province and the Southern Highland Province of Papua New Guinea who are shareholders of Papua New Guinea's mineral resource development company (MRDC). The PNG landowners have invested in the Fiji economy through the Grand Pacific Hotel in Suva and the Pearl Pacific at Pacific Harbour because they are selling the minerals they own through their investment company.

I make no case to those behind the Christian State movement, however, I am in agreement with their belief that all minerals belong to landowners and they must be supported to become entrepreneurs like the PNG landowners, and not to be passive land providers through the State's development interest.

Madam Speaker, sending the rebels to prison will not solve the problem and the Guatemala prison exercise stands as an example which proves that the United States of America has even failed to stop the Al Qaeda in advancing the Islamic ideology of jihad. Is there any way this Parliament can work to avert this challenge of breaking up our nation into separate states and instead address the concerns this dissident group represents? Where do we direct the human rights or group rights issues pushed by the Nadroga and Ra movements? How can civil society organisations play an important role in the context by seeking to ensure the voices of the communities in Nadroga and Ra who associate with a woman are hurt and provided with substantial expertise to prevent a separate State ideology?

Madam Speaker, we have differing views on the 2013 Constitution, especially on how it came into being and whether the will of the people was in the 1997 Constitution and whether the Government that was overthrown in 2006 was the will of the people?

What is the difference between the 2006 democratic Government and the 2014 democratically elected Government? Why was it lawful to overthrow the 2006 democratic Government and why is it unlawful to overthrow the 2014 democratically elected Government? Why is the Judiciary prevented from dealing with the question of revocation of the 1997 Constitution? Madam Speaker, Fijians demand answers.

Madam Speaker, Fiji has embraced the worldwide trend towards pure democracy but our systems are not yet democratic. The United Nations Human Rights Council last year in Geneva, by the recommendations of member countries that were part of the working group, had identified many areas we can improve in our democratic system. These all pointed to the reviewing of the 2013 Constitution.

The United Nations ILO Convention 169 Committee in 2012 had directed the Government to go back and consult the indigenous people in the removal of their group rights and institutions. I cannot understand, Madam Speaker, why the honourable Prime Minister continues to say that the 2013 Constitution is the best for the *iTaukei* people, when the ILO 169 Committee of Experts has already concluded that there was a breach. I cannot comprehend why the Government is saying that the 2013 Constitution is regarded as one of the best in the world when no modern democratic nation in the world will include immunity in their Constitution.

Madam Speaker, if Fiji continues to move towards democracy without changing the system that allows corruption, *coups*, immunity, violation of human rights, nepotism, insider trading, decision making in the hands of the elites, then I believe the American experiment in democracy will fail.

Madam Speaker, the Bainimarama-led Government has been careful not to contradict its purported multiracial ideology, it intentionally put in place pro-indigenous policies as a way of mobilising indigenous support and loyalty. The Bainimarama Government knowing that *iTaukei* people have been in the land of scarcity for so long that they should grab hold of whatever they can, this becomes an opportunity for our Fijian leaders who proclaim to put their country first and people first to abuse their own people through development.

(Inaudible Interjections)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order, you must be consistent in observing. No interjections as you will have your turn when you debate.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Free text books, free bus fares, free medicine, free milk and free education - all in an attempt to secure votes for the next Elections. Fijians have now realised that Government has not only borrowed and acquired debt to build infrastructures like roads, bridges, wharves, electricity dams, and reservoirs, they know that the Government has also borrowed to maintain the sugar industry. They now know that the divestment of public assets to get revenue to meet Government's expenditure and to make a decent figure of GDP. Taxpayers are complaining, they are now paying more for goods and services.

Madam Speaker, I just returned from Labasa yesterday and I hear from the communities that they are still waiting for the promised small business grants through FDB.

In Savusavu, only a few have received it and some very good business ventures have been denied because they voted for SODELPA (this is what the people saying not what I am saying). Many people in the North have not seen the usefulness of free water and electricity because they have no access to service providers. Farming communities and business still pay the same bills because consumption is based on increased production.

Free bus fares will be 35 cents per stage from next year. Most of the listed medicine is out of stock in our hospitals and even employees like drivers at the Ministry of Health have been denied overtime pay, and it is compulsory now for them to take up time-off. Is this justice and fairness? The free milk and weet-bix is still not available to some schools and even stock is running out in rural schools. The free medicine and textbook scheme is confusing to parents and students. People in the North are asking the rationale behind the anti-suicide day which had directed schools not to evaluate students on examination while the Honourable Minister for Education had earlier denied on television that the cause of suicide was not the examination system. Why are there sudden changes to the reforms, Madam?

People in the North are asking why the dhal price has increased from \$3.15 to \$5.13, canned tuna has increased from \$1.38 to \$1.88 and many more household items have increased in the last two months. The landowners in the North are still waiting for iTLTB to distribute the promised lease money and the landowners are fed up of excuses given by officials, for example, the system is still being fixed and the assurance given by the officials that the money will be coming at the end of the month. Nothing has come by the end of last month.

The New Home Owners' Scheme does not benefit villagers because native reserve do not have house block titles. Villagers are still waiting for the one-third housing scheme assistance and the application made in 2011 is still pending in the Commissioner Northern's Office. Indigenous women vendors in Labasa who pay fees to sit on the footpath in front of the Macuata Provincial Office are asking for proper shelter to cover them from the heat of the sun and the rain.

New farmers in Labasa are complaining of the lack of understanding between policies of the iTLTB and the Sugarcane Growers Council to allow a new farmer to secure a cane contract. In normal circumstances, Madam Speaker, the Sugarcane Growers Council gives \$3,000 to assist farmers to get lease title from iTLTB, while on the other hand, the Sugarcane Growers Council wants the lease title first to release the grant. This is frustrating.

Many of the new farmers have already started planting once an offer letter is given by iTLTB. Tenants are complaining that leases have increased from \$300 per month to \$600 per month without the iTLTB conducting a proper land valuation. On the other hand, the landowners are questioning why iTLTB on Unimproved Capital Value, as a base of reviewing rentals have not fixed rentals on a market rate. Members of the *Mataqali* Raranimeke in Labasa are complaining about the extraction of soil from their land used to refill the FNU project at Naiyaca Subdivision which has been done without their consent and knowledge.

The FSC's share farming scheme has been given quota priority, while cane farmers who are not part of the scheme will not harvest their cane when the mill closed after FSC has achieved its target. Farmers are complaining.

The \$10 million grant to help landowners subdivide their land only benefit landowners in urban areas but many landowners in urban areas do not have a development lease, a scheme plan to be eligible for the grant. Government has not done any community awareness for the grant in the North. The Northern Development Programme is now requiring villagers who are trying to open up businesses in rural areas to get a land title which they can afford or the land is a native reserve. Most businesses under the scheme have failed, Madam Speaker, because there is no secure market to sell their produce and the operation cost is too high than sales.

The Fiji Water Authority's attendance to breakdowns is frustrating in the North. It takes them two days to fix a simple problem. Government rent, office accommodation and hired vehicle payments are always late and landlords and vehicle owners have to pay additional interest to banks for late repayments.

Students enrolled at the Labasa Sangam Nursing School need assistance to pay their tuition because they fall short of the minimum mark requirement. People in the North are frustrated in the slowness of the LTA Board in making decisions on permit applications. Public service vehicles are frustrated to pay \$75 to sit for an examination to pass with 90 per cent to renew their license; if they fail, they pay another \$25. Most of these drivers are not properly educated to pass with 90 per cent. There is another thing, Madam Speaker, that when are you fined by LTA, what we now call in the North a "triple up" by LTA, once you do not pay a fine within 21 days, it will increase three times.

Madam Speaker, people in the North are complaining about the social welfare payments and the late process of the applications. Most of the people who have brought their complaints to my attention had voted for FijiFirst and they have regretted it. One said in the Hindi language “*Bhai ham logh 279 vote dhis, abhi hum logh jao, phir kaan pakdho*. I believe, Madam Speaker, Government in developing people must learn from an example shown by the Christian Mission Fellowship which has recently opened a harvest supermarket in Kinoya. A hotel development in Nukutatava in Labasa, a Trust that it will help members buy shares. The achievement by the CMF is a result of its leadership prioritising the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven to be preached to the entire world as a witness to all nations and the end will come. The CMF Church has overcome the religious mindset based on Christianity and has focussed on the centre of Jesus message, “the Kingdom of God”. I believe, once Government alliance itself to the right mission, God will restore the wealth and health of our Government.

Our 7s Team testifies that God gives them victory. They write Bible verses on their wrist bands and jerseys, sing hymns and prayers before and after the game. That is why they are world champions. Manny Pacquiao has become a millionaire because he testifies that Jesus is Lord and he gives praises to God.

Madam Speaker, if the power of the people, if democracy is in the people then we the people, become the sovereign of our lights corporate destiny and thus, becomes our provider, ruler and God.

I would like to conclude, Madam Speaker, on the note that by proposing that we need to revisit the preamble of the 2013 Constitution which begins with and I quote:

“WE, THE PEOPLE OF FIJI,” and ends with and I quote:

“HEREBY ESTABLISH THIS CONSTITUTION FOR THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI.”

and compare it with the Preamble of the 1997 Constitution which begins with and I quote:

“WE THE PEOPLE OF THE FIJI ISLANDS....”and ends with and I quote:

“WITH GOD AS OUR WITNESS, GIVE OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION.”

We need to acknowledge God.

Madam Speaker, Saint Peter said to the paralysed man who was asking for money at the temple gate and I quote:

“I have no silver and gold, but what I do have, I will give it to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.”

Government's finance is paralysed, Madam Speaker, and we are running to banks to settle our debts, but only in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, this country will rise up and walk.

Madam Speaker, God should be the head of our nation. May God bless you all and May God Bless Fiji. Thank you, *vinaka vakalevu, shukriyaa and bahut and dhanyavaad*.

MADAM SPEAKER.- After that much presentation, I think we need refreshments. Parliament will now adjourn for morning tea and I would also like to invite our distinguished guests in the gallery to join us, particularly our honoured guests from the Australian Federal Parliament. The Parliament will now adjourn to 11.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.01 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.35 a.m.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now give the floor to the Honourable Joeli Cawaki.

HON. CDR. J.R. CAWAKI.- Madam Speaker, Honourable Acting Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Cabinet and my fellow Members of Parliament, *ni sa bula vinaka, namaste, as-salam-u-alaikum* and a very good morning to you all. Please allow me to commend in response to His Excellency the President's Address at the opening of the new session of Parliament, delivered on Monday, 14th September, 2015.

I wish to thank His Excellency the President for setting the platform and the foundation of our sovereignty as an independent democratic State and also reminding us of the launch of our new democracy one year ago. In our Ministry, under the leadership of the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management has worked diligently to bring equal access to basic services to every Fijian, regardless of where they live. You may have heard the Honourable Prime Minister say on many occasions how important it is to the FijiFirst Government that every Fijian has the same opportunity to experience the benefits of the new Fiji. This is a vision we fully support and work daily to achieve.

Madam Speaker, this is in contrast to any action taken to set up an alternative State or overthrow the current Government, as these actions are unlawful and against the national interest. They threaten the well-being of all Fijians, especially our people in the rural and maritime areas. Improving the lives of Fijians in rural and maritime areas is only possible if our national integrity is preserved and we can ensure economic and social stability. It is only possible when we respect the will of the people, who had freely expressed their choice of Government in the last General Elections.

Madam Speaker, upholding and maintaining our national sovereignty is the very foundation of our existence as an independent nation. When we have our sovereignty, we will have widespread prosperity and this will reach every Fijian, including our rural and maritime populations.

What do we mean by sovereignty? We mean that the State has the power and the authority to govern its land, its territorial seas and its people according to the rules, principles and values set out in the Constitution. Madam Speaker, to put it more bluntly, the State through the constitutionally appointed organs of Government has the right to say what is permitted and what is not permitted in this country.

Two essential things flow from this. Firstly, the State cannot tolerate and will not tolerate any attempts either internally or externally to interfere with its sovereignty. Secondly, the extent of our national resources, any interference with our sovereignty will be resisted and destroyed.

When the State is allowed to do its job, it can accomplish greater things for the Fijian people. I appeal to everyone to look at evidence around you, see the:

- 1) roads, bridges, jetties, ports and other infrastructure projects our Government is developing and has already developed;
- 2) free education we are providing for all Fijian students, including those in remote areas; and
- 3) investments we are making in communications infrastructure to bring all Fijians into our national conversation.

Those are all part of our Government's larger strategy to put Fijians in rural and maritime areas on equal footing, so that we may step into Fiji's future together.

We are making excellent progress in getting back on the right track and our people are already benefiting from that, and we are gaining international, regional and national respect. As for those who wish to spread discontent and unrest, I ask: what do they have to offer? They have no plans to develop our nation for the benefit of ordinary Fijians and they only offer their own selfish motivations. Abandon these false prophets; they threaten our national sovereignty and the livelihoods of every hard-working Fijian.

Madam Speaker, citizenship and residence in our country are privileges. These privileges are made available subject to conditions. These conditions are put in place for the benefit of our society as a whole. When we respect those conditions, we will continue to be a productive society and make an even larger impact on the global stage.

Madam Speaker, may I conclude by saying that our sovereignty is ultimately about us, because we are a democratic republic. We, who are the citizens of this land, have agreed to stand together under one flag and one Constitution.

It is on all of us to protect and uphold the sovereignty of Fiji, so that we may entrust it one day to our children and our future generations. I once again, thank His Excellency for his Address.

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- Madam Speaker, my fellow Fijians and visitors here with us in the gallery and those watching at home, a very good morning to you all.

In reply to His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau's Address at the Opening of the New Session of Parliament and having just recently celebrated "International Democracy Day", I wish to speak on the subject of democracy.

Madam Speaker, democracy is derived from the Greek word *demos* or people, dating back to the fifth Century. It is defined as Government in which the supreme power is vested in the people. In some forms, democracy can be exercised directly by the people. In large societies, it is by the people through their elected agents. Democracy is government of the people, by the people and for the people. Freedom and democracy are often used interchangeably, but the two are not synonymous. Democracy is a set of ideas and principles about freedom, but also consists of practices and procedures that have evolved over the course of a long and often unstable history. Democracy is the institutionalisation of freedom.

Madam Speaker, democracy promotes fundamental values such as religious freedom and worker rights. Democracy helps create a more secure, stable and prosperous environment in which Fiji can advance its national interests.

Madam Speaker, democratically governed nations such as our own strive to secure the peace and deter aggression, expand open markets and promote economic development, protect all Fijians and uphold human and worker rights, avoid humanitarian crisis and improve our local environment. With these goals in mind, Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government seeks to:

- 1) Promote democracy as a means to achieve security, stability and prosperity for all Fijians;
- 2) Assist Non-Governmental Organisations and Civil Society Organisations in implementing democratic principles;
- 3) Assist democracy advocates to establish vibrant organisations locally; and
- 4) Identify and denounce regimes that deny Fijians the right to choose their leaders in elections that are free, fair and transparent.

This Government is committed to supporting and promoting democratic programmes throughout Fiji.

Madam Speaker, democracy and respect for human rights have long been integral to our honourable Prime Minister through core values of integrity, diversity, meritocracy and self-reliance.

The FijiFirst Government enshrined the Bill of Rights in our Constitution, an unprecedented legal document that protects and guarantees the rights of all Fijians, no matter who they are or where they come from. We look forward to working with those who embrace genuine and inclusive democracy. We will oppose any attempt to restrict the rights of others or to hold power through coercion. Democracy depends on free and fair elections, strong and accountable institutions, and a strong respect for the rights of the marginalised.

To my fellow Members, I have no hesitation in saying that each one of us in this House is intimately attached to the soil of this beautiful country, just like the famous *Tagimoucia* of Taveuni and the *Sekoula* Trees of the West.

Madam Speaker, we pledge ourselves to continue liberating all Fijians from poverty, deprivation, suffering and all forms of discrimination. We commit ourselves to the construction of a complete, just and lasting peace. We shall continue to build a society in which all Fijians, our youths, as well as future generations are able to walk tall and proud, without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity.

Madam Speaker, I personally and wholeheartedly thank His Excellency, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau for his illustrious and unwavering service to every Fijian here and abroad during his tenure.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. I. DELANA.- Madam Speaker, it is a great honour for me to be part of the Opening of the new Session of Parliament and to congratulate His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji on his magnificent lesson on the nature of democracy. I would also like to take this opportunity to show my appreciation to the current Government, the honourable Prime Minister and members of Cabinet, especially the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports (Lt. Col. L.B. Tuitubou), for his constant support, guidance and leadership. It is more than a year now since I took up this challenge and there are so many people who have helped me both personally and professionally, and I am for ever grateful to them. I also believe we all need to uphold ourselves, as Members of this august House, for our collective contribution to our nation's achievement.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Youth and Sports has taken on a very challenging role, to empower and stir Fiji's young people towards a future of sustainable development. This task is a mammoth one. Madam Speaker, our Ministry is no doubt the smallest Ministry but with the leadership of its Minister and senior officials, we remain committed to ensure that all young people, even those at the remote part of Fiji, are reached and heard. Our youth needs to understand that their Government values them and is working hard to provide them a future that will reward them for their talents and hard work. Fortunately, our commitment to democracy, fairness and equality drives us to make sure our limited resources and assistance are evenly distributed to all youth clubs across Fiji.

Madam Speaker, so far the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports and I have visited close to 500 youth clubs since we took office. There are 2,500 youth clubs registered with the Ministry and we will continue to reach out to many more in the future. These visits have helped us to re-evaluate our programmes, provide targeted assistance and trainings, seek integrated partners for youth development and understand the real plight and challenges our youths encounter in their communities.

Youth comprised 38 per cent of Fiji's population and we must ensure that we engage them now, while they are developing their independence and testing the values they have learnt in schools, at home and in their places of worship. Nothing can guarantee their future, for they will make it themselves, but our Ministry, with the leadership of our dedicated Minister, will ensure that they are given the necessary attention and assistance, as well as necessary tools, guidance, mentoring and assistance to put them on the right track and to eliminate obstacles that are born of poverty, isolation or low expectation. We believe that if the youth are secure, Fiji will be secured in the years to come.

Madam Speaker, in His Excellency the President's Opening Address on Monday, 14th September, 2015, he reminded us of the interests of the youth of Fiji, and may I quote from page 6 of the *Daily Hansard*:

“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, this is what the Ministry and its current leadership have embarked on. We are making sure that this Government empowers young people to develop their skills, to contribute positively to nation building at all levels, and to secure as much as possible better livelihoods for themselves. We are grateful for the increase in Budget by Government for 2015, and we will continue to request for more, to deliver the kind of intelligent Government assistance that will create a new standard for youth development and lift our young people to greater heights.

Madam Speaker, I wish to voice my pride as a Fijian, who was raised to believe in democracy in the provisions set out in the 2013 Constitution regarding greater equality for all Fijians. May I congratulate the Government once again for its innovation to produce the Constitution in Braille form, making it a first for Fiji. This alone, Madam Speaker, is a strong statement of this nation's respect and concern for disabled minority of Fijians. I again thank the Government and Honourable Members of this august Chamber for always keeping the plight of the disabled community and citizens before us and before our fellow Fijians.

Madam Speaker, the achievement of the Special Olympics Fiji at the recent World Games in Los Angeles speaks volume about the abilities of our disabled citizens namely, that the people we call "disabled@ are very capable and often very courageous and determined. Fiji sent six athletes to the World Games and brought home eight medals – three gold, two silver and three bronze medals. A great achievement indeed! This is the testament to the potential and power of our disabled athletes and citizens.

Madam Speaker, our Honourable Minister stated in this august Chamber a few weeks ago that Fiji has chosen to host the Inaugural Special Olympics Games for the Pacific in 2017. This would be a great opportunity for Government to showcase again to the region that my election as an Honourable Member of this Parliament and all programmes and initiatives designed for disabled persons in Fiji are genuine, and that we care for and will provide equal platforms and opportunities for our disabled citizens. We, as the Ministry of Youth of Sports, will continue to provide necessary platforms, strengthen and provide boost and confidence to the disabled community so that they can become productive citizens of this nation. The disabled do not want charity or pity, they do not want to take from the country, and they want to contribute as equal citizens as much as they can. We have included them in our sports and youth development programmes and we will continue to advocate for their maximum involvement and participation at all levels of the community.

Madam Speaker, as we speak, the Ministry is wrapping up its preparation for the 2015 National Youth Sports Conference to be held at the FMF Gymnasium from tomorrow until Thursday, bringing 400

youth from across Fiji, including Rotuma, Kioa and Rabi. This Conference is another platform whereby the Ministry will capitalise on, to empower and provide necessary training for youth.

This year, the Ministry is gathering underprivileged youth and youth clubs from the rural and remotest parts of Fiji. The programmes are designed holistically to meet every need of these young people at their level, while taking into consideration the current trend of developments. I wish to also extend an invitation to the Honourable Members of this august Parliament to pay a visit to the conference venue in your free time, and show support to the youth of this nation. The conference programmes vary from thematic presentations to skill training, cultural shows and sports programmes.

Madam Speaker, to conclude, I once again thank the Government for the trust placed in me to assist in the daunting task of empowering youth. I again hope to remain committed to this calling and provide the necessary assistance when and where necessary, one that brings all youth together and provide the impetus for positive development.

Vinaka vakalevu, thank you.

HON. ROKO T.T.S. DRAUNIDALO.- Madam Speaker and Honourable Members of the People's House, again, I am grateful for the opportunity given to me by the electorates to give this response to His Excellency the President's Address to this august Chamber.

Madam Speaker, I acknowledge that it is the convention that the elected government writes the Address of the Head of State, and we all know that. However, it is certainly not the convention that the elected government disrespects the Office of the President or Governor or Queen by writing for him or her a politically partisan Address on very sensitive and live issues that embroil the Head of State in petty politics.

Madam Speaker, that is because the Office of the Head of State is one that should be independent, neutral and above all the politicking. This includes the appearance of independence and neutrality. That is why their speeches are referred to as "gracious speeches", exalted ones, and not for muck raking.

Madam Speaker, I have constitutional backing for this, it is in Chapter 4 of the Constitution and I will leave that to my Honourable colleagues to further enlighten us on that issue. Unfortunately, this elected Government could not respect the Office of Head of State enough to write him a gracious Address, especially when it was his last as Head of State. Very sad indeed!

Sad but not surprising. Well I am certainly not surprised! This is, after all, a revolution, where all conventions, laws, good manners, et cetera, go out the window. The elected Government talked of their revolution and this is what revolutions entail, turning the State on its head to change the order of things.

Due to my respect for the Office of the Head of State, I shall address that speech in a way that stays well way from His Excellency, while at the same time addressing the issues contained therein.

As many have expressed anger and dismay that His Excellency would have read that speech but my answer to that is this, His Excellency led by example to the Military, for which he is Commander in Chief.

Let me start on this subheading by saying that before we got this Section 131(2) of the Constitution which reads, and I quote:

"It shall be the overall responsibility of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces to ensure at all times the security, defence and well-being of Fiji and all Fijians."

That plenary power, Madam Speaker, before we got that and gave it to the Military, came under the authority of the Parliament via the Executive through Cabinet and Minister for Defence. What we now have with Section 131 puts the Military, in theory, above Parliament. That provision of the Constitution gives the Military a greater scope of governance than Parliament which limits us in Section 46 to law making, full stop.

Of course, the assumption is that, in making laws for the realm we, in this the People's House, are concerned about the nation's peace, order and good governance but that overriding responsibility is spelt out under the Military power in Section 131 of the Constitution and not Section 46. So, in the haste and non-consultative way in which this Constitution was made, the then unelected Government put this executive institution with armouries and a bad past of interfering with Parliamentary rule, above the people and the People's House, which now includes the FijiFirst Government. But thankfully, the power in Section 131 of the Constitution can be read as one which gives the Military a discretion. That is certainly how I would interpret that Section to the Military, so that it exercises these extraordinary powers wisely.

Recently, I read that the Military says it is using its powers under the Constitution to do things, like help the Police with investigations, go shopping while fully kitted or what have you, but that power also means the exercise of restraint to do nothing in the interests of peace, order and good governance.

At this point, I wish to draw the Military's attention, through you, Madam Speaker, to one of my favourite excerpts, from the writings of Thucydides, the Greek military philosopher who wrote and I quote:

"Of all manifestations of power, restraint is the most respected."

Some powers, Madam Speaker, are best used when they are not. This one in Section 131 of the Constitution is one of them.

The Military must understand that the wide powers given to them means that they are no longer the political football of the elected Government, to be used in political fights between political parties. This elected government or any other into the future.

Section 131 of the Constitution puts them above and that gives them a discretion not to act, when told to do so by political masters, if it is in their opinion, in the best interest of national security, the nation, its peoples and the people's House because, Madam Speaker, it is the people who pay their salaries. They have to heel to the people and not the other way around.

To most democrats, including myself, this is anathema. How can an unelected body, paid for by the people, second guess the people and the elected House of which FijiFirst is now a majority? I find that disgraceful.

However, Madam Speaker, that is the genius that only the honourable and learned Attorney-General can explain, as this is the Constitution which he drafted for us and which now places heavy expectations and burdens, requiring the balancing of expectations and rigorous thought of competing interests, the kinds of burdens usually reserved for elected officials, at the feet of the Military.

In terms of solutions, on how to deal with this bad law that we have, I urge the Military to use Section 131 in that light of restraint. Not only must it restrain itself from carrying out another Military *coup*, as it is the only institution that commits *coups* in this country, it must also restrain itself from being used in political fights by politely refusing orders that they believe are not consistent with the overall good governance of the nation for now and into the future.

In that context, Madam Speaker, in reading that speech, as politically partisan and muck raking as it was, the Head of State as Commander-in-Chief, led by example to the troops in showing restraint, he brought his high office down to defer to the 32 elected Members on the Government side. He did what Heads of State in proper democracies do; they defer to the will of the people, the People's House, proper democracies with Constitutions, like the 1997 and 1970, but those Constitutions were overthrown by the Military in 1987 and 2006 respectively, after their attempt in 2000 was unsuccessful.

Now, under the 2013 Constitution, I would have counselled the Commander-in-Chief to exercise even more restraint under Section 131, and not read the speech prepared by the elected Government because it embroiled his high office in political muck raking, which is well beneath the neutrality and grace expected of the Head of State.

The lesson, however, to the Military from the speech of the Commander-in-Chief is that you must always defer to the elected Government of the day. The people will judge whether the elected government gets another term or not - that is none of its business. They should not be involved in any way; stay in the shadows and do what they are told by the elected government, after tendering advice on national security issues.

Again, Madam Speaker, I say, Section 131 of the Constitution gives them even more power, and the Head of State as Commander-in-Chief had the discretion to not read the speech prepared by the elected Government, if he assessed, after taking advice from the Military that such speech would not augur well for peace, order and good government.

The Military can and should use its powers under Section 131 of the Constitution to independently and fearlessly advise the elected Government of the day to not embroil the Military in political matters, as this leads to trouble of the kind that we all wish to avoid.

Again, Madam Speaker, I say to the Military Forces through you, if there are no security threats, and the Honourable Minister of Defence has said this quite a few times, then it must independently and fearlessly advise the elected Government of the same, as national security is in its domain. If it believes that the elected Government is saying and doing things that incite or may incite security issues, then it is the duty of the Military to independently and without fear, advise the elected Government of the same. However, the Military must never usurp the Government, that is not its role.

In that same vein, Madam Speaker, the Military must not publicly comment or act on political matters. That is not their business, because no one elected them.

On that note, Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, I am pleased to note that what was in the print media a few days ago, in which the Military was requested to make comment on what the Honourable Nawaikula said on social media about the President's Address, but the Land Force Commander resisted, as it was in the political sphere. That is encouraging, and I would urge them to stay on that track.

Moving on to the other topics contained in the speech by the Head of State, let me start with the electoral mandate of the elected Government and let me say this much; the fact that the Opposition is here to face the elected Government in Parliament shows the world that we have accepted that it is the elected Government.

In fact, we have been asking the elected Government many, many, many times for us to sit more often in this, the People's House, to thrash national issues out in a peaceful and civilised way, with the elected Government as the Government of the day and we, as the elected Opposition.

At this juncture, Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, may I say that we are one year after the polls, and 2018 is just around the corner, yet the elected Government is still very sensitive about this matter. They are very, very sensitive, Madam Speaker, it is very embarrassing. We are embarrassed for them.

As with the other desperate acts of the Government to create drama and tension in the country, this is all to do with the Government getting bad feedback from the electorates. I have been given very good advice on that. The people are not happy with them. We, in the Opposition, are going to win the Elections in 2018, and it is driving people a little crazy.

Madam Speaker, again, making the Head of State use the word "free" when referring to the MOG Report on the Elections, when the word used in that report was "credible" and not "free". If that sounds loopy, I would ask anyone who takes issue with it to ask me and the foreign governments who compiled that report because they have their government's interests at heart and not Fiji, that is our interest.

Madam Speaker, again, embroiling the high office of the President in muck raking is very disrespectful. It is all to do with 2018 because we are exchanging sides of the House, we are going over there after the 2018 polls and they are coming over here. Do not look so down, it is exciting being on this side of the House, and it is character building - good for some of you.

Now to the issue of "sedition", Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order, order!. I would like you to withdraw the words "look so dumb". It does not augur well to the respectful language of the House.

HON. ROKO T.T.S. DRAUNIDALO.- Which word, Madam Speaker?

MADAM SPEAKER.- "Look so dumb". You are referring to Members as "looking so dumb".

HON. ROKO T.T.S. DRAUNIDALO.- No, "down."

HON. DR. B.C. PRASAD.- No, she said "down."

MADAM SPEAKER.- Sorry, you may continue.

HON. ROKO T.T.S. DRAUNIDALO.- You wish to substitute it, Madam.

MADAM SPEAKER.- No. I think you understood that I wrongly heard the word, so you are not allowed to make that comment. So "down" is the word.

HON. ROKO T.T.S. DRAUNIDALO.- Not content with disrespecting the Office of the President, the speech prepared by the Government of the day totally disrespected the independent judicial arm of the State, by finding those charged with offences before the courts guilty as charged, made worse by the presence in the House of the judges, as the Head of State read the speech. Imagine that, Madam Speaker, the judges sitting by your side up there and the Head of State finding those charged before the courts guilty as charged; very disrespectful.

I could go on and on here about the "contempt of court" issue and bringing the judiciary into disrepute, but the honourable and Learned Attorney-General is well versed in it. He has used it or the threat of it effectively, to curb free speech in this country because it is alright to curb the free speech of everyone, but not theirs. The Honourable and learned Attorney-General even tried to put me in prison in 2007 or 2008 (I cannot remember now) while I was Vice-President of the Law Society, for contempt of court, but sanity eventually prevailed and they withdrew the charges against me.

There you go, Madam Speaker, it is all right for some to disrespect the Judiciary but not all right for others, it is embarrassing. And these matters and allegations of sedition have to be proved in a court of law, not in this court of law making and we will (as I said in the last sitting) not discuss matters before the court. We will respect the court's independent deliberations.

And again, I say, Madam Speaker, more smoke screen - all with the jitters about 2018 as we in the Opposition are looking forward to free and fair elections, after which we will find ourselves on the other side of the House.

What is not smoke screen and that to which the Head of State referred is the matter of the national economy. We would have expected His Excellency the President to talk about measures the Government has, or will put in place, to ensure that public funds are better acquitted and accounted for, like Head 50 or explain to the people why we needed a closed session of Parliament to talk about their money. Shady, shady stuff, Madam Speaker, and the people who are voters are not fools, nor are the investors with a few million or hundred millions to spare.

Now, this issue of the economy is a national security issue, which I hope the Military, under Section 131, is tendering independent, competent advice without fear or favour to the elected Government. Again, I would have preferred that the Military have no role in this as the elected Government has been elected but that is the law now under Section 131, given to us by the Attorney.

Moving on, I must say that allowing irresponsible economic management to continue without caution will drive us to one of the multilaterals like the IMF as a last resort, which as the Minister has admitted, come with their austere *laissez-faire* economic measures. Now dealing with those is always a way of giving up our sovereignty to foreign interests. I hope that the elected Government does not take us there with its 'know it all' and 'non-consultative' approach.

The international literature is replete with cases where the multilaterals take over national sovereignty to have their loans repaid by managing national assets in the form of natural resources and this will be made easier in Fiji with the land bank mechanism, the powers of compulsory acquisition with the removal of entrenched provisions for native lands (90 per cent) and removal of *qoliqoli* interests and benefits by the Surfing Decree.

Those are the real issues of national security and good governance which confront us and which will turn the people and voters in their wisdom to elect us in 2018.

Moving on, Madam Speaker, please allow me to thank the incumbent Head of State for his public service to the nation when he was Speaker of the People's House. Not many people will disagree with me when I say that he was one of the best Speakers of a democratic House, not just Fiji but anywhere in the wWorld. He was well acquainted with the Standing Orders and he went out of his way to be fair to the underdogs - the lot with lesser numbers in the House. It ensured meaningful progress of democracy. He obviously did not like bullies and oppressive majorities, he copped political fire for it but he was greatly respected and we thank him.

We also want to wish the national team well against the Australia and Madam Speaker on the issue of military *coups* the honourable Prime Minister himself has admitted in meetings that it was the Military that committed the coups of 1987, 2000 and 2006, so I suggest that they talk to each other all the time so that they can reassure each other for the benefit of the nation.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Jiosefa Dulakiverata.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Madam Speaker, Honourable Acting Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ministers, fellow Parliamentarians, visitors in the gallery, ladies and gentlemen; *ni sa bula vinaka*.

Madam Speaker, I rise to join other Honourable Members before me in thanking His Excellency the President for His most gracious Address, delivered in this august House on 14th September 2015. His Excellency's Address has not only set the platform and foundation for a new journey as we look for ways and means to create a strong and united Fiji but, more importantly, it has also required us that in order to achieve this, there are basic truths and catalysts that need to be identified and applied to the building process.

Madam Speaker, under Section 81(4) of the Constitution, "the President shall open its annual session of parliament with address outlining the policies and programme of the government." Unfortunately the Address has fallen short of this requirement.

The bulk of His Excellency's Address is focused on, and I quote: "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 national interest."

It is unfortunate, Madam Speaker, that His Excellency the President has been advised to speak on this issue when the matter is before the court. Since he had spoken, I am also obliged under section 60 of the Standing Order to make a reply.

Madam Speaker, I also would like to suggest to the Government to please quickly find a solution to the problem for the benefit of the nation. It appears, Madam Speaker, that this Government has a very short memory. The people of this country still vividly remember how this Government came into being; the passage it came through and the tactics it employed, I am sorry to say that His Excellency the President was implying that we should ignore all these, forget and move forward.

Madam Speaker, we are human beings. We have a mind of our own and we have our right of thinking and association and should not be dictated upon. To address the situation, I strongly suggest, Madam Speaker, that the current Government should establish a True and Reconciliation Commission to address all the ills of the past eight years. This will take away all the mistrust and the suspicion people have. When we reconcile, we will all be free and would then move forward on a new beginning.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President stated that he is extremely proud of our Constitution. But, Madam Speaker, I am sorry to say that I tend to differ with the remarks, as this Constitution failed to fully traverse the democratic process, it lacked full public consultation.

Madam Speaker, I would like to thank His Excellency the President for highlighting the Government on its infrastructure development. However, I fail to note Government's plan on the development of primary industries and other sector of the economies. Investors need to know the Government plans as they too also want to strategise on theirs.

Madam Speaker, with regards to the management of the economy I commend the Government for the reform initiatives being introduced. I am, however, concerned on the level of overseas borrowing that the Government has undertaken on infrastructure developments. There are global elements and environment, Madam Speaker, which are beyond our control, which could have negative effects on our capability to service debts. I wish to remind the Government of the famous slogan "live within your means".

Borrowing funds for infrastructure development is a noble intention, but it must be remembered that this infrastructure would depreciate in years to come. It is therefore necessary to set aside funds preferably in sinking funds to meet the future maintenance costs.

Madam Speaker, whenever we try to comment on the state of the economy, we are accused of doing so for political expediency, or to score political points. It must be remembered that we are put in this House by people who voted for us and we have obligations and commitments to express their sentiments on issues of national importance. The economy is not only a Government business, it is everyone's concern, including the Opposition.

Madam Speaker, I am glad that His Excellency the President had highlighted the legislative programme that will be tabled in this House in the next Parliamentary session. There are altogether four new laws that will be introduced and with the reduced number of sittings, it will be impractical to fully address all those laws.

This House is mandated with the task of making laws. The Bills should be thoroughly researched and deliberated by the House for the benefit of all the people. All Bills that go through Parliament should follow the Parliamentary process. It is unfortunate, Madam Speaker, to say that most of the Bills that have been passed through the last session of Parliament had been conveniently rushed through under Standing Order 51.

We, in the Opposition, want to contribute constructively to the Bills presented and we must be allowed sufficient time to raise our views, that is democracy. I would only have appreciated if some of the draconian decrees that were introduced by the Military Government were repealed or amended, such as the Surfing Area Decree and the Mahogany Decree, to name a few.

Madam Speaker, as Opposition's spokesman for land and mineral resources, I would like to comment on a subject that is crucial for the economy and dear to our hearts – the ALTA issue. The ALTA is of critical importance in regard to the security of tenure for farmers, particularly sugarcane farmers. We also know that sugar is crucial for our economy and everything should be done to help sustain and grow the industry. These subjects will be only openly discussed and it is in the best interests of the industry, farmers, landowners and the nation as a whole that legislation be reviewed immediately.

The area of concern to be looked at is the basis of assessing rental for the following reasons:

- 1) the security of land of tenure for the tenants; and
- 2) an equitable rental return that will safeguard and secure the needs and aspiration of the landowners.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President stated, and I quote:

“Your right are protected in our Constitution for all times. Have you lost your culture, your identity, your land since the promulgation of the Constitution or since the FijiFirst Government was elected? The answer is an emphatic no. The Constitution is a safeguard.”

Madam Speaker, the Constitution is very clear on those issues but the action by this current Government is the opposite. We have had cases where expired native leases were renewed, or new leases issued to another tenant, without consultation or consent of the landowners being obtained. Where are the landowners' rights in this instance? May I ask, where are the landowners' right to property as a protection in this regard? These dealings are not done to freehold property owners, they are only practised with the *iTaukei* own land.

Madam Speaker, allow me to quote from His Excellency the past President, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara on page 7 of the *Hansard Report of the Parliamentary Debate* on March 1995, and I quote:

“We cannot have long-term peace and unity unless every citizen and every community in a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society feels a genuine sense of participation and sharing, both in the political process and economic developments.”

Madam Speaker, promises and utterings from the current Government do not guarantee a task and equitable society. We must have actions and policies introduced to ensure this.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President stated that his number one priority as President is to engage with the young people. He further stated and I quote:

“The younger generation has no interest in listening to the voices of division and fear mongering. They want stability, opportunity to carve out worthwhile life for themselves and each other. They want to build one Fiji.”

Madam Speaker, the Youth Employment Centre has recorded the highest unprecedented number of unemployed youths in Fiji, approximately 40,000 and out of these, approximately 3,000 with tertiary qualifications. It is Government's duty to create a conducive environment for economic development that will enhance job creation. The Government of the day should take this on board as a measure of failure on the initiative in this regard.

Madam Speaker, the current policy within substantial contract to companies that bring in their own labour force does not help in this situation. A fair portion of the contract is reverted overseas for expected workers' salaries.

Madam Speaker, before I conclude, His Excellency had indicated that his term will be finished in November, 2015. I wish to take this opportunity to thank His Excellency the President for the excellent work that he had carried out during our most difficult and trying times. I wish His Excellency good health, long and prosperous life and every success in his future endeavours.

With those words, Madam Speaker, I thank His Excellency the President for his most gracious Address.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I now seek leave of Parliament to extend our time, just a few minutes because we have only one more speaker for the day, so instead of coming back after lunch just to hear one more speech, if we can just continue and have the last speaker of the day.

Does anyone oppose?

HONOURABLE MEMBERS.- No.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you very much, I will now give the floor to the Honourable Lorna Eden.

HON. L. EDEN.- Madam Speaker, the Acting Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen, a very good afternoon to you all.

Madam Speaker, I wish to extend my appreciation and gratitude to His Excellency the President for His most gracious Address.

I also take this opportunity to congratulate His Excellency on his long and distinguished career, diligently serving the nation and the Fijian people in a variety of roles over the years.

His Excellency's service as Commander of the RFMF, as an Ambassador, as a Permanent Secretary, as Speaker of the House, as a Minister and as our President, presiding over a period of Fiji's substantial economic growth, while ably leading us through some of the most trying times in our recent history. This speaks volumes of the qualities he possesses as a "servant of the people" while at the same time being a "true leader and an even greater statesman."

The unwavering commitment shown by His Excellency to ensure that the outcome of the 2014 General Elections is realised and that every Fijian understands the fundamental democratic principles upon which our Government, this Parliament, and our modern nation State is founded is applauded.

Madam Speaker, I fully concur with His Excellency's statement that genuine and lasting democracy to move this multi-racial country forward can only be achieved if we all put our differences aside. We should therefore, all work together by committing ourselves to upholding the principles of democracy.

Madam Speaker, as we look back since our FijiFirst Government was elected by the will of the people some 12 months ago, we have vigorously and enthusiastically implemented what we promised the people of this country during our Elections campaign, at the same time, sustaining continued growth of our economy. We are a "Can Do Government", Madam Speaker, and we believe in positive change. We do not just talk, we actually deliver.

Under our new Constitutions, Madam Speaker, we are all equal and we encourage every Fijian to stand tall and say "I am proud to be Fijian".

Madam Speaker, under the very able and strong leadership of our Minister, the Honourable Parveen Kumar, the right to housing under the Constitution is being facilitated by Government through various programmes implemented by our Ministry, with significant Government funding of \$27 million. This budget is targeted at providing public housing through the Housing Authority and the Public Rental Board, providing social housing through the Housing Assistance Relief Trust (HART), and systematically upgrading our informal settlements through a participatory approach with Non-Government Organisations, civil society organisations, municipal councils, landowning units, communities and donor agencies.

Government, through various initiatives for home ownership, has assisted the people of Fiji through Housing Authority. These schemes include interest subsidies, squatter relocation grants, loan guarantees, concessional loans negotiations, social housing schemes and the latest housing assistance grant.

A grant of \$500,000 was given to Housing Authority to subsidise financially disadvantaged customers who have paid more than one and half times for their loan. It also assisted customers in its village scheme accounts whose annual income did not exceed \$6,500, and it provided development subsidies to decrease the cost of land development.

Madam Speaker, our Ministry has also provided a total grant of \$12.9 million for the development of public and social housing needs of all Fijians. This includes the Lagilagi Housing Project of 154 units and the Public Rental Board Housing Development of another 89 new rental units.

Currently, there are altogether 121 informal settlements, with around 77,000 people, which is nine per cent of the population. Government has been able to reduce the total number of settlements on State

land through participatory informal settlement upgrading works, ultimately resulting in securing 450 residential leases, the deserving residents in the Suva-Nausori corridor and Ba.

Madam Speaker, the programme relating to full upgrades of settlements on *iTaukei* land requires partnership with *iTaukei* Land Trust Board. Our Ministry has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the iTLTB, and acquired a five year development leases that will assist another 6,000 people.

Within the next five years, our Ministry plans to complete 12 more settlements on state and *iTaukei* land, securing leases for around 2,500 deserving residents. We would be replicating this programme with a focus on the Western and Northern Divisions, to ensure wider coverage of housing upgrades throughout the country.

Madam Speaker, in line with our Government's commitment, our Ministry is also continued to diligently administer and monitor Government Housing Assistance Grants for first time home-owners, house fire victims, financially disadvantaged groups, the destitute, disabled and elderly, to ensure that they have equitable access to housing opportunities.

Madam Speaker, during the last two years, our ministry has assisted 430 first time homeowners. This group comprises 193 Fijians assisted through \$5,000 grant for the purchase of readily built homes and another 237 Fijians through \$10,000 grant for the purchase of land and house construction.

Madam Speaker, on economic policy reforms, we are aligning our policies and programmes to those highlighted under Fiji's Green Growth Framework. This will ensure that we are speaking the same language but more importantly, it will ensure efficient utilisation of our resources. In line with efforts to enhance investment confidence, a reduced planning approval processing timeline has been implemented to ease doing business in Fiji, effective January 2015.

Madam Speaker, our Ministry is also committed to provide every citizen of this country a clean and healthy environment. Waste management and clean-up programmes for our towns and cities have been incorporated within the programmes of all our municipal councils. The development of a waste transfer station for the Central Division, the conservation of our major water catchment areas through the Reef to Ridge programme, will also soon be implemented, in line with international conservation obligations.

On this note, Madam Speaker, our Ministry also acknowledges the general fact that urbanization is an all important factor on the global development agenda. More people now live in urban regions than in rural communities, and it is anticipated that by 2015, more than 60 per cent of the population will become urban dwellers.

In confirming His Excellency's statement on infrastructure development, Government, through our ministry, is investing in urban areas through market and bus stand upgrading, development of multi-purpose courts and children and senior citizens parks, installation of solar lights and capital purchases such as garbage contracted trucks.

The role of the National Fire Authority has increased to include emergency services and geographic coverage for fire services has expanded with the establishment of new fire stations for Korolevu, Korovou and Savusavu.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, I echo His Excellency the President's call for us to corporately work together, to advance national interests, to debate and wage battle of ideas with civility, with humility and with national unity, national interest and the common good always at the forefront of our minds. If we work together, Madam Speaker, positive changes can and will happen.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Acting Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Members, I thank you for your time.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I thank you all for your contributions to the debate today. That has brought us to the end of our sitting day, also the end of the list of speakers that are to present today.

We will now adjourn Parliament until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.36 p.m.