

THURSDAY, 16TH OCTOBER, 2014

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

MADAM SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services and honourable Assistant Minister for Youth and Sports.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Wednesday, 15th October, 2014, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Votes cast:

Ayes	-	44
Not voted	-	6

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIR

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, at the sitting of Parliament yesterday, there appears to have been some confusion regarding the procedure for taking a point of order. For the assistance of all honourable Members, I will outline the correct course to be followed. Rather than objecting to the content of a speech from their seat, the Member should rise in his or her place and seek the call by saying "Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order", and only that. It is only after the Chair recognises the Member, should the Member start addressing the point. The honourable Member who was speaking at the time of interruption should resume his or her seat. Having heard the point of order, the Speaker may choose to hear further arguments on the point or rule immediately. Depending upon the ruling, the Member who was speaking at the time the point was taken would continue his or speech and, or obey the ruling of the Chair.

On another matter, I would like to remind those Members, who have not yet made their inaugural speech in this debate, of the Convention that it is highly undesirable for their speech to contain controversial and provocative materials and that, as far as possible, their speech should be relevant to the content of His Excellency's the President's opening Speech. So far, I believe the Chair has been very tolerant in this regard and it would be regrettable at this stage of the debate, if the Chair is forced to invoke the provision of Standing Order 67 and direct a Member to terminate

his or her speech. I would ask Members to observe the Convention and practice what is outlined above.

Honourable Members, we would have one speaker less today, as the Minister for Health and Medical Services, the honourable Jone Usamate is still out of the country and should be in tomorrow. He will therefore, be given the opportunity to deliver his maiden speech tomorrow.

URGENT ORAL QUESTION

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order, and I request to ask an urgent oral question in accordance with Standing Order 43(1) and this is to do with *Ebola* precautions.

Although Fiji is relatively isolated, Madam Speaker, the tourists and the general air and sea traffic, arriving and departing our shores are significant and the air links to the United States of America (USA) and then onward travel to and from other countries mean that we can still have an individual arriving with the virus. Given the potential of the epidemic to worsen before it is expected to be brought under control, may the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services, or the Government, please inform Parliament of the following:

- 1) Does the Ministry for Health and Medical Services have in place any plans to create any public awareness about the *Ebola* virus and what can be done to prevent it;
- 2) What plans do we have to effectively isolate any suspected cases;
- 3) Has the Ministry of Health started any training of health personnel to handle cases while maintaining their own safety;
- 4) Do these plans include the establishment of an *Ebola* testing laboratory, to enable quick results;
- 5) Have all border control officials and airline personnel been briefed on this virus and are they ready to conduct proper screening of visitors and returning residents; and
- 6) What plans have we got in place for the screening of our returning police contingent from Liberia?

Madam Speaker, with your indulgence, may I table this oral question.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, thank you very much for bringing up such an urgent issue right now and I will call on the Leader of Government in Parliament to respond.

HON. LEADER OF GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the oral question raised by the honourable Member.

In the absence of the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services, who will not arrive until tomorrow night, the Government is requesting for time until after lunch to reply to that oral question.

On the matter of the police troops who have returned from overseas missions, the honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs is making the necessary arrangements with PRUNE in New York, to make sure that the relevant police and soldiers are free from the concerns that have been raised by the honourable Member.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will be having a response to this issue after lunch today.

**RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE MOTION TO THANK
HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT ON HIS ADDRESS**

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA. – Madam Speaker, I rise as an honoured man this morning upon this very special occasion - humbled by the honour given by God, the Creator and sustainer of life as well as the Fijians who voted for me in the last Election. I also rise as a Member of the FijiFirst Party, as an elected and thankful candidate. Further, I rise as one of the elected 50 Members of Parliament; entrusted by God and all Fijians with a great sense of responsibility to move our beloved Fiji forward.

Madam Speaker, I am indeed humbled and honoured to make my first speech in this place of national significance, which I never dreamt that I will find a place in one day but with God's grace, I have, eventually.

It is appropriate that I pay tribute to the great leaders - men and women who have served the nation through this forum, some of whom have passed on but their legacy lingers on, while others are still around, enjoying their twilight years.

Madam Speaker, I thank God for your life and that of your family and on the same note, I join my other colleagues here in Parliament in congratulating you in your election to this role. History has been created and this milestone will surely be a source of inspiration to women and young girls of this nation. Madam, we look forward to working with you.

MADAM SPEAKER. – Thank you.

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, I acknowledge with appreciation the endorsement by the honourable Prime Minister, that I contest the last Election as a party candidate. I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate the honourable Prime Minister in his role, and I wish him and his family the very best of everything.

Madam Speaker, I also wish to congratulate the honourable Leader of the Opposition and the honourable Members of the Opposition for their equally important role. We look forward to working with you in the betterment of our beloved nation and its people. In so doing, we will be responding positively to the call by the Head of State, His Excellency the President, as he sees it, and I wholeheartedly agree that the greatest challenge before us, honourable Members, is working together to move our nation forward.

Honourable Members we have no other choice but learn and re-learn on how to work and live together in and outside Parliament. The first step towards this end, in my view, is forgiveness. Unforgiveness is cancerous, both to the person and to society as a whole. Given each of our faith background, honourable Members, we know that this is essential and is a basic tenet of all our faith. Once forgiveness is sought and given, only then will real and genuine restoration and a process of working together could be carried out. If we choose otherwise, this bondage of unforgiveness will surely be a barrier to our work in Parliament. I pray that God will grant us the wisdom and strength to forgive people who have wronged us.

Madam Speaker, since my fellow Members and I were sworn in on 6th October, 2014, I have had time to once again reflect on what actually motivated me to participate in the Election process and activities. It has cost me to reflect on my life journey.

Madam Speaker, for the benefit of those who do not know me, I come from the village of Makadru on the island paradise of Matuku, and have maternal links to the village of Tokalau in Kabara, Lau. My life journey started with a humble beginning. I was born and bred in a family of God's servant to be precise, a Methodist Church Minister, who was called to serve God and the people of this nation. Both my grandfather, the late Reverend Setareki Rika, and my father the late Reverend Maciu Rika, were called to serve through the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma. The call to serve uprooted us from our roots in the village, and took us to many parts of Fiji, which we grew to love and called home.

I come from a family of eight. We lost our dear mother, the late Elenoa Tuberi Rika, earlier on in this life of service and most recently, we have also lost a sister and a brother. Madam Speaker, naturally, I grew up in a family that was guided by Christian principles and values and to which I hold dear, and I believe that they will also help me serve all the people of this nation well in my new role as a Member of Parliament.

Madam Speaker, the God of my grandfather, father and mine as well, have looked after us well through time and space up until now and in faith. I believe it would be the same in the unknown future ahead.

Madam Speaker, at a tender age, I have witnessed God's faithfulness and goodness, with the small pay packet at the end of the month, together with a large family and many a times, a house full of relatives, we were able to obtain education. We had food on the table in every meal time; we were clothed; we had shelter and other life necessities, and most importantly, we were happy and always thankful.

Madam Speaker, in their life of service, they have taught us amongst many things, to learn to love and trust God in everything; learn to love and serve the people in their charge; learn to be a committed servant; be disciplined, healthy and strong to be able to serve better; value hard work and to learn to have a thankful heart always.

Madam Speaker, given this life experience with its many lessons learnt, I humbly accepted the responsibility and pledged to serve my nation and its people, doing my outmost best in carrying out my duties as a Member of this Parliament.

Madam Speaker, I wish to pay tribute to some senior members of my family who are not only influential in my life, but also contributors to nation-building in their own fields of service. My late grandfather, the Reverend Setareki Rika; my dad, the late Reverend Maciu Rika; my uncles who have passed on - the late Dr. Peni Rika and the late Mr. Nacanieli Rika; and my two uncles who are still alive today - Jonetani Rika who is a Missionary in Australia and Akuila Rika who is a retired civil servant.

Madam Speaker, this tribute would not be complete without acknowledging the contribution of women who assisted these men in their call to serve. My grandmother and mother - the late Kelera Nawa and Elenoa Tuberi Rika; my aunties - the late Seini Ravula and Rusila Tuidraki who were both nurses; the late Salanieta Rika, who was the Womens Interest Officer; my aunties in law - the late Alisi Nai Rika and Dorothy Rika.

Madam Speaker, with this family history to serve the nation, I am always inspired and duty-bound to do the same.

Madam Speaker, the gracious, thought-provoking and heart-warming Address by His Excellency the President, has once again reminded us of some very important pointers which every honourable Member of this Parliament need to be mindful of always. In fact, they should serve as a background in all we do and say during our term in Parliament, and these would include; firstly, to dedicate ourselves once and for all to the democratic ideals of genuine equality of all Fijians and resolve to work constructively in our new democracy in this new refurbished Parliament for the benefit of all our people. Madam Speaker, the bar has been raised and I humbly urge honourable Members of Parliament that in whatever role we play, we need to heed the call of His Excellency the President that the ideal outcome of the new vessels namely; democracy and the refurbished Parliament, should always benefit all Fijians. Secondly, our first duty must always be to keep the trust and confidence of those who have sent us here. This, in itself, is a sacred trust that we have pledged before God to uphold in our Oaths of Office. We are therefore, accountable to both God and the people of this nation.

Madam Speaker, I am fortunate and thankful to have worked and continued to work under a Government that has a clear vision and vision being that Fiji progressively becomes a modern nation State, taking a prominent role in our Region and strengthening our presence and voice in the global community.

Madam Speaker, I believe that both individually and corporately, and at all levels of society and including us, Honourable Members, we will need to work together in the maze of this vision, if you allow. Fortunately, we are not starting anew, all that we need to do is to build on the work of the last eight years towards this end. After all, four years is not long, and in no time it will be Elections time once again. The intent of the reforms is to continue to improve the lives of ordinary Fijians and better equip our young people for satisfying roles and responsibilities in a vibrant, growing and thriving economy.

Honourable Members, this is our time, this is our season, and we all need to rise above all our differences and barriers to move the nation forward and establish our mark in this Parliament that we were the Team of 50 who genuinely had Fiji and its people at heart.

Madam Speaker, I feel that in our quest for modernisation and globalisation, we should also strive to uphold time-tested values and principles that have not only made life in Fiji meaningful and desirable, but also set us apart from life experiences of bigger and modern countries. Over time and against all odds, to some degree, we have maintained our sense of family,

community and working and living together. That has and will continue to hold our very fabric of the Fiji society.

Madam Speaker, I have heard the voices of the people in the different settings - urban, rural, semi-rural, maritime and informal sector, both in my capacity as the former Commissioner Eastern and during the election campaigns. I have heard and continue to hear a mixture of voices; those full of life and hope, voice of complacency, voice of being lost with no sense of direction, those of the hopeless and worse off, the voice of anger and being frustrated with oneself, others and of life in general.

Madam Speaker, these are the same voices that have voted us into Parliament and into Government. The task before us therefore is how to respond appropriately and urgently to these different voices as they are watching and waiting.

Madam Speaker, I wish to inform the House that the members of these communities that I had visited had raised various individual and community issues which I will liaise with the relevant ministers to resolve. They had asked me to express their utmost appreciation to the honourable Prime Minister and his Government for the assistance which has enabled them to now live more decent and satisfying lives, with the hope of a much better future for their children and grandchildren. Thank you once again, honourable Prime Minister.

Madam Speaker, I am encouraged by the commitment of the Government through the various initiatives designed to alleviate poverty, provide a leg-up for ordinary Fijians who may be struggling and who look to Government to improve their lives not only in tangible ways, but most importantly in sustainable ways.

Before I conclude, Madam Speaker, I wish to raise a few general areas of concern that need to be addressed with a sense of urgency.

Firstly, my concern with the over-consumption or the abuse of *yaqona*. This menace is everywhere, in our homes, family, community, work places and even in the church. I honestly think that we need to work together to find a solution to this. Ironically, on one hand, we are trying to be economically smart and on the other hand, resources are continuously drained away through this means, and negatively impacting on the family purse, family quality time and the health of the person.

Secondly, our littering habits which have over the years negatively impacted our land and sea. Surprisingly, the scene that always greeted us years ago after a major event still greets us today. The same could be seen in some public places, workplaces and even in our neighbourhood and coastal areas. We need a clean, beautiful and safe Fiji. For that to be achieved, we will all need to band together and find solutions to this undesirable habit.

Lastly, my concern over moral decay which have manifested itself in many forms and ugly faces. Values such as honesty, respect, love, compassion, hard work and discipline need to be taught and lived in the homes and schools and also be re-enforced in all social settings, including the four walls of Parliament.

Our women and children and the population at large need to feel safe and secure everywhere and at all times. We must work together to protect these basic values and our bedrock

institutions, including our families.

Madam Speaker, I owe so much to many people, some of whom I have mentioned and acknowledged already. I wish to acknowledge with appreciation the assistance and support of the FijiFirst Party, its leader (honourable Prime Minister) management team, fellow candidates, office staff and volunteers.

Madam Speaker, I also thank all the voters who voted for Candidate 286 in the September Elections. A special thank you to the FijiFirst Team at Ovalau - Mr. Peni Boila, Lido, Samuela Raganitoga, Ratu Seru Rokotuinaceva and all the Turaga ni Yavusa on Ovalau, Mr. Kang Lee (Johnny) for giving us the space to advertise and Mr. George Patterson for assisting us in our transportation.

Madam Speaker, please allow me to say thank you to the following campaign managers, and their teams: Mosese Tawake (Vadravadra, Gau), Wate Soko (Yadrana, Lakeba, Lau), DAC Member (Vutuna, Nairai), Gade Varanise and Akuila Rika (Makadru, Matuku, Lau), Laveti Tavo (Levukana, Vanua Balavu), Akuila Saqa (Wailea Settlement), Mrs. Veronica (Samabula), Jone Vakaris and Aminio Naivalu (Mead Road Housing), and Ledua Salakabu (Samabula).

Madam Speaker, I acknowledge with appreciation the work of the Nasinu Team – Samu Tupou, Setareki Boletawa, Azim, Afzal, Habib and Satish Prasad. On the same note, thank you Abdul of Verata, Wailevu, Uday Singh of Naselai Farm Road, and Pundit Naren Maharaj and Deepak.

I have saved my last thanks for those most dear to me - my family. I acknowledge with much appreciation the continuous support of my wife, Pulotu, all throughout the 32 years of our marriage life up until now. She has always been a pillar of strength in our family and for that I will be forever grateful.

Madam Speaker, I would also like to thank our son, Maciu Rika, and our two granddaughters - Esther and Tine, for their support during the campaign period.

Madam Speaker, please allow me to say this to those who have put me in Parliament. Friends, my journey to Parliament has just begun and I can assure you that I have a responsibility to ensure that your voice is heard and I am and will always be interested in what you have to say about things concerning you.

Madam Speaker, I end by once again affirming my pledge to serve our beloved nation Fiji and all its people to the best of my ability. It is my hope and prayer that God will continue to bless our beloved Fiji and all of its citizens now and forever more.

(Acclamation)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members of Parliament, I stand with some trepidation to speak because it is one of those rare occasions in the last eight years that I have actually written a speech for myself, will read it and I am not used to doing so. But then again, Madam Speaker, the events of the last couple of weeks have been momentous, to say the least, and calls for such adorations.

Madam Speaker, please let me congratulate you on your appointment which has established a number of firsts. I wish you all the best in your different roles, not just as an Arbiter in this Chamber, but as someone we look up to, to implement the Constitution and Standing Orders, and to keep the honourable Members of this Parliament in check.

Madam Speaker, before I speak on His Excellency's Address, in particular *viz-a-viz* the portfolios I have been assigned by the honourable Prime Minister. I wish to thank His Excellency for his address to this Parliament. I also wish to put on record, Madam Speaker, that I had apologised to His Excellency last week, on behalf of some of the Members of this Parliament who did not return the bow to him. I thought it necessary to do so because, Madam Speaker, any inappropriate behaviour that anyone of us have towards, in particular, a visitor to this House, more so the Head of the State of our country, is a collective responsibility of all of us, even though it may be only for one side of the House.

Madam Speaker, I also wish to acknowledge the dignity and decorum with which His Excellency has carried himself as the Head of State for Fiji for the past five years or so. He has served his country with grace and fortitude at a time when many had abandoned their country not necessarily physically, but in their commitment as Fijians.

His Excellency in his Address, highlighted the need for this Parliament to work together for the betterment of our country. This was also echoed by our honourable Prime Minister. Working together, Madam Speaker, requires all honourable Members to speak the truth, know the law, display good manners and respect (not personalise matters), be principled, not to fear monger, nor make threats of supposedly impending violence and they need to know the facts before engaging in any conversation. Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, listening to the contribution from the other side, I think in many respects, we have some way to achieve that level of commitment and/or sophistication.

While those Members may not be ready, Madam Speaker, we on this side intend to guide them to do so. We will do so because, Madam Speaker, we all collectively have a responsibility to the Fijian electorates.

HON. REAR ADMIRAL (Ret) J. V. BAINIMARAMA.- *Vinaka!*

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- We cannot, as His Excellency said, "let them down".

Madam Speaker, it therefore, becomes our responsibility to point out where the contradictions, the paradoxes, the oxymoron and hypocrisy lie. After all, without an understanding of these - without identifying and without the knowledge of them, the naïve or the ignorant of those distorting the facts won't know how to rectify some of these problems and move forward to serve the Fijian people. In short, Madam Speaker, we need to recognise and fix up intellectual dishonesty. Conversely, let us have intellectual honesty.

Madam Speaker, every honourable Member in this Parliament and indeed, all Fijians must be reminded that Fiji has passed the crossroads from moving from mediocrity to greatness because of the sincerity and focus of one man, the honourable Prime Minister, Josia Voreqe Bainimarama or Frank Bainimarama, as known by many. Having working for and with him for nearly eight

years, I am constantly amazed at his tenacity and energy. Never before have I met a man who has so much genuine love and care for all Fijians.

For some leaders, Madam Speaker, the easier route is to give in to those who have the loudest voices. Indeed, it is a true leader who will hear the voice of the marginalised and disenfranchised. A true leader is someone who may not have suffered injustices to him or herself, but is able to sympathise and assist those who have. A true leader is one who has the tenacity to stick to the ideals and end goal, even the road to it may have been rocky or indeed even distracting.

A true leader, Madam Speaker, is not one who compromises the fundamentals of a vision simply for political expediency or survival. These are the qualities of the honourable Prime Minister Bainimarama. Indeed, Madam Speaker, I have, in fact, been blessed to work for and with such a human being, who is not only a compassionate man but deeply spiritual.

Madam Speaker, I have great admiration for individuals who are deeply spiritual, without feeling the need to tell the rest of the world about it or feeling the need to shove it down on other people's throats. I have great admiration of such a quality because it shows a deep sense of self confidence, security and faith. This, you will see manifest in such a person because that person will always be smiling and will always be happy and not grumpy. Demagoguery in government, Madam Speaker, is the domain of those who are ultimately insecure or use religion to further an ulterior motive.

While I am not into autobiography, I wish to acknowledge the influence of my parents. My mother, with her unique, unwavering emotional support and my father whom I call *Bala*, was the one who introduced me to the world. Fiji and the World on FBC, for those of you who are old enough to remember, was a time when in our house, the volume went full boom and we had to maintain utter silence.

He introduced me to apartheid, the Middle East and Gough Whitlam. His healthy sense of scepticism of established norms, even religious doctrine was most valuable.

The slap I received when I picked up a term from school as one does without knowing it was a derogatory term for an ethnic group and being told, "I am not going to have racism in my house", has held me in good stead. This is not bad for a man who had limited formal education because he had to leave school so that his ten younger siblings could have a better life.

My maternal grandparents from Matamata, were commonly known as the area in front of Yavulo Village, had enormous influence on me.

My *Nani* and my grandmother, the matriarch with the renowned generosity and charms, who believe in treating everyone equally and feeding them, no matter who they were or what time of the day it was. *Nana* commonly known in Nadroga as Babu, whose ethnic categorisation some questioned, but whose innate spirituality was beyond reproach. He had a wicked sense of humour and the ability to poke fun at others in a witty manner, perhaps somewhat similar to the Prime Minister's.

I vividly remember the late evenings that we would hang out outside the extended family home with the elders from Yavulo, cracking jokes in what we call the hard core Nadro dialect, these people and others, including the Marist Brothers and these events, left an indelible mark on my makeup and the values that I hold dear today.

Madam Speaker, I also wish to acknowledge the love and support and strength of my wife Ela. Madam Speaker, while I may not be the youngest in Parliament, I think I have the youngest family in Parliament. This ideally requires more contact time at home. Thankfully, Ela has not just held the house together in my periods of absence from our boys - Ibrahim and Idris, but also has been a valuable member of the FijiFirst team because of her innate modesty and lack of pretension she underestimates her own political powers.

Madam Speaker, this side of Parliament is the newest government from the youngest political party in the South Pacific. There were literally thousands who banded around the party that was formed just a few months before the General Elections. We could not have set up these offices and implemented our strategy without the support of our volunteers.

Madam Speaker, what is really refreshing was that, most of our core team were below the age of 30. We are most grateful for the energy, time and loyalty which they gave FijiFirst. The demographics of our volunteers were reflective of the youngsters of our country. These are our future, these are the future leaders and these are the ones who, both His Excellency and the honourable Prime Minister mentioned, we must give primacy to.

I also wish to thank the core group who helped implement the strategy because of their resourcefulness. The overwhelming victory by FijiFirst and the leadership of the honourable Prime Minister which has translated into 32 seats is your doing. Of course, Madam Speaker, if the 4,000 odd voters who had not mistaken 297 to be 279, then our numbers could have been greater and indeed, the National Federation Party (NFP) more likely would have been absent from this Parliament.

(Laughter)

Then the issue again at the polls, but thanks to this mistake and to the electoral system implemented under this Constitution, the National Federation Party (NFP), despite winning far less votes than they did in the previous years when they did not win a single seat are with us today. Of course, they have their founder leaders with us today like A.D Patel, Siddiq Koya, James Madhavan and Shirad Ali Shah; these esteemed gentlemen most certainly would not have been sitting on that side. They have the guts and the will to recognise and stand up to those who were not driven by national agenda, but an agenda driven by ethnic considerations and self-centred motivation. We also did not make excuses for such people.

HON MEMBERS OF GOVERNMENT.- Hear! Hear!

As Attorney General, Madam Speaker, I have requested that copies of the Constitution which we have specially printed for Judges and visiting dignitaries, be distributed to all honourable Members of this Chamber. We have done so because I note that there still appears to be a lot of misunderstanding, deliberate or otherwise. I implore the other side - please read it. If you have

any queries, please ask us. We need to do this otherwise, we will not be an effective Parliament because, Madam Speaker, this is the supreme law of the land.

This is the Constitution that every single Member of this Parliament has sworn to uphold. It is not a transitional document. It is not in the document that a Fijian's right to practice religion is relegated only to the private sphere. Please read Sections 22, 27, 28 and 29 on the unprecedented protection of the *iTaukei* land from permanent alienation which, Madam Speaker, actually happened during the period of the so-called entrenched provisions. Unfortunately, it did not stop the former Ministers of Land in the *Soqosoqo Vakavulewa ni Taukei* (SVT) and the *Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua* (SDL) respectively (one of them who is here with us today), from facilitating the permanent alienation of *iTaukei* land.

I raise this, Madam Speaker, because we need facts and the law, if we are to function properly and give credence to the agenda of government set out by his Excellency.

HON. REAR ADMIRAL (Ret) J.V BAINIMARAMA.- Hear! Hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Similarly, it is wrong to say that it is only this Constitution that allows for the compulsory acquisition of land including *iTaukei* land for public purpose, or that *iTaukei* land will be dealt with without the consent of the members of the landowning unit under the Constitution, or other subsidiary laws. Please read and compare these provisions to the previous ones and you will see fact from fiction. I am sure the honourable Minister for Lands will address these issues. Please also read the new accountability and transparency rules which have never been incorporated in any other previous Constitution.

Madam Speaker, much has been said about the rule of law or the lack of it. Many talk about the rule of law without knowing exactly what it entails, put very simply, it means that the law applies to everyone and when people are brought before the law, it is applied equally to everyone.

This principle must carry on at all times, Madam Speaker, because even when there are political changes taking place around us, the daily routine of life goes on. In other words: contracts need to be enforced, debtors needs to be pursued, people still steal, paedophiles still try to prey on the vulnerable, some continue to perpetrate domestic violence, taxi drivers get robbed, lawyers may still rob their clients, women and children get abused and some trying to create disorder in our society, some may abuse office, some continue to take and give bribes, and the list goes on.

Madam Speaker, as the honourable Prime Minister stated in his response to His Excellency's speech, the Judiciary must continue to function, and I wish to also recognise and thank the Chief Justice for his fortitude. Under his leadership, the Judiciary today is far more open and transparent and does not have the judge of forum shopping practice, even by lawyers and law firms that suddenly became the guardians of the rule of law post- December 2006.

Madam Speaker, while the Budget will be delivered on 21 November, then we will have more to say on that, on the economy and the state of the Government finances then. I wish to assure this Chamber that contrary to the political twist, given in the analysis in the state of the economy, the Fijian economy has a growth rate surpassing that of four per cent.

The projective growth rate for next year is also very positive. One only needs to look around to see the magnitude of the development, both public and private that is taking place around in Fiji. We will ensure that all the Ministers and backbenchers on this side of the Chamber, under the leadership of our honourable Prime Minister, will work diligently to capitalise on that growth for the benefit of all Fijians. We ask the honourable Leader of the Opposition and her team, to work with us on this national initiative.

In relation to the Ministry of Finance, I also wish to inform Parliament that following discussions with the Auditor-General's office last night, I have been informed that Reports dating back to 2007 will be printed and ready for submission to this Chamber tomorrow morning.

Madam Speaker, to capitalise on the economic growth and to keep up the momentum, we must carry out a major reform of the Public Service. We are already in discussions with some of our bilateral and multi-lateral partners. We require assistance to make the Fijian Civil Service relevant to the 21st Century and to capitalise on our growing integration with the global economy.

The Civil Service must be specialised and there must be specific career paths in different spheres of expertise. The past and the current trends of uniformity undermines the ability to attract the best and the brightest. The fundamental basis of appointments must be on merit, if the best professionals are appointed to the right positions, then the public will benefit and the taxpayers will get premium returns on the investment.

We anticipate the international review of the Civil Service in the new year and implementation soon thereafter. Like the Job Evaluation Exercise that took place by Price water house before the permanent secretaries salaries were adjusted, these reforms will also be based on professional reports.

The state-owned enterprises continue to do remarkably well, unlike prior to 2006, state-owned enterprises were caught with independent audit assessments. Some are realising true potential.

Fiji Hardwood Corporation despite owning the largest part of mahogany's forest in the world, mind bogglingly did not make profits until 2007. AFL is going through a \$100 million investment, to make sure it keeps Fiji in play as a premier destination but the funding is not being provided by Government nor any borrowings guaranteed by it. AFL is doing it on its own.

Fiji Pine has already paid unprecedented bonus payments twice in one year. In other words, in its nearly 40 years in existence, this is the first time it has happened. We will capitalise on this. We will look at opportunities to the private sector wherever appropriate and wherever we get the best return for the Fijian people. These achievements have taken place because of the right attitudes are removing systemic corruption and appointments of people on merit.

The state-owned enterprises were headed, in some instance in the past, by people directly from the Civil Service or those who had no sense or appreciation of the commercial and financial realities of everyday enterprises. People are now appointed on merit. These people know how to read balance sheets, know what is gearing and about the bottom line.

Our history is replayed with ethnic religious provincial and corrupt considerations for appointments to state-owned enterprises. At the end of the day, the pine landowners who received their bonus did not care about ethnicity, or religion, or provincial allegiance of the executive chair. They were concerned that they, the stakeholders and shareholders got what they deserve.

Madam Speaker, to localise or to appoint people on any other consideration other than merit does no one any favours. It does not make sense for shareholders, economic sense - commercial or financial.

Madam Speaker, let me briefly mention that it was neither the Bainimarama Government that removed the exclusivity in the telecommunication industry nor is there any exclusivity in this Chamber for the record. It will continue to propel our ITC sector to new heights and testing for digital television will commence before the end of this year, with full implementation by the end of next year. This is one of the most critical areas of empowerment - the digital divide must be bridged equally, otherwise it will lead to even a bigger divide. We, today have a more connectivity with internet than ever before, and for your information, we have more SIM (Subscriber Identity Module) cards in operation in Fiji today than the actual Fijian population numbers. We will capitalise on this momentum as set out in our manifesto.

Madam Speaker, all these measures are designed to produce the modern nation's state that we have been working towards since 2007.

I thank His Excellency for the vision he laid for this Parliament. We must all work together for the common good and for our beloved Fiji.

Vinaka. Thank you.

(Acclamation)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members of Parliament, I rise to add my voice to the honourable Members who have spoken before me, in thanking His Excellency the President for his most gracious and stimulating Address at the inauguration of Parliament.

Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate you first of all on your election as Speaker of this Chamber. Being the first woman Speaker of a Fijian Parliament, is an achievement worthy of note and one which will be an inspiration to all women, not only in Fiji, but the Pacific as a whole.

I also wish to congratulate the Deputy Speaker for his appointment to that high office.

Equally important, I congratulate all Members of this Parliament for their election by the people of Fiji, as Members of Parliament.

Madam Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to convey my deepest appreciation to those who voted for me, for their confidence and trust in my ability to represent them and their concerns in this august Chamber.

It will be remiss of me not to acknowledge the hard work of my campaign team and many friends for their support and encouragement.

Most of all, I would like to pay special tribute to my wife, Litea and my three children – Kaminieli, Joyce and Christina and to my late mother, Vika Seruiratu, who had always stood by me and is my source of inspiration today.

I am reminded of my humble upbringing in Kumi, Verata, Tailevu, in not having had the opportunity to know my father who passed away when I was very young.

You will understand the challenges of having been brought up in a family of six children by our mother, me being the youngest. Madam Speaker, every day was a struggle, not only for me and my other siblings, but more so for that courageous and very special woman who was our rock and role model. For the strength and bravery of that woman, I pay tribute to all mothers in Fiji today.

HON. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- After my primary education at Vunibokoi Primary School in Verata, I continued with my secondary education at Ratu Kadavulevu School in Tailevu - an all boys' school where my leadership qualities were recognised and nurtured, serving as the school's head boy during my final year.

Having a special interest in agriculture, I was first employed by the Native Land Development Corporation in 1984, before joining the Republic of Fiji Military Forces in 1987 as an officer cadet. I do appreciate the training, character development, exposure and experience gained during my 20 years of Military Service, including a two-year's posting with the New Zealand Defence Force as an officer instructor at the Officer Cadet School in Waiouru, and further training at the New Zealand Joint Command and Staff College in Wellington.

These postings, Madam Speaker, and trainings provided me the necessary skills, knowledge and exposure in international relations and diplomacy, strategic leadership and management, joint operations planning and moreover, taught me to appreciate the sensitivities of cultural diversity. These are experiences that, coupled with my tertiary training at Massey University in New Zealand and my earlier grooming as a student leader at RKS, helped prepared me well for this day.

My Civil Service career began with my appointment as Divisional Commissioner Northern in November, 2007. In 2011, I was appointed as the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry for Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management; and in the late 2012, as the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forests, Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management.

Madam Speaker, I am reminded today of George Bernard Shaw's adage, and I paraphrase: "The people who get on in this world are the people who are not defined by their circumstances but are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want."

I encourage all young people, who face the same circumstances that I did as a child, to take these words to heart and to work hard to pursue their dreams. As the honourable Prime Minister has said many times before, there has never been a better time to be a Fijian young person. You are in a better position than any young person in Fiji's history.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency's Address is one of remarkable clarity of purpose. We all heard his call for honourable Members of this Chamber to dedicate ourselves to genuine equality for all Fijians, work co-operatively together to advance the national interest, adhere to the highest standards of personal and professional conduct, and improve the lives of ordinary Fijians and to better equip our young people for satisfying roles in a growing and thriving economy.

Madam Speaker, we can only achieve these lofty ambitions if we remember that we are servants to the citizens of Fiji who elected us to this august Parliament. We serve for the greater good of all rather than our individual interests.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency rightly said that the country is resource rich, but the majority are cash-poor because we have been slow to appreciate the potential wealth and economic gains that we can derive from the responsible and sustainable use of our natural resources. All efforts, therefore, must now be made to unlock these potentials to improve the living standards of all citizens, address the issue of food security, as well as to reduce our import bills while boosting our exports. This is the principle belief that will guide my work as Minister.

Madam Speaker, I am deeply honoured that the honourable Prime Minister has found me worthy to be appointed as the Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management. Each of these three portfolios demand equal devotion and calls for urgent and focussed attention for the benefit of the Fijian people.

On agriculture, Madam Speaker, it has been and will continue to be the backbone of our country's economy. It accounts for around 9.3 per cent of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The development of the agricultural sector will ensure that the benefits of economic growth reach the entire population, especially our rural people. It represents a major component of rural household economies, and its crucial importance for development and food security cannot be over-stated.

Madam Speaker, I would like to expand on some of these specific activities and initiatives that my Ministry is already working on, in our effort to reduce costs, while maximising yields in the agricultural sector. One of our top priorities will be to continue facilitating the availability of more land for productive use. As we all know, land is an important ingredient for socio-economic development, and the growth and diversification of the economic base of the country.

Intimately linked to this is the sustainable utilisation of land which balances production with protection that safeguards the rights of landowners for future generations. This requires a sound land-use framework which promotes the proper and sustainable use of land, and one that supports agricultural production in the immediate and in the long term.

Madam Speaker, my Ministry will continue to provide support to farmers by providing a fertilizer subsidy for the sugarcane industry, as well as for *dalo*, rice and dairy farmers. From next

year, we will extend this fertilizer subsidy to ginger farmers as well, and within two years, we plan to expand this programme to other crops.

Madam Speaker, we recognise the high cost of land preparation and to encourage land-use in agriculture, my Ministry has plans to allocate additional funding to assist farmers to prepare land cultivation for all types of farming.

My Ministry also notes the concerns regarding water-logged farms and we are rolling out plans to address this issue as well. Furthermore, we will focus attention on improving drainage networks and other associated infrastructure such as structures that guard against saltwater intrusion, along with Fiji's river plains and low-lying coastal areas, and we will also help farmers with irrigation systems to support production and boost food security. This will include rehabilitation and upgrading works.

Madam Speaker, related to this, of course, is ensuring that we develop better water management policies and introduce new technology, to mitigate the effects of drought. Because the majority of the rural and maritime island villages are located along coastlines, they are subjected to erosion as a result of destruction to coastal vegetation and climatic change. We will continue to monitor sea-level rise, provide engineering support as necessary and assist in the design of modified infrastructure to arrest this problem.

Madam Speaker, Government spends millions of dollars in disaster relief programmes in the aftermath of floods. The question, therefore, of flood mitigation is one that we will focus much attention on. In order to effectively mitigate flood damage, my Ministry has embarked on land drainage and flood protection programmes. Activities involved in this initiative include the dredging and bank protection works for the rivers of Viti Levu, and this will continue in full force. The dredging and bank protection works on Vanua Levu will continue as well. Construction of engineering infrastructure related to watershed management will also continue.

Madam Speaker, the value of subsistence production continues to exceed the value of imported food. The current goal of our non-sugar sector rests on the transformation and diversification of agricultural production to boost food security, improve nutritional standards and create more opportunities for enterprises, including exports.

We will continue to teach farmers about the importance of phase planting, and the adoption of organised cropping programmes that will ensure self-sufficiency and consistent supply of quality agricultural produce.

My Ministry will also promote the adoption of proper post-harvest handling and storage to improve product quality, self-life and meet the standards required by our local export markets.

Madam Speaker, in order to boost agricultural development and increase the income of our rural people, my Ministry will embark on an agricultural commodity diversification programme which will be directed at a range of crops, including traditionally grown crops, new crops and crops with the history in Fiji which offers new opportunities for farmers and can be sold in near markets. There are a number of separate programmes under this umbrella initiative which will aim to provide the relevant tools, resources, infrastructure and expertise for specific crops. These are

individual programmes for coconut, ginger, *yaqona*, other rootcrops, vegetables, tropical fruits, and flat land crops – banana, vanilla and rice.

The Small Enterprise Development Programme which is part of this initiative, is aimed at reviving small enterprises as major income earners, especially in economically deprived rural areas.

Research and Development Programmes to improve the processing and quality of our products to meet market demands will also be pursued. Better networking and information dissemination will be prioritised to address specific market demands, and these enterprises include *masi*, *voivoi* and *kura*.

You will recall, Madam Speaker, that the Sigatoka Valley has always been vital in the production of vegetables and other agricultural products. In an effort to revitalise and improve production in these areas, the Sigatoka Valley Improvement Project will be implemented as a follow-up to the Sigatoka Valley Rural Development Project, to cater for improvements to the existing drainage, roading and irrigation facilities. The establishment of a High Value Exportable Crops Programme in the area will continue.

Within the livestock sector, Madam Speaker, we will adopt a Food Security Policy by protecting our local poultry, pork, beef and dairy industries. My Ministry will continue to support our local livestock industries by providing technical and operational assistance, financial support, and infrastructural development and subsidised low cost veterinary services.

Madam Speaker, the establishment and strengthening of community-based agricultural enterprises for youths, women's groups and rural communities through small holder livestock projects will also be pursued.

The Research Division of my Ministry will continue to support the work of our operational arms through the development of new technology to suit the needs of our farmers, clients and stakeholders. Our core activities will be directed at plant genetic research, development of technologies to improve cultivation practices, pest and disease management, provision of regulatory services and product development.

Madam Speaker, the Bio-Security Authority of Fiji will be strengthened and upgraded to be able to efficiently perform their role of preventing the introduction and spread of toxic pests and diseases that may have negative effects on the nation's flora and fauna and agro industries. At the same time, we will strive to ensure that we are able to meet the requirements of our market destinations through the provision of sound and scientifically-based quarantine assurance programmes and certifications for the export of agricultural produce.

Madam Speaker, all efforts within the agricultural sector to support farmers and small holder farmers, in particular, will be in vain, if there are unable to sell their crops at the markets. For too long, small holder farmers have been at a disadvantage in not being able to compete with large commercial farmers. This has resulted in these farmers losing faith in the industry, shutting down business and reverting to subsistence farming.

As Minister, one of my priorities is to revitalise and diversify the services of the Agricultural Marketing Authority. To this end, the investment will be made in the modernisation of the Authority's facilities and equipment, including its human capital in order to better fulfil its statutory responsibilities and fully realise its future plans.

On rural and maritime development, Madam Speaker, Fiji's geographical spread, remoteness from markets vulnerability to natural disasters, high cost of transportation and communication constraints constitute significant development challenges that are compounded by issues of unemployment and poor living standards.

Against this backdrop, Madam Speaker, my Ministry is committed to improving the quality of people's lives and expanding their ability to shape their own future in rural and under-developed regions in our country, through the provisions of economic and income-generating opportunities, along with amenities and services.

Madam Speaker, substantial resources will continue to be directed towards developing the rural and maritime areas of Viti Levu, Vanua Levu and the outer islands. Such activities include the improvement in community facilities, infrastructure, water supply, housing, social welfare services, marketing and distribution networks.

My Ministry will play a leading role through the Integrated Rural Development Framework in co-ordinating the Rural Development Programmes of a number of Government agencies, non-government organisations, civil society groups and the private sector, to further develop and enhance sustainable livelihoods for Fijians living in remote areas of our country.

Growing our economy and improving the living standards of our people forms the core of my Ministry's mission. We are committed to unlocking opportunities for Fijians in the rural and maritime areas.

Finally, on National Disaster Management, over the last decades natural disasters have caused substantial damage to properties, crops, livestock and infrastructure. Government, in turn, has spent millions of dollars responding to and assisting in the rehabilitation and recovery from these disasters.

Madam Speaker, initiatives to better prepare communities and enhance their resilience to natural disasters are in the pipeline. This include the introduction of retrofitting programmes for existing houses outside areas covered by the Rural Local Authorities, to ensure that they are able to withstand strong winds and, also we will appoint Divisional Disaster Management officers to assist communities, prepare community disaster management plans to conduct disaster awareness training and disaster preparedness exercises; and to organise response, relief and rehabilitation during times of natural disaster.

Madam Speaker, by better preparing communities, we should substantially reduce the financial impact of natural disasters on the national coffers.

Madam Speaker, my Ministry will also review the Natural Disaster Management Act, 1998 and the Disaster Management Plan, 1995, to formulate appropriate regulations to strengthen the co-ordination and response to improve rehabilitation works during times of natural disasters.

Madam Speaker, my Ministry, in a nutshell, is committed to contributing in every way we can to ensure that all Fijians are able to realise their dreams and to improve their livelihoods through agricultural production and through our rural development programmes.

Before I resume my seat, I beg to add that I am strongly in support of the motion before the Chamber for the acceptance of His Excellency's address.

Madam Speaker and honourable Members of the Chamber, I thank you for your indulgence, *vinaka vakalevu* and God bless Fiji.

(Acclamation)

HON. DR. N.P. SHARMA.- Honourable Speaker, my sincere felicitations on your ascent to this rightful position in this august Chamber.

The President's well-articulated opening presentation of our honourable Prime Minister and Government's vision and direction is much appreciated and will be my focus as a parliamentarian. On the subject of maiden speeches I proceed as follows.

I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land we live and work on. I acknowledge also my own ancestry especially of my *Girmitya* grandfather Shiri Dayal Sharma who travelled *the Kalapani* deep blue ocean, arriving in 1904 and served his ten year indenture and settled to cane farm on freehold land in Nadari, Ba.

It is a great honour and privilege that I am here today, much like my father, the late honourable C.P. Sharma, NFP parliamentarian 1977. "CP" as he was known amongst his peers stood tall on civil rights in Colonial times. As a student at Otago University, New Zealand, without regular funds, he gravitated to economics and accountancy, with part time manual work. He was deported as a student socialism leader, when an expatriate police officer on vacation from Fiji spotted the brown skinned lad.

Serving in the Treasury as chief accountant, unionist and president of the Fiji Public Service Association in its heydays, first local manager of the National Bank of Fiji, he left his footprints in the Public Service Credit Union and fore-runner of the Fiji National Provident Fund. Dad capped his short political career as NFP parliamentarian in 1977 as the choice candidate for Suva Rural and Navua, trouncing Sir Vijay R. Singh and Vijay Parmanandam. Disheartened at the Dove and Flower divide, he did not seek re-election.

I am a product of the multi-racial Holy Trinity Primary School and Marist Brothers High School. My mother was a staunch school teacher and encouraged all her three children into the study of medicine. However, life had its own destiny.

Armed with a degree in medicine in January 1977, I gravitated into the area of reproductive health, in all its evolving spheres over a 32-year period, both in the public and private sectors.

In the Maternity Ward at the Colonial War Memorial Hospital, I met my future bride, Nurse Nirmala. She has been a faithful pillar of strength and fortitude. She practically managed the domestic front, rearing three lovely children as I was riding the tide through to postgraduate certificate, diploma, membership and a fellowship.

To her credit today, we have an aviation, Captain Navneet Sharma, Army Major/Lawyer, Navneel Sharma with the Fiji Military Legal Unit, currently in South Sudan with the UN Forces. Our last born and only daughter, Nashika is a fourth year medical student. We have two grandchildren, - Neil and Nevahn.

I have been part of the Bainimarama Cabinet from January 2009. The last five and a half years has been most challenging. The health care reform process was set in motion with modernisation of all relevant archaic health laws, in addition to the necessary ones developed over time. Now, there are a total of 23 health laws.

In line with Pillar 10 of the People's Charter for Change, the Health Policy Technical Support Group (HPTSG) was established. The disparity between community and the health care delivery was reduced to a certain extent and the linkage of equity based customer demand base health service delivery was accentuated.

The need for a Health Policy, Planning and Budget Analysis Unit with the inbuilt Monitoring and Evaluation Unit did not take place without resistance, nor did the decentralisation of outpatient and mental health services flow seamlessly. Resistance was great but greater still was the commitment to ensure accessibility of health services to our people, noting that this had been on the Ministry for Health's agenda for over 10 years.

Establishing the recipe to right size Human Resource Health (HRH) was painstakingly slow but work is completed. The need to right size and adequately re-distribute pharmaceuticals and medical supplies have been largely complete.

Madam Speaker, the Vision for Fiji on Health 2015–2030 outlines all those reform measures undertaken in the last six years and the need for its oversight. This document provides alignment footprints to the global post development agenda 2015–2030 based on continuing strategic governance, leadership in health, using evidence based approaches to decision-making, planning, policy formulation for best outcomes for all Fijians. I trust the incoming Ministers will carry the formulations laid out in the previous five years onto an enhanced trajectory.

Unfortunately, the clinical service delivery is adversely affected by politics in the civil service. People detest change and raise barriers, stall progress and effect reversals, despite nods of approvals at face value. When root cause analysed, patient-complaints originate from poor communication of service processes in equity on service delivery, lack of vision, poor planning and poor execution of policy by the executives in governance. When these are brought to the surface for rectification, certain factions of the executive arms resist such. Without commitment

from all factions of leadership in in the Ministry of Health, achievement of the mission, vision and value is nullified.

However, with Secular State enshrined in the 2013 Constitution, meritocracy where work and life values will supersede race, religion, class and creed will pave the way to a just society.

Medical personnel are trained in one to one communication and the election trail was personally a great leap into the depths. Whilst on the podium as Vice-President to Chair the World Health Assembly in Geneva this year, addressing 194 Ministers of Health or for that matter, becoming Inaugural and Interim Chairperson of Civil Registration, Vital Statistic (UNESCAP-2013) may seem daunting to some but let me put on record that electioneering is a totally new ball game.

The micro picture of health care, the bread and butter issues of a place to stay and call home, water and electricity availability and road access had great commonality throughout the nation. New and innovative reform measures are essential if the citizenry is to be satisfied before the next General Elections in 2018.

I acknowledge my campaign managers, Arun Sewak, Hasmat Ali, Phillip Arun Singh, Faiaz, Kasi Ram, Elizabeth Dass, Mahendra Singh, Kitione Tukana, Alifereti, Harendra Prasad, Pradeep Sewak and Vijendra Sharma for their commitment to a just cause. To my back office manager, a big thank you. To the supporters who helped, I will not forget and serve you along with others.

My parliamentary contribution is largely geared in the social domain. Education, health, social services and oversight will be areas my eyes will focus on. Education and health underpin socio-economic and national development. Both remain tools for social justice and serve long term national development needs.

Specifically health reform needs momentum and direction. Much of the infrastructure, human resource, technology upgrade is just about in place. The executive arm of government needs to address the triple burden of diseases nationally that of communicable, non-communicable and re-emergent diseases. The special needs of mental health care, cancer and diabetes cannot be treated as business as usual, needing international alignments.

Madam Speaker, Universal Health Coverage (UHC) needs the greatest injection of innovation in Fiji, as the Post Development Agenda 2015 replacement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) concludes in 2015. As a sequel to the Social Health Insurance, a study undertaken by the World Health Organisation in 2013 in Fiji, health coverage and health insurance are issues for public stakeholder discussion.

I remain a silent admirer of President Obama who was elected in 2009 when I joined the Bainimarama Government. Obama-care provided the Affordable Care Act, 2010 which has an implementation period from 2014 to 2022. Individual, employer and health insurance providers have obligations to the provision of additional benefits, rights and protection to common citizenry. Open enrolment providing essential minimal health coverage is not available in the public health system in the United States of America (USA).

With a sizable, stable private health sector, an appropriate agency to control transactions like Fiji National Provident Fund establishment and Private Health Insurance Companies, all stakeholders need to address this under a universal health coverage scheme if the government and other stakeholders want health to make positive head way and also contain escalating health costs.

Madam Speaker, finally I do not know whether I will be in this place for a short or long term, which is for others to decide, but I do know that I have no intention of being here for the sake of being here. Together with my colleagues, it is my intention to make a difference.

(Acclamation)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now break for morning tea for 20 minutes.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.50 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.15 a.m.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before I call in the next Speaker, I have a communication.

Earlier in the sitting, the honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu rose sought the call on a Point of Order and then proceeded to ask an Urgent Oral Question Without Notice under Standing Order 43. I let the honourable Member proceed, and the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport was generous enough to respond.

There are several points that needed to be made regarding this procedure:

- 1) The Order of the Day for the Resumption of the Debate had already been read;
- 2) There was no Point of Order involved, and that procedure should not be used as a pretext to debate or raise a substantive matter such as a question;
- 3) The time for Questions is set out in Standing Order 34 under the normal routine of business, and this morning was not that time. There is a resolution in place which gives precedence to the address of thanks for His Excellency's Opening speech over all other business.

On this occasion, I will give the honourable Member the benefit of the doubt as we are all learning. However, for all above reasons, the honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu was out of order, and therefore the proceeding which occurred this morning will not be taken as a precedent. Thank you, honourable Members.

HON. B. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, I rise in conformity with Section 28 of the Standing Order. I will speak in English, though I had thought to speak in the *iTaukei* language.

Madam Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Cabinet Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, good morning, *bula si'a, as-salam-alaikum, namaste, faiakse'ea, waheguru ji ka khalsa, waheguru ji ki fateh.*

Madam Speaker, a philosopher once said, and I quote:

“A nation is not defined by its waters, or the boundaries of its land mass. Rather, a nation is defined by adverse people who have been unified by a course, and a value system who are committed to a vision for the type of society they wish to live in, and give the future generations to come”.

The Almighty Lord has blessed us with His wisdom, strength, goodwill and another chance to build one nation. Therefore, we need a nation of great people who live and sacrifice to positively impact their mankind and build enduring legacies. For the nation to progress in this dynamic and changing environment, we must be a community in liberty, equality and fragmentary. In our personal ambitions, we are intrinsic, but in our seeking for economic and political progress as a nation, we all go up or else go down as one people. Leaders must be at the forefront of nation building to bring the Fijian people together, and therefore develop a whole new ethos of human co-existence, culture and social wellbeing.

At this juncture, as the other honourable Members before me have qualified, allow me to congratulate you, Madam Speaker, as the first female Speaker of the Parliament of Fiji and the South Pacific. Madam Speaker, I salute you for your achievements and for having a keen enthusiasm in building our nation.

A few days ago, we celebrated our 44 years of Independence and I would like to acknowledge a few of the Statesmen for their great vision in building a peaceful and prospective nation; late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, late Ratu Sir Edward Cakobau, late Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, late A.D. Patel, late Siddiq Koya, late Dr. Timoci Bavadra and the late Irene Jai Narayan, to name a few. Thanks to the heroic sons and daughters of this country who have paid sacrifices. We have been able to score a number of victories which are encouraging the nation building process we are engaged in.

In addition, I must also salute our soldiers, sports icons and all other personnel who have helped built Fiji image as “the way the world should be”.

Madam Speaker, allow me also to acknowledge the FijiFirst Party leader (honourable Prime Minister), its General-Secretary (honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum) for giving me the opportunity to contest the 2014 General Elections under the FijiFirst Party banner. I confess that your goodwill will never be forgotten and remembered with gratitude.

Madam Speaker, allow me to give a bit of my background and my family history. Our family is the fourth generation dairy farmers, who cultivated land for many years and contributed to the well-being of the society and Fiji as a whole. I must say that I am a proud farmer.

Born in *Tokatoka Vanuadina*, raised in Naivicula, Naloto, Tailevu, and married in Vuisiga, Naitasiri, and will not forget my *koro ni vasu* of Votua, Ba. Further, I would like to acknowledge my late father, Mr. Santok Singh who dedicated his life to the service of mankind, and not forgetting my mother who is the cornerstone of my success. She always inspired me, and I would like to acknowledge her. Thank you, Mum.

I would also like to acknowledge my wife, our two daughters and son, my siblings for their coaching, aspiration, wisdom and sacrifice. Thank you and not forgetting our long term family friend, the late head teacher, Mr. Naidu, who was also a pillar of strength and motivation.

I would further like to acknowledge my relatives and friends for their diligence and tremendous support during the campaign, and the various provinces and settlements of Tailevu, Naitasiri, *koro ni vasu* (Ba), Ra, Rewa, Nadroga/Navosa and Macuata. Furthermore, not forgetting my former colleagues from the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC), Public Works Department (PWD), Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Reconciliation, Fiji Electricity Authority (FEA) and Colonial National Bank.

Let me also thank all the supporters from the international community who, with open hearts supported me and FijiFirst Party in the 2014 General Elections, I will also be indebted to you all. We must applaud the Fijian people for their trust, faith and wisdom, and I must confess that your goodwill will not be forgotten and gratefully remembered.

Madam Speaker, I would like to reiterate on His Excellency the President's sentiments that the honourable Prime Minister intends to run a government that is inclusive and serves the need of Fiji for all Fijians, no matter who they are and where they come from.

We are indeed blessed that in a country where we have this multiracial society, there is peace, harmony and tolerance. A great responsibility lies upon the leaders shoulders, it is incumbent upon us not to do anything by word, deed, gesture that might disturb the peace of minds of Fijians.

We cannot live in a fragmented society, as we have our utmost responsibility in nurturing our way forward for a thriving economy. Human kind must put an end to fragmentation or fragmentation will put an end to mankind. Therefore, to survive in peace and harmony, united and strong we must have one people and one nation.

We must be focussed, speak of sincerity and dedicate our service to the mankind and strengthen our voice in the global market through constructive commitment to generate prosperity and wealth.

Fiji has strong indicators of progress and economic social spheres under the leadership of our party leader, the honourable Prime Minister. These achievements have been made possible because of his enduring unity, peace and stability. For this, we must be thankful to the Almighty for his wisdom.

Madam Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the initiatives that the government has embarked on in building a better Fiji through reforms in the public sector. The Public Service must be more than just doing a job effectively, efficiently and honestly and must be with complete dedication to all Fijians.

Thus we need to acknowledge the hardworking civil servants who have diligently delivered the service to the nation at large. We need to cultivate a patriotic civil service which is dedicated to achieve the desired goal of the government and also use as a benchmark by private sector - a pinnacle of excellence.

The government continues its formulation implementation of robust policy to assist in building prosperity and wealth.

Madam Speaker, I would like to note the honourable Prime Minister's championing of good governance practice in the statutory body and public sector. His commitment in establishing the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC) marks the significance in his government for continuously strengthening this institution through robust legal framework.

FICAC is also part of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption, a global affiliation of anti-corruption bodies. This has been strengthened further by the establishment of an Accountability and Transparency Commission under the 2013 Constitution. The establishment of FICAC has eliminated certain level of bad governance and has provided a window of opportunity for stimulating investor confidence and economic growth.

This was evident when the honourable Prime Minister embarked on reforms in TLTB (formerly known as NLTB), where some elites or *iTaukeis* devised mechanisms for personal gains at the expense of the poor *iTaukei* landowners. I praise the honourable Prime Minister for his intervention and they have now been all prosecuted.

Madam Speaker, I wish to emphasise to this august Chamber that the NLTB established an investment arm, the Vanua Development Cooperation Limited in 2004, as a vehicle of sound and prudent investment for landowners. Vanua Development Corporation Limited initial capital of \$7.7 million comprised of \$3.1 million extinct *Mataqali* funds, \$3.4 million trust funds and a government grant of \$1 million which was given for prudent investment.

I now came to see that certain elite *iTaukeis* have held high office in NLTB and VDCL misused their powers for their personal advantage and prejudice the landowner's hard earned money. Their act was grossly arbitrary, they were entrusted and empowered to make sound business decision for the benefit of NLTB and the landowners.

There were huge sums of public monies which were entrusted to them to manage and invest for the betterment of a larger community which they failed. Therefore, it is evident that much anticipated public trust being eroded when they abuse the authority vested in them for those three years. The loss to landowners and NLTB was around \$5 million.

Madam Speaker, I feel it is important to inform Parliament that I was the forensic financial analyst in this case. Now justice have prevailed, but with economic loss to landowners. This has prompted the honourable Prime Minister and the government to make sure that no landowners are deprived of their equal shares of economic and financial rights or return on investment from their lease.

The Constitution now protects their *iTaukei* land as it has never been in the past. Furthermore, with the Prime Minister's intervention and wisdom, now land lease money is fairly distributed to the *iTaukeis* who deserve to be paid fairly on their leases.

The *iTaukei* Land Trust Board has been directed to develop a mechanism to reduce the cost of doing business so that more lease money is distributed to the landowners. In the past, poundage use to be 15 percent for every dollar paid as lease money which now has been reduced to 10n per cent ,a further reduction in due course.

Madam Speaker, further I would like to applaud the honourable Prime Minister for his views on commercial agriculture. His determination is reflected through value adding initiatives that presently the Ministry of Agriculture has embraced.

The Agriculture and Tourism and Forest industries are the core of our economic, major deterrents of our employment and source of wellbeing and key drivers of our land, water and biological resources.

Fiji's location as a developing country in a global economic means that it has surpassed the other developed countries which has huge, strong support and effective production in agriculture sector. Despite this, credential to survive and expand, private and public partnership needs to be revamped.

Madam Speaker, we need to capitalise instinctively, an initiative of our financial sector in order to improve small and accessible, affordable and a profit function services and empower women for management of finances. Therefore, we need to align Fiji Development Banks role and policy to meet and cater for the demand with reasonable access to loans to supplement government assistance to farmers.

We do not need to duplicate this with any financial institutions rather strengthen and streamline the Fiji Development Bank in its operations.

Madam Speaker, despite challenging which includes the aftermath of global economic crisis, our government has achieved simple milestones in the socio, economic transformation journey over recent years. The challenge in going forward to ensure that we sustain this inclusive growth transitionally towards true social economic transformation. This would endeavour a continuation of a long journey towards creating a better Fiji for Fijians today and in the future.

If we are really to be a great nation we must not merely talk, we must act and act the talk.

May God bless us all and our great nation of Fiji.

(Acclamation)

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, I join other honourable Members in thanking His Excellency the President for his most gracious Address.

His Excellency has had a long and distinguished career, serving Fiji in many capacities. Personally, I became well acquainted with him during my 11-month term as Leader of the Opposition between October 2001 and September 2002, when he was the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Madam Speaker, I also congratulate you on your election as the first woman Speaker and I am hopeful that under your stewardship, Parliament will maintain dignity and decorum for the next four years.

The election of the *Marama Bale na Roko Tui Dreketi*, honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa, to be the first woman leader of the Opposition, is also historic and both positions go a long way towards the political empowerment of women in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, I wish to correct some misconceptions in the honourable and learned Attorney-General's maiden speech this morning. Firstly, he named NFP stalwarts and founding fathers of 1960s, saying that if they were in Parliament, they would be sitting on Government benches. Those members were giants of their time in ability, understanding and perception of the problems facing Fiji. They would never have supported a *coup*, or benefited from one.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. P. SINGH.- I am also amused at the honourable and learned Attorney-General's suggestion that voters mistook number 297 for 279 in the recent General Elections and had those votes gone to 279, NFP would not have been in Parliament.

Madam Speaker, there is something seriously flawed in the honourable and learned Attorney-General's mathematics because even if it had happened, it would not have made any difference whatsoever to our percentage because the total votes cast would have remained the same. If that is the quality of his mathematics, Madam Speaker, then we should all be worried because he controls the finances of this country.

(Laughter)

However, Madam Speaker, let me come back. The serious aspect of the honourable and learned Minister's observation here is, if that were indeed the case, then many thousands of voters have committed similar errors. For example, voters who intended to vote for 155, voted in error for number 255 ...

(Laughter)

... leading to the obvious conclusion that the Open List system of elections is seriously flawed. Under those list system, the voters would not have made such errors. That is for the general information for honourable Members on the other side of this Chamber.

As stated earlier by the leader of the National Federation Party, the people of this country have spoken and elected their government.

I also wish the honourable Prime Minister and his government well for the next four years.

Further, I wish to thank team NFP, my campaign team (they know who they are), my wife and my children for their extremely hard work during the Election campaign. Madam Speaker, I make special mention of my wife and kids because after four years, I will go back to them because they are the only people who will be there.

I also offer my gratitude to the team of experts from UNDP, for their invaluable assistance towards the restoration of our Parliamentary democracy, and I am sure this assistance will continue.

Madam Speaker, I returned to Parliament after my controversial exit 12 years ago. But this pales into insignificance when compared to the absence of parliamentary democracy in our nation for a total of 14 years since the start of the *coup* culture in this very Chamber 27 years ago on 14th May, 1987.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President reminded us of the events of 14th May 1987, when the then Royal Fiji Military Forces removed the NFP/FLP Coalition Government of Dr. Timoci Uluivuda Bavadra. In the process, His Excellency was also usurped as the Commander of RFMF in his absence. He also rightly pointed out in his Address that the cycle of instability that plagued our nation and retarded its development must never be repeated.

Madam Speaker, the overbearing stench of *coups* has overpowered our nation in the last 27 years. His Excellency the President, in his reference to the first coup of 1987 said, and I quote "It was the first of four disruptions to elected government and the beginning of a cycle of instability that has plagued our nation".

These, Madam Speaker, are pertinent questions that must be addressed because His Excellency the President categorically stated that the cycle of instability caused by *coups* must never be repeated. On this, we agree with His Excellency.

As honourable Members, we must frankly acknowledge that the four *coups* were nothing but power-grab at gunpoint that retarded the nation, if we are to herald in a new era of unity and purpose as stated by His Excellency the President.

We cannot be enslaved in the past, but Madam Speaker, we must truthfully acknowledge our mistakes of the past and the cardinal sins and treasonous acts of the last 27 years and move on to work collectively in the national interest.

There is no justice without compensation but in this case, those personally, physically, psychologically and financially aggrieved by the 2006 *coup* cannot seek compensation from Government or the court due to the watertight measures of the various Decrees and the Constitution, totally preventing them from doing so.

There is no denying that many people have suffered the hurt, discrimination and isolation over the last 27 years. It is our responsibility, as a Parliament and indeed as a nation, to put all this behind us. We can only do this through a process of truth and reconciliation and I sincerely hope that the Government considers this seriously. There are good examples around the world from which we can learn.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency spoke about Government's commitment to provide free prescribed medication to those earning less than \$20,000 per annum. We commend this, but at the same time point out that our extremely poor health service is a blight on our nation. There is no other way to put it. One may go to any hospital in the country and will see the pathetic conditions, even the expectation of clean and hygienic conditions at our hospitals is just too high, and an expectation is buried when one visits a public hospital. It is like a mirage on the horizon.

An example of the deteriorating health system is that the blood testing machine at the Lautoka Hospital has not been functioning for the last three weeks. This week, the Lautoka Hospital ran out of morphine tablets that are given to patients to ease their severe pain. Madam, this is totally unacceptable. Government needs to pay immediate attention to this chronic problem.

Madam Speaker, Fiji needs a comprehensive health care modernisation programme. Such programme should place our citizens at the heart of rebuilding health care.

Government should ensure medical care that is focused on compassion, respect and dignified life for all our citizens, regardless of age and place of residence, citizens must have access to decent health care. To achieve this, a personalised health care framework is needed.

Funding must be committed to ensure that Fiji has well-placed and well-resourced team of medical workers. Our citizens should know that in hospitals, they will be seen by doctors within a specified time and not wait endlessly,

Madam Speaker, public provision for health care in Fiji is a foundation on which this country is built. Investing in health is investing in our future.

I come from the cane belt. Unfortunately, there has been no mention of the sugar industry in the Government's plan for the ensuing year that was outlined by His Excellency.

Madam Speaker, the sugar industry has weathered many storms over the last 100 years when it was the mainstay of our economy. But our sugar industry has been staggering for the last eight years. This is no exaggeration.

Madam Speaker, the sugar industry has weathered many storms over the last 100 years when it was the mainstay of our economy but our sugar industry has been staggering for the last eight years, and this is no exaggeration. Madam Speaker, the reality that is the decline of the industry is reflected by the following statistics – it is a whole table from 2006 to 2013, but I will just read through which are comparative figure.

In 2006, the number of active growers were 18,636 and total cane produced and crushed was 3.226 million tonnes. Total sugar production was 310,140 tonnes. The tonnes of cane required to make one tonne of sugar (TCTS) was 10.4. The price paid to the growers was \$58.60 per tonne. In 2013, active growers were 13,000 and total cane crushed was 1.6 million tonnes. Total sugar production was 180,000 with 9.1 TCTS and \$82.12 per tonne was the price paid to growers. Madam Speaker, the number of active growers have fallen by more than 5,000 since the *coup* until 2013. Cane production fell by 1.618 million tonnes from 2006. Sugar production fell by 130,140 tonnes. This is the unmistakable reality.

The deteriorating state of the sugar industry is also largely linked to the problems faced by cane farmers, and the problems of the farmers remain largely unresolved. The Sugar Cane Growers Council (SCGC) was tinkered with, and the legitimate authority usurped, spearheaded by the unlawful sacking of the SCGC Chief Executive Officer.

Almost three years later in 2009, the SCGC was scrapped which meant that the last remaining democratically elected institution comprising of elected representatives of the growers was abolished. Farmers, however, still continue to pay levy to the SCGC through deduction from their proceeds to fund its operational expenditure. Now, the SCGC is basically like a toothless tiger, unable to effectively raise the concerns of the farmers, let alone find meaningful solutions to their common problems.

Madam Speaker, some of the basic problems faced by cane farmers are; firstly, land tenure – the failure to renew majority of expiring land leases which has been a contributing factor to declining cane production. Secondly, rising cost of cane production, harvesting and delivery. The average cost of cane production, harvesting and delivery is about \$45.50 per tonne of cane. The cost includes hiring of farm labourers and cane cutters during harvesting season; purchase of a 50 kilogramme bag of fertilizer at a price of \$31.50; weedicides; land preparation for new crops such as ploughing and harrowing; and delivering of cane by lorry due to the state of decay of the rail system. Cane farming has become a non-profitable business for, at least, 70 per cent of farmers who produce only 30 per cent of the total cane crop, while 30 per cent of farmers produce 70 per cent of the crop.

Madam Speaker, since 2009, Government has pumped in \$220 million into the Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC) and since then, cane farmers have received a meagre \$36 million through Government subsidies on fertilizer, cane planting and repair of cane access roads.

Madam Speaker, the European Union (EU) had earmarked a total of \$265 million in planned assistance between 2007 and 2013, to help Fiji adapt to globalization and to lower prices of sugar

exports to the EU due to the total withdrawal of preferential prices by 2009. If the *coup* hadn't destroyed democracy, Fiji could have now been producing around four million tonnes of cane and manufacturing around 400,000 tonnes of sugar. The sugar industry would have been salvaged.

Fiji and the cane farmers are poorer for the loss of the EU grant. We urge the honourable Prime Minister, who is also the Minister for Sugar, as well as the honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs, to negotiate with the EU to salvage the grant or whatever remains of it. Alternatively, Madam Speaker, Government needs to invest between \$250 million to \$300 million in the industry, especially targeted at farmers to revitalize the confidence of cane farmers. I cannot see any other way.

Madam Speaker, the Government is urging farmers to plant more cane but this will not become a reality unless Government injects substantial funding towards our farmers by way of paying premiums to TLTB for land lease renewals or acquisition of new leases. Furthermore, Government must announce in the Budget a 50 per cent subsidy to farmers for the purchase of weedicides and farm inputs, and most importantly, farmers need financial security and a minimum guaranteed price of \$85 per tonne would be an ideal way to offer them security.

Madam Speaker, Fiji's leadership has to emulate the wisdom and vision of those who put national interest above personal and political advancement, if they genuinely believe in their philosophy of a united, harmonious and stable Fiji. The three issues that I have highlighted will never be resolved, if we cannot rise above narrow and parochial interests.

We have two shining examples of the oppressor and the oppressed, casting their differences aside and coming together in the national interest – Sitiveni Rabuka and Jai Ram Reddy in Fiji; F.W. De Clerk and Nelson Mandela in South Africa, prevailed because the vast majority of the citizens of their respective countries willed that it be so. They put aside mistrust, fear and hatred that had gripped their respective nations for many years. They defied all odds and did the unthinkable. They prevailed because they genuinely believed in a common future and genuine reconciliation.

Similarly, we as honourable Members, have to cast aside our political differences. The barrel of a gun, alienation of political rivals, entrenchment of discord, fear and mistrust has not succeeded anywhere in the world, and Madam Speaker, Fiji is no exception.

Thank you and May God bless Fiji.

(Acclamation)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, the Secretary-General to Parliament, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Cabinet Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, the honourable leader of the National Federation Party, fellow Members of Parliament, guests and fellow Fijians; *Bula Vinaka, Namaste, Asalaam Alaikum.*

Madam Speaker, at this juncture, I would like to join my colleagues in congratulating you on your appointment as the first woman Speaker of this Parliament, which is a first not only for Fiji, but also for the South Pacific. I also take great privilege in thanking His Excellency the

President of the Republic of Fiji for his most gracious Address to Parliament, and in challenging us to put our differences aside and join hands to make Fiji a better nation.

It is certainly a privilege to be part of this Parliament where I have a chance to be among the esteemed leaders of the new Fiji. It is also an opportunity to further the legacy of some great leaders of the past, who once graced these very Chambers. For this, I would like to thank the FijiFirst Party leader, the honourable Prime Minister; and my party general secretary, the honourable and learned Attorney-General; for having faith in me and giving me this opportunity to represent my people in Parliament.

I would also like to thank my family, friends, relatives and all other people who helped me campaign in the General Elections. I pay tribute to my:

- 1) father, Mr. Chandra Sudhakar, and my mother, Mrs. Premila Sudhakar, who despite their ripe age, went house to house in promoting and campaigning on my behalf;
- 2) sister, Deveena Sudhakar Herman and brother-in-law, Anselm Herman of Australia; sister-in-law Angeline; my cousin, Arti Pratap and brother-in-law Amit Chand; my cousins – Arpana Pratap, Ashrit Pratap and Pratikshna Singh; Ulash Pratap from Australia and Ritesh Sachindra Kumar, for always being there with me during the Election campaign;
- 3) campaign team and managers who went with me to various towns, villages and settlements to campaign. First and foremost, Mr. Jay Dayal of Ba for being with me on the ground all throughout; my team in Rakiraki - Babban, Feroz, Kappu Seth and Ashna; Sigatoka – Mr. Arvind Mestry and in Navua and Suva – Mr. Kishore Kumar; Nasinu - Mr. and Mrs. Ashok Balgovind; Lautoka – Mr. Chetan Raniga; Nabouwalu - Rajesh Kumar; and in Labasa - Tula Ram, Mr. Shiu Dayal, Abhilesh, Amitesh Pratap and Shanant Ram.

I also thank my fellow party candidates; honourable Parveen Kumar, honourable Rosy Akbar and honourable Viam Pillay, for including me in their campaign meetings.

To my partner in my law firm, Krishna & Company, Mr. Shailend Krishna, for allowing me leave and carrying the added burden of office work while I was out campaigning, my office staff and practice manager, Jasmine, thank you very much.

Most of all, I would like to thank and pay tribute to my voters all over Fiji and overseas, who had faith in me and chose me on 17th September, 2014. I promise to them that I would try my level best to meet their expectations and serve Fiji and the Fijians with utmost honesty and integrity.

Madam Speaker, I am the youngest of three siblings. I started primary school on the island of Vanua Levu in the remote settlement of Nabouwalu in Bua, about 160 kilometers from Labasa Town. From there, I moved to the interior of Ba and completed my primary school in Namau, a settlement closer to the famous Navala Village.

After that, I obtained my secondary school education at Xavier College in Ba, I then moved to Emalus Campus in Vanuatu to complete my Law Degree, which I did in 2003, and moved to

the University of the South Pacific to complete my Post Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice in 2004.

Madam Speaker, I, for one, have observed the politics and governance of Fiji since childhood and believe me, what I recall of previous parliaments is not of very pleasant. All I remember from those days is unnecessarily heated arguments, racial discrimination, religious intolerance, corruption, scams, bad investments in infrastructure, and the like. Lots of racial slurs were exchanged. Racial, religious, class, gender and other prejudices surfaced in parliament. Members of Parliament were swearing at each other. People were not discussing issues of national interest, but wasting time insulting each other.

Madam Speaker, the Parliament is the highest institution on this land. It commands and deserves the respect, and we have to give it just that. Mistakes have been made in the past. They should not be repeated. We have to show our people that we have learnt from our history and have evolved as better people since the events of 1987 and 2000.

Our honourable Prime Minister has shown the world that if all the above prejudices are discarded, Fiji can be taken to greater heights. The development which the Bainimarama Government has brought is unprecedented. I believe and I know that we all have the ability to share his vision, ability and the political will to make a better Fiji for all of us by disposing of politics of the past and ushering in a new era.

I thank the honourable Prime Minister for giving Fiji the 2013 Constitution, which among other things provides for a Secular State. People are now free to practice and preach their respective religions without discrimination and fear.

The law and order situation in the country has greatly improved. Today, people are not afraid to walk on the streets at night because they know someone is watching over them.

There was a time when it was unthinkable that Indo-Fijians would be sitting in Parliament with our *iTaukei* brothers and sisters on an even playing field, but that has been made possible by the dedication and vision of one man, our honourable Prime Minister. When the history of Fiji will be written again, the honourable Prime Minister's name will not be mentioned among politicians only, but will be honoured among statesmen.

I was asked why I chose to contest for FijiFirst movement and no other party, and my answer was simple. The man who faced the bullets for us Fijians in November 2000 will always stand stronger for us - no matter what.

As the great Indian epic the Mahabharata says, "Be with the righteous and victory shall be yours". The resounding victory of FijiFirst and the Prime Minister Bainimarama at the recent Elections is testimony that he is a righteous man.

On 17th September, 2014, Fiji was at the crossroads of history. The pen and the ballot paper were in the hands of our people. They had the choice and they chose wisely. The people who voted for us do not worry about what race we belong to, what religion we believe in, or what church we go to. They are more concerned about how they will put food on their tables, send their

children to schools, have a roof over their heads, have electricity and water supply, better hospitals, better roads and infrastructure, security, jobs, et cetera. They want us to lead them up the correct path so that their future is secured.

There are places in Ba and other areas like Namau, where there is no electricity. There are places in this country like Volivoli in Rakiraki, Dremasi in Tavua, Qerelevu, Koronubu and Nakavika in Ba, where proper water supply has lacked for years. These are some of the real problems that we need to solve.

Many people, both young and old, educated and uneducated have asked me, what good is voting going to do for them or what the Government is going to do for them. This is our chance to show the people what we can do for them and a country without discrimination. When people pay taxes, from which the country gets bulk of its revenue, they deserve the very best of services.

I, being one of the youngest members of Parliament represent the aspirations of some 200,000 voting youths of Fiji. Many of those people voted for the first time and are anxious to see what this Parliament has in-store for them. I seek all the honourable Members' assistance in delivering the goods to them so that they do not feel cheated when they go to the polls again.

I come from a cane farming community in Ba and have seen the problems faced by the farmers. I believe my experience as a farmer gives me the insight of the problems they face and the urge to solve them. I have travelled around the country and have seen the various problems faced by our people. The people out there do not want to hear about problems anymore, they want solutions.

I come from Veisaru in Ba, a predominant farming community with poor farmers and labourers. Before 2006, I witnessed mass exodus of farmers from the area due to non-renewal of agricultural leases and the fields which were once covered with lush cane crop was left to become wastelands. I thank the honourable Prime Minister for taking the initiative in renewing majority of the agricultural leases around the country, which has not only saved the farmers from becoming homeless, but has also rejuvenated the sugar industry.

I am a fourth generation cane farmer. My great grandfather and my grandfather were cane farmers. My parents who were school teachers and now retired, continued the tradition and kept cultivating the farm, the income, of which, put me through law school because in those days, scholarships were not given to Indo Fijians.

After obtaining my Law Degree, I had many opportunities to move abroad, but I chose to stay in Fiji and wanted to work for this country like my forefathers who shed their sweat and blood to make Fiji prosperous.

I have served in school committees, religious organisations, sports clubs, charity organisations, other volunteer groups and the Red Cross. I am also an active member of the Rotary Club of Ba. My involvement with people through these groups has given me first-hand information on the problems people are facing.

Being a barrister and solicitor of the High Court of Fiji for more than 10 years standing, I believe that I have the foundation to represent my people and their aspirations well in Parliament and various Select Committees which will be formed soon to discuss important legislation and policies.

Some of us has had the allegiance in the past to certain political parties and ideologies. The question before us today is; do we want to go back to age old politics and prejudices? If they have not worked before, then there is little chance that they will work now, or do we want to build a better Fiji together? It is time to put the nation first.

We have campaigned on different platforms to reach here. Some were based on issues and some emotions. Members of FijiFirst have one element at heart which is to serve Fiji and its people.

His Excellency the President has challenged us to rise above our respective prejudices and work to make a better Fiji and I believe we can solve problems by working together as one nation. The people out there are watching us and it is upon us to give them a performance worthy of applause and not contempt.

I am honoured to be one of the 50 people who will be remembered as a group that took the challenge to bring about a new Fiji. We went to the pools not as *iTaukeis*, Indians, Chinese, Europeans and Others, but as Fijians and the result is in front of us. We should not be remembered as 32 honourable Members of the Government side and 18 honourable Members of the Opposition side, but as 50 honourable Members on Fiji's side.

Our detractors will criticise us, but we must remember that even Jesus Christ was crucified before they realised that He was the son of God.

Fiji is a great country but it has the potential of becoming greater. It is in our hands now how we handle the affairs of Fiji to help it realise its greater potential. The time is here and the time is now for us to do that. We may never be given this opportunity again.

With these words, I wish all my fellow parliamentarians best of luck for the next four years. God bless Fiji and my fellow Fijians. Thank you, *vinaka vakalevu* and *dhanyavaad*.

(Acclamation)

HON. RATU V.M. TAGIVETAUA.- Madam Speaker, it saddens me to be told that I cannot speak or address this august Chamber, when specifically my voters, in my mother tongue. I understand that you are guided by the Standing Orders, however, I am at peace, as you have advised me to refrain from speaking in my mother tongue, I am reminded to look internally into these three words of this august Chamber which are located in the three large screens only to find the Coat of Arms which reads "*Rerevaka na Kalou ka Doka na Tui*".

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear! Hear!

HON. RATU V.M. TAGIVETAUA.- It is my prayer, Madam Speaker, that amendments will be made in the Standing Orders, where should the situation dictates, honourable Members will be allowed to speak in their native tongue for the betterment of our voters.

On that note, Madam Speaker, I join hands with my fellow colleagues, the honourable Members of Parliament, in congratulating you in your election to the position of Speaker. I know you will bring great grace and poise to the position.

To honourable Members of Parliament, I also congratulate you on your appointment and I will try my utmost best to work closely with you for the betterment of our beloved Fiji.

Madam Speaker, I have a great sense of gratitude to the people of Bua who put their faith and trust in me to be their representative in this Chamber. I am humbled, yet also excited about getting on with the job they have entrusted me to do so. I, like many others here in this Chamber will serve the people of Fiji, regardless of who they voted for. I also stand before you, Madam Speaker, as a proud son of Bua in the province of Bua in Vanua Levu.

Firstly, for those who have not had the pleasure of discovering the natural beauty of Bua, you must consider coming across to Bua.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Hear! Hear!

HON. RATU V.M. TAGIVETAUA.- The people of Bua also have their unique challenges and I promise you, Madam Speaker and honourable Members of Parliament that I will share their challenges with you over Parliamentary sittings.

Madam Speaker, the first of any government is a test of how they fairly distribute and allocate resources, to ensure the whole nation prospers and no one in our beloved Fiji is forced to live under adverse economic, social or political conditions. The people of Bua, also have their unique challenges, many of them purely developmental and I promise you Madam Speaker, and the honorable Members of the Chamber, that I will share them with you over each Parliamentary sitting.

Madam Speaker, an essential part of any Government is a test on how they fairly distribute and allocate resources to ensure that the whole nation prospers and no one in our beloved Fiji is forced to live under adverse economic, social or political conditions.

I wonder at times, Madam Speaker, whether we live in a country that is bent on building a wealthy government, or a wealthy nation. I say this on the back of 8 years of so-called rural development and promises laid out to us in the Governments "Look North Policy". I also say this after viewing the Parliamentary Remunerations Decree No. 29 of 2014, the Fiji Trades Union Congress (FTUC) statistics on the Pricewaterhouse Cooper's salary assessment of Civil Servants and taking into account the Civil Service pay increases in February early this year.

A true government, Madam Speaker, of the people, for the people and by the people, will also diligently allocate the States resources systematically and with equity for the people.

Madam Speaker, I am an optimistic person and we, as a nation, have much to be optimistic about, but we do face challenges. I see challenges divided into three main areas namely; economic, social and political.

Economically, Madam Speaker, when you include private debt, we are one of the most indebted countries in the world. We must have a government that is prudent and responsible. When the people of Fiji want responsible economic management, they always turn to the Opposition, as they know we are the only ones who can give the most practical and realistic solution.

Government should strive to empower the people, to fend for themselves and make their own living. To set up a village store for example, Madam Speaker, the amount of hurdles one must overcome before setting up a business is counterproductive and not ideal for small business entrepreneurs. It is the small businesses that will build strong rural communities and whole societies that understand the importance of good governance and financial management practices. This, Madam Speaker, is people led-growth.

We understand that there is a change in the emphasis on the economic policy. There is a clear move away from sugar, and indeed the agricultural sector as a whole, to the development of tourism and manufacturing.

Large scale tax incentives were provided, such as long term tax holidays for new hotel developments and the development of natural resources like mineral water and the mining industry, as well as for the clothing and textile industries. These incentive, Madam Speaker, have had significant economic and social effects.

Socially, Madam Speaker, Fiji is a wonderful example of a rich, diverse multicultural society. We have many institutions which make this system work, not the least our education system. We need to continue to support the role it plays, not only in educating our young, but also in nation building.

Madam Speaker, this free education, or free tuition rather, is also an issue I would like to address. But before I go into that; I support the efforts of Government to make tuition free in all school. This was an initiative started by the *Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua* Government, and I support the concept fully.

I also support the Government's call to make free tuition also available to pre-schools, starting in 2015, this again, Madam Speaker, is part of SODELPA's Manifesto.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear! Hear!

HON. RATU V.M. TAGIVETAUA.- Madam Speaker, the shortfall here is free tuition. It is the standard or quality of education and the types of person's who flourish under this new education policy.

Let me talk from an Indigenous Fijian, or *iTaukei's* perspective. A Form Seven student from Bua is expected to compete with a Form Seven Student in Suva, for a scholarship. The quality of present Educational services in the rural community has resulted in less indigenous Fijian's getting scholarships, but they are encouraged to take up loans from Government for tertiary education. Because of this, Madam Speaker, a large number of students from the province of Bua are in debt before they even try to imagine employment.

Madam Speaker, because of the need to get a good job, to pay back their loans, these young people of Bua will now have to leave the province and seek employment in the urban centers where jobs are said to be. If Government does not provide an affirmative action solution, targeting scholarships and rural education challenges, the system will only lead us down the road of poverty and empty out our provinces. So we are still entrenched in the age old system of provinces providing raw materials and urban centers enjoying the benefits.

Madam Speaker, free tuition is not free education. If Government is serious about free education in its entirety, I suggest that they start with our rural schools and families that earn below \$25.00 per annum.

Madam Speaker, having a Government ready to give us so many mediocre services for free is concerning, especially, where the economic reality is worrying. In February 2013, Madam Speaker, Moody's Investors Service had revised the outlook of our economy, from negative to stable saying that many investors, were awaiting for the completion of the National General Elections.

Instead of empowering the people of Fiji to find community based solutions, we have a Government responding by dishing out freebies or hand-outs. Are we content with the nations surviving on hand-out mentality? The only way to end hand-out mentality is, if we the people undertake to end it.

This is not the top-down policy that well-meaning and courageous politicians can impose on us. It must be grass root imperative, where enough of us accept that hand-out mentality has the corrupting influence on our country.

Corrupting because it teaches today's children and the next generation that they deserve fees they have not worked for, and are not prepared to pay off.

HON. MEMBERS. – Hear, hear!

HON. RATU V.M. TAGIVETAUA. – Corrupting because it dishonours the idea that Government ought to provide for those in need, instead even middle-class and rich end up in Government's hand-out.

HON. MEMBERS. – Hear, hear!

HON. RATU V.M. TAGIVETAUA. - Corrupting because families are no longer saving or spending wisely, that while hand-outs are given out in all directions, statistics with the National Substance Abuse Advisory Council, Madam Speaker, show alcohol and tobacco sales have increased and its abuse expounded.

Corrupting because we have lost sight of the need to use taxpayer dollars in the most efficient and effective way. At every level, the hand-out mentality corrupts the notion that we are responsible for our own actions, instead Madam Speaker, the tendency is to shift the blame to someone with deeper pockets, the State and their taxpayers' reserves.

Let us not create dependence society. Let us empower people to be productive members of society. Politically Madam Speaker, we sit now in a guided democratic platform, after eight years of limited, if not zero consensus or dialogue. Now, we can openly challenge and hold promises being made in this Chamber accountable. Now, the people have a real opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue.

Madam Speaker, to gauge the political will of Government in ensuring they serve the ordinary citizens better, I ask Government to improve public service delivery and decentralise services more to the rural communities. While Government is committed to streamlining the Public Service, I feel there is a real need to look at the quality of service being provided.

Madam Speaker, *Muanidevo in Dreketi, Macuata* is a classic example. Rice farmers in *Dreketi* are now practising mechanised farming. However, the poor rice farmers in *Bua* are labour intensive and have been deprived of mechanised farming because all equipment and staffing personnel are stationary in *Muanidevo, Dreketi, Macuata*.

Madam Speaker, a present policy in the Ministry of Health does not qualify a request from the district of *Lekutu* in *Bua*, to establish a nursing station on *Galoo* Island, to look after the islands of *Laqaga, Galoo* and *Tavea*. All these three islands, Madam Speaker, have to travel to mainland and be serviced at *Lekutu* Health Centre. *Yadua* Island, on its own, enjoys the services of a nursing station, and I urge authorities concerned to relook at policy requirements and change, if necessary, as landowning unit of *Galoo* as already approved to the construction of the nursing station to the benefit of the three islands. Because Government services are not decentralised as such, many people in the province of *Bua*, travel to Suva for certain government business.

Madam Speaker, if Jacks of Fiji, Vision Motors Limited and Sports World can see a demand in *Vanua Levu*, and open branches in *Labasa*, why can the Registrar of Titles, Ministry of Tourism and even the Fiji Public Trustee Corporation Limited not see the value in setting up a branch in the North? The disconnection is clear.

Madam Speaker, our roads are also an issue worth speaking about here in this Chamber. Many of the roads in *Bua* and around *Vanua Levu* date back to the Colonial and SVT/SDL times. We have heard of road projects from right across the nation and *Vanua Levu*, but during my campaign tours around *Bua*, I was very shocked at the state of our roads and more importantly, the village and settlement roads. An example could be where they agreed to have a fixed target, where the State will build new roads on a quota of example, 500 kilometres per year, shared fairly across the nation. An allocation for fixed quarter for the maintenance of existing roads and a special focus of maintaining village and settlement roads.

In ensuring excellence service delivery by the State, there are also a few things that can be done to include the voices of the citizens in the development of service delivery.

Madam Speaker, for the benefit of the ill-informed Member from Government side, who had touched on equal distribution of lease money. I think I need to touch and remind the honourable Member in more detail.

Madam Speaker, the equal distribution of *iTaukei* lease money is another unfair change imposed on the *iTaukei* without consultation. Madam Speaker, one who is registered in the *Vola Ni Kawa Bula* (VKB) automatically enjoys three privileges. Firstly, he qualifies to be a member

of a landowning unit, be it a *Tokatoka*, *Mataqali* or *Yavusa*. Secondly, he qualifies to be part of a landowning unit, who claims ownership to *iTaukei* land and its resources, as well as usage right to customary fishing waters, commonly known as *iQoliqoli*. Thirdly, once entry into the VKB warrants him to partake in traditional obligations as clearly spelt out in the *Tukutuku Raraba*, a record kept at *iTaukei* Land and Fisheries Commission.

HON. MEMBERS. – Hear, hear!

HON. RATU V.M. TAGIVETAUA. - What I am trying to highlight here Madam Speaker, is if one qualifies to be given lease money, he must also be seen to be undertaking the traditional obligations of the *mataqali*.

HON. MEMBER. – Hear, hear!

HON. RATU V.M. TAGIVETAUA. - Madam Speaker, the process is three prone, and must be seen in its totality. Going against this Madam Speaker, is eroding the *iTaukei* structure and this has its consequences.

On another note, Madam Speaker, in its present form, a two month old baby once registered in the VKB, received equal share of lease money to that of a bent 70-year old, who is assisted with a walking stick to enable him to be a mobile and who has year in, year out served the *mataqali* with distinction in all its traditional obligations.

The same age, old aged *iTaukei*, Madam Speaker, later becomes the *Turaga ni Mataqali*, the *Turaga ni Yavusa* or the *Turaga iTaukei*, yet, he equally shares the same amount as that of all those registered with him in the *mataqali*.

In my *vanua of Bua*, Madam Speaker, it is an obligation for all *Turaga ni Mataqalis* to conduct monthly meetings with his *mataqali*. Likewise, the *Turaga ni Yavusa* is to meet all his *Turaga ni Mataqalis* where the *Turaga iTaukei* meets and discusses *vanua* issues monthly with his *Turaga ni Yavusa*. Included in this monthly meet, Madam Speaker, is the teaching and training of traditional roles, customs and practices.

Madam Speaker, the responsibility of a chief is enormous, as well as challenging, let alone it is a *i vota mate*. Having said that, it is only proper, Madam Speaker, that *Naulumatua*, on behalf of the indigenous people of Fiji request that the issue of *iTaukei* lease, money distribution policy be relooked at, taking great consideration of the depth and *vanua* maturity, part of which I have tried to unfold in this honourable Chamber.

In concluding, Madam Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the people who brought me into this honourable Chamber. It was God's divine intervention through prayers of our religious leaders, *Wasewase o Bua*, *Tabacakacaka o Bua*, my brothers and sisters, both local and abroad, brothers and sisters in Christ, and not forgetting the Fiji House of Prayer which I stand before you today.

I thank my wife, Nani, my family and campaign managers - Jiuta Seru, Solomone Takiveikata,. I also thank the SODELPA management for accepting me to be a candidate in this year's General Elections.

To the *vanua of Kubulau*, *vanua o Wainunu*, *vanua o Nadi*, *vanua o Solevu*, *vanua o Vuya*, *vanua o Raviravi*, *vanua o Dama*, *vanua o Lekutu*, *vanua o Navakasiga* and the *vanua o Bua*, I

thank you most sincerely for your trust and understanding which has enabled me to be your voice in this honourable Chamber. To the *Yavusa Ratu* of Moturiki, the *Ratu* of Moturiki, my *koro ni vasu* of Nasesara, I owe you a big *vinaka vakalevu*.

Madam Speaker, and honourable Members of this august Parliament, I thank you for your attention. May God bless each and every one of you, and may God bless Fiji.

(Acclamation)

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- Madam Speaker, *ni sa bula vinaka*. I take this golden opportunity to congratulate you on your appointment as Speaker of this august Parliament. Not only as the Speaker of Parliament, but historically, as the first lady Speaker for Fiji's Parliament. I wish you well in your appointment, and future deliberations and control of the parliamentary proceedings.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- Madam Speaker, at this juncture, I wish to extend my appreciation and thank all those who voted for me in the General Elections. Due thanks also goes out off course to my hard working campaign team - Ratu Emosi Lagilagi, Ro Mereani, Tuisese, Matakibau from Bau, Manasa and Dainiteci, Manasa Kikau who assisted in my campaign visits to villages and settlements in the Tailevu South area and through the urban portion of Nausori.

I also offer my gratitude as well as to those who financially assisted me with my elections campaign. *Kivei kemuni na Turaga Bale na Vunivalu*, Ratu Epenisa Cakobau, a very special thank you, Sir, for appointing me to stand for the people of Tailevu. Likewise to the *Turaga Bale na Ratu*, *Turaga na Tui Nakelo*, to all the chiefs and people in Tailevu, my humble *vinaka vakalevu* to you all. *Vinaka vakalevu* Tora Dreketi, *Turaga na Vunivalu*, *Tui Naduku*, Vunikalou, my lost brother *Tui Vuci*, the people of Naceruku and my people of Lomainasau - *vinaka saka vakalevu na dina kei na veitokoni*.

Most importantly, I pay humble tribute and appreciation to my family who have always been by my side throughout the very difficult political path we toiled through.

Madam Speaker, as opposed to norm in the former parliamentary system, as an Opposition Member, and given the new form of our parliamentary system has transitioned to, I am now obliged to focus on national rather than constituency issues. Before I do, Madam Speaker, I thought I would need raise some very important issues of this Parliament.

We appreciate, Madam Speaker, that as the former President and elected Member of FijiFirst, you will at times have difficulty in maintaining your impartiality and independence in all matters under your control in this august Parliament, which is not helped, Madam Speaker, by the unbecoming behaviour of the honourable Prime Minister and the honourable Attorney-General during presentations of Members of this side of the Parliament.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear,hear!

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- Madam Speaker, both the honourable Prime Minister and Attorney-General should protect your independence and integrity by desisting from trying to direct your management of this Parliament from their seats.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear! Hear! Tell them.

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- If they have a Point of Order, do the right thing, stand up in this august Parliament and call it.

Another observation, a number of honourable Members on this side of the Parliament have been warned, Madam Speaker to refrain from making remarks that are alleged to have contravened Standing Orders 62. However, Madam Speaker, a number of Members on the Government side, including the honourable Prime Minister have referred to their 'revolution', yet none of them have been pulled up for breaching Standing Order 62. A revolution, Madam Speaker, can also be a rebellion revolt, insurrection, mutiny or uprising so its use gives rise to a breach of Standing Orders 62(4).

Rule of Law - I would like to thank the honourable Attorney-General for giving us a lesson on what is meant by the rule of law, and how it applies equally to everyone who is brought before the courts. He also stressed the need for the truth and honesty, and in fact highlighted intellectual dishonesty, perhaps referring to his side of the Chamber because, Madam Speaker, on this side of the Chamber, we believe and base all of our contributions on facts, not the distorted facts of just a few from the other side. Perhaps he was either being evasive or plain ignorant of one important fact, and that is in the 2013 Constitution, Chapter 10, the Immunity provides safe haven from prosecution for the President, the Prime Minister and honourable Members on that side of the Chamber, including the Military, the Police and Judiciary, as well as civil servants for their part in the events of 2006. So, by placing themselves above and beyond the rule of law, where is the equal application of the rule of law that the honourable Attorney-General refers to? A shining example of the intellectual dishonesty that this side of the Chamber will expose for the people to see over the next 44 years.

Rights of Indigenous People: Madam Speaker, your recent ruling on the use of our mother tongue when delivering in Parliament is evidence of the Government's strong standing on zero tolerance of anything indigenous in our society now. This is Fiji, the native tongue is Fijian. If one cannot speak and or decipher the English language well, then one must be allowed to speak in one's native tongue, and which I note is also taught in the school curriculum in Fiji, and that is, Indians speak Hindu, English people speaks English, and anyone who may choose to speak in English, they may do so.

Madam Speaker, I congratulate the Government of their attempt to serve the *iTaukei* landowners, but they must understand that they are encroaching in a very sensitive area for us Fijians. NLTB, now iTLTB is a native authority charged and paid for the Fijian indigenous landowners to look after their native land. I personally ask the General Manager of iTLTB at our Provincial Council Meeting in Tailevu of how much the Bainimarama-led Government financially contributes to the running of the TLTB? He replied and I quote: "Nothing. The landowner pays for all." Then live us alone, we have very clear support from the UNDRIP (United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) to run our own affair.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- Madam Speaker, can the Government explain the reason of these Decrees that have been passed, that diminish the landowners rights to ownership of all resources that are owned by the indigenous Fijians, whilst on the other hand, Government cleverly manipulates blind support from landowners through the provision of freebies such as the \$10 million alluded to by His Excellency the President in his address, and which I say is hardly

sufficient for these tactics which will later dethrone the indigenous Fijians from their authority and indigenous rights.

Lorimer Fison in "Land Tenure in Fiji" said,

"The end of the whole matter is that the tenure of land in Fiji is tribal, and that the title is vested in a full blooded member of the tribe. Commoners as well as chiefs, not in any individual or individuals to the exclusion of the commoners though the total lands in many places are divided or sub-divided amongst households and individuals ye each owner holds for a group and not for himself alone. He cannot alienate the land from his tribes, nor can he dispose of it, as that his own heirs shall not inherit it."

The job of iTLTB is to honour this. They are supposed to be responsible to the landowners who are paying them.

Madam Speaker, in the eye of the law, land includes the surface of the land, everything beneath the surface, everything affixed to the land. Further, to the rights, carries with its right to property over things in the air space above the land.

Madam Speaker, the renewal of lease without consent of landowners by the iTLTB and the land bank of the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources has again reminded me of Sir Arthur Gordon, a former Governor of Fiji, who is also known as Lord Stanmore in London. In the House of Lords, (House of Lords Paper, No. 205, page 52, paragraph 13, he reiterated and I quote; "All who are appointed with the Fijian race know perfectly well that if you separate them from their land, the race will die out".

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- I urge the Government to slow down and ensure the interest of the indigenous people are safeguarded for greater peace and prosperity for our beloved nation.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- Madam Speaker, it took 65 years of research for United Nations to finally agree to establish the UNDRIP. Therein all are 47 Articles, I will share some to inform the people of Fiji, that the United Nations in 2007 established the UNDRIP to protect the rights of indigenous peoples. This is designed to be part of any system of governance either to be a core part of democracy or an apolitical institution of governance that runs parallel. This is the duty of Government to support it as it will generate peace, security and prosperity in the said country. I will recall the incident in Bougainville, our military took part in creating peace in Bougainville.

Papua New Guinea has decided to take so much of the resources out there but people rebelled. So, after a long case that happened in the history of Bougainville and Papua New Guinea, they resort to Bougainville to be given the autonomy. Just now it is autonomous government of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea.

For a multi-racial country like ours, it should be the democracy with the Fijian characteristics that will generate a balance participation and the outcome will generate a stronger, secure and prosperous economy that Fiji needed most.

I only wish, Madam Speaker, that the UNDRIP reached our shores before Fiji gained its Independence in 1970, Fiji would be so much better than Singapore today. How? The economics, security, stability, peace, prosperity, harmony, zero disparity and equal growth to the multiracial people in Fiji would have been scored qualifying us “as the way the world should be”.

The truth of what we are going through now, Madam Speaker, is the conniving use of that famous tourist slogan about Fiji, “the way the world should be” by keeping the nativity of indigenous people for show and depriving them from utilizing, and economically gaining the right return and sharing their resources for the benefit of all citizens of our beautiful country Fiji.

Let me inform the whole world today that Christianity had created a new indigenous people 180 years ago, who I today, without any reservation whatsoever, can categorically state that we are the kindest people in this world. All races living amongst us here through generations can testify to this. Giving is our core function, it is habitual to all indigenous Fijian to give, hence it is simply right to return ownership to us indigenous people, the nation and all the races will bear fruit of a renewed democratic Fiji that embraces the rights of indigenous peoples and of course the importance of human rights.

I, Madam Speaker, would like to touch on some Articles of the UNDRIP:

- (1) Article 4 states, “indigenous people in exercising their right to self-determination have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions”.
- (2) Article 8 (26) states, “State shall provide effective mechanism for prevention of, and redress of any action which has the aim or effect of dispossessing them of their land, territories and resources”

In 1970, the instrument of Independence reached our shores, but the ownership of the resources was not handed over to the rightful owner, the indigenous Fijian people.

Madam Speaker, Article 10 states:

“Indigenous people shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories. No relocation shall take place before, free prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned and after agreement on just and fair compensation and where possible, with the option or return”.

We strongly believe that we were “short changed” in 1970. The Queen took it all, but returned all, just for the political governance to intervene and assume ownership. We give credence to the political leadership then to strengthen the Great Council of Chiefs and other Fijian administrative structures, as part of the Government to ensure a slow transition of de-colonisation was to be carried out over the years. This was to fully return what we gave Her Majesty Queen Victoria and her family, to be fully returned to the Fijian indigenous people.

Madam Speaker, the current Government has now removed all the safety catches designed to protect indigenous Fijians and re-directed the decolonisation process to Government to fully own all the resources in Fiji.

Madam Speaker; Article 26 states:

“Part 1 - Indigenous people have the right to their land, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired.

Part 2 – Indigenous people have the right to own, use, develop and control the lands, territories and resources that they possess, by reason of traditional ownership or other traditional occupation or use, as well as those they have otherwise acquired.

Part 3 – State shall give legal recognition and protection to these lands, territories and resources. Such recognition shall be conducted with due respect to the customs, traditions and land tenure systems of the indigenous peoples concern.”

I wish to bring to light at this juncture, Madam Speaker, the fate of the people of Nausori. The kind chief and people gave their comfort and very chiefly land to the Colonial Sugar Refinery Limited (CSR) to accommodate factories and residences of staff during the initial stage of sugar industry in the yester years.

As we learn to understand, when the decision to relocate the sugar industry to the West, the Colonial government took advantage of the situation and established the Vunivivi Hill as the government station and surprisingly, some significant portion of the land was converted to freehold land. A recent survey conducted by the late Ratu Luke Yavaca of NLTB found that only 18 acres now remain to the landowners of Nausori.

Many governments have led this country in the past. I, for one, as Commissioner of the Central Division have sounded all the ill-effects and concerns of development and changes in the Nadonumai, Suvavou and Nausori villages. The impact is catastrophic and the authority continues to expand and totally disregard restitution or where not possible, just, fair and equitable compensation maybe entertained as a token of appreciation to such a commitment.

The Nausori chief and their people, as well as Suvavou are watching your government, Sir, to provide them with a better deal. With the recent expansion of Nausori Town, the people of Nausori will continue to lose control of their land and resources.

Suvavou Village can longer be extended, the new RB Patel supermarket location sealed it off for good. Who allowed for this?

It took the United Nations 65 years to undergo detailed thorough research before endorsing this remarkable declaration, your 2013 Constitution is not even two years old. Is the United Nations racist, when simply it is merely stating the fact that the world must be educated to understand the simple fact that these are just the rights of indigenous people.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- I invite the honourable Members of this Parliament to at least read the Declaration, one could access it through the internet. Please read it. I request, if all of you have reservations to the Declaration, then you may sound all your decisions so that the indigenous community of Fiji is informed of your views.

Why are politicians covering the eyes of the people of Fiji by not educating the people of this Declaration? Our engagement with the United Nations has allowed Fiji to be widely recognised in this world. Why have we been silent about this Declaration since its inception in 2007.

Madam Speaker, I invite the Government to join the Opposition in its concerted effort to educate the people of Fiji of the UNDRIP. When this is addressed, the people will then be obliged to be actively involved in the re-designing of a modern democracy with a Fijian character.

The indigenous Fijian is of course resource-rich and whilst it is imperative to undergo strenuous training on the art of business, we need to conduct proper management of their resource. Indigenous Fijians are to be induced to thrift management skills to be tailored to a new business culture for modern indigenous Fijians. The economic disparity gap will finally disappear. Every citizen will benefit from this new approach to economic prosperity.

Security and Border Control Issues: Madam Speaker, I wish to now present my views on some security issues, especially border control.

It is appalling to see the sudden influx of people of all races, some as far as "exotic" countries now entering our borders and residing in Fiji. Countries like New Zealand, Australia and even the United States with their robust border control capabilities continue to maintain control on international arrivals into their borders. Comparatively, Fiji with our inconsistent border control capabilities allow various persons, particularly from Asia, to enter Fiji, visa free, for a few hundred dollars, without the proper checks and balances that will ensure minimal border control issues and associated crime.

Madam Speaker, I note with some concern the recent developments relating to the petroleum potential in Fiji by this Government. A number of geological and seabed exploration tests have revealed that Fiji's offshore basins had many similarities with the petroleum producing basins of East Timor and Papua New Guinea. Our source rocks and seabed are capable of generating oil and gas and the reefal structures potential for exploration. I refer, Madam Chair, to His Excellency's Address which refers to this.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, thank you for your statement. You have completed the time allocated to you for the day.

(Acclamation)

With your indulgence honourable Members, there are only two more speakers, if you will allow us to continue us so that we can adjourn for lunch before we break for the day.

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU.- Madam Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and Members of this august Chamber, I wish to thank the Fijian people and the honourable Prime Minister for the opportunity to serve them and the nation in this Parliament. It is a great honour and like my other fellow Ministers, I pledge that I will do my utmost to fulfil the confidence and trust that has been placed in me.

Firstly, Madam Speaker, may I congratulate you on your election to the Chair of this Parliament. All over Fiji, young women see someone who has achieved the high office of Speaker after a career in medicine and a long record of public service. You are a great role model for young people and I wish you every success.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU.- Madam Speaker, like my fellow honourable colleagues, I have a number of people to thank for the roles they have played in my life that led me to this Chamber.

First and foremost, I want to pay tribute to my wife, Ane and my three sons – Apimeleki, Eroni and Nemani. They have been the joy of my life and I owe a great deal to them. More joy came in the form of my beautiful granddaughter, so I count myself extremely fortunate.

Like many of us, I come from a humble background from Sinuvaca in the island of Koro in the Lomaiviti Group. My father, the late Nemani Tuitubou was a school teacher and my mother, Mereti taught me the values that I hold dear to this day - the love for family, community and country.

There are a couple of other people who are pillars of strength in my life. My aunty, the late Kelera Taqailaloa, my uncle the late Isoa Vakaciwa and the late Mere Sigavere. To them, I also extend my heartfelt thanks. Special thanks to Nau Mate Rakai, my single voter in Sawana, Vanua Balavu and to all my cousins, brother and sister, family and friends who supported me in New Zealand, Australia, United States, Lebanon, Sinai, Iraq and Afghanistan.

I would also like to acknowledge Mr. Koli Saukuru, the FijiFirst campaign assistant in Nausori and the management of East-West and Railway Taxi Companies for their support during my campaign. I would like to thank them for the roles they played in my life that brought me to this Chamber.

I was sent away to school, first at Nabua Primary School in Suva, then to Levuka Public School and finally to Ratu Sukuna Memorial School. Like so many of us, I was fortunate to have teachers who inspired me and I have always remembered them.

In 1974, when I left Ratu Sukuna, I joined the RFMF and from then on, I gained Stages I and IV and a Diploma in Civil Engineering under the City Guilds in the then Derrick Technical Institute. Gradually, I climbed up through the ranks to the position of Lt. Colonel, I had the privilege to serve as a peacekeeper in Lebanon, Sinai and East Timor. I was a Company Commander in East Timor, and finally Commanding Officer in Sinai in 2008 and 2011.

I was by the side of the RFMF Commander, now the honourable Prime Minister during the events of 2000. I was very proud to hear the account he gave in Parliament on Monday, 13th October, 2014 of why we need to do what we did. It was not for ourselves but the nation, to preserve the unity of the State, I have no regrets.

In 2009, I left the Military to join the Civil Service. First, as a construction engineer in the West and then as Commissioner Central in 2011. Some of the things that have been said in the Chamber this week about the lack of rural development is simply not true. As a Government, we have done more for ordinary people in Fiji. Of course, there is still much to do, but Fijians know the truth of this as the Government is committed to providing them with the things they need to improve their lives.

As Commissioner Central, we personally check or co-ordinate with 40 senior civil servants in inaccessible parts of Naitasiri to access the needs in order to see that the under-developed, the under-privileged in this province. We did the same in Namosi, Serua, Rewa and Tailevu and the jobs of providing them with the service they need in full swing, including the construction of a few roads to places that had never had roads before. So I ask everyone to examine the evidence and not take what is heard at face value. There are still more developments to come, including the Sawanikula to Tuburua Road.

Madam Speaker, I would like to acknowledge and thank His Excellency the President for his most gracious address.

I would like to take this opportunity with feelings of respect to thank the honourable Prime Minister for having faith in me, to be the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports, and I wish to outline some of my intentions for this portfolio.

Madam Speaker, the development of a dynamic population of young Fijians and the promotion of sports to improve this social and economic status are the paramount objectives of my Ministry. We all know that sports, not only keeps our young people fit, it teaches some of the most basic qualities we all need to be successful in life - endurance, perseverance, teamwork and fair play.

The will to win on the sports field translates to a will to win in life and it is a vital part of nation-building because teamwork, perseverance and unity are the building blocks for any successful nation.

Madam Speaker, allow me to remind the Chamber that more than 171,000 voters were young people between the ages of 18 to 30. That is more than three out of 10 of the overall voter population. It is crucial that we guide today's young people – our next generation of Fijian leaders, to become productive contributors to the sustainable socio-economic development of this great nation, and help them develop the qualities of character, reliability, honesty and trust as they prepare to participate fully in our national life.

We owe it to them, indeed we have an obligation to provide our young people with the necessary programmes and services, and to create a conducive environment to develop their full potential. What we must give them is a simple opportunity; the opportunity to create better lives for themselves than the generation before them, and the opportunity to share the benefits of a more modern and prosperous Fiji.

Madam Speaker, to this end, the Ministry has developed a four-year Strategic Development Plan to motivate young people to be proactive and productive citizens of our nation, ensuring that all young Fijians, regardless of background and family income are provided with opportunities.

According to the UN definition, "youths" are those aged between 15 and 24 years, but given the unique structure of our society and the prolonged period of parental dependency, we have decided to extend this definition to Fijians up to the age of 35. In a concerted effort to improve the ability of our young people to earn a living, the Ministry will continue to establish income-generating projects that will benefit them and their community as a whole. This includes the provision of funds to youth groups through our Youth Empowerment and Seeds of Success programmes. We are also establishing sustainable livelihood projects for aspiring entrepreneurs graduating from our training programmes and training centres.

The Ministry will also be realigning and reviewing our current youth grants to increase funding in a targeted way, so that young people can be launched into rewarding lives as business people, professionals, civil servants or whatever path they may wish to take in life.

Madam Speaker, to put into action targeted, efficient and need-based youth development programmes, the Ministry has established five youth training centres in Nasau, Sigatoka; Valelevu in Nasinu; Naqere and Naleba in Vanua Levu and Yavitu in Kadavu. These centres provide basic skills training and are accredited with Level III certification by the Fiji National University. In line with the Government's manifesto of establishing vocational colleges that provide Level II certificates in key trade areas, my Ministry is currently upgrading these training centres to deliver vocational courses with Level II certification in agriculture, carpentry, music and other key areas.

Madam Speaker, we are dedicated to creating sustainable progress for our young people through a targeted and systematic approach that generates tangible results. This is a mission that is vital for nation building and Fiji's economic development.

Madam Speaker, in sports development, my Ministry is committed to elevating the current standard of our sports participation at community, district, national and international level. The Fiji National Sports Commission has established a clear and manageable framework to guide and enhance the delivery of sports programmes in Fiji; and the opportunity for every Fijian to actively participate in sports or physical activity, both for enjoyment and to improve their general health.

The Ministry will also continue to support the development of urban and rural sports playing fields in line with Government's key initiative to expand sporting facilities throughout Fiji. In this regard, a total of 12 sports grounds, two cricket pitches and a gold driving range have been constructed.

Madam Speaker, to complement making sports facilities available and accessible to all Fijians, the Ministry donates basic sports equipment to youth groups, sports clubs, schools and communities that request help. Under my leadership, this programme will continue and we will also be exploring new avenues of assistance, especially to those young people who have yet to benefit from our programmes.

Madam Speaker, I am deeply honoured to have been given the task of developing our young people; surely one of the most important priorities for any Fijian. It is on their shoulders that the future of our nation rests, and they carry the vision of this Government for a fitter, smarter and a better country. I ask God's blessing on the young people of Fiji, and may God bless our beloved nation.

Vinaka vakalevu, bahut dhanyavad, Shukriya and thank you.

(Acclamation)

HON. A.T. VADEI.- Madam Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Cabinet Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members of Parliament; it is indeed a great honour and privilege to rise and deliver my maiden speech in this august Parliament. I owe that privilege to those who have entrusted in me their confidence to be their representative in this Parliament.

Madam Speaker, before I enlighten this Parliament any further, I wish to join my fellow honourable Members in congratulating you, Madam, on your appointment as the honourable

Speaker of this Chambers. I sincerely take this opportunity to wish you well in your new appointment, and promise that I will work with you in years to come.

Madam Speaker, I take this opportunity to pay tribute and express my appreciation to all those who have stood by and supported me during the campaign and Election period, up to this day. It was never an easy exercise, one that took courage and endurance to succeed this far.

Firstly, I wish to thank my family - my wife and children, my brothers, sisters, cousins, uncles and aunties for their support, prayers, and endless words of encouragement and well wishes. I also wish to pay tribute to the:

- 1) *Vanua o Nailagolaba kei na Vanua of Nacobua* in the province of Tailevu for their support and encouragement;
- 2) *Turaga na Tui Levuka* and the villages of the *Tikina ko Levuka* in Ovalau, *Turaga na Tui Wailevu* and the villages in the *Tikina ko Lovoni*, *Turaga na Ratu mai Bureta* and the villages in the *Tikina ko Bureta*; *Turaga na Roko Takala*, and the villages in the *Tikina ko Qalivakabau*;
- 3) *Mata ki Mudu* and the villages in the *Tikina o Mudu* in the island of Koro, *Turaga na Tui Cawa* and the villages in the *Tikina ko Cawa*;
- 4) *Tui Nairai* and the villages in the Island of Nairai;
- 5) *Toronibau* and the villages in the Island of Batiki;
- 6) *Turaga na Ratu* and the villages in the Island of Moturiki; and
- 7) *Turaga na Tui Vanuaso* in the Island of Gau, the villages in the *Tikina ko Vanuaso*, *Turaga na Ratu* and the villages in the *Tikina ko Navukailagi*; *Takala i Gau* and the villages of my *Tikina ko Sawaieke* .

Madam Speaker, I also wish to extend this appreciation to all members of my polling and campaign team. I thank them for enduring the long hours of meetings with our supporters, the rough seas and long travels to be able to meet with almost all voters within my province.

I pay a special tribute to my parents. They were the true pillars and inspiration to my career and political endeavour. It was through their humble upbringing that made me who I am today. Through their teachings, they instilled in me the values of impartiality, honesty, respect for one another, trust, moral courage and love. My choice of this political journey, Madam Speaker, is founded on a number of beliefs.

Firstly, our people need better and improved services. In my former career as a civil servant, it was a requirement that I travelled to various centers around the country to perform my duty. As I travelled, I discovered that the needy and disadvantaged are mostly rural or remote based. They lack the proper infrastructure support and assistance. They lack the resources and are often neglected. In the maritime area, I found that they resort to improvised means of transportation, to be able to access some of the basic necessities of life.

In my engagement in the church, I involve myself in the social welfare division. I travel extensively within our Davuilevu Circuit and discover an alarming rate of social issues that range from unemployment, drug addiction, and deplorable living standards to high costs of living. These are destructive forces that are destroying our family structure and the people of this nation.

Secondly, building a better nation through good leadership. This nation requires a firm and strong foundation. May I quote from my Bible "A wise man builds his house upon the rock and the foolish man builds his house upon the sand".

Madam Speaker, it is my humble observation that this beloved nation of ours requires strong leaders, who can choose and identify the right foundation. I submit that there is no other rock but the Lord Jesus Christ with Christian values and principles be the founding rock of this nation.

Our great grandfathers identified this rock in 1835. Today, we note that the new Constitution has erased and shifted this choice of foundation and introduced other foundations. It is a very sad occasion and dark moment in the history of this nation.

Madam Speaker, the choice of secularism over Christianity is a deceiving and misleading move. Secularism insists on Pluralism, where everything and anything can be the truth.

My Christian sisters and brothers who formed the majority of the population of this country will have experienced and enjoyed the benefits, love and joy of the said foundation and vouch for the same. This has created fear of backlash from God. We, as members of this Parliament, owe it to our people to lead and direct them to the right foundation.

Madam Speaker, our nation calls for leaders who are honest, fair, full of respect for the law and for the people and God-fearing. Leaders who walk their talk that they do not only talk but need to be transparent and are morally courageous. Leaders must show that no one is above the law and that the principle of equal citizenry applies to all.

Madam Speaker, we also need to recognize the important role that the indigenous traditional leaders played in our society. This nation carries the scars and hallmarks of their sacrifice in the last two World Wars, the Malayan Campaign, Lebanon, Rhodesia, Sinai, Iraq and now Syria. They deserve respect here in their own land.

We also need to recognise the roles played by other social groups, including NGOs as they always play a complementing role in leading our people to the right foundations of life.

Thirdly, strengthening and promoting healthy relationships with the rest of the world. We cannot afford to isolate ourselves from our international partners. However, our partnerships need to be properly scrutinized and we must pay respect and align ourselves to the Commonwealth foundation. We seem to be overly engaged and spread ourselves too thinly and face the risk of breakage for lack of loyalty.

Madam Speaker, I mostly campaigned in the Maritime Zone of the Lomaiviti Group and parts of South Tailevu South and the corridors of Suva and Nausori and the Pacific Harbour area. During my campaign, I noted the vast disparity in the levels of services delivered by the Government. It makes me wonder if we are all equal as preached by Government.

Madam Speaker, I will attempt to highlight some key issues later, but at this stage, I do trust and hope that the Government will hold firm to the commitment made by the honourable Prime

Minister that all will be serviced equally by the current Government and that no one will be victimised.

Madam Speaker I wish to draw the attention of this Parliament the concerns of the voters I visited.

Firstly, on infrastructural development: On the road upgrading in Gau, Ovalau and Koro Islands, in the last eight years there has been a neglect in upgrading of these infrastructural developments. Consequently, this has caused high vehicle maintenance costs and increased fares. It has also affected economic activities and an obstacle to accessing markets for their farm produce.

Secondly, airstrip upgrade in Koro and Gau need to be upgraded to allow for bigger airplanes (19-seater), as the island of Lomaiviti is also a potential tourist destination in the not too distant future.

Thirdly, building of jetty and wharf in Gau and Nairai. I wish to bring to the attention of this honourable Chamber the delay in the completion of these two projects.

Fourthly, health & medical services. Government is to relook at staffing and pharmaceutical supply in health centers and hospitals in the Lomaiviti Group. Government should also review its policies in providing return air tickets to patients who are referred to Suva or Levuka on emergency basis.

Fifthly on education. There are five secondary schools in the Lomaiviti Group. They all lack proper facilities to deliver quality education. The biggest concern relates to lack of quality of educational facilities, those are laboratories, libraries, ICT laboratories and access to internet and research facilities, lack of proper dormitories and qualified staff. Also, lack of educational facilities have been seen as the major reason for rural indigenous Fijians resorting to urban migration.

On free education policy. There is a misconception borne out of this. On one hand, Government is giving free money and on the other hand, it is discouraging parents from paying for building funds by limiting the fundraising activities to one per year.

On economic activities, firstly, Pacific Fisheries Company (PAFCO), Levuka, Lomaiviti needs PAFCO. It is central to the economic life of Levuka. PAFCO has a history of providing jobs to the people of Ovalau and Motoriki. Madam, Speaker, removal of PAFCO could be destructive to the lives of the population of Levuka and Moturiki.

Secondly, ice plants in Gau, Koro and Nairai. Maritime people rely heavily on revenue from fishing. Lack of proper transportation and lcommercial power have been a challenge to accessing their markets. Ice plants will be a perfect relief.

Thirdly, Multi Ethnic Budgetary Allocation. Descendants of those from Solomon Islands have settled in Wainaloka and Wailailai. Their settlement has not been recognised as a formal village under the Fijian Affairs Act. To-date they cannot enjoy their FNPF Village entitlements because their settlements are not recognised as Fijian villages. So I request the Government, if they could look into the interest of our friends and all other communities living in the Lomaiviti Group of Solomon descendants.

Fourthly, maintenance of Government Stations and Government-owned properties within the villages in the Lomaiviti group. Madam Speaker, during the visits to the islands of Lomaiviti,

I also witnessed a Nursing Station in Levuka i Gau, where the station is vacant and has fallen to pieces. It is an eye sore in the village. Also the bio fuel premises in Nacamaki– Koro is now becoming a pig sty in the village and also the copra dryer in Mudu, Koro. Furthermore, the Nawaikama Jetty Shed building is another eye sore and has been left neglected for many, many years.

Fifthly, shipping services, Madam Speaker. As you are aware, Lomaiviti is a maritime province. We badly need consistent and quality shipping services as shipping services are linked to economic activities. Inconsistency in shipping affects the farmers planning and marketing strategies. On some occasions, the farm products are wasted when ships do not show up on time.

Sixthly, co-operative movement, Government is requested to revisit the cooperative strategy, to be the focal point for the purchase of farmers' produce, such as copra, *dalo* and *yaqona* and also to act as the distribution agents to the village stores in the remote islands. The benefits of this venture will bring relief to the cooperative societies and its villages.

Madam Speaker, I will now respond to His Excellency's speech. His Excellency stated that and I quote: "Fiji has finally had a General Elections based on the genuine democratic principle of equal value".

Madam Speaker, the statement is marginally untrue. In fact, the last General Elections process deprived a lot of their right to vote freely. This is because of the process used.

The maritime provinces like the Lomaiviti group was imposed with pre-polling dates which was inconvenient to many of them. Sad to say that some even missed out on exercising their civil duty to vote, as they were in Suva attending the Methodist Annual Conference and some men from the villages were in the west harvesting cane for their village development projects.

Madam Speaker, there were a lot of irregularities. Voters' electoral rolls were not provided in time to the rural even in urban areas. Some voters though registered, were not allowed to vote, because their names did not appear in the Electoral Roll.

There was also misunderstanding on pre-poll, as it was like a practice poll for the 17th day poll - little did they realize it was the real thing.

(Laughter)

There are many other negative things to say about the last General Elections. I will now continue to just one more point. The last General Elections was supposed to be one day, however, it was a three weeks exercise, excluding counting.

On the Office of the Opposition, Madam Speaker, as a member of Opposition, I do sense high expectations from the public for this office to make a difference. People are looking to the Opposition, to offer the best alternative government. While such expectations come naturally, I must say I am disappointed with the level of resourcing in the Opposition Office.

In that regard, I wish to highlight, that there is a genuine need to adequately staff and fund the Office of the Opposition, so we may effectively perform our functions. However, Madam Speaker, I must pledge to the people of this great country that the Opposition will be active and diligent and is determined to keep the Government in check. We shall leave no stone unturned to

make sure that the executive arm of government is kept accountable for its actions and the public is kept well informed and abreast of all government business from within and outside Parliament.

Madam Speaker, despite our numerical deficit, we will do our utmost best to ensure that Government policies and activities are given the best possible scrutiny. We will oppose where we must, we will expose what must be exposed.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, once again I am deeply grateful to the people who voted for me and give me the opportunity to represent them here. I am proud to have been elected to this august Chamber and I undertake to the best of my abilities to honour this Chamber and the people of this nation, in particular the people who have bestowed their trust in me.

May God Bless us all, *Vinaka Vakalevu* and thank you.

(Acclamation)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that concludes our business for today. I will now adjourn Parliament to 9.30 a.m. on Friday, 17th October, 2014.

The Parliament is now adjourned.

The Parliament adjourned at 1.20 p.m.