

**TUESDAY, 14<sup>TH</sup> 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.

**MINUTES**

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> 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	-	43
Abstain	-	7

Motion agreed to.

**CALENDAR OF PARLIAMENT MEETINGS 2014 & 2015**

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

That following the recent General Elections, this House adopts the Calendar of Meetings for Parliament for 2014 and 2015, as follows:

<b>OCTOBER – DECEMBER, 2014</b>		
OCTOBER	Monday, 6 <sup>th</sup>	First meeting of New Parliament. Swearing-in of Members of Parliament.
	Tuesday, 7 <sup>th</sup>	His Excellency the President Addresses Parliament.
	Monday 13 <sup>th</sup> to Friday 17 <sup>th</sup>	Parliament Meeting.
NOVEMBER	Friday 21 <sup>st</sup>	Budget Address.
	Monday 24 <sup>th</sup> to Friday 28 <sup>th</sup>	Informal Meeting/Caucus Meeting on the Budget Address.
DECEMBER	Monday 1 <sup>st</sup> to Friday 5 <sup>th</sup>	Debate on Budget Address
	Monday 8 <sup>th</sup> to Friday 12 <sup>th</sup>	Debate on Budget Address

<b>FEBRUARY - DECEMBER, 2015</b>		
FEBRUARY	Monday 9 <sup>th</sup> to Friday 13 <sup>th</sup>	Parliament Meeting.
MARCH	Monday 16 <sup>th</sup> to Friday 20 <sup>th</sup>	Parliament Meeting.
MAY	Monday 11 <sup>th</sup> to Friday 15 <sup>th</sup>	Parliament Meeting.
	Monday 18 <sup>th</sup> to Friday 22 <sup>nd</sup>	Parliament Meeting.
JULY	Monday 6 <sup>th</sup> to Friday 10 <sup>th</sup>	Parliament Meeting.
SEPTEMBER	Monday 7 <sup>th</sup>	Parliament Prorogues.
	Monday 28 <sup>th</sup>	Opening Session.
		His Excellency the President addresses Parliament.

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Honourable Members, as you are well aware, it is important for Parliament to co-ordinate its meetings up to the end of the year, including 2015. It is for this reason that the meetings for the rest of the year (2014) and up to September 2015 have been worked out in advance.

The proposed Calendar has been endorsed by the Business Committee, and Madam Speaker, I commend the motion to the House.

Question put.

Votes cast:

Ayes	-	46
Abstain	-	4

Motion agreed to.

### **COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIR**

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before we resume debate on the motion to thank His Excellency's Address, I wish to remind you of Standing Order 28, which requires that all speeches must be delivered in English. Therefore, honourable Members, I would ask that you refrain from speaking in the vernacular when delivering your speeches.

May I also remind you all that the Secretary General will ring the bell at five minutes, and then one minute, before a Member's allocated time is up. That will give honourable Members sufficient time to wind up.

Moreover, honourable Members, we wish to complete the debate on His Excellency's Address before 12.30 p.m. on Friday, 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2014. You will notice that we are moving ahead of time, and will not be strictly following the schedule on the Batting Order.

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

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Madam Speaker, I rise this morning and seek leave to deliver my maiden speech. Before I present my speech, Madam Speaker, I would like to first of all, refer to a statement written by a Christian author, which has been a source of inspiration to me. It says, and I quote:

“The greatest want of the world is the want of men - men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.”

This, Madam Speaker, has been my inspiration and I will base my presentation on this, hoping that it would be a source of enlightenment, not only to me, but to all honourable Members.

Madam Speaker, I wish to join the other honourable Members of Parliament in congratulating you on your appointment as the first female to become the Speaker of Parliament in Fiji.

I would also like to congratulate all honourable Members of Parliament on their elections by the citizens of Fiji in the last General Elections. As I see it, I must thank God Almighty for leading me on the journey that has brought me to this destination. I believe that He initiated my journey and according to His ability, He will always finish everything he has started.

I would like to sincerely thank my family, my wife and four children for their support and love. The journey has not been easy for us but we were able to persevere by the grace of God, and together we have prevailed against unforeseen obstacles we have encountered. Their support during the Election campaign is unsurpassed and for this, I could witness God's divine purpose for families. At the time when I needed assistance, I was always assured of their availability. The Election journey has brought us together and to be more closer than before. This is a testimony that a strong nation can only be achieved through strong family unity.

I also wish to extend my sincere appreciation to my brother and sisters, who were at the frontline of my political journey; a journey that was started by our father but did not eventuate because of unavailability of funds to pay for his education. He was a bright individual but was unable to reach his full potential because our grandfather did not have the money to pay for his school fees. My grandfather travelled around the island of Lakeba in Lau, with a mare seeking for someone who may be interested to buy it. It was a difficult time economically for everyone, and no one had the money to buy the mare, so it was the end of my father's ambition to strive for further education.

My grandfather's inability to pay for my father's school fees was a blessing in disguise because it allowed my father to stay back in the small village of Vakano, where he pioneered social reforms with the objective of providing funds for every student who had the potential to advance in better education. I believe I inherited the ability to persevere during difficult situations through his teachings. In addition, being witness to the spirit of strife and perseverance when growing up, has helped made me who I am today.

I would also like to indicate my sincere appreciation to those individuals in Tamavua, Wailoku, Nai-ka-Va - a settlement in Tamavua-i-cake, and also the Cunningham areas, those who had volunteered to participate as agents during the General Election. I must not forget all those who had supported my efforts, those who had voted for me and also those who had put aside time to pray for my political journey. We acknowledge that we are not fighting against those who are opposed to our values and way of life only, but according to the words of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians, Chapter 6 Verse 12, and I quote: “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places”. This truth, Madam Speaker, has made me stronger in time of adversity and strife. I realised that when we encounter opposing views, it is the time to examine how we stand before the Originator of ultimate values, and that is God Almighty.

Madam Speaker, in December 2006, I was unceremoniously removed from my position as Supervisor of Elections by the then Commander of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces. Today, is a great day because I now have the right to say this in his presence, "My only fault was because I was the Supervisor of Elections and I had exercised impartiality in my judgment on Elections issues."

After my termination on 6th December, 2006, I was given 24 hours to vacate the government quarters I was occupying with my family. We witnessed the strong hands of God, providing for our needs according to His glory. He was ever present at all times. I resisted the temptation to move abroad, even though I had the opportunity to do so. This was due to my love for the country God Almighty gave our forefathers so that we, in this generation, could become means of blessings to those of different races, who would make Fiji their permanent home.

In the past eight years, I have, apart from my work as a lawyer, been engaged as a co-worker with the Lord Jesus Christ. During this time, I found comfort in bringing happiness and joy to those who were weary, not knowing what the next day would bring. The Lord taught me that happiness and peace could only be achieved if we are at peace with Him. Madam Speaker, this is to accept that the general good that we look for cannot be found in our own intrinsic values. It comes from an external absolute moral value, which can only be inherited through our personal desire to invite Jesus to reside in us.

Madam Speaker, during this time, I learnt that it is morally destructive to live an untended relationship, forgotten due to the trend of time. If this situation continues, it will give way to further conflict and harm for Jesus Himself says in Matthew Chapter 6 Verse 14, I quote: "For if we forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you." As I forgive those who have wronged against me, I realised many more, Madam Speaker, were subjected to similar treatment and likewise, have chosen the same path I have taken.

This is the beauty of Christianity, Madam Speaker. This nation has so far been preserved by the Spirit of God, imbedded in the hearts of every believer. Surely, there may be a false belief that the power of tyranny that had suppressed citizens of this nation was overwhelmingly strong to allow any opposition to rise against it. The greatest power is the one in the believers of Christ that enabled them to resist the natural inclination to take revenge. As John wrote in I John Chapter 4 Verse 4, it says: "Ye are of God, little children and have overcome them; because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world."

Madam Speaker, Christians are naturally humbled with complete dependence upon the Word of God. God promised that He will avenge for the believer. In Romans Chapter 12 Verse 19 to 21, it says, I quote:

"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath for it is written, Vengeance is mine. I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him, if he thirst, give him drink, for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

We, as a country, Madam Speaker, have come to the dawn of a new era as described by His Excellency the President in his Address on page 7 of the *Daily Hansard* on 7<sup>th</sup> October, 2014, I quote: "... the launch of our new democracy". In my opinion, Madam Speaker, it is a gloomy and sad beginning. Never in the history of Fiji have we been so divided on issues that are so fundamental to our existence as a nation.

In the Government's resolve to promote equality to every citizen in Fiji, it has chosen to relegate the fundamental rights of the indigenous people over their resources and traditions under all rights under Chapter 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji.

Madam Speaker, there is no dispute on the issue of ownership of land but I am greatly concerned in the control imposed by the Constitution without prior consultation with the indigenous owners. The control imposed under Section 26 of the Constitution is perhaps, used to address the impasse faced by previous governments over the expiry of sugarcane farm leases and other associated land issues. However, this end cannot be justified by the means employed, and it is a clear indication of lack of respect towards the indigenous people and their established institutions.

Madam Speaker, no one can dispute that the structure of ownership comes from God. It is so because He is the creator of all things and He gives His creation to all those He desires. This must be respected because it is a divine arrangement. The manner provided to use something that does not belong to me, is simply to ask the owner. In Mathew Chapter 7 Verse 7, it says, and I quote: "Ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be open up to you, for everyone that asks receives and he that seeks finds, to him that knocks, it shall be open".

Madam Speaker, it is absolutely important to reflect all intended provisions of the absolute value standard, in order to determine whether such provisions meet universal justice requirements. The Charter cannot be used in that respect for this purpose because our human intrinsic values cannot substitute God's absolute values. The Charter contains 13 Pillars but God's absolute values contain only 10 principles. When these principles are violated, we will expect God's judgment to visit us.

Madam Speaker, if I take something that belongs to someone else without asking for the owner's permission, I can be subjected to the crime of stealing. It is the same thing with legislating the use of land that belongs to the indigenous people without asking for their permission, it is wrong under the Criminal Code and also wrong under God's standard of morale of principles. The Eighth Commandment says, "thou shall not steal". This irregularity has been legitimised by the Constitution and unless remedied, it will be a permanent obstacle to peace and prosperity.

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- Hear, hear!

HON S. D. KARAVAKI.- Madam Speaker, it is understood that many native lands were acquired in the past to be used for public purpose. Some of those lands have been converted to freehold lands after the reason they were acquired for had ceased. To rectify this wrong, the Government must take steps to identify and return all these lands to the rightful owners. The Government cannot excuse itself from its responsibility of correcting the wrongs committed by past governments. The Government must take immediate steps to remove the limitations in Section 28 (2) of the Constitution.

Madam Speaker, Government must take immediate steps to return land under Schedules A and B to their rightful owners. There are some landowning units that have their land retained by the State, when the owners can be readily identified. Not doing so, is again Principle 10 of the absolute standard of moral principles, "thou shall not covert thy neighbour's house, thou shall not covert thy neighbour's wife, nor his maidservants, nor his ox, nor anything that is thy neighbours".

The Government initiative to set aside \$10 million to help the *i Taukei* develop their land should be commended. At the same token, Government must ensure that appropriate compensation is paid to the *i Taukei* landowners where their land is used by investors.

I have been reliably informed that the three landowning units involved in the bauxite mining in Bua were paid \$1.9 million, \$1.6 million and \$30,000 respectively as compensation. This was done when valuation, according to international valuation standard, sets the compensation at \$US150 million.

HON. GOVT MEMBER.- Who did the valuation?

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- It would be hypocrisy to state the desire to assist the *i Taukei* landowners, and on the other hand, deprive them from their rightful compensation.

Madam Speaker, God is ready and willing to bless this country and show the world His endorsements - different races can all live here without fear of the unknown. Only God knows our destiny. However, we, as elected representatives, must have the capacity to move this nation forward with certainty of peace and prosperity for all.

Madam Speaker, as the Opposition, we are here to remind the Government of its responsibility. We may not have the numbers to compel any changes but we take must immediate steps to resolve or to remove all its divisive policies. It must ensure that true justice is based on God's moral standard principles and is permanently set in place. Without this, Madam Speaker, all efforts made, based on human intrinsic values will be found wanting when up against flood and tempest. There is no power or might that can stand against the judgment of God.

As I close, Madam Speaker, as a nation, we are to humble ourselves before God and turn to Him and pray, for He is ready and willing, as He had promised to heal our land. Before moving on, it is time to examine ourselves as leaders and as a nation. We, indeed, have a unique lifestyle to show to the world. It is the one that the God Jehovah must take in his rightful place and all must look unto Him because He is the author and the finisher of our faith.

Madam Speaker, may the Lord bless you, may the Lord bless all Members of Parliament and may the Lord bless Fiji.

(Acclamation)

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Madam Speaker, it is my testimony today to direct the glory to God Almighty for this momentous occasion, whilst standing here to deliver my maiden speech. Indeed, for most of us admitted to Parliament for the first time, it is made possible by the endorsement of the people, our voters after an eight-year period of democratic darkness and suppression.

Firstly, I would like to congratulate you, Madam Speaker, on your election and being the first lady to ascend to this very important position in the history of the Fiji Parliament. You have set another high bar for all women in Fiji to aspire to.

I would like to acknowledge the many people who have helped me in many different ways, which had enabled me to be here. Firstly, to the God Almighty for giving me the good health and this opportunity to serve my country in this capacity. Secondly my party, the Social Democratic and Liberal Party and thirdly, to my family and loyal friends – *vinaka vakalevu*.

Madam Speaker, special mention, therefore, is due to those who have voted for me. I extend to you all my gratitude and a big *vinaka vakalevu*. I assure you that I will not disappoint you in my new role. I acknowledge also with thanks; *na Vanua o Vuna, na Vanua o Naitasiri, na Vanua o*

*Waimaro, na Nakorolevu e Lomaivuna, na Vanua o Navuakece, na Vanua o Delai, na Vanua o Burenitu, na Vanua o Qaranikula kei na matavuvale vaka Vulinitu.*

Special mention to a tough selfless and dedicated campaign team, without whom I would not have achieved such a milestone; to the President of Naitasiri – Kelemedi Naidiri; Campaign Director – Inoke Devo and family; technical director – *noqu yaca*, vanua protocol – *Mata kei Vuna e Waimaro*, Sanaila, Tamanimako, Di Ma and the children and my grandchildren, *Vakatawa* Paula Navunisaravi – Naivikinikini and *Vale ni Lotu e Nataqiri*, for the financial support and donations. I take this opportunity to convey to you all my sincere gratitude as I do not intend to mention your name, *vinaka vakalevu*. Madam Speaker, it is my prayer that the good Lord will continue to richly bless them and their families.

Madam Speaker, as for me, I am most humbled and privileged to say that I am the first from the *Vanua o Vuna* to be elected as a Member of Parliament, and I know that the younger generations will be inspired by this achievement.

I would also like to acknowledge our predecessors, who have sat in this august Parliament before, after Fiji attained independence from Great Britain. However, Madam Speaker, we all have our different paths to this honourable Parliament, pursuing different careers in government or in the private sector. For me, it has been a long journey. At the age of 64, I am probably one of the oldest Members of this Parliament.

After six years of primary schooling at Sawani Village School, I went to Ratu Kadavulevu School (RKS) for three years. I completed my secondary education at Queen Victoria School (QVS) in 1969. Eight years of moulding in an environment of boys' boarding school, away from the comforts of our home - a life where long lasting friendship had forged forever and will continue till death.

Madam Speaker, I must pay tribute to the wisdom and foresight of the Great Council of Chiefs, (GCC) to convince the Colonial Government in those times to build schools like Queen Victoria School (ACS), Adi Cakobau School (ACS) and Ratu Kadavulevu School (RKS), for the potentially bright indigenous children from all over Fiji to be taught in those schools, in the hope that they would become future leaders. And indeed, it has been so till to-date.

Madam Speaker, your esteemed self is a product of ACS, so are our Governor-Generals, Prime Ministers, Ministers, Permanent Secretaries, Military Offices and most civil servants, who are all products from these schools at provincial and village levels, giving inputs in the development of this nation at all levels. Well done QVS, ACS and RKS!

Madam Speaker, as far as my political career is concerned, I joined SODELPA because I truly believe that it represents the sort of hope that we can be inclusive, determined, self-reliant, compassionate and progressive. We all have markedly different views on both sides of the House, on how we can get Fiji moving into the future, however, I would like to think we can be certain of one thing, we all came here because we have a genuine desire to see good done.

Following our General Elections last month, some commentators and leaders have expressed concerns about the growing differences amongst our people. They were warning of divisions, and are calling for unity. I am reminded by an observation made by a Parliamentarian from another country who said that; "Differences are not divisions. It is the intolerance of differences that are divisive."

I believe our community will develop out of robust debates, stronger, not just in Parliament, but in the larger society as well. Social cohesion will be strengthened when we give people, including our

young people, room to voice their views and grievances, in particular in community affairs. This is being recognised in households and at workplaces around us, and is affecting how they are run. There is no reason not to learn from it, but we must start from a position of difference, not a forced unity.

How do we move forward from a position of difference? A wise gentleman once wrote to me recently on social media stating that, "The key is always to set our devilish pride aside and for both parties to communicate. The aim is not to impose one's view over the other, but to find as much common ground as possible for the good of the common objective both parties have. And yes, I have always practiced this in the office and with the wife. So far, so good. Politics is the art of the possible".

Let me state quite clearly how I see myself as an Opposition Member of this Parliament. I may challenge Government policies in Parliament, but I do not, by definition, oppose Government policy. I will perform my role to voice alternative and opposing views in the law-making process, based on my Party's policy and philosophy.

Madam Speaker, during my campaign in villages of Naitasiri, issues raised were in regards to the lack of appreciation of the poverty level, and the lack of a productive policy to increase individual productivity capacity. Matters of concern include the following:

- 1) High cost of food items at supermarkets;
- 2) Very poor returns from their weekly trips to the market to sell their crops;
- 3) A meagre one to two square chains of ginger quota per farmer per year is absurd, and the Government should be in a position to address the shortfall. Mechanised tilling of the land will increase production for these crops, thus increase the earning capability of the villagers;
- 4) Areas between Nawaqabena and Delaiwaimale are still without electricity, which they continue to ask for, the provision of the service. In the case of Nawaqabena Village, they have paid their deposit since 2012, but are still waiting, so is their borehole which is in place, but not operational;
- 5) A sore sight of irresponsible excavation road work between Nawaqabena and Delaiwaimale, mindless of the environmental impact. Naduna District School is vulnerable to landslide, so are the houses in Delaiwamale and Vatukorosue, due to this roadwork;
- 6) Continuous water problem at Lomaivuna Secondary and Primary Schools that result in the continuous closure of the schools; and
- 7) The pending issue of the settlement of expired leases at Lomaivuna since 2001, which the Cabinet of the previous regime is aware of.

Those are some of the concerns from the Naitasiri areas that I visited.

Madam Speaker, for my professional input to this august Chamber on the Fisheries Sector, I would like to emphasise the importance of the fisheries resource to the well-being of Fiji and its citizens. It is the wish of the Opposition, to see not only our industry growing, but also that the people of Fiji can enjoy and readily access fish for their home consumption and recreation. Likewise, we have



a substantial tourist trade around shark diving and game fishing. I am certain that we share a common goal with the Government, to ensure that we use the resources wisely and for the benefit of all.

There are serious concerns over the state of our commercial fishery, and these have been well documented over the last year with staff redundancy and vessels being laid up and their crews unemployed. Also, needs to be highlighted is the lack of control due to the congestion problem at Muaiwalu Wharf. It is a risk in tantamount proportion, rise in social problems such as stealing, illegal trading in all forms, organised crimes, et cetera.

In January this year, the Government moved to provide a support package to the industry. I am sure industry stakeholders are in agreement with the various aspects of the package, which would have helped in some way to make our industry more competitive internationally. There are still many recommendations that have not been carried through, and the key elements of the support package still have to be attended to. We ask the Government that an update on the support package is provided to this Parliament soon.

Our export seafood industry, if properly supported, can be a major employer, both at sea and onshore. Madam Speaker, we all know that the industry can contribute so much to the economic growth of Fiji. It is necessary that we remove all bureaucratic impediments that deny this industry the chance of being internationally competitive.

Our domestic fleet is ancient and port infrastructure is poor and lacking. These matters need to be addressed with urgency.

The core element of our fisheries business whether it be Cannery in Levuka, our domestic fleet or the processing factories in Suva, is tuna. These highly migratory species travel the Pacific, spending only a short period of time of their lifespan in our waters. Consequently, how our neighbours fish, and what quantities they catch has an immediate impact on the resource within our 200 miles EEZ.

Fiji is a responsible fishing nation and has credibility as such. It has contained and reduced fishing licences, and introduced regulations to manage our fishery to internationally acceptable standards. Regrettably, some of our neighbours and deep water fishing nations have not.

Fiji must stand up internationally in the international fora and be counted. The opposition will seek for Fiji to have a stronger voice and use its influence, both at the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) and Western Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, in curtailing the overfishing and capacity that is occurring in waters adjacent to us. Fiji needs to be more prominent in these matters.

Finally, Madam Speaker, we only seek to work with Government in ensuring that we have good governance of our fisheries and support all aspects, including commercial and recreational.

Unfortunately, many good intentions of the last Government have not been acted upon and as a first step, we should complete what has been started. Then we need to sit down with the industry and other sector interest to plan a positive way forward to the benefit of all.

Development of Maritime Fisheries: Madam Speaker, while a lot has been said about the tuna industry, we also have in our maritime provinces, fish resources that can be harvested in a more planned and co-ordinated way so that the Fijian *qoliqoli* owners can reap some commercial benefit.

We need to review the role of the Department of Fisheries to ensure that they are appropriately resourced. There is so much that we can do to help develop this relatively small industry.

The benefits accruing to the maritime provinces of an effective and efficient Department of Fisheries is immense. The improved capacity of people to earn money will undoubtedly help to stem the drift to the urban centres.

Development of Aquaculture and Mari-Culture: There is also tremendous capacity to develop fish, prawn and crab farms in the main islands of Fiji. The tourism industry is a major local market for these products. There has been great advances in science and technology to make these projects more commercially viable. Again, our rural people will be able to diversify away from just planting cassava and *dalo*.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear! Hear!

Forestry Sector: This sector, Madam Speaker, covers a relatively large area of the major islands and a portion of Native-owned land. Harvesting, milling and sale of our native timbers have been going on for over decades by various private interests. I truly believe that all activities in this sector can be more efficiently harnessed and co-ordinated, so that it can increase its contribution to our economy.

While we strive to increase the share of the GDP pie, we must also ensure that all stakeholders have a fair share of the proceeds. Well documented records show that trial hardwood plantations, including mahogany, started way back in 1935 and in 1960, it commenced with increased focus in the Western and Northern Divisions. In this regard, I would like to touch very briefly on the development of the mahogany hardwood plantation.

The *Burns Commission Report*, which was adopted by the Legislative Council in 1960 and form part of the 10 Year Development Plan for 1960-1970, recommended, and I quote: "...experience throughout the world has shown that the State itself, as opposed to individual is usually the most appropriate authority for developing forestry and managing the National Forest Estate". Also arising out of this Report was a proposal by the then Director of Lands and approved by the Colonial Secretary in 1961, as follows:

- "That the mahogany industry associates the indigenous directly with the development and that the payment of a modest rental rate pending crop maturity, to ensure that the present generation of indigenous owners will gain some benefit from land they would not otherwise develop;
- It was an understanding that the Fijians will, to some extent, share equitably in the venture and there will be no question of government exploiting Fijian or indigenous lands solely for its own benefit."

Prior to 1990, over 63,000 hectares on 14 plantations and under 82 land leases with Native Land Trust Board (NLTB) as trustee for native landowners were developed for mahogany plantations.

In addition to the above, there are now more areas of Native land which are covered by mahogany trees. Most of these trees are not easily accessible. Native landowners of these forests, therefore, need urgent assistance in the harvesting, processing and marketing of their mahogany, and also other Native timber to maximise their benefits from these resources.

Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited's (FHCL) assessment of sustainable volume of mahogany to be harvested annually is about 140,000 cubic metres. In 2010, a number of licences were issued by the Mahogany Council for the purchase of various grades of mahogany logs from FHCL.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, there has been an interjection.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Madam Speaker, I rise to make a point of order. The honourable Member has exceeded his time.

MADAM SPEAKER.- No. The first bell was a five minute warning and I am still awaiting the one minute warning. He is still within his time.

HON. RATU. K. KILIRAKI.- Madam Speaker, the question that I would like to ask is; why more than two-thirds of the total volume comprising Grades 1 and 2, is awarded to only one company? What makes it more intriguing is that, this is an overseas company and local companies are awarded the crumbs.

(Acclamation)

HON. BRIG. GEN. (Ret'd) J.K. KONROTE.- Madam Speaker, it is a great honour to make my maiden speech in this Parliament after the FijiFirst election victory and my appointment as Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations.

Firstly, I want to join previous speakers in congratulating you on your election as Speaker. The fact that 14 per cent of the Members of this Parliament are women, demonstrates the great strides that are finally being made in Fiji and the Pacific to give women a voice in the political process. We have a long way to go to achieve true equality for women, but this is a great start.

Madam Speaker, I am greatly honoured to have been given the Employment portfolio, one of the most important in Government, as we continue our labour reforms of the past eight years. The creation of jobs is one of the Government's primary objectives. Increasing our productivity and efficiency as a nation is equally important, and we want to maintain a co-operative industrial relations climate that serves the interests of Government, employers and employees because we all need to work together in the national interest to take our nation forward.

Madam Speaker, in many ways, the various strands of my professional life to this point have equipped me with skills that I believe would enhance my ability to do this job well. As most of you know, I have been a soldier. I joined the Royal Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) in 1966 and climbed the ranks over the years to the position of Major-General. The Military teaches you many things but above all, it teaches you team work.

I firmly believe that Government, employers and workers in Fiji can benefit from better teamwork. We do not need an industrial relations climate characterised by a "them and us" attitude - the kind of aggressive behaviour that we have sometimes seen in the past, things have got to change.

Without wanting to score points, I believe that the failure of certain trade union leaders to gain traction in the recent Election demonstrates that Fijians have rejected confrontation and the atmosphere of class warfare that some union figures have promoted in the past. Similarly, more employees and employers have gained an appreciation that they can achieve far more in the way of productivity gains, if they build an atmosphere of teamwork in the workplace.

We are starting to see some spectacular results from the workplace reforms that the Bainimarama Government has instituted over the past eight years. A great example of this is Fiji Airways, which was on the verge of collapsing altogether when the Government stepped in at the eleventh hour to pull

it out of its demise. Working with the Fiji Airways workforce and not against it, we achieved a spectacular turnaround and our national airline is now making record profits.

The reforms involved changes to certain work practices that were effectively contributing to ruining the Airline but by agreeing to those changes, Fiji Airways workers have not only kept their jobs but are now benefitting from a share in the airlines profits. I believe they are happy - the Airline is happy, Fiji Airways shareholders, including Government are also happy and the whole nation is benefitting as Fiji Airways flies higher than ever before, with newer aircrafts and increased frequency of flights, thus contributes to much large amount to our economy.

It has turned from an industrial relations battleground into a model of management-worker engagement and it is a great role model for other companies and industries in Fiji to emulate. As Minister responsible for harmonious industrial work relations, I believe that there are some aggrieved parties, but let me assure them that as Minister, things will get better.

Madam Speaker, the other role I have held and that is certainly going to assist me in this job, is my experience as a diplomat. From 2001 to 2006, I have had the privilege of being appointed Fiji's High Commissioner to Australia and diplomacy teaches you judgment and restraint. You learn that in international affairs, you rarely get everything you asked for. You have to negotiate the best possible deal but you also have to be prepared to negotiate, to yield to the other side, even if it means you are able to conclude on the agreement in which both parties walk away happy, a win-win situation is the desired outcome.

I intend to approach Environment, Productivity and Industrial Relations portfolio with judgment and restraint. I will be a tough negotiator, especially if my objective is in the national interest. But I will also be diplomatic and civil because the best negotiations are those conducted in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

Madam Speaker, I intend to work with the trade union movement to achieve the reforms that the Bainimarama Government has already put in train in this area, but I will not be railroaded into policy positions that are against the national interest, against the interests of the majority of Fijians. The reform process must go on. The union excesses and inefficient work practices of the past cannot get in the way of the absolute need for Fiji to sustain jobs, create new ones, and improve productivity and general economic performance. We cannot allow a minority to dictate terms and conditions to the nation as a whole.

Madam Speaker, we plan to continue with the productivity drive in a range of areas of the economy. It is imperative to make our economy more efficient and to lift Fiji's export performance. Our Balance of Trade is wildly out of kilter. We are importing far more than we export. So we need urgent action to tackle the bottlenecks in our system that are impeding our export trade.

Madam Speaker, the task of conducting union elections will now be the responsibility of the Fijian Elections Office that conducted our highly successful national Elections last month. The move is designed to ensure that union ballots are held to the same high standards - credible, free and fair. I note that some elements of the union movement are opposed to this, but let me assure you, they should not fear. It is not about reducing union power, it is about making sure that union elections are truly representing of the will of the membership, in the same way that our national elections represent the will of the Fijian people.

As it is, we get complaints about how some union elections are not above board, as they are conducted in-house and by the very same people who are contesting themselves. Indeed, in countries

like Australia, trade union elections are now conducted by the Australian Electoral Commission. This initiative will take genuine democratisation beyond the national power.

Madam Speaker, as everyone knows, I am a proud Fijian from Rotuma, just as all Rotumans are.

(Laughter)

I want to thank Rotumans everywhere for supporting me throughout my life - in my military career; my diplomatic career and now as a politician. I especially want to thank my family - my dear wife Sarote and our sons, Emal and Andrew; our niece Fiu and her daughter, Josephine; and all those who have always been a tower of support for me.

I also remember my parents, who taught me the values that I hold dear today - values about patriotism, loyalty to country and love for my fellow citizens.

Talking about Rotuma, I also wish to thank the Bainimarama Government over the past eight years for carrying out such unprecedented roads in Rotuma. The enormous improvements in infrastructure and government services have made Rotumans feel that they are truly part of Fiji and made them realise that this is what governments should be doing all along. Madam Speaker, all of this has happened without a single Rotuman being in Cabinet. Thank you immeasurably, honourable Prime Minister, for all the work that you have done. *Vinaka saka vakalevu.*

I also want to thank all those who have had an influence on my life, whether at Natabua High School in Lautoka, my comrades, nuns, the Republic of the Fiji Military Forces, the Australian College of Defence and Strategic Studies, the Australian Defence Force Academy and the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

In words of the famous song from Gilbert and Sullivan, I became "*The very model of Major General*" only because of the encouragement and support. I have had many testing times in my life, not the least, commanding Fijian peacekeepers in the Middle-East. I became Deputy Force Commander of the UNIFIL operations and then eventually, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General and Force Commander in Lebanon. I can say that it has always been a great privilege to lead, but it has always been a much greater privilege to serve. And that is what I pledge to do in this role over the next four years.

Madam Speaker, I was very touched by the honourable Prime Minister's comments yesterday about the noble cause the RFMF took up eight years ago, to hold our nation together against the forces of division that threaten national unity. We have put an end to the era of division and set off on a new course, and it is a wonderful privilege, Madam Speaker, to be part of this new journey.

May God bless us all and may God bless Fiji. *Vinaka saka vakalevu, dhanyavaad* and thank you.

(Acclamation)

HON. CMD S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, my speech this morning is one of congratulations and thanksgiving.

I wish to join other honourable Members of this Chamber who have spoken before me in congratulating you on your appointment as Speaker. I was honoured to nominate you as Speaker, as I believe that you are the most suitable candidate to take the role of Speaker in our new democracy.

I worked with the FijiFirst Team to campaign for FijiFirst, before being nominated to stand as a candidate in the later stages. I campaigned for FijiFirst as I believed in the Party ethics and ethos.

Madam Speaker, secondly, I wish to congratulate His Excellency the President for his thought-provoking Address on 7th October, 2014. His Excellency has provided a platform for honourable Members of this Parliament to work together for the benefit of all Fijians, irrespective of race, colour or religion.

Fiji can accommodate all of us and together, we will be able to face the challenges that will front us in the future. Together, as Fijians, we will be stronger under this new democracy. The onus is here with us, the 50 Members of this Parliament, elected to take Fiji forward in the next four years.

Madam Speaker, I wish to take this opportunity to thank the numerous people from the different sectors of society who assisted me in my campaign. Firstly, I wish to thank my family for supporting me during the Elections, and being the last candidate to be nominated for FijiFirst (and in fact nominated on the last day) was a great challenge for me. This situation compelled me to ask my entire family, relatives and friends to rally behind me.

I wish to thank my wife, Joanna, for her planning and execution of my campaign efforts. Madam Speaker, I also wish to thank my children, who travelled from overseas to campaign during the two weeks: Anthony from San Francisco; Ballina from the US Air Force Base in New Mexico; Alifereti, who had to delay his family's departure to Auckland, New Zealand; to my family in Fiji - Vincent and his friends from USP; Larsen and Seini, who also made their contributions.

May I also add my thanks to Captain Cook Cruises, my fellow directors, management and staff for their outstanding efforts in assisting me to prepare for my campaign.

Madam Speaker, I wish to thank my Campaign Manager in Nadi, Dr. Mohammed Yunus; my Campaign Manager in Yasawa, Charlie Doughty; and my brother Alifereti, for my campaign team in Kadavu.

I wish to acknowledge the *Turaga Tui Lawa*, the villagers in Malolo and Mamanuca. I also wish to thank:

- 1) The villages in Yasawa - Nacula, Matacawalevu, Yaqeta, Naviti, Waya and Waya (sewa).
- 2) Communities in Nadi - Yaralevu, Marasa, Malomalo, Navatulevu, Yakuilau, Korovuto and Yako Village in the province of Nadroga.
- 3) Mr. Abbas Ali, Mr. Babu Ganesh, Mr. Garry Raniga, Mrs. Akanisi Koroitamana and the business community who supported my campaign efforts.
- 4) My district of Yawe and the southern villages in Nabukelevu, Kadavu, and the five villages which I was able to cover in the five days I spent campaigning there.

Madam Speaker, I wish to thank the staff of Captain Cook Cruises, who became my new found families in the last 20 years. They have shown me huge support, even though some of them may have not voted for me because of their political beliefs, and I totally understand that. The captains and crew who campaigned in Levuka, Savusavu, Taveuni, Kioa, Rabi, Kia in Macuata, Labasa, Galoa in Bua, Vanuabalavu, Oneata, Fulaga, Kabara, Totoya, Matuku and again, Namuana in Kadavu.

Madam Speaker, last but not least, I wish to acknowledge my parents, Josaia and Vive Koroilavesau, who brought me up in very difficult circumstances from the village of Nalotu, Yawe in Kadavu.

To all my relatives and friends all over Fiji, I owe you for the trust you have bestowed in me, and hope that I will make a difference in your lives during the next four years.

Madam Speaker, I now wish to make some general comments, based on my experience in my 30 years of employment, 20 years of which was in the tourism industry in Fiji.

The tourism industry, Madam Speaker, has seen unprecedented growth. The fundamental shift in the last four to five years under the Bainimarama Government, from the change of name from Fiji Visitors Bureau (FVB) to Tourism Fiji; the ability to focus on direct sales rather than relying simply on three or four wholesalers, or localising positions for the sake of it, has been unprecedented.

As a businessman, I can tell you that the Bainimarama Government has been running the efforts of Government similar to that of a business. We need to appoint the best people for the job in the tourism industry and not for the sake of localisation. Appointment is not an end in itself but rather what the output is derived from that appointment. Localisation can also take place but those locals must be properly trained at all times, otherwise, you would be simply flogging a dead horse.

Madam Speaker, my visit around Fiji has given me an overview of the huge advances made in infrastructural developments. I believe it has never been done before in Fiji. It also gave me the opportunity to see what needed to be done in the future, and what could be done by the 50 Members of this Parliament. It is a joint responsibility of the honourable Members of this Parliament to make it happen. We owe it to the people of Fiji who voted us to be here.

We need to plan our development in a systematic and smart way, to make our meagre resources reach the very people that need it the most. We need to add to the developments that have been carried out in the last eight years, and we must prioritise to maximise benefits to our people and concentrate on those who will give us the better returns in the medium and long-term.

Madam Speaker, may I close by saying that His Excellency's Address has provided the best platform and base for further developments. It is up to us in this Parliament to progress and assist in the process. It is our duty and call to help Fiji and all Fijians progress and reach new heights.

Madam Speaker, thank you for your indulgence and being allowed to address this Parliament.

May God bless Fiji and all the people who now call it home. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

(Acclamation)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now adjourn for morning tea.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.42 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11:08 a.m.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, fellow Ministers and honourable Members of Parliament; this is a very special moment for me to stand in the same Chamber where my father, the late Siddiq Moidin Koya, stood 45 years ago in 1969, as the Leader of the Opposition, and delivered his maiden speech. I remember as a young boy witnessing this occasion and since then, have been struck by my father's passion for his country, his belief in Independence and his vision for a new nation – full of opportunities and the promise of a bright future.

As a Leader of the Opposition and as a Member of the House of Representatives, my father strongly believed in genuine democracy for the newly independent nation, after fighting for years to free Fiji from the shackles of Colonial rule. He pressed for a legislature elected by universal suffrage with a common electoral roll, and for all the people of Fiji to enjoy a common identity under a shared name. I am sure he is smiling from the heavens, seeing Fiji finally united under a Constitution that enshrines the principles that he fought so long for. If you are listening dad, your dream for Fiji has come true and your son is standing here today to follow in your footsteps and to pursue your life's great passion – to serve Fiji and all Fijians.

I pledge to serve my nation and its people to the best of my ability as the Minister for Industry, Trade and Tourism and as a FijiFirst representative under the leadership of the honourable Prime Minister. Indeed, I would not have had this remarkable opportunity to continue my father's legacy, had it not been for the revolution led by the honourable Prime Minister over the course of the last eight years. During one of our nation's darkest periods, the honourable Prime Minister emerged with the vision as well as the strength and determination to steer Fiji towards a road of genuine democracy and prosperity.

When he embarked on this revolution, our Prime Minister was determined to ensure that no one was left behind in the new Fiji. He believed that everyone has the right to such things as free education, better roads, better health services, clean water and electricity. He was not interested in making short-term promises to win political support, but he only cared about delivering real reforms, genuine progress and tangible development for the people of Fiji and in so doing, won my strongest respect and support. I am indeed privileged and humbled to serve under you, Sir.

Of course, I would also like to convey my humble and heartfelt thanks to my family, friends and close relatives, who have had unwavering confidence in me and who have provided me with an overwhelming amount of support and assistance.

At this point, I also wish to extend a special thank you to a special friend, who is more a brother, the honourable Attorney-General, who, despite being younger, has been my inspiration and it was he who reignited my passion for politics and to serve the Fijian people. Without him, I would not be standing here today.

Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your historic appointment as the first lady Speaker, not only in Fiji, but in the Pacific Region as well. We look forward to your leadership and guidance in the future, as we debate the nation's affairs and make laws for the benefit of all Fijians.

I would also like to take this opportunity (like other honourable Members who have spoken before me) to thank His Excellency the President for his inspiring Address at the opening of Parliament. His Excellency called on honourable Members of Parliament to work together to advance the national interest, reminding us that our first duty, above all others, is to keep the trust and confidence of those



who sent us here. We are the people's representatives, our power derives from their support, and I pledge to them my fullest dedication and service.

Finally, I would like to thank all those who voted for me and also those who voted for the FijiFirst political movement. Your overwhelming support for our vision of a united, just and prosperous Fiji has been a source of great personal inspiration to me. Equally though, I repeat the honourable Prime Minister's assurance that FijiFirst will serve on behalf of all Fijians, no matter where they live, what their background is or who they voted for.

Madam Speaker, I am happy to report that we are embarking on the coming session of Parliament from a very strong starting point. The Fijian economy has recorded an average growth of approximately 3.2 per cent over the last five years. Last year alone, our economy grew by 4.6 per cent and we are positioned for another year of strong growth this year. This period of sustained growth is a result of the consistent policies and forward-looking initiatives of the Bainimarama Government. As the Minister for Industry, Trade and Tourism, I intend to continue to build on the impressive and considerable achievements of my predecessor, the honourable Attorney-General, in order to continue to attract investment, grow the economy and create the jobs that we all know are needed, especially by our young people. As the honourable Prime Minister has said, it is about growing the size of the national cake so that everyone gets a bigger slice.

I am determined to make sure that more and more Fijians are included and benefit from the growth of our nation's economy. I believe in empowering grassroot communities and encouraging rural development to bring more people into the mainstream economy. I think that farmers, fishermen and traders should have access to technology, to be able to immediately determine the price and market for their produce.

I support forging strategic public private partnerships as a way to deliver quality, value, investment, job creation and transparency to the Fijian people. I believe in the idea of Pacific Union – the creation of a single market in the Region with the free movement of goods, services, labour and capital. Put simply, I have a long term vision to develop an internationally competitive and dynamic economy in Fiji, one that takes full advantage of our location in the Region, our resources and our people. I want Fiji to be the hub of the Pacific, the gateway to a region that possesses a huge amount of untapped potential and opportunity.

Madam Speaker, one of my first priorities as Minister is to ensure that Fiji's Trade Policy Framework is endorsed by Cabinet and launched immediately to get all sectors of the economy working closely together, to achieve our common goal of growth and development. The Trade Policy Framework is a versatile resource that clearly articulates policy measures and strategies that will work together to drive economic growth over the next decade from 2015 to 2025.

The document spells out Government's long term vision for Fiji's priority sectors and sets targets and timelines. It explains Fiji's stance towards key bilateral, regional and multilateral trade agreements, and it articulates a detailed development agenda focussed on expanding trading opportunities, promoting industrial growth, attracting domestic and foreign investment, increasing exports of goods and services, emphasising the importance of value addition and addressing supply side constraints. The policy will guide future agreements between Fiji and her trading partners that will help secure more meaningful access to international markets for our products and, of course, the policy recognises the vital role that the private sector plays in driving growth and development, mapping out a path for closer co-operation and collaboration with Government and its statutory bodies.

Madam Speaker, investment is a crucial component for growth. As Minister, my vision is to maintain a sustainable level of investment by proposing initiatives that will increase private sector investment. Last year, Fiji recorded the highest level of investment since Independence, at 29 per cent of GDP. This growth in investment was largely fuelled by private sector investment, which represented 45 per cent of total investment in 2013. However, the lengthy and cumbersome investment approvals process remains an obstacle for potential investors, and I will take immediate steps to address this issue.

My Ministry, with the assistance of Investment Fiji, is undertaking reforms to the approvals process (started by my predecessor) to establish an online investment registration and approval system. This will create a single application form for potential investors to get approval from all the first tier agencies in one simple step.

In the coming sessions of Parliament, I will also begin work on FijiFirst's plan to implement the current recommendation for a new fee structure for small to medium enterprises. Under this structure, micro-finance entities and small businesses will be exempted from paying fees to meet health, fire and occupational health and safety regulations. I will also focus resources on setting up the micro-finance start-up or assistance grants to encourage small scale economic activities.

Madam Speaker, an integral part of my role is to secure new markets for Fijian-made goods and services by continuing to implement and negotiate bilateral and multilateral trade agreements, such as the PACP's Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the EU, the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Trade Agreement and the PACER Plus. Although attempts have been made in the past to isolate Fiji from participating in crucial trade negotiations, it is widely recognised that Fiji provides a crucial leadership role that is necessary to strengthen the free flow of goods and services within the Region.

Due to Fiji's economic importance and position in the Region, our neighbours have invited us back into the PACER Plus negotiations and I plan to lead these negotiations with Fiji's and the Region's best interests at heart. I will ensure that we enter the PACER Plus negotiations on our own terms, as equal parties. It is crucial that Fiji and the Pacific secure tangible, long term benefits from Australia and New Zealand, which so far has been conspicuously absent from the talks.

Madam Speaker, whilst it is important that we pursue and enhance both new and existing market opportunities abroad, my Ministry also plays a key role in strengthening the local business environment. To this end, we will continue to help grow the export capabilities of local businesses through the National Export Strategy (NES). Indeed, I fully support the proposal to increase the NES budget to \$2 million for the coming year. This approach ties in well with the commitment of the FijiFirst Government to provide \$1 million micro-finance setup grants to small and micro enterprises that want to sell crops and other goods and services, and that have difficulty in accessing finance from commercial lending institutions.

Madam Speaker, one of the most successful programmes implemented by the Bainimarama Government is the "Fijian Made and Buy Fijian Campaign", and I assure my fellow Members and the Fijian people that I will continue to support and expand this initiative. To-date, more than 190 companies have been licensed under the Campaign, of which 90 are micro, small and medium enterprises. This campaign has instilled a sense of pride, ownership and has also contributed to increased sales of quality of Fijian products. This Campaign, in the next year, is expected to start promoting the Fijian brand name in international markets.

Madam Speaker, in the tourism arena, I am firmly committed to maintaining Government's support for the industry and for Tourism Fiji, and I believe that in close co-operation with our partners in the private sector, we can achieve visitor numbers in excess of a million by 2020.

Madam Speaker, in conclusion, I dedicate my speech to my family and supporters, especially to my father, who has been my inspiration and guide throughout my life. Dad, I will continue my journey on your principles. I know you are always with me in spirit and I will honour your memory by wearing your distinctive bow-tie at each Parliamentary session, to remind me why I am here, to remind me to keep fighting for what you stood for, and to remind me to always serve all Fijians.

To my colleagues, honourable Members of Parliament, I remind you that we all have an obligation to move this country forward and build a nation that our children and grandchildren will be proud of. *Vinaka vakalevu* and thank you very much.

(Acclamation)

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- Madam Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members of Parliament; it gives me great pleasure and honour to stand before you today and to see you presiding over this august Chambers. Like honourable Members of Parliament who have spoken before me, I wish to congratulate you, Madam Speaker, on your new appointment and more significantly, being the first female Speaker in Fiji and, indeed, in the South Pacific. Madam Speaker, may I also congratulate and thank our Prime Minister for being steadfast in his unwavering commitment to our Roadmap, and to bringing this country back to parliamentary governance.

I remember, Madam Speaker, that in 2010 when I was invited to the Ministerial Contact Group in Auckland which consisted of Foreign Ministers from Australia, New Zealand, Tonga, Samoa, Tuvalu and Papua New Guinea, after outlining our Roadmap to the Ministerial Contact Group of the Pacific Islands Forum, the then Foreign Minister of Australia, honourable Stephen Smith, came out very strongly and said, "honourable Minister, I do not believe in your roadmap that you will not have elections in 2014." I responded by saying, "Minister, I cannot help you, if you cannot believe me". However, I know that the honourable Prime Minister is very steadfast and committed to our Roadmap: From 2010 to 2012, our socio-economic reforms to be done; in 2013, the Constitution making; and 2014, we will definitely have elections, and here we are. I want to thank the honourable Prime Minister, especially for bringing Fiji back to parliamentary governance.

Madam Speaker, may I also acclaim and congratulate His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, for his comprehensive and moving Address on the occasion of the opening of the first session of Parliament on Monday, 7th October, 2014. In his Address, His Excellency urged, and I quote from page 8 of the *Daily Hansard*:

"Let us dedicate ourselves once and for all to the democratic ideal of genuine equality for all Fijians, and resolve to work constructively in our new democracy and in this refurbished Parliament for the benefit of all our people."

He appealed to us all, and again I quote from page 8 of His Excellency's Address:

"...to work co-operatively together, to advance the national interest and to adhere to the highest standards of collective and personal conduct."

He further emphasized that: "As democratically elected Members of Parliament, your first duty must and always be to keep the trust and confidence of those who have sent you here."

Madam Speaker, the people of this great nation have indeed spoken in the recent General Elections. Their pervading message is loud and clear, they want and demand their leaders to come together in a genuine spirit of cooperation. I ask that we unite under this common purpose and seize the moment, as we can ill afford to fail and run the risk of our history repeating itself.

As we look back over 44 years since our Independence and the evolution of our nation's political and international identity, we have much to be thankful for. The last few years, in particular, have given us much reason to celebrate and work even harder for.

In his Address to this House on Monday, 7th October, 2014, His Excellency the President, encouraged us, and I quote

"...to build on the reforms of the past eight years to continue improving the lives of ordinary Fijians and better equip our young people for satisfying roles in a growing, thriving economy."

His vision of Fiji is to be, and I quote: "... a modern-nation state, taking a pre-eminent role in our own Region and strengthening our voice and presence in the global community at large."

Madam Speaker, many of our traditional friends, who were wedded to the Western concept of geo-political relations had questioned our decision to forge deeper bilateral relations with countries like the People's Republic of China or the Russian Federation, among others. The Government's foreign policy motto of 'Friends to all, enemy to none', was the driving force behind that decision, and the pursuit of expanding our diplomatic relations and enhancing our international persona. As a result, Fiji's relations with the international community has grown considerably in the past 8 years. Our international profile has been boosted significantly.

We are a small and vulnerable country. We can never again permit ourselves to be dependent politically, strategically or economically on a narrow group of powerful countries. Our security must lie in establishing a broad set of relationships that protects us from the political winds that occasionally blow from one nation or another. More importantly, Madam Speaker, it will also give us more sources of trade, cultural exchange, development co-operation, financing, technology and military and diplomatic co-operation.

However, that does not mean that Fiji's foreign policy's priority is simply to seek protection. Fiji has and will have a foreign policy that unselfishly and unashamedly pursues national interest based on openness, equality, principle and leadership. We will pursue productive relations with as many States as possible, under terms that guarantee our equal treatment and that contributes to the well-being of the people of Fiji.

Madam Speaker, we know that we, Fijians, are not selfish or mercenary people. We are generous and principled people, and our foreign policy must be generous and principled as well. In that context, we will continue to do more than our share to promote peace and understanding in the world. We also know that this small country, Fiji, is larger and more developed than many of our neighbours. We have an obligation to provide leadership and resources that will help lift this entire Region, it is an obligation that we gladly undertake with modest pride. The Pacific Region, Madam Speaker, is not just our neighbourhood, it is the home of our brother and sister Pacific Islanders, with whom we are forever bound and with whom we must work closely with, to ensure our common future.

Madam Speaker, we have made these ideals and priorities the basis of our foreign policy. In turn, that led us to take actions that have raised our stature in the world. However, stature is not our goal, but the result of a foreign policy that is based on enlightened self-interest, principles, generosity and leadership. Fiji is a proud nation, a more confident nation and one that knows that it has a contribution to make, a voice to be heard, and an obligation to serve. We have a place at the table because we have demanded it and have shown that we deserve it, and of course, I know that all other nations can count on us to do more than our share.

Please permit me, Madam Speaker, to share some ways in which Fiji has increased its reach and stature in the world. These included:

- 1) the establishment of six new overseas Missions;
- 2) Fiji's Chairmanship of the 133-member developing country bloc of the Group of 77 & China;
- 3) our Chairmanship of the International Sugar Organisation;
- 4) our hosting the 13<sup>th</sup> ACP Ministerial Conference on Sugar;
- 5) high level exchange visits with the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation;
- 6) a State visit by the President of the Republic of Indonesia; and, of course,
- 7) the fact that we were the driving force behind the creation of the Pacific Islands Development Forum and hosted the inaugural meeting.

I am confident, Madam Speaker, that Fiji's international persona will grow even stronger in the coming years, as we stick to these guiding principles. I am committed to working closely with everyone in delivering the best Fiji has to offer to the international community, and in return, to win their confidence and attract their investments.

Madam Speaker, the Government's foreign policy has decidedly projected a more independent, fair and more respectful global citizen. Fiji is ready and willing to play its part under the banner of the United Nations and within its rules. His Excellency the President asserted us when he opened this Parliamentary Session that, and I quote:

“We are no longer just a small nation in some far off corner of the Pacific. We no longer can isolate ourselves from the rest of the world. The recent capture of the 45 of our UN peacekeepers has reminded us yet again that the world's problems are our problems. We are an integral part of the global community and must carve out a successful place in it.”

In this regard, Madam Speaker, Fiji has since 2007 embarked on a major review of its diplomatic relations and widened its areas of diplomatic contacts with countries, as well as regions, to cover the entire globe. Our diplomats are taking a message of hope, reconciliation where there is conflict, and peacekeeping and peacebuilding where there is discord. The latter explains our active and longstanding participation in the UN peacekeeping missions for the last 36 years.

In the implementation of Fiji's foreign policy, Madam Speaker, we do not sit in judgment of countries we make contact with because we respect their sovereign right as independent nations, but

to decide for themselves what they and their people decide is best for them. Fiji would like to be a bridge to countries needing understanding and support when they are going through difficult times. We do not intrude on the domestic affairs of nation states. At a time like now, Madam Speaker, when many countries with which Fiji has close diplomatic ties are facing difficult challenges, we offer our solidarity and support for their efforts in promoting dialogue as the cornerstone of finding solutions to the problems they face.

Madam Speaker, Fiji sees the entire Pacific, not just the South Pacific, as an integrated Region that is driven by the shared value of "Collective self-reliance as an Engine of Growth". Because of Fiji's geographic location and relatively more developed status than most Pacific States, it is obviously the hub that can take a more significant role in regional co-operation through the newly established Pacific Islands Development Framework (PIDF). It is the first platform in the Pacific, focussing specifically on green economies and sustainable development as established in the UN's Global Agenda on Sustainable Development. PIDF's inauguration has also launched a new era of regional co-operation through partnership and genuine consultation between governments, civil society groups, and the business community, hitherto excluded from the Pacific Government's decision-making processes.

We are committed to working actively to establish a robust global follow-up system to make all nations accountable, and ensure that the very critical interests of Small Island Developing States (SIDs) like Fiji and our neighbours, are respected and advanced.

Madam Speaker, I wish to underscore the great importance of addressing climate change, as the Minister responsible. Fiji, like other SIDs, is extremely vulnerable to sea-level rise and the adverse impacts of climate change. They pose significant risks to our livelihood and our efforts to achieve sustainable development. It represents the gravest of threats to the survival and viability of many islands nations, including for some, through the loss of territory. Fiji has proven its commitment to confront this global crisis. We have established a National Climate Change Co-ordinating Committee and are actively engaged wherever people are working, to find solutions.

Madam Speaker, Fiji will build and capitalise on the unique characteristics, skills and talents of its people. We intend to explore official friendship programmes with other countries and regions of the world. The cornerstone of this friendship programme may be an increase in people-to-people exchanges and contacts through sporting events and cultural and educational exchanges at all levels. Our love for sports provides an excellent base through which Fiji can increase people-to-people contacts.

We are also keen to engage with those countries that possess rich musical and artistic tradition from whom we, in Fiji, could learn. The same is true when it comes to Fijian culture with all its diversity. Cultural exchanges with bilateral partners will enrich our understanding of each other.

Madam Speaker, the citizens of Fiji are our greatest national asset. Their talent, energy and goodwill could advance our national interest, help build strong relations with other nations, and give and receive cultural and technological wisdom through these citizen exchanges. As we engage our citizens in our diplomacy, we become a stronger, wiser and more confident nation.

Madam Speaker, in concluding my speech, I wish to thank the people of Fiji for the trust they have placed in me. Many people worked hard to get me here, and I cannot thank them enough. I was amazed and humbled by the number of friends, who offered to help along the way. I refer to not only members of the FijiFirst Party and those whom I know, but also those who are not members of the FijiFirst Party, and whom I do not know. I thank them all, and I promise to honour their efforts. I

could not and would not have taken this journey without the love and support of my wife and family. I commit myself, Madam Speaker to represent the people of Fiji and to contribute to the well-being and growth of this great nation.

Madam Speaker, I thank you for your patience and indulgence. I commend and support the Address of His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji, to this Parliament.

May God richly bless Fiji. *Vinaka vakalevu, shukriya, bahut dhanyavad* and thank you.

(Acclamation)

HON. P. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, Cabinet Ministers, and honourable Members of Parliament: I thank you for your kind invitation to speak in this august Chamber.

Madam Speaker, firstly, allow me to make my hearty congratulations on your appointment as the Speaker of this august Chamber. I reiterate the earlier sentiments regarding your notable appointment as the first female Speaker, not only in Fiji, but in the Region as well.

It is an honour and a privilege to deliver my maiden speech in this august Parliament as the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment. Let me, at the outset, congratulate and thank our leader, the honourable Prime Minister, for leading us through a democratic election. Honourable Prime Minister, the Elections kept off a period of political reforms under your leadership for the past eight years, and provided the platform for better reforms and progress for all Fijians.

Sir, I congratulate your vision and tenacity to bring us to this momentous day. It has been some time coming, 44 years almost to the day since we gained Independence in 1970. Nevertheless, for the people of Fiji, it has been well worth the wait. The cry for one nation, one country, and one people is over. If one carefully reads the speeches and absorbs the sentiments of our leaders during Independence, this was also their vision for Fiji.

Madam Speaker, credit must be given where it is due. On this note, I congratulate the work done by the Supervisor of Elections, Mr. Mohammed Saneem. I congratulate his team which he led admirably, and with considerable patience and grace in often difficult and trying situations. As leaders, we will do well to follow his example in the work that we do, where Fiji is a priority over the petty and the party.

On a personal note, I would like to thank my mother, who has been my rock and pillar of strength whilst serving in public office. Thank you mum for once again providing the support and reality checks that only a mother could give, especially when the business of politics in this Parliament becomes too much.

I am grateful to the chiefs and *vanua* of Ba for their tremendous and open support towards my campaign. I also thank all my campaign managers, supporters, family members, friends and well-wishers, in particular, my niece Sanjivni, for standing by me during the Elections and providing me with much needed moral support. My supporters came from all races and all works of life. They indicated a considerate and conscious choice which I made not so long ago. I was totally aware and always mindful of the political consequences of my choice to stand for FijiFirst; I stuck to my guns.

On a personal level, the name FijiFirst, its vision, ideals and most importantly, its actions and achievements in which I played a role in at Local Government level already made decisions for me.

There was no looking back for me from this point on, nor did I feel uncertain to make any apologies or to explain myself beyond my commitment to my beliefs to Fiji and FijiFirst.

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

HON. P. KUMAR.- This belief stands on a profoundly personal level of engagement with the ideals of our visionary Prime Minister. To move beyond this level of engagement is to make a commitment. The commitment I made was to the people in local government politics.

In October 1997 (almost to the day this month 17 years ago), I was elected as the youngest Mayor of Ba. Many doubted my capability for the position and youth, for once, was not given its due as an advantage. It was at this point that I took heart from the words of encouragement received from the then Minister for Local Government, the late Vilisoni Cagimaivei, in his letter of congratulations, and I quote: "Be humble and respect all people. Rise above pettiness, believe in and work together with your Councillors and Staff". I took those words to heart and they have been my guiding principles since then.

Those principles enabled me to work successfully in the arena of local government, including its politics and challenges. It provided me with the means to move beyond party politics, to serve the people well and without fear or favour. It also provided me with the opportunity to serve as the Mayor of Ba for 12 years. I believe this long innings at the helm of local government was also testimony to my commitment on a sustained basis to the people.

I bring to my current ministerial portfolio these same guiding principles – humility, respect and the capacity to rise above petty politics. I hope, Madam Speaker, that honourable Members of this Chamber will conduct their debate and cast their votes in matters pertaining to the well-being of all Fijians with humility and respect, so that we rise above pettiness.

Madam Speaker, to achieve the above, we will also need to abandon the confrontational approach of the past and move in the direction of co-operation and harmony. Honourable Members, perhaps it will be wise for all of us to remember this very apt saying, "don't blow off another's candle for it won't make yours shine brighter". I look forward to a powerful debate in this Chamber, sharing knowledge from my portfolio with other Members, and also look forward to their input on a constructive and timely fashion regarding matters relating to my portfolio. If there is to be a Team Fiji, then that Team Fiji has to emerge from this august Parliament.

Madam Speaker, it will be a true test of our mettle as representatives of all Fijians that we strive for and attain for them the best possible solutions in all aspects of their lives. I would like to dedicate the rest of my first speech to this Parliament, to matters relating to my three portfolios of Local Government, Hosing and the Environment.

One of the priority areas of my Ministry will be a push to facilitate and streamline Local Government Regulations that favour local economic development which requires effective partnership between all levels of governments, local businesses and communities. It requires a determined push from government for economic progression and the Bainimarama Government has clearly set out an agenda for such economic developments that tells industries that the local economy is open for business. My Ministry will work with industry associations, research groups, local businesses, community groups, traditional authorities and knowledge skills sets, in order to bring in best practices in all that we do.



Madam Speaker, in terms of a stocktake of current activities and initiatives within my Ministry, I have the following to report to this august Chamber.

At this point, let me thank His Excellency the President and acknowledge the reflective and considerate manner of his candid Address which, in no uncertain terms, sets the platform for Government to conduct itself and its activities in a principle and progressive manner. It also addresses many relevant issues, some of which were related to my Ministry.

In reference to the issues of squatters, I reaffirm the commitment of Government that included the implementation of long term leases to re-settle squatters on State, Freehold and with the consent of the landowners on Native land.

On the issue of accommodation for market vendors, we will fasttrack the building of the remaining centres in Nausori, Labasa and Savusavu. This Parliament will note that the Government has commissioned such centres in Suva, Nadi, Lautoka, Rakiraki and Ba. The Sigatoka accommodation is ready, and will soon be officially opened.

Madam Speaker, since my appointment as Minister, I have initiated the following changes to the Ministry and some of its procedures and policies are:

- 1) Building applications to be processed and approved within 20 working days;
- 2) Land sub-divisions to be processed and approved within 30 working days; and
- 3) Re-zoning to be processed and approved within 45 working days.

All these approvals are subject to applicants and consultants meeting all the requirements at the time of lodgment.

Madam Speaker, those changes will be effective from January 2015, in order to meet the required legislative and legal obligations, and will also be effected at the local municipal council level which will be a major boost to investment and economic activity.

Madam Speaker, to conclude, please allow me to make a few brief comments. At this juncture, I extend my congratulations to all honourable Members of this august Chambers. There is a diversity among the people who voted us into office, which has often been used in a deliberate and misleading way to create and keep divisions.

To overcome such divisions is no mean feat. Many would not have thought it was possible in their lifetime, or even in that of the next generation. The election of our Party to govern Fiji made it possible to bridge such divisions, bringing together the two major races in a way and at a place that many predicted would not be possible.

At the polling booth the people spoke, loudly and clearly and their voices vindicated the vision of FijiFirst to have one Fiji and today, we celebrate that achievement. It is not a singular achievement, but means that we in Government will have to work hard to ensure that the One Fiji dream is not just in words, but in deeds. Despite what some in the Opposition have been harping on and on over the past day and a half, stop sounding like a broken record, it is time to move on.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- *Vinaka, vinaka!*

HON. P. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, I look forward to the challenges that lie ahead and to contribute in material terms through my work and that of my Ministry for the people of Fiji.

Madam Speaker, once again, I thank you and God bless Fiji.

(Acclamation)

HON. DR. B. LAL. – Madam Speaker, honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Cabinet, honourable Members of this House, *Bula Re* to everyone. I wish to congratulate you, Madam Speaker, on your appointment and look forward to serving under your direction. Madam, your appointment as the first lady Speaker of the Fijian Parliament is a great inspiration and motivation for all other women, not only in Fiji but also in the Region. The Government is also to be thanked for recognising your talent and also fulfilling its promise of honouring men and women who have sacrificed their lives for the service of the nation.

I am honoured to be sitting in the Fijian Parliament just because of the people of this country who have voted for me and the Fiji First Party. I congratulate the honourable Prime Minister and Leader of the FijiFirst Party for his dynamic leadership that led to a convincing victory. I thank many of my friends, my relatives, my wife and my daughter for their tremendous support during the campaign.

Madam Speaker, for the past 38 years, I have worked for the Ministry of Education as a Teacher, Head Teacher, Education Advisor, Education Officer, Senior Education Officer, Fiji Program Manager on the AusAID funded Fiji Education Sector Programme, Director of Primary Education, Deputy Secretary for Education and Permanent Secretary for Education. I take this opportunity to thank all the teachers (those in service and those who may have retired); school management committees, teacher unions, members of Divisional School Management Boards, members of the Education Forum, School Management Association of Fiji, Fiji Principals Association, Fiji Head Teachers Association and all controlling authorities, including staff of the Ministry of Education for their support and co-operation rendered to me in the last four decades.

Madam Speaker, I started my career in 1978 as a primary school teacher in a small rural school in the only sandalwood town of Fiji, Bua. The school is Vunivau Bhartiya School. It is the very same school where I had attained my primary education. My late father, who was completely illiterate, had a lot of say and was a pioneer in building five schools in this locality, including Vunivau Bhartiya School, which is now known as Vunivau Sanatan Dharam Primary School.

As a first teacher in 1978, I had written my first article for the Fiji Teachers Union journal. To me, that article was powerful and very meaningful then and today. Let me very quickly share this with all of you, it was titled “Fiji, The Emerging Nation”, and I will quote from the article:

“Fiji is not just land, mountains and rivers. Fiji is you and me, all the thousands of young and old who are her citizens. The thoughts and actions of the people who have inhabited Fiji for hundreds of years have moulded our society. Out of the past grows the present and what we do today will shape our future. When we build a road or plant a tree or inculcate good habits, it is not for ourselves alone, but also for those who will be born in years to come. The work of building is not easy. We must give it all we have and strain every nerve and muscle. It is not by training that we learn and by doing that, we gather strength. All the world over, progress has been possible because of the hard work and sacrifice of pioneers. The future is calling you, don't be disheartened by difficulties. You can change the bad, not only by doing big things, but by trying your best to do even ordinary things extraordinarily well. “Help others and forget yourself and you will find happiness. Success does not come to those who sit back and wait for success to come to them.”

Madam Speaker and honourable Members, although this article is 38 years old, its content is applicable today as well. I am confident that all of us shall work in that direction in creating a better Fiji.

Madam Speaker, during my campaign around Fiji, Fijians have raised the following issues:

- 1) Improvement of water supply to areas like Nasarowaqa, Valelawa, Wavuwavu, Lagalaga, Taveuni, Viria, Tailevu, Western Viti Levu and the squatter settlements in the Suva Nausori corridor.
- 2) Improving the roads in various parts of Taveuni, Wavuwavu to Wainikoro and other parts of Bua.
- 3) The plea by ordinary Fijians living in squatter areas for security of land, provision of regular water supply and electricity.
- 4) The request from carrier operators, taxi operators and other vehicle owners to relook into the Land Transport Authority regulations.
- 5) The request from farmers for improved road conditions and identifying better markets.

Madam Speaker, I will now look at some of the issues raised by His Excellency the President while opening Parliament.

**Agriculture and Health:** Madam Speaker, I very much appreciate the assistance that will be provided to our farmers. This will definitely increase their interest and commitment for better output from their farms. In this way, their income would increase which will lead to more investments in their funds and having a better bank balance.

Madam Speaker, my concern is the health of our young and the aged. The young are our future, and the old are our wisdom. As Permanent Secretary for Education, I launched the schools' Health and Wellbeing Policy in 2012. This Policy is an ongoing effort to improve childhood nutritional and behavioural changes, as well as academic performance. Indeed, I supported the commitment in the Policy of establishing a healthy learning environment that positively influences students' general wellbeing, eating behaviours, physical capacity and learning ability to succeed academically.

In launching the Policy I said, "There is an old and popular proverb which states that 'we are what we eat'. Indeed, our nutritional status, health, physical and mental faculties depend on the food we eat and how we eat it. Access to good, healthy and quality food has been man's endeavour from the earliest days of human existence.

Many, many years ago, everyone was strong and healthy. They ate a very varied diet and especially loved fruits, vegetables and fish. Everyone took daily exercise, and they enjoyed themselves playing and leaping about. The earth was the healthiest place you could imagine, and it was clear that both adults and children were full of joy and good moods. It is a challenge for all of us to bring this back and it is not an easy thing.

Looking worldwide, we have come to learn of the sad fact that millions of children around the world are currently hungry and malnourished. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that one-third of the world is well-fed, one-third is under-fed and one-third is starving. We all have to help in improving healthy lifestyles and encouraging healthy balanced meals for the children of Fiji.

Education: Madam Speaker, Government's plan to introduce free education for the kindergarten students needs to be praised. This will greatly remove the financial burden from the parents and will strengthen the initiative of making Fiji a knowledge-based society. The provision of 250 millilitres of milk for Year One students is welcome news for the students. I urge that in the near future, we should also look at providing flavoured milk to early childhood children to boost their energy and moral. This will also encourage regular attendance.

What we give to the children will be remembered for long. In 1970, as a Class 8 student, I was present at the Nabouwalu foreshores to celebrate Fiji's Independence. We had to walk 14 kilometres to get there. Although this happened 44 years ago, there were two things that I remembered about this historic function:

- 1) We were all excited to see the new Fiji Flag. Then the Fiji Flag was hoisted and raised but it was upside down.
- 2) The Government had provided an apple each to every student. This was the first time I touched and held an apple in my hand. I carried the apple back home to share it the rest of my brothers and sisters. Madam, I had 12 of them. That was a child's picture 44 years ago. Back then, it was fun to climb trees and eat nutritious fruits like mangoes, oranges, *kavika*, pawpaw and guavas. Today, children find it easy to purchase snacks off the shelves and ignore the locally grown fruits. Let us encourage our people to enjoy our native fruits and vegetables.

Having a Cultured Society and the Role of the Family: Madam Speaker, teaching of values, culture, tradition, language and good habits starts in the family home. The grandparents, parents and others in the family play a key role. A family is a group of people living together, generally the parents and the children. Each member of the family has to play his or her role. The parents support their children. They have to love, care and guide and in return, the children should respect and obey their parents and learn from them good habits, culture, religious values and tolerance and remain committed to their responsibilities.

We have noted a lack of love, tolerance and understanding which is resulting in violence. Children are often abused which results in mental and physical violence. Young children are turning to alcohol, drug and violence. In order to maintain a good family, strong kinship ties have to be maintained. A good family stands firm when it is cultured by good moral and human values. I appeal to all parents to carry out their roles faithfully and devote more time with their children to enhance family values. In this way, they will not only be helping their child but also helping to build a highly cultured society that has care and respect for all.

Building a Better Fiji: Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President rightfully said; and I quote from page 8 of the *Daily Hansard* of Tuesday, 7<sup>th</sup> October, 2014:

“Let us dedicate ourselves once and for all to the democratic ideal of genuine equality for all Fijians and resolve to work constructively in our democracy...”

We are proud to be citizens of this beautiful country, Fiji. It is our multicultural and multiracial set up that makes us beautiful and unique. Here in Fiji, we have qualities of life and values, which many countries strive for but never attain such things as unity and togetherness of the different races, peace and harmony among the people; tolerance, understanding, happiness and prosperity. I quote the words of the late President, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara who, on 8<sup>th</sup> December, 1987 said, and I quote:

“I believe we can succeed because our history has shown that we are a very resilient nation. We have faced many difficulties and problems in the past and we overcome them. We were visited by many natural disasters, destructions and suffering yet, we have survived and progressed.

We prevailed because we were together as a nation and as a people. Fellow citizens, I urge you, I plead with you, put the past behind you, cast aside enormity and hatred and individually and collectively, let us recommit ourselves to the task of nation building and pledge to work in co-operation and in harmony to rebuild our beloved country.

For the sake of all of us, for the sake of our children and our children's children, let us pledge to build and not to break; let us pledge to love and not to hate; let us pledge to help and not to hinder and let us rededicate ourselves towards restoring national harmony and unity in the nation.

Let us praise God for giving us the opportunity. We now have to rebuild our nation. Let us ask for his blessing so that we can live in peace now and in future. If we have erred in the past, let us learn from our mistakes. May mutual trust increase amongst us. May the Almighty help us to break down barriers of national, religious, cultural, tribal or personal suspicious or ill-will. From now on, let us go forward truly together.”

Madam Speaker, we have just celebrated our Fiji Day. Celebrating Fiji's new dawn brought all the people together regardless of race, colour, religion, ethnicity or creed. This is the dream we all have for Fiji. Let us proudly show this to the rest of the world.

We were fortunate to be visited by Pope John Paul in 1986, and this is what he had to say about Fiji, I quote:

“I admire the way people of diverse cultural backgrounds live together here in harmony and peace. You differ widely amongst yourselves, yet you are one united nation.”

In the recent case of our soldiers in Golan Heights, we saw all of Fiji coming together in prayers. It is our prayers that the God listened.

Madam Speaker, let me conclude with a small story. I am reminded of the story of the large stone in the middle of the road. One day, a farmer walking down the street in a small town came across a large stone in the middle of the path. The farmer complained; “Who could be so careless to leave such a big stone in the middle of the road? Why does someone not move it?” He went away complaining. The next day, the same happened with a milkman. He also went away grumbling but left the stone as it was.

Then the next day, a student came across the stone. Worried that someone might fall over it and hurt himself or herself, he decided to push it aside. He pushed long and hard all by himself and eventually, managed to remove the stone from the path. He came back and noticed a piece of paper where the stone was. He picked the paper, opened it and this was written on the paper; “You are the true wealth of this nation”.

There are two kinds of people; talkers and doers. Talkers merely talk while doers do the work. The moral of this story is that, if you do not want to get involved, you have no right to criticise –

become the change you wish to see in this world. Service to society is the rent we pay for the space we occupy on this earth. Fiji First will not be a talker but a doer.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- *Vinaka, vinaka.*

I have been guided for over 45 years of my association with the Fiji Scouts Association as a cub, scout, a leader and currently, as its Deputy Chief Commissioner. I have also been guided by the words of the founder of Scouts, the Lord Baden Powell, whose vision was stated many, many years ago, and I quote:

“Try to live in this world a little better than you found it. When your turn comes to die, you can die happily in feeling that at any rate, you have not wasted your time but have done the best.”

Madam Speaker, I ask all the honourable Members that we are here for a purpose and let us do this duty honestly and faithfully.

May the Lord guide and bless Fiji. Thank you for your patience.

(Acclamation)

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- The honourable Prime Minister, honourable Cabinet Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition and my colleagues, the honourable Members of Parliament; I stand before you, Madam Speaker, to also try and make a few constructive contributions based on His Excellency the President's Address in this august Chamber.

Before doing so, I would also like to join my colleagues who have spoken before me, in congratulating you on your being elected to the high Office of leading this august House in its deliberations. It is not only that, that you became the first lady in Fiji and in the Pacific to be the Speaker, but you have also represented Fiji in sports and other fields as well. So the passion to participate in getting our country together and leading is nothing new to yourself, and I wish you all the best in your tenure as Speaker of this august House.

At the same time, I would also like to thank the SODELPA (Social Democratic Liberal Party): its leadership, not forgetting those from the *Vanua o Lalagavesi*; *Vanua o Caumatalevu* and *Cakaunitabua*; for the great support and belief that you had in us in this last campaign.

The campaign was not an easy one, Madam Speaker. The electoral system is a new one, the power of money was so obvious, so glaring but the will to participate was there and I thank the three *Vanuas* for being able to withstand the onslaught of the great power of money as displayed by the honourable Prime Minister and his party in the last General Elections. We still have doubt on the results. Thank you, honourable Prime Minister, congratulations for your win!

My contribution this morning to His Excellency's Address will be premised on a few constructive criticisms as to the issues or probably, the Government policies that have been raised by His Excellency. After all, that is the role of the Opposition.

I have just recently heard from my colleague on the other side, honourable Brij Lal, that we do not have the right to criticise. He said; “We walk the talk on this side of the House and we will do this and that, we are not here just to be talking”. However, this side of the House has been entrusted to carry out that work and we will do that work diligently. We will be offering very, very constructive

criticisms, so as to help each and every honourable Member in Parliament since you are all representatives of the people in Parliament, where we give the best to the very people that voted us in.

From the outset, Madam Speaker, the General Elections has brought in a breath of fresh air. We have seen the swearing in of the honourable Prime Minister and his Cabinet colleagues, your election to the high Office of Speaker, the election of the Leader of the Opposition that certainly has come as a great relief to us because after eight years, being in the wilderness and darkness, we have made it. We must thank the Lord for all that had happened, in being able to withstand, bear and endure it up until this point in time. It is now a clean slate, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I hope that what I am about to say could be taken in the vein it is being said because this is another role that we have to play. Having said that, now it is a clean slate but I think part of that slate is not that clean as required under the Constitution.

Twice, in His Address, His Excellency the President mentioned that he was doing what he was doing, as Head of State. I fully understand the transitional provisions (Part D of the Constitution of 2013), and I am quite comprehensive and finding it hard to believe that the incumbent was not elected under Section 84 of the 2013 Constitution. He mentioned that this is the time when we need to come together and stop the *coup* culture. Yet, the honourable Prime Minister, Madam Speaker, they were the authors of the Constitution and why was this very sensitive part completely left out. There is a Fijian saying which goes, "*Vakasala vaka i Rakasala*". That I am not allowed to elaborate on since you have made your ruling this morning, Madam Speaker.

However, if we are going to start afresh, we are going to start clean, that is all. We need to make sure that the Government plays its part in ensuring that everyone is on a clean slate. The honourable Prime Minister is sitting here with the mandate of the people, and I hope they can complete that part properly, so as to ensure that we are on a clean slate.

Be that as it may, Madam Speaker, I will now touch on the Address proper, especially on the part of where \$10 million is being offered to help the *i taukei* use their land for subdivision and development. He went on to say that for too long, the landowners have leased out their land for others to develop and to make huge profits. Madam Speaker, this is nothing new. Since the former Prime Minister, the *Turaga Tui Nayau*, the Right Honourable Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara's reign, we have been trying to get Fijians developed in so many ways individually and collectively. We even had the Seaqaqa Subdivision done to help Fijians live beside their Indian brothers and sisters, to try to go into commercial cane farming, but that was not a success. This \$10 million is just the same as what the late Ratu Mara did, including the former Prime Minister Major-General Rabuka, and of course, Laisenia Qarase, in turning this around, not re-inventing the wheel and just working on the collective groups that were there – the *mataqali*, *yavusa* and the *vanua*. This went very well, Madam Speaker.

As we go around the nation, we find investments standing under the name of the *yasana*, *vanua*, *mataqali* and *yavusa*. This, they were able to do because that is part of them; to go individually. Success has been very minimal, probably we are not used to it. We live in a village, we have collective decisions to make and land for that matter, is also collectively owned by a *mataqali* through individuals owning any land. For that, Madam Speaker, I would like to implore upon the honourable Prime Minister and his Government, why do we not just use the present custom that we have, the custom of *solesolevaki* because as a group, we can achieve more? We have nothing, we have little but collectively, we come together. We would be able to raise funds that would be able to provide capital for great investments.

Individually, it is a hard road to take and a long one as well. It would take years before we reach that, Madam Speaker, even though the present Government and its policies are being highlighted by His Excellency is very firm on seeing that developments as such for individuals are promoted but again, the advice from this side of the House is, why do we not take what we feel is part of our life, part of our culture and part of the reason that we have to collectively do things?

When I say that, Madam Speaker, it brings me to the point, this is only our group rights. It is part of our group rights that does not exist in the 2013 Constitution. This is a vehicle that is already there to help us undertake all these, helped us build a landmark within the Suva business district, that is standing out there, which is known as the *i Taukei* Land Trust Board Building. That was done from the sheer wisdom of the Great Council of Chiefs and its members and the people by not borrowing a single penny from the then Colonial Government, but instead raising loans which they paid off themselves from the Bank of New Zealand. There stands a hallmark of how indigenous *i Taukei* had also participated actively in the commercial business through their birth rights.

Madam Speaker, now, as I see it, the Government of the day would like to make reforms within the ITLTB. They even reduced the poundage. Poundage reflects something that will make the landowners own the ITLTB, instead of relying on Government and taxpayers to pay for everything that is about them and their trust body. Mentioning trust body, Madam Speaker, the ITLTB does not come under the Public Trustee Act because the Native Land Trust Act is an Act on its own, it is an Act of Parliament and so to its creation and status. Now, Decrees have been passed in the past or quite recently (17 of them), I suppose that will affect one way or another this Act of Parliament.

Again, I would like to touch on a very important point that His Excellency the President touched on and that is to do with the sovereignty of this nation. I would like to raise this question, Madam Speaker, as to; is there absolute sovereignty in this country? What office does it lie in? Who is in-charge of it and my answer to that is; what His Excellency has raised in his speech, especially on para 3, page 12 of the *Hansard Report* dated Tuesday, 7<sup>th</sup> October, 2014. The consent to get 99 year leases will be held with the landowners. 90 per cent of the land in Fiji is owned by Fijians. When government wants any native land to utilise for government purposes, it will have to go to the registered landowners. In New Zealand, the Maoris only own six per cent of all the lands in New Zealand, the rest belongs to the State. So absolute sovereignty rests with the government. In Australia, small reservations are now being set aside for the original people or the Aborigines so 90 per cent of the land is still absolute sovereignty, or rests with the State.

In Fiji, 90 per cent of the land is owned by Fijians. It is registered and privately owned, and for this, there is always a need, Madam Speaker, to ensure and to protect this very interest of the people. We need to work with them. You need to explain fully what development is all about to them, and allow them to seek advice from other sources rather than trying to force them to come to terms with something that they are not familiar with and they do not know anything about especially to do with development. So the answer there, Madam Speaker, is the Government of the day needs to tread carefully in ensuring that all these interests are fully protected.

I would like to round off my contribution this afternoon, Madam Speaker, because this new found democracy to me is a bit incomplete because the remnant of the old continues to this very day. A perfect example of this is to do with information, and especially in this august House that only FBC can broadcast the proceedings. Why is this? How was this decision made and who made it?

Madam Speaker, we have three TV stations - *Fiji One*, *Mai TV* and *FBC TV*, and if there is to be any credibility in His Excellency's reference to this Government's measures on a fairer and a more equal society than why two of our three TV stations have been denied the opportunity to



broadcast these proceedings. That is not fair. It is not even transparent and where the equal continuity for all, and the promise by Government is that no one will be left behind. This is all about control.

HON. REAR ADMIRAL (Ret) J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- It is not true!

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Given the time allocation that is fully lapsed, Madam Speaker, I thank you.

(Acclamation)

MADAM SPEAKER.- We will now adjourn for lunch and resume at 2.30 p.m. as per Standing Order (23). Since there are only three speakers in the afternoon, we may be able to adjourn early.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.30p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.25 p.m.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Madam Speaker, firstly, I would like to congratulate you for being appointed as the Speaker of Parliament.

Madam Speaker, today I rise in this Chamber for the first time as a very humble yet proud Member of Parliament. At the outset, I want to place on record my thanks to the people of Fiji for their trust in me to represent them. I will always honour this, just as they have in the Bainimarama-led government, someone who will work hard, listen, fight for them and will respect and defend the values that have made this country great.

People of Fiji, I am someone who will not make decisions ruled by fear, or come up with controversies to gain media attention. Today, we cannot sacrifice the future of this country on the altar of political expediency, for the decision we make here in this Parliament, will shape our future.

We face big challenges and I will not duck the task of tackling them. Fiji has a strong tradition and a proud legacy, in particular I honour the contributions of my parents, grandparents, Mr. Ram Abhilakh Maharaj and Sampat Maharaj, my siblings, Mr. and Mrs. Alick and Nilu Maharaj, Mr. and Mrs Alrick and Kirti Maharaj, Mr. Neel and Aileen Prasad, for being a great Fijian and my mentors as well as friends to have moulded me into what I am today.

I would also like to thank my campaign managers, Mr. Ratnesh, Pundit Sanjay Sharma, Reena, Lalita and friends, Mr. Chandrika Prasad, Mr. Lalta, Nalin, Mahesh Prasad, Mr. Arnold Ram and others whom I have missed, along with those who have voted me in today.

One thing more than any other binds the diversity together, that is aspiration. Fiji is full to the brim with aspirations. The young couples renting at the moment but desperate to own their own homes. Families wanting the best for their children, saving to provide them with the best opportunities in life. Small business people, rolling up their sleeves, taking a chance and creating jobs. Older residents, who have worked hard throughout their lives, whose accomplishment prove what can happen when you dare to pursue your ambitions.

The story of Ambika Prasad and his beloved Malti Devi is a true example of aspiration. Mr. Ambika was born in early 1950s, one of the six children and lived in what was then a working class in the Friendly North. He left school at nine years of age, and worked as a garage assistant and after struggling got a job in Public Works Department (PWD), earning a net salary of \$123 per week. Years later, he met Malti Devi, daughter of Mr. Shiu Dhari and they got married. They made a one-bedroom house with kitchen made out of bamboo, educated their four children in this one bedroom house, sending them to schools in Fiji and abroad in their secondary years to give them educational opportunities that they themselves had been denied.

Today, they must be sitting home somewhere watching me speak, as I could not have asked more from them as my parents.

Madam Speaker, the same spirit of aspiration that drove my grandparents also drove my parents. I have been the first of their families to go to university to pursue a medical career, and the first in the family to set up my own business. They worked hard and sacrificed to give me and my siblings quality education. If not for their love and sacrifice, I would not be standing here today at the age of 30. Yet again, first in the family to join politics.

I joined FijiFirst because the Party helped people fulfil their aspirations. It is indeed a pleasure to be part of the revolution that started in 2006. A Party which fought the Elections on the basis of development and integration between all ethnic groups. I have great honour and pride to be given a chance to serve under the leadership of our Prime Minister. Thank you, Sir.

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

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Had the events of 2006 not taken place, people like me and many others would have been degraded to third-class citizens. Many young people would have migrated, and I am not just talking about Indo-Fijians, but about all young professionals regardless of their background. Sir, thank you for giving us equal rights and dignity to live.

My sincere appreciation goes to the honourable Attorney General for vesting his trust in me in allowing me to be a candidate for FijiFirst. Born and bred in Labasa, currently staying in Nausori, and operating my business from Suva gives me a prime opportunity to deliver my service to a wider community. I hereby stand today to fulfil the vision of our visionary leader.

I, being appointed as few of those young parliamentarians, puts an immense pressure as expectations have doubled to see, as a youth representative, will I offer to Parliament and the country at large. How would words spoken in Parliament help me encourage the current youth and the future leaders of Fiji stay and vest their knowledge and skills back into the country, for the very reason so that one day:

- 1) Fiji can be called a developed country, rather than being called a developing country;
- 2) To encourage graduates to take politics as a profession,
- 3) To have a say and mould Fiji into a country where we have tarsealed roads and concrete footpaths with streetlights,
- 4) A place where we can say that no one is living in poverty;
- 5) A place where a child going to school does not have his uniform colour turn brown due to dust;
- 6) A country where no one dies because he or she was not able to afford medical care or medication; and
- 7) A country whereby all Fijians benefit equally, whether they are in the rural or urban areas, regardless of what ethnic group they belong to.

In my view, the best path to our collective prosperity involves giving individuals, families and businesses the freedom, opportunity and encouragement to build and secure their own future. That is why I am here. I want to create the best possible environment that allows people to pursue their aspirations, and one that values the family as the backdrop of the society to be nurtured and protected. The brain power of 800,000 people is given the freedom to create solutions for their families and communities, setup businesses which creates jobs that would always yield better outcomes.

I shall act to maximise choice and opportunity. Non-government alternatives are important. We need to encourage private health care and agricultural growth. At the same time, it is critical to have a strong public health and public school system. We need to demand excellence and achievements from both to ensure real opportunities for Fijians.

Our policies encourage self-reliance and resilience. It is not about how much time we spend at the workplace, but what makes the difference is what we have done at the workplace. It is better to be awake for just 12 hours a day and being productive, rather than being awake for 18 hours a day, and being non-productive.

Social policies cannot be implemented without strong economy. No one has seen life before birth, nor does anyone know what happens after that. However, we do know that we get one life, which has an average life span of 60 years, out of which 20 years is spent on sleeping. With the remaining 40 years, should we have time to hate and discriminate each other? What would we achieve by segregation between different ethnic groups? Life, therefore is too short for us, so let us do something that at least one extra person, apart from our own relatives remembers us after our death.

A strong economy is the ultimate form of social policy. With it comes the chance of a job, a higher standard of living and the chance to fulfil aspirations. It is therefore very important to live with prosperity and dignity.

In working with my colleagues in this House, I will seek to maximise the competitiveness of our economy and our productivity. I shall put my motivation towards work and my colleagues experience to achieve this. We need an economy that promotes workforce participation and wealth creation. I will never forget that politics is about people, and that an individual can make a difference. That is why I am here. I look forward to playing my part in building an even better Fiji and being part of the revolution to see Fiji as a developed country. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

(Acclamation)

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- Madam Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Cabinet Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition, and my fellow honourable Members.

First of all, I offer my most sincere congratulations to you, Madam Speaker, on your election as the Speaker of this honourable House. You have made history in being the first woman to take up such a position in Fiji, and I offer you my very best wishes.

I also wish to acknowledge the increasing number of women candidates in the General Elections, and the fact that we now have eight women in this august House, including yourself, Madam Speaker - 16 per cent is a remarkable increase from previous years. Our women have also taken up leadership positions in their political parties, and I say, "Well done to the women of our beloved nation."

Madam Speaker, I also note from the honourable Roko Tupou Draunidalo's address yesterday that you are a product of Adi Cakobau School (ACS). I have also learned that the honourable Leader of the Opposition, the honourable Ro Temumu Kepa, the Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources, honourable Mereseini Vuniwaqa and my fellow colleague the honourable Salote Radrodro, are all former students of ACS.

Adi Cakobau School have produced women leaders who have clearly made their mark in Fiji and abroad and they are found at all levels of Fiji's society striving to make a difference in lives of the people.

Madam Speaker, I wish to acknowledge the wisdom and the foresight of the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga* in endorsing the establishment of Adi Cakobau School, to nurture and train excellent young Fijian women from the 1st of October, 1948 – 74 years after our representative high chiefs who had the sovereignty of this nation, had ceded Fiji to Her Majesty Queen Victoria and after the first school for young male Fijian chiefs *Vuli ni Turaga* was established 41 years earlier in 1907.

Without doubt, Madam Speaker, Adi Cakobau School, named after the high ranking lady of Bau, from the chiefly household of *Naisogolaca*, has since its inception, continued to fulfil the

objectives of its founders by producing many great Fijian women, who have gone on in their lives to contribute much to the intellectual, social and cultural fabric of life in Fiji and abroad.

I also offer my sincere congratulations to all Members of this august House for your success in the General Elections. Without doubt, the people of Fiji are looking to us for wisdom and goodwill in taking our beloved Fiji forward.

We are all elated with the win of our super 7s Rugby Team in the Gold Coast last weekend and I would like to offer my congratulations to the Coach, the Manager and to our Seven's gladiators, our talented die-hard players. Thank you for continuing to put Fiji in the world rugby map and for bringing joy to the people of Fiji.

I have been a member of Parliament since August, 2001 and again in May 2006, which only lasted six months, before we were removed unlawfully by the then Commander of the Fiji Military Forces.

Madam Speaker, I wish to thank the honourable Prime Minister for his invitation to the Leader of the Opposition to put aside their political differences and work together for the betterment of Fiji.

The way forward for our country requires active consultation and in particular hearing the opposition views of the changes which have been brought about without consultation and without consulting the people of Fiji and more so the indigenous people, through their institutions at the apex of which is the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga*. The question in the mind of many people is, what are the purpose of these changes; to what end; at what pace; on whose term; under what conditions; through what means and at what price? These questions are at the heart of the political debate in our nation. Unless we accept that these questions need to be thoroughly discussed, issues resolved, we cannot really take our country forward.

I sincerely hope that good sense will prevail, as we continue in our journey to answer the question at the heart of Fiji's current political debate and to bring about the best policies, to not only improve the wellbeing of the people of our nation, but also to protect the rights of the first people, the indigenous Fijians, whose representing chiefs had collectively held the sovereignty of Fiji including my great, great grandfather had entered the solemn compact on behalf of the Fijian people with Her Majesty Queen Victoria, in what we know as the Deed of Cession. The first guiding sacred document of our beloved Fiji.

Madam Speaker, our representative high chiefs, had in the Deed of Cession, sought protection and civilisation in four main areas:

- 1) promotion of education;
- 2) trade;
- 3) Christianity; and
- 4) the protection of our chiefly system together with their way of life and ownership of our resources.

As a direct descendant of one of the signatories to the Deed of Cession, I have been greatly saddened that our early history through the Deed of Cession document containing the solemn compact of the protection of our chiefly system, indigenous Fijians resources and their way of life, civilisation through education, trade and Christianity has been unduly removed from the 2013 Constitution.

Madam Speaker, I also raise my grave concerns on the manner in which the rights of the indigenous people of this country to be consulted through free prior informed consent was unceremoniously dumped by those who had illegally removed the legal elected government in December, 2006.

Madam Speaker, we cannot pretend that all is well in this country, if the issues of grave concerns to the first people of this nation have been trampled with. I talk about the weakening of the native institutions:

- 1) the removal of the Great Council of Chiefs;
- 2) the removal of the representatives of the GCC in the Fijian Affairs Board, the Native Land Trust Board and the Fijians Trust Fund;
- 3) the changes in the approved formula for payment of leases to landowning units; and
- 4) the election of the entrenched legislation, our Group Rights contained in Chapter 13 of the 1997 Constitution and many more.

I am also talking about the making of Decrees that have negatively impacted the rights of indigenous Fijians through the Regulation of the Surfing Area Decree and the Land Use Decree. Both Decrees have grossly affected the rights of indigenous Fijians to address their concerns in these Decrees in a court of law because here are provisions that do not allow any court of law to accept or hear or determine their concerns.

Madam Speaker, the 2013 Constitution champions “equality” of all citizens of this country. I ask Madam Speaker, where is the “equality” of all citizens, if the courts of law in this country are barred from accepting, hearing or determining any concerns laid down in these two Decrees, as well as other Decrees such as Momi Bay and Denarau Decrees.

Madam Speaker, there are many other issues to be raised and other Members of Parliament will continue from here. All I am saying is that, we cannot ignore the plight of the people of this nation. No amount of improvement in the roads, supply of quality water or supply of electricity or the so called “free education” will appease the indigenous Fijians of this country if their rights to be consulted on matters that impact on their rights and aspirations are not addressed.

I now wish to refer to His Excellency, the President of the Republic of the Fiji Islands Opening Address to this august House. I thank His Excellency for a well-delivered speech. The speech portrays the vision of government and the plans to improve the lives of the people of this nation.

His Excellency has called for democratic ideals:

- 1) of genuine equality of all Fijians;
- 2) championed Parliamentary process that that is more transparent and accountable;
- 3) confirmed to us that the Prime Minister intends to run a government that is inclusive and serves the needs of all Fijians, no matter who they are, where they come from or who they voted in the recent election;
- 4) that the Prime Minister intends to place compassion to the less fortunate; and

- 5) that they intend to assist indigenous Fijians to generate wealth from their land.

On these ideals, Madam Speaker, I wish to appeal to the Prime Minister and his Government, to first reconsider the two radical Decrees which have negatively affected the resource owners and the first people of this nation. Their rights to address their grievances in any court of law have been violated and restricted. Their voice as indigenous people, whose rights are protected through international Conventions and Declarations have been removed.

Government needs to recognise and acknowledge the key role that the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga* has brought about for this country:

- 1) it was through the representative High Chiefs collectively holding the sovereignty of this country that Fiji was ceded to Great Britain;
- 2) it was through them that the Chiefs agreed to put their land into the Native Land Trust Board, and to avail their land to be leased for development and farming purposes;
- 3) it was through them that ALTO and ALTA were promulgated;
- 4) it was through them that the political problems in this country in 1987 and 2000 did not escalate to worse level; and
- 5) it was through their recommendation that the 1997 Constitution was approved.

There are many more milestones of the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga*.

Government must convene the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga* and carry out necessary reforms after consultation and approval of the indigenous Fijian people. Whatever process government wishes to bring about, must be inclusive and beneficial to all the people who call Fiji their "home". They must discard the dictatorial rule and they must place priority in the interests of Fiji from the interests of the nation and investors who are interested only in extracting resources and money out of the people of this nation. I, as a member of the Opposition have a role to support our team in ensuring an effective opposition to probe for clarity, for transparency, accountability in the governance of this nation in particular the last eight years under a military and dictatorial rule.

Madam Speaker, our youths of today are our future leaders. There is a need to increase the voices of young people in decision and policy making, in political processes to ensure that our young people participate in an effective way. Their participation today ensures their effective participation now and in the future governance of our nation. It is crucial to develop the capacity of youths.

Madam Speaker, youths make up one-third of Fiji's population and have the potential to make a difference in the community, improve current living standards and increase access for all in the development process.

Madam Speaker, in conclusion, I am honoured and proud to be a Member of this august House representing the people of Namosi and the people of Fiji, and I would like to assure Parliament and the people of Fiji that I will serve them with integrity and the very best of my ability. May the Almighty Lord bless us all and bless Fiji.

(Acclamation)

HON. A. NABULIVOU. – Madam Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Cabinet Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, fellow honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen, *bula vinaka* to you all. Before moving on Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment as Speaker; the first woman Speaker in this Parliament and all the Pacific region. We will fully support your appointment for many years to come. With this custom of Parliament, I stand here today with this golden opportunity in reply to the Address of His Excellency the President of Fiji. Before that, I have much pleasure in acknowledging those who have supported me during the build up to the September 17<sup>th</sup> General Elections, and those who had voted for me, leading to my being elected as a Member of Parliament.

I wish to thank the leader of the Fiji First, the honourable Prime Minister for having faith and confidence in me and giving me a humble ginger farmer from Naitasiri the opportunity to become a Member of Parliament. I am not here because of money, luxuries, fame or the Parliament privileges.

(Laughter)

I speak as someone who has been at the end of the line at all times, and I understand the difficulties of waiting and frustrations of being lied to. You as honourable Members of Parliament can easily forget your commitments when enjoying the privileges but remember, the people are looking up at us and the Lord Almighty is looking down at our every move. If it was His will to bring us to Parliament to serve the people, then let us make sure to serve that will.

We will be present in this Parliament from now on - discussing, deliberating and even arguing in the presence of our Madam Speaker. We can bring all sorts of explanations and all technicalities to support our arguments but the end of all this, is to derive the best for our beloved nation. I speak to you, honourable Members of Parliament, let us deliver the best for our nation.

We have the support of our neighbouring countries. We must strengthen our trade agreements, to ensure it is for our benefit. For the past few years, Fiji has achieved unprecedented growth trend. Let us try to lift the same to another level.

I now make reference to His Excellency the President's Address. We had been welcomed and introduced into Parliament by an inspirational speech. We have also been enlightened by the various initiatives which the Government plans to take in the next few years. Looking back at our commitments to the people, I believe that as it has been put forward by His Excellency the President, what we must make sure to achieve in the next few years.

We are surrounded by the best legal framework that realise the rights of the people which, in our 2014 Constitution, have never been more equal. It will be great to see everyone working together, coming out of their shells and unleashing their best. Our previous political system and constitution constrained us from achieving our potential. Those constraints no longer exist.

Madam Speaker and honourable Members of Parliament, there are now no barriers to working together. We have different views but we have a common goal and that is, to deliver the best for our beloved nation. We are in exciting times, so let me end by saying that we will never fail, if we work hard and continue to work together.

Madam Speaker, I would like to touch on another area of development. I come from an agricultural community, like so many others in this country. We are small businessmen, very small businessmen. On the one hand, we have rich and fertile land and capable of growing many useful



crops such as *dalo*, tapioca, ginger and papaya. On the other hand, there are many issues confronting such farmers.

Earlier on, after European settlement, two cash crops became dominant, namely sugar and copra. They became economic engine room of this country for many years. Understandably, because of their economic importance, a great deal of capital investment in these industries took place, not just by farmers but also by government in providing infrastructure to assist these industries. I sincerely hope that everything that can be done, will be done to improve the outlook of those industries.

We are now seeing relatively small scale export industries being established for ginger, tapioca and as I have mentioned already, *weleti* (papaya). There are many growers like myself, who wish to extend those industries to provide a decent living for our families and a prosperous future for our children.

The barriers to developing other crops I have mentioned are numerous. They include:

- 1) quarantine restrictions in foreign markets;
- 2) lack of collective bargaining power on behalf of the small growers;
- 3) lack of capital to purchase modern equipment;
- 4) uneconomically small growing plots;
- 5) lack of downstream processing and value adding; and
- 6) dis-proportionate sharing of profit by middlemen.

I take ginger by way of example. Ginger root has a farm gate price of about \$1.00 per kilogramme in the local market. If we sell to the present value-adders, the retail price in Suva is presently about \$1.50 to \$2.00 a kilogramme. The wholesale market price in Sydney, Australia right now is about \$17.00 to \$20.00 a kilogramme, which is equivalent to about F\$25.00 to F\$50.00 a kilogramme.

For many years, there have been quarantine restrictions on Fiji ginger entering the Australian market. I understand these restrictions have recently been eased.

I would like to promote greater research and agricultural extension work amongst farmers to enhance opportunities for all ginger crops. Our aim should be to have a world class product that no one can object to. If we can do that, the reward is likely to be instantaneous and large. It could easily double or triple the average earning capacity of farmers in my district and in other places.

I digress to mention the disaster that overtook my district in my father's time when the banana export industry was wiped out because of quarantine (biosecurity) problems. The quarantine issue is an opportunity, if dealt with correctly and a threat, if not. It requires money, research, dedicated agricultural extension specialists and assistance with implementation of correct techniques.

I ask for some consideration of local prices as well. Ginger has been fixed in price in Fiji for many years without reflecting the increase in costs of other foodstuff. I am most mindful of the overall national interest in keeping down the cost of living but the present process is not one in which the

producers have a reasonable input. This is possibly an area where representative bodies acting in the interest of farmers could undertake collective bargaining on behalf of farmers.

One of the real challenges of farmers is that, they often farm small uneconomical plots of land. They lose economies of scale and the opportunity to diversify. The holdings are usually so small, that they cannot afford more efficient farming techniques. This is another area where rural co-operatives seem to offer some potential.

Value-added processing in the areas where crops are grown provides wages and employment in rural areas. I hope that by increasing output and developing value-added processing, we can do something about creating and sustaining jobs.

I would like to see a mechanism established to assist groups of farmers identify and pursue the best economic outcome for them. This may be a matter of identifying markets, establishing protocols

It is commonplace that each level of production and marketing chain is accompanied by substantial uplifts in value. My objective is to place more of that value back in the hands to which it rightfully belongs, namely the farmers. This is an area which needs an injection of management and technical skills, as well capital. It will work best if done in a planned and co-ordinated manner. What I have said about ginger is every bit as true for the other crops I have mentioned.

Madam Speaker, and honourable Members, I take this opportunity to commend this area of our national economy for your ongoing attention.

Madam Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Cabinet Ministers and fellow Members of Parliament, may I close by saying thank you, *vinaka vakalevu* for the opportunity to speak in your midst. May the Lord Almighty bless all of us and our beloved nation Fiji.

(Acclamation)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end the list of speakers for today. You are all invited to share afternoon tea in the Committee Room. I now adjourn Parliament until 9.30 tomorrow morning.

The Parliament is now adjourned.

The Parliament adjourned at 3.09 p.m.