

TUESDAY, 7TH OCTOBER, 2014

The House resumed at 10.00 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MADAM SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

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

Hon. Biman Chand Prasad.
Hon. Aseri Masivou Radrodro.
Hon. Salote Vuibureta Radrodro.
Hon. Netani Rika.
Hon. Neil Prakash Sharma.
Hon. Balmindar Singh.
Hon. Prem Singh.
Hon. Ashneel Sudhakar.
Hon. Viliame Manakiwau Tagivetaua.
Hon. Ratu Isoa Delamisi Tikoca.
Hon. Anare Tuidraki Vadei.
Hon. Samuela Bainikalou Vunivalu.

Absent

Hon. Ratu Naiqama Tawake Lalabalavu

ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI

Madam Speaker, the honourable Chief Justice and members of the Judiciary, the honourable Prime Minister and Cabinet Ministers, the honourable Leader of Opposition, the honourable Members of Parliament, Your Excellencies, members of the Diplomatic Corps, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen: Good morning, *ni sa bula vinaka, salaam malaykum, namaste.*

We gather together, as a nation today, to mark a momentous occasion - the launch of our new democracy. Forty-four years after Independence, Fiji has finally held a General Election based on the genuine democratic principle of equal votes of equal value, and the Fijian people have chosen you, the fifty members of our new Parliament, to represent them and serve their interests over the next four years. I am delighted and honoured, as your Head of State, to formally launch these proceedings and to join you in commemorating this landmark event in the life of our nation.

Firstly, allow me to congratulate you, Madam Speaker, on your election as Speaker of this Parliament. To become the first female Speaker of a Parliament in Fiji, or in any other Pacific Island country, is a singular achievement and an inspiration to women everywhere.

The historical significance of what we are witnessing today cannot be overstated. We gather in a Chamber that has seen some of the greatest events in Fijian history. These include: the meetings of the Legislative Council in colonial times that set the scene for our independence from Britain, and the first gathering of the Parliament of an Independent Fiji 44 years ago, in 1970.

Within these walls have echoed the voices of the great historical figures who fought for our rights and those who led us to nationhood: Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, A.D Patel, Ratu Sir Edward Cakobau, Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, Siddiq Koya, Dr Timoci Bavadra, Julian Toganivalu, Semesa Sikivou, Bill Yee, Loma Livingstone, Adi Losalini Dovi and Irene Jay Narayan, to name but a few. They speak to us across the decades today, urging us to complete the task they had started in this place with so many other men and women of goodwill, who are no longer with us but who we also remember with gratitude.

Regrettably, this Chamber was also the setting for one of the most traumatic and painful events in our history, whose impact lingers with us almost three decades on.

At 10.00 a.m. on 14th May, 1987, a group of soldiers entered Parliament, stopped the proceedings and herded the newly-elected government of Dr Timoci Bavadra away at gunpoint. It was the first of four disruptions to elected government, and the beginning of a cycle of instability that plagued our nation and retarded its development. It is a chapter in our history that must never be repeated.

Now, 27 years later, we gather at the site of that first *coup* to establish genuine democratic rule, and to finally draw a line under the years of division that have held Fiji back, and herald in a new era of unity and purpose.

The symbolism of returning our Parliament to this place is extremely potent. History has today come full circle. God has blessed us with another chance to build one nation. 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. I appeal to you all, as your President, to work co-operatively together, to advance the national interest and to adhere to the highest standards of collective and personal conduct.

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. They look up to you to set an example to the nation, and especially our young people, of dedication and service.

Never before has the parliamentary process been more transparent, nor have our Members of Parliament been held more accountable. You must never forget that the Fijian people are listening and watching; either on radio, television or the permanent live-streaming of these proceedings over the internet. They will not easily forgive or forget those who put petty arguments for short-term political gain before the great challenge before you, to work together and move our beloved nation forward.

It is a sacred trust that you have all pledged before God, to uphold in your oaths of office. Those who have sent you here have already demonstrated their passionate desire to exercise their democratic right with a remarkable election turnout of more than 80 per cent. I implore you all, as your President, please do not let them down.

It is also my duty today as the Head of State, to outline the Government's legislative programme for the coming session. I am gratified to have been informed by the honourable Prime Minister that he 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 for in the recent Election. It bodes well for our future, and I urge every Member of Parliament, whichever Party you represent, to approach your duties here in the same spirit.

My Government's goal is to build on the reforms of the past eight years, to continue improving the lives of ordinary Fijians and better equip our young people with satisfying roles in a growing and thriving economy. It has a clear vision of Fiji as a modern-nation State, taking a preeminent role in our own Region and strengthening our voice and presence in the global community at large. Fulfilling that vision will require dedication, focus and hard work, but the potential to grow our economy and improve the living standards of our people has never been greater.

My Government is also determined to carry the nation with it on our journey over the next four years, to govern for all Fijians and leave no-one behind. It intends to place compassion, especially for the less fortunate, high on the list of national priorities as it strives to generate prosperity and wealth.

Indeed, many of the Government's initiatives for the coming parliamentary sessions are designed to continue to alleviate poverty, and provide a leg up for ordinary Fijians who may be struggling and who look to the Government to improve their lives in a tangible and sustainable way. They include a major provision to benefit the *I Taukei*, whose ownership of more than 90 per cent of the land in Fiji makes them asset rich but in many instances, cash poor.

My Government wants to unlock the further potential for *I Taukei* landowners, to generate wealth from their land, not only to benefit themselves, but the entire economy. To this end, \$10 million will be set aside to help the *I Taukei* use their land for subdivision and development purposes. For too long, landowners have leased out land for others to develop, and to make huge profits.

My Government will encourage landowners to become landlords while reaping direct commercial benefits from their land. The funding will be made available as grants, to assist landowners to meet development costs, such as the provision of electricity, water and roads.

My Government is committed to ensuring that the I Taukei Land Trust Board (ITLTB) perform at the highest possible level for the benefit of ordinary Fijians. It will continue to reform the ITLTB to make it more efficient, and address issues of corruption within the organisation, in particular, where landowners have been deprived of their say in the renewal of leases. It will also ensure that members of landowning units do not have to pay an application fee when they lease their own land. So my Government is committed to strengthening the economic status of the *I Taukei*, and they will also benefit naturally from a range of other provisions that apply to all Fijians.

My Government intends to reduce the cost of living pressures on ordinary families with targeted, affordable and sustainable initiatives, rather than quick-fix measures that deprive our nation of the revenue we need to meet our expenditure requirements. To this end, my Government will revise the national minimum wage upwards in line with the recommendation of the *Reddy Report*, to a new rate of \$2.32 an hour from 1st July, 2015.

My Government will increase the electricity subsidy for low-income families from the current 75 kilowatts per hour to 85 kilowatts per hour. This will provide immediate relief to thousands of households.

My Government will provide 91,250 litres of water, free of charge per year to Fijian households earning less than a total income of \$30,000. Our calculation is based on an average of five members per household and takes into account a World Health Organization (WHO) Report that estimated that an individual requires 50 litres of water each day.

My Government will extend the current free education for primary and secondary students to pre-school students from the beginning of the second term in 2015. Free education will now be available, one year before admission to primary school at recognised and accredited pre-schools.

My Government will provide 250 millilitres of milk a day to children enrolled in class 1 at all primary schools, starting from Term 1 of 2015.

My Government will strengthen and streamline the Tertiary Education Loan Scheme (TELS), to make it more efficient. Additionally, by 2016, TELS will be extended to those who already have a Diploma or who are in the workforce and want to gain formal qualifications.

My Government will continue with the existing social security system for those pensioners who have never been members of the Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF). From 1st July 2015, FNPF will lower the age of eligibility to 68, and then further lower it to the age of 66 from 1st July 2016.

My Government will conduct a further review of the social security system to ensure that those Fijians who are most in need, do not fall outside the net. This is on top of the recent reforms that restructured the system to make it fairer, reduce abuse and ensure that resources are targeted properly. There continues to be anomalies that exclude deserving Fijians from receiving benefits, and these will be addressed.

My Government will provide all medicines prescribed by a doctor and currently under price control for all Fijians, who earn less than \$20,000 a year. This include medicines for non-communicable diseases. It will also ensure that all essential drugs remain under price control, and that there is a regular supply of all essential medicines through the public health system.

My Government will provide land and funding to the Fiji National University (FNU) to establish a world class tertiary hospital in Lautoka. This is to run in collaboration with the University's medical college. Once this hospital is operational, Fijian citizens earning a household income of less than \$20,000 will receive medical procedures free of charge. For retirees, irrespective of whether they are on pension or not, the cost of all procedures will be borne by Government.

With a view to reducing fuel prices and increasing our buying power, my Government will follow the lead of Mauritius in taking control of the import of all fossil fuel, such as petroleum and gas, in place of the existing private companies. We will call for international tenders for the supply of fuel, and the existing companies will then buy that fuel from the Government. As well as being able to negotiate lower prices in the international marketplace, the Government will generate revenue from the sale of fuel, establish price stability and be able to pass on the benefits of competitive prices to consumers.

My Government will set up a separate and standing emergency fund, to enable the nation's farmers to better cope with drought and natural disasters.

My Government will continue to give commercial agriculture scholarships to encourage young people to take up farming as a vocation.

My Government will continue to provide fertiliser subsidy to the sugarcane industry, *dalo*, rice, and dairy farmers. From next year, we will extend this fertiliser subsidy to ginger farmers. It is expected that within two years, this programme will be extended to other crops.

My Government recognises the high cost of land preparation and to encourage land use in

agriculture, we will allocate an additional funding of \$5 million in 2015, to assist farmers to prepare land for cultivation of all types of farming.

My Government recognises that water-logged farms are a major problem for the nation's farmers, some of whom urgently need assistance with drainage, such is in the Lakena Irrigation Scheme.

My Government will ensure that all State land on which squatters have been living will be subdivided, and they will be given 99-year leases. Negotiations will also be held with *I Taukei* landowners and with their consent, give 99-year residential leases to squatters. This initiative will extend to the whole country.

Successful arrangements have already been concluded in the Lami-Nausori corridor, Nadonumai, Qauia, Wakanisila and Waidamudamu. My Government will formalise leases on Crown land that were sold without proper consent, in order to give tenants security of tenure and the ability to apply for consent to connect to electricity and water.

My Government will set aside a fund of \$1million to provide for emergency assistance to Fijians with income below \$20,000, who have proper leases, but no insurance and who lose their homes in a fire.

My Government will, at least, double the amount payable under the Workmen's Compensation for death and injury claims.

My Government will fast-track all pending rural and peri-urban electrification projects, in particular, where deposits have been paid by the community. It will also work with various international agencies to speed up the expansion of the national grid.

My Government will set up a Parliamentary and Government Committee to oversee the quick implementation of socio-economic rights. This Committee will oversee a transparent programme with public involvement, to integrate the provision of socio-economic rights through every Government decision-making process. This includes: the right to work for a just minimum wage; the right to education; the right to economic participation; the right to reasonable access to transportation; the rights of persons with disabilities; the right to housing and sanitation; the right to adequate food and water; the rights of children; the right to social security services; the right to health; and environmental rights.

My Government will make it easier to establish small businesses by streamlining the current regulatory requirements.

My Government will 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.

My Government will provide micro-finance start-up or assistance grants to encourage small-scale economic activities. These grants will be targeted at individuals, who have particular skill sets such as handicrafts, or those selling crops and vegetables.

My Government will continue with its programme of upgrading the country's municipal market to improve conditions for market vendors, and provide accommodation to women travelling into those markets from outlying areas.

Madam Speaker, honourable Members, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen; all these measures are designed to assist Fijians either directly or indirectly; to give them a leg up and to create economic growth; to reduce the gap between the more fortunate and the less fortunate among us, and to continue to build a fairer and more equal society.

There are many more initiatives that my Government plans across a broad front in all sectors of the economy. The focus will be on realising our true economic potential. The Government will work with all stakeholders to create a conducive commercial environment that is investor and business friendly while at the same time, ensure that our vulnerable (those at the lower end of the socio-economic scale) are also beneficiaries of our economic policies and growth.

We will make Government more accountable, protect our environment, take a tough line on law and order, develop our communications and information technology capability and improve our transport and infrastructure.

In the coming months, a large part of my Government's focus will be to reform the public sector, which needs to be restructured to keep pace with the demands of a modern economy. The reforms are designed to make the Civil Service more efficient, modern and responsive to the needs of the people.

My Government intends to encourage a culture of excellence at every level, improve work conditions, and develop specialised career paths to enable us to attract the best and brightest to government service.

Madam Speaker, honourable Members, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen: in this Parliament begins the task of capitalizing on the progress of the past eight years, and build on the goodwill (at home and abroad) that has accompanied the arrival of our new democracy.

We have much to be grateful for as a nation. We are unified and at peace. Our recent Election has been hailed as credible, free and fair. As we embark on this new journey, let us join hands (whatever our political allegiances), work together and move our beloved nation forward.

My Government is urging a change in our mind-set, to think beyond our own narrow interests as individuals, within and beyond the walls of our newly-elected Parliament. I urge you all, especially the honourable Members of this Chamber, to think beyond the parochial interests - perceived or real - of ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status or wherever you come from in Fiji. If we do not, it will be to our ultimate peril as a nation-state. But if we do, not only will it make us stronger and a modern, inclusive and mature nation-state, but it will give us our rightful place as Fijians in the Region and the world at large. It will enrich our own lives individually, enrich the life of our nation and enrich the lives of those in the global community with whom we come into contact.

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 our 45 UN Peacekeepers has reminded us yet, once 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, and so we are doing so, whether it is to put our case for a fairer trading system for developing countries, such as our own or adopting international best practices or confronting head-on the crisis of global warming and rising sea levels. Fiji has never stood taller in the world than it does today.

However, my Government wants to fire the imagination of every Fijian, to think of how much taller we will stand when our education revolution produces the smarter nation that we intend to become. Henceforth, we must ensure that every Fijian child is given the best possible opportunity to be educated, have access to all basic amenities and services, be brought up in a liberal and inclusive society and become a true citizen of Fiji and the world.

Today, you fifty men and women take your place in this Chamber, charged with the responsibility of leading us. You carry on your shoulders the hopes and aspirations of all Fijians.

Madam Speaker, the honourable Chief Justice, the honourable Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen: it is now my honour to declare the 2014 Parliament officially open. May God bless you all and may God bless Fiji.

Thank you, *vinaka vakalevu, sukria, bahoot dhanyavaad.*

ADJOURNMENT

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before adjourning Parliament, I would like to remind you that the Induction Workshop for honourable Members will be held at the Holiday Inn on Wednesday 8th October and Thursday, 9th October, 2014. Whenever possible, I encourage honourable Members to attend this invaluable Seminar, which I am sure will be useful.

Also, when Parliament next meets, we will proceed with a Motion of Thanks for His Excellency's Address. I will now invite honourable Members and guests for refreshment at the Government Buildings car park.

The Parliament now stands adjourned until Monday, 13th October, 2014 at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.00 a.m.